

# Evaluation of the Making it REAL programme

## Information for early years settings and schools

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) have funded NatCen Social Research (NatCen) to carry out the independent evaluation of the Making it REAL programme, which will be run by the National Children's Bureau (NCB). This information sheet explains the programme and what setting participation involves.

### What is Making it REAL?

REAL stands for Raising Early Achievement in Literacy. The original REAL Project was developed by Dr Cathy Nutbrown from The University of Sheffield, who later worked with NCB to develop the Making it REAL programme.

The original REAL project saw a significant positive impact on the early reading, writing and language skills of the children taking part. Since the original study, Making it REAL has been delivered in over 80 local authorities in England and had a number of small-scale external evaluations. Results of these evaluations show Making it REAL having a significant positive impact on children's home learning environment (Sutton Trust, 2018) and increasing parental confidence in supporting children's early literacy (CREC, 2021).

Making it REAL is based on the Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction and Modelling (ORIM) framework, which highlights four approaches parents can take to create a home learning environment that supports children's early literacy development:

1. Creating **opportunities** for children's literacy development by making children's books, CDs and writing materials available and accessible in the home environment;
2. **Recognising** and encouraging children's literacy milestones;
3. **Interacting** with children positively and supporting real-life literacy tasks and;
4. Acting as **models** of literacy users, so children see parents use literacy in everyday life.

### What does the programme involve?

The Making it REAL programme includes a two-day training course for practitioners on how to share the Making it REAL approaches and activities with families. Practitioners will then identify the families from their setting they believe will most benefit from the programme. Practitioners will visit those families in the home as well as delivering literacy events for all the parents in the setting. Throughout the school year, practitioners will also attend five network meetings with NCB to support their delivery of Making it REAL.

### Home visits

Practitioners will deliver four home visits with the selected families. During home visits, practitioners will introduce families to the four strands of literacy:

1. Oral Language and Rhyme
2. Environmental Print
3. Early Mark Making
4. Books

Practitioners will provide linked activities which they will leave with the parent, and which will help the parent support their child to develop within the strand of literacy.

### Literacy events

Practitioners will also deliver four literacy events that will be open to all parents of 3 and 4-year-olds in their setting. During these events, practitioners will have a further opportunity to introduce parents to the four strands of literacy, offering a range of activities that may not have taken place (or may not be able to take place) through the home visits. Literacy events can be held in the nursery setting but could also take place at a local venue such as a library, a park or a museum.

### What does the evaluation want to find out?

The purpose of NatCen's independent evaluation is to:

- assess the impact of Making it REAL on children's early language skills;
- explore how the programme is delivered;
- assess the perceived effects of Making it REAL on practitioners, parents and children.

### What will the evaluation involve?

NatCen's evaluation will be a randomised control trial. A randomised control trial is a study in which research participants are divided into two groups – the treatment group and the control group. Treatment groups receive the programme, control groups do not. The division is random, that is, it is by chance. By looking at the results for both groups at the end, the research team can see if the programme was useful or not.

Settings assigned to the treatment group will receive training and deliver Making it REAL home visits and literacy events. Those assigned to the control group will continue with their usual early learning and care. NatCen will inform settings about their allocation to treatment or control in November 2023.

NatCen's evaluation will also involve other research activities, such as interviews and surveys. NatCen will provide further information about these activities in the autumn of 2023.

### Who can take part?

Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) settings as well as nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools in Yorkshire and the Humber are all eligible.

### Does it cost anything?

There is no fee to take part.

The training is free, and settings in the treatment group are provided with a grant of £250 per participating child to support the delivery of Making it REAL. Settings do need to consider the cost of releasing staff for training, home visits, literacy events and network meetings. We estimate this to be around 10 days per practitioner for the school year, with two practitioners

per setting taking part. The grant of £250 per child is estimated to cover 50% of backfill costs and to provide some resource costs. Each setting also receives a £300 incentive payment.

Settings in the control group will receive an incentive payment of £150 after children have completed baseline testing and another £150 after they have completed endline testing.

## What are the potential benefits for settings?

If a setting is allocated to treatment, two practitioners will be able to attend the training and network events. We also anticipate several positive outcomes for families and practitioners from the home visits and literacy events. For example, we expect that by the end of the programme, parents will be more **confident** in supporting their children in the home and that practitioners will be more **effective** in offering early literacy support.

If a setting is allocated to control, they will be supporting really important research into children's early literacy that will benefit practitioners and families in the future.

## What are the commitments from settings?

### Treatment group

Practitioners in the treatment group will:

- Identify families to receive Making it REAL
- Facilitate child assessments and parent interviews (carried out by NatCen researchers)
- Attend a two-day training, deliver four home visits (up to 1 hour each), deliver four literacy events (minimum 1 hour) and attend up to five network meetings (1.5 hours each) - all in person, estimated to be around 10 days in total
- Complete surveys and interviews

Treatment settings can receive up to £1800 for their participation (if six children take part) and a £20 book voucher for every child that takes part.

### Control group

Practitioners in the control group will:

- Identify families to receive Making it REAL
- Facilitate child assessments (carried out by NatCen researchers)

Control settings will receive £300 and a £20 book voucher for every child that takes part.

## Evaluation timeline

Timing	Evaluation activity
September	Selecting families Sharing child data
October	Baseline testing Parent survey #1
December	Practitioner training
January-June	Making it REAL home visits and literacy events
May	Parent interviews
June	Endline testing
June-July	Practitioner interviews Practitioner survey
July	Parent survey #2

### Whom do I contact for more information?

If you would like more information about the Making it REAL programme, please contact Laura Sarmiento at NCB: [lsarmiento@ncb.org.uk](mailto:lsarmiento@ncb.org.uk).