Chit Chat Programme Report
2023/2024 Academic Year

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1. KEY POINTS

Chit Chat Programme Report
23/24 Academic Year

Chit Chat is an early intervention and prevention Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) service for children in Dublin 24, from infancy to Junior Infants. It includes programmes for parents, teachers, and early years professionals. Chit Chat is a three-tier support model: universal, targeted, and individual support. In 23/24, we supported children in Early Years Services and DEIS Primary Schools. We also delivered educational courses for teachers, and disseminated the Talk to Your Baby Cube.

Early Talk Boost Outcomes

Pre-intervention trackers
- 27%
- 45%
- 28%

Post-intervention trackers
- 60%
- 28%
- 6%
- 5%

Percentages total add up to 100%, but numbers have been rounded off.

80 Children
- meeting age expectations
- working towards age expectations
- below age expectations
- No tracker data available
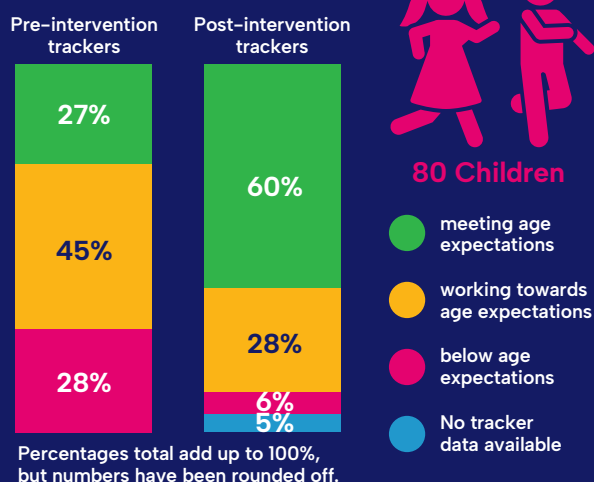
Talk Boost Key Stage 1 Outcomes

Pre-intervention trackers
- 13%
- 69%
- 18%

Post-intervention trackers
- 59%
- 17%
- 6%
- 18%

55 Children
- meeting age expectations
- working towards age expectations
- below age expectations
- No tracker data available
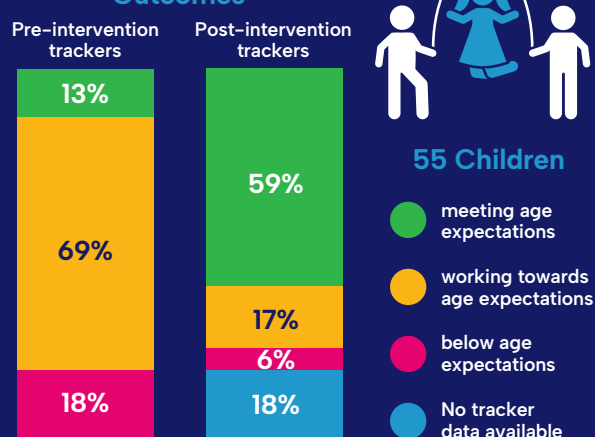
Testimonials from Early Years professionals/teachers on Early Talk Boost/Talk Boost Key Stage 1:

100% practitioners/teachers reported that E/TB proved beneficial for the children in their setting.

" *Students have a better understanding overall and are completing activities to a higher standard as they are more engaged* "

93% of participants reported improved confidence in identifying and supporting the **speech, language, and communication needs** (SLCN) of primary school students after the course.

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20 teachers participated in Chit Chat's online summer course: **"Speech Language and Communication in the Classroom and Beyond"**

495 families received **Talk to Your Baby Cubes** in Dublin 24

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80 children participated in the **Loving Listening** programme

169 individualised sessions were facilitated, providing additional support to children around **language** and **speech sound difficulties**

2. ABOUT CHIT CHAT

Chit Chat Programme Report
23/24 Academic Year

Chit Chat is the Childhood Development Initiative's (CDI) prevention and early intervention Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) service located in Dublin 24. Supports and interventions are delivered through a suite of programmes designed to target speech and language skills from infancy to Junior Infants, and includes education and resource sessions for parents, and training for educators and direct interventions with children. The early intervention speech and language supports are delivered by Senior Speech and Language Therapists and trained Early Childhood Education and Care (ECECs) practitioners/primary school teachers to groups of children in ECECs and DEIS Band 1 primary school settings. Through this integrated approach with education, health, and childcare provision, the intended outcomes of the service are:

1. Timely access to quality speech, language and communication supports,

2. Children achieve age – appropriate speech, oral language, and communication abilities and

3. Supports and interventions are implemented with quality.

The Chit Chat supports and interventions include:

1. Talk Boost, a structured and evidence-based intervention developed by *Speech and Language UK* to improve children's core language skills. This is currently delivered through a co-delivery model for two components of the Talk Boost intervention: Early Talk Boost[1] (a nine-week programme for 3 – 4 year-olds) and Talk Boost Key Stage 1[2] (a ten-week programme for 4 – 7 year-olds). CDI's Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) provide training and support to teachers and early years professionals to deliver these interventions in their settings.

2. Episodes of care, which are needs-led and consist of one-to-one or small group speech and language therapy, are offered to a small cohort of children who need individualised support. These children are identified by the ECEC setting, school and/or parents, or are identified as having speech and language needs following targeted intervention sessions with the SLTs. They generally consist of six to eight sessions and focus on specialist communication, language and/or speech sound needs. These needs cannot be supported in targeted or universal methods alone. On completion of therapy, children may be discharged from the service or referred on to specialist services, for further therapeutic support or multi-disciplinary assessment.

3. Loving Listening, a 6-week evidence-based intervention aimed at Year 1 ECCE[3] children. Early Years practitioners are provided with training and a resource pack. A rating scale is used to select children for the intervention and monitor outcomes post intervention. The SLT delivers the first four sessions and ECEC practitioners complete the last two sessions and are encouraged to integrate the programme activities into the curriculum from a menu of activities included in the resource pack.

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[1] Early Talk Boost is considered an evidence-based programme and is available on Ireland's Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth What Works website at https://whatworks.gov.ie/hub-search/report/47/Early%20Talk%20Boost

[2] Talk Boost Key Stage 1 is considered an evidence-based programme and is also available on the What Works website at https://whatworks.gov.ie/hub-search/report/48/Talk%20Boost%20Key%20Stage%201

[3] ECCE is Early Childhood Care and Education, a scheme which provides up to two years of early childhood care and education for children of pre-school age.

4. Speech, Language and Communication in the Classroom and Beyond, a CDI–designed online summer course that has been approved by the Department of Education for primary school teachers. The course contains five modules, with 20 hours of materials and training to build teachers' skills and confidence in identifying and supporting the speech, language, and communication needs (SLCNs) of primary school students.

5. Toddler Talk, which entails three one–hour sessions for parents with tips and advice on nurturing their child's speech, language, and communication development.

6. Talk To Your Baby, a developmental tool and information leaflet to guide parents and caretakers on the communication development of infants from birth to 12 months. The feely cube provided is the "Talk to Your Baby Cube", which serves as a physical prompt for reading, talking, singing, and playing with the baby.

The Chit Chat Programme evolved naturally, starting as components of two of CDI's original suites of programmes, the Early Years Programme[4] and the Healthy Schools Programme. After extensive community consultations, CDI developed the initial programmes alongside its establishment in 2007, when it was established as part of the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP). This was a joint initiative of the (then) Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and The Atlantic Philanthropies. The first piece of work was a needs analysis titled *How Are Our Kids?* study published in 2004[5].

This study drew on interviews with 79 families in West Tallaght were randomly selected to be interviewed, followed by a public conference to gather further community feedback about the study. This research and community consultation, and a thorough review of research literature on child development, the impacts of poverty, and the need for additional SLT services in the West Tallaght community informed the creation of the SLT support components. This effectively served as Chit Chat's pilot, which ran from 2008–2011, and in 2012 Chit Chat became its own, established programme.

Collaboration is central to the Chit Chat Programme. The SLTs work closely with CDI's Parent Carer Facilitators (PCFs) who deliver the Powerful Parenting Programme. SLTs work together with PCFs to deliver developmental supports to parents and carers by attending PCF led activities such as parent–toddler and infant massage groups. Additionally, Chit Chat partners with HSE Speech and Language Therapy in Dublin 24 for activities such as, shared care of children, clinical supervision, and continuing professional development opportunities. Finally, Chit Chat regularly meets with other ABC SLTs for shared–learning opportunities and Communities of Practice.

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[4] The Early Years Programme has evolved over the years and become the Powerful Parenting Programme.
[5] This report is available on CDI's website at https://www.cdi.ie/app/uploads/2024/04/2004_How_Are_Our_Kids.pdf

2023–2024 Programme Overview

In September 2023, Chit Chat adopted a three-tier model of Speech and Language support based on the Multi-tiered System of Support model (McKenna et al., 2021). This model incorporates **(1)** Universal support such as delivery of the Talk to Your Baby Cube **(2)** Targeted interventions e.g., skills-based group intervention and **(3)** Individual 1:1 support of children with specific communication needs. The priority from 2023 was to provide Level 2 targeted support to reach a wider number of children given the SLCN needs in Chit Chat settings.

As part of the level 1 intervention, Chit Chat delivered a series of three 'Toddler Talk' sessions in Spring 2024. While 324 parents and carers signed up for Toddler Talk, 274 attended either live or by watching a recording. Additionally, 494 families received Talk to Your Baby Cubes. Finally, 20 primary school teachers attended the online summer course to support speech and language in the classroom.

For level 2 interventions, Chit Chat incorporated Talk Boost[6] for the second academic year running. 80 children completed Early Talk Boost, and 54 children completed Talk Boost Key Stage 1. Across the academic year, 40 referrals were made from Chit Chat to other services. Moreover, Loving Listening, a listening and attention skills programme, was introduced this year and was delivered in five ECEC services, supporting 78 children.

For level 3 interventions, 169 one-to-one and small group SLT episodes of care were facilitated as needed, providing additional support to 56 children. Of these, 73 sessions targeted language needs, and 96 sessions targeted speech sound difficulties. Of the 169 sessions offered, 134 were attended, or a 79% attendance rate.

The goal of all CDI programmes is to utilise or develop evidence-based programmes, and there have been two external evaluations (2012[7] and 2016[8]) to build enough evidence for Chit Chat to achieve this. While these evaluations showed that Chit Chat is effective at providing early intervention, assists in referral processes, and effectively integrates parents and schools in a social model, the complexities of speech and language development limited the evaluations of overall programme efficacy. The programme has also been revised since the evaluation to align with recent, evidence-informed best practice, such as focusing on group interventions.

While Talk Boost is an evidence-based programme adopted by Chit Chat, CDI's continuous monitoring and evaluation, and external evaluations suggest that Chit Chat is currently an evidence-informed programme and needs further evaluation to reach evidence-based. These external evaluations, and CDI's own continuous monitoring and evaluation, are important to constantly assess the effectiveness of Chit Chat, maintain an up-to-date evidence base to inform the programme design, and continuously maintain and improve programme effectiveness. This process can be reviewed in more detail in the sections below.

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[6]   More information about Talk Boost can be found here: https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/

[7]   This report by the Dublin Institute of Technology is available to read on CDI's website at https://www.cdi.ie/app/uploads/2023/11/CDI-2012_SLT-Report-09.11-web.pdf

[8]   The report is available to read on CDI's website at https://www.cdi.ie/app/uploads/2024/03/CDI-Chit_Chat_Reflections_SLT_Report_24.06.web_.pdf

3. METHODOLOGY: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This section is an overview of the programme data collection processes, the measures used to measure children's speech and language skills, and teacher's knowledge, and how these data were collected and analysed. This is some of the important context that was considered when CDI interpreted the statistical results.

3.1 The Data Collection Method

Data for the Chit Chat service were collected in numerous ways as follows:

Programme Output Data

Programme output data, such as the number of onward referrals and the number of speech and language therapy sessions offered, are collected monthly by SLTs, and collated by the Chit Chat Coordinator. These numbers are reported in the 2023–2024 Programme Overview section above.

Children's Talk Boost Trackers

Children's skills are tracked before and after the nine–week Early Talk Boost (ETB) intervention, and 10–week Talk Boost Key Stage 1 intervention by SLT's in collaboration with trained ECEC/primary school staff.

3.2 The Measures Used

Trackers are used to track the children's speech and language skills against age–appropriate milestones and were designed by *Speech and Language UK* as part of the Talk Boost intervention. It is not a diagnostic tool and does not replace a detailed speech, language and communication assessment when needed. Comprehensive details on the measurements used can be found on the *Speech and Language UK* website[9].

Early Talk Boost Tracker

The Early Talk Boost trackers were developed for children between the ages of three and four years. It includes four subscales, i.e., attention and listening skills, ability to understand words and sentences, speaking, and communication skills (personal, social, and emotional). The overall tracker scores range between 0 and 80, with higher scores indicating age–appropriate speech and language skills. Tracker scores are categorised dependent on the child's age (see Table 1).

Table 1: Early Talk Boost Tracker Score Categorisation

Age (Years)*	Below expectations	Working towards expectations	Meeting expectations
3.0 – 3.49	0 – 27	28 – 53	54 – 80
3.5 – 3.99	0 – 43	44 – 67	68 – 80
4.0 – 4.5	0 – 59	60 – 71	72 – 80

*Note. Talk Boost trackers originally state 3.0—3.5, 3.5—4.0, and 4.0—4.5, but for clarity, these ranges were decided to avoid overlap.

[9] https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/educators-and-professionals/programmes-for-nurseries-and-schools/talk-boost/

Talk Boost Key Stage 1 Tracker

The Talk Boost Key Stage 1 (TBKS1) Tracker is intended for children between the ages of four to seven years. It includes five subscales, i.e., a child's ability to understand spoken language, their ability to understand and use vocabulary, their use of sentences, their storytelling, and their social interaction skills. Overall scores range from 15 to 75 and are categorised based on age expectations (see Table 2). The trackers also gather further information, including the child's gender and first language.

Table 2: Talk Boost Key Stage 1 Tracker Score Categorisation

Early Talk Boost Tracker Score			
Age (Years)*	Below expectations	Working towards expectations	Meeting expectations
4 – 7	15 – 44	45 – 64	65 – 75

Practitioner Feedback

Chit Chat's SLTs distributed surveys to practitioners of the Talk Boost Programmes, i.e. the educators and teachers in ECEC services and primary schools to get feedback on their knowledge and understanding of language delays and speech, their experience with programme implementation, the perceived impact on the children, and overall feedback. This is a bespoke, 14–question survey with open feedback questions, Likert–scales (rating from 1–10, 5–point scale of Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree), and Yes/No questions. Please refer to Appendix I: Surveys and Measures for full details.

Summer Course Surveys

As part of the online Chit Chat Summer course, a pre and post survey was administered to participants. The surveys gathered data on the participants' knowledge of speech and language, confidence in using the speech and language therapy process, and satisfaction with the quality of the course. Full details of the survey are in Appendix I: Surveys and Measures.

Twenty primary school staff participated in the Chit Chat Summer course, and nineteen participants completed both the pre and post survey. The analysis focuses on those participants who completed both.

3.3 Data Analysis

At data collection, children's scores on the Talk Boost Trackers were directly inputted into the Talk Boost online portal and extracted as Excel files for analysis. Data were prepared within an Excel spreadsheet and analysed using SPSS 29 (Vers. 29.0.2.0). Data from the Summer Course pre– and post–surveys were similarly imported into SPSS for descriptive and inferential analyses. Analyses included descriptive and inferential statistics and refer to Appendix II: Data Analysis for full details.

4. OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

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This section is an overview of the statistical data analysis. Demographic information, such as gender and ethnicity, are provided as additional context to consider when interpreting the results. The statistical tests that were used looked at **differences** between children's speech and language at the beginning and end of the programme and determine how **likely** it is that these differences exist due to natural differences in people. When a result is statistically **significant**, that means there was less than a 5% chance that these differences were due to natural differences. A significant difference is some of the evidence that would suggest that Chit Chat contributed to the change in children's language skills. All results 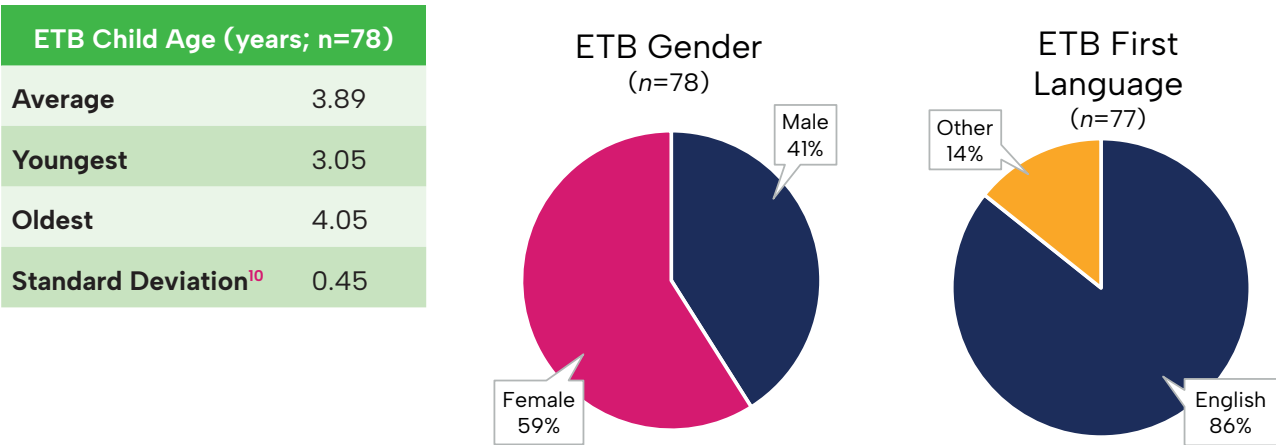must be interpreted together and within the context of the community to fully understand the programme impact. Please refer to the Discussion of Findings section for full interpretation. In this report, "*n =*" means how many participants.

4.1 Early Talk Boost

Demographics

There was demographic information and Tracker data available for 78 children from seven different Early Education and Care settings (ECECs) that participated in the Early Talk Boost (ETB) intervention. Refer to Figure 1 below for demographic details, and Appendix III: Demographic Breakdown for full details.

Figure 1: Early Talk Boost Children Demographics

ETB Child Age (years; n=78)	
Average	3.89
Youngest	3.05
Oldest	4.05
Standard Deviation[10]	0.45

ETB Gender
(*n*=78)

Male 41%

Female 59%

ETB First Language
(*n*=77)

Other 14%

English 86%

Data Analysis

Seventy–four children[11] (95% of participants) completed the Early Talk Boost Tracker before and after the intervention and were included in the analysis. A significant[12] difference[13] was found, suggesting that children improved their speech and language skills. The median tracker score before the programme was 60 (IQR[14]=16), and this rose to 71 (IQR=13.25) after the programme. The full breakdown of all (n=78) available Tracker scores is displayed visually in Figure 2.

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[10] Standard deviation is a statistical term used with normally distributed data. About 95% of a population's scores will fall within 2 standard deviations above or below the average.

[11] Tracker scores were missing for four children post–programme.

[12] Children's tracker scores violated the assumption of the data following a normal distribution, so data were analysed using the Wilcoxon Signed–Rank Sum test.

[13] Z = –7.14, p = < .001

[14] IQR stands for interquartile range, which is a statistical term used with non–normally distributed data. About 50% of a population's scores above and below the median should fall within this range.

Figure 2: Early Talk Boost Tracker Meeting Age–Expectations Breakdown

Early Talk Boost Tracker Scores—Age Expectations

Before Talk Boost: Met age expectations 27%, Working towards age expectations 45%, Below age expectations 28%

After Talk Boost: Met age expectations 60%, Working towards age expectations 28%, Below age expectations 6%, No data 5%

Percentage of Children

■ Met age expectations ■ Working towards age expectations ■ Below age expectations ■ No data
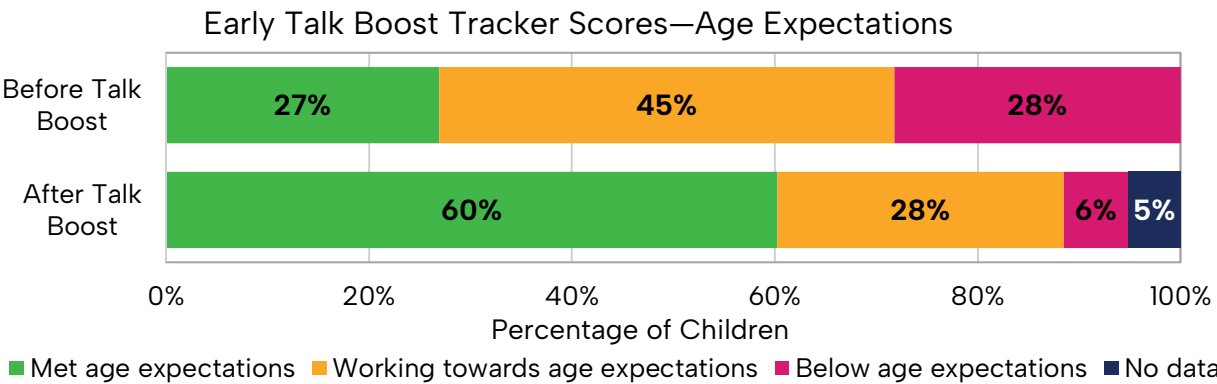
Moreover, children showed significant[15] differences across all subscales of the Early Talk Boost Tracker. Children's scores after the intervention were higher than before the intervention. Subscale details are provided in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Pre and Post scores on the subscales of the Early Talk Boost Tracker

Speech and Language Subscale Skills	Median (IQR)		Score Increase
	Pre	Post	
Attention and Listening[16]	16 (5.25)	18.5 (4)	2.5
Understanding Words and Sentences[17]	16 (4)	19 (3)	3
Speaking[18]	15 (5)	17.5 (4.25)	2.5
Communication: Personal, Social and Emotional Skills[19]	13.5 (8)	17 (5)	3.5

* Note. All available scores (n=78) are displayed, not just the matched scores (n=74) that were analysed. The number breakdown is Met (Pre=21; Post=47), Working towards (Pre=35; Post=22), Below (Pre=22; Post=5), and No data (Pre=0; Post=4) regarding meeting age expectations. The "After Chit Chat" percentages total do add up to 100%, but numbers have been rounded off.

[15] Subscale data were analysed using the Wilcoxon Signed–Rank Sum test.

[16] $Z = -5.75$, $p = < .001$

[17] $Z = -6.65$, $p = < .001$

[18] $Z = -6.09$, $p = < .001$

[19] $Z = -5.58$, $p = < .001$

4.2 Talk Boost Key Stage 1

Demographics

In total, 54 children from three different schools participated in the Talk Boost Key Stage 1 (KS1) intervention. Refer to Figure 3 below for demographic details, and Appendix II: Demographic Breakdown for full details.

Figure 3: Talk Boost Key Stage 1 Children Demographics (*n*=54)

TBKS1 Child Age (years)	
Average	4.98
Youngest	4.02
Oldest	6.44
Standard Deviation	0.55

KS1 Gender

Female 54%
Male 46%

KS1 First Language

Other 4%
English 96%
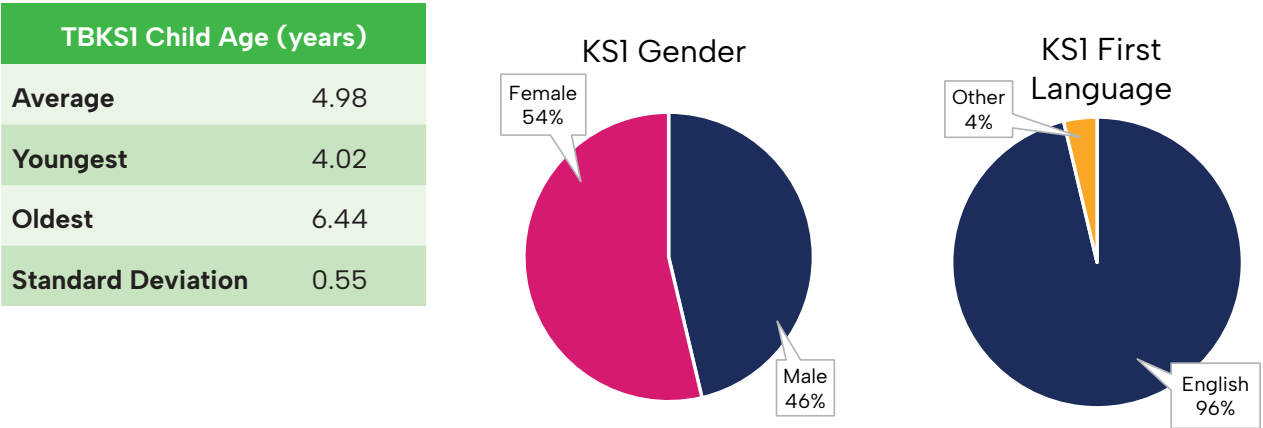
Data Analysis

Fifty–two[20] (96%) children completed the Talk Boost KS1 Tracker before and after the intervention and were included in the analysis. A significant[21] difference[22] was found, suggesting that children improved their speech and language skills. The average tracker score before the programme was 53.46 (*SD*=9.26), and this rose to 64.23 (*SD*=10.98) after the programme. The full breakdown of all Tracker scores is displayed visually in Figure 4.

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[20] All children completed the pre–tracker; however, two children did not complete the post–tracker.

[21] Children's tracker scores met the assumption of the data following a normal distribution, so data were analysed using a paired samples t–test.

[22] $t(65) = 10.29$, $p = < .001$

Figure 4: Pre– and post–summary scores on the Talk Boost KS1 Tracker

Talk Boost Key Stage 1 Tracker Scores—Age Expectations

Before Talk Boost	13% — 68.5% — 18.5%
After Talk Boost	59% — 31% — 6% — 4%

Percentage of Children

■ Met age expectations ■ Working towards age expectations ■ Below age expectations ■ No data
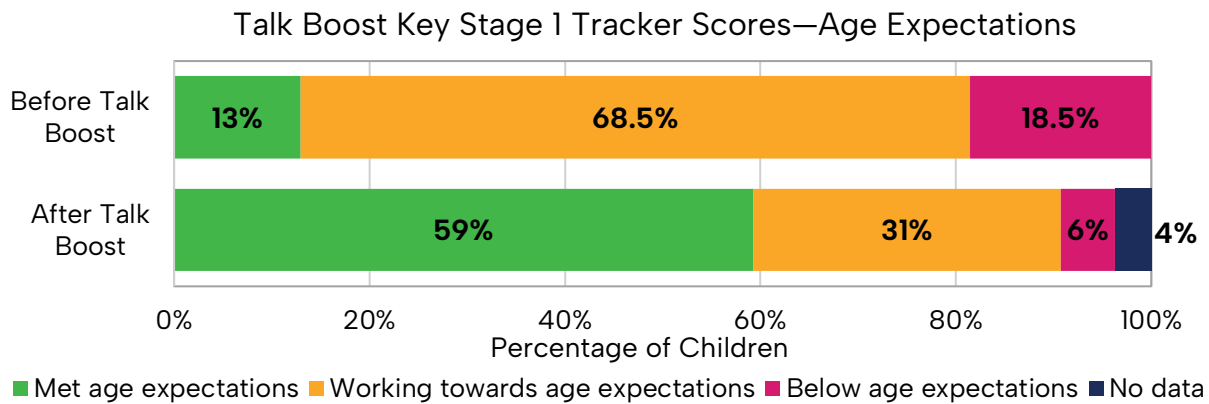
*Note. All available scores (n=54) are displayed, not just the matched scores (n=52) that were analysed. The number breakdown is Met (Pre=7; Post=32), Working towards (Pre=37; Post=17), Below (Pre=10; Post=3), and No data (Pre=0; Post=2) regarding meeting age expectations.

Moreover, children showed significant[23] differences across all subscales of the Talk Boost KS1 Tracker. Children's scores after the intervention were higher than before. Subscale details are provided in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Pre and Post scores on the subscales of the Talk Boost KS1 Tracker

Speech and Language Subscale Skills	Median (IQR)		Score Increase
	Pre	Post	
Understanding Spoken Language[24]	13 (4)	15 (2)	2
Understanding and Using Vocabulary[25]	13 (2)	15 (2)	2
Using Sentences[26]	11 (4)	15 (6)	4
Storytelling and Narrative[27]	7 (4)	13 (8)	6
Social Interaction[28]	11 (4)	15 (4)	4

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[23] Subscale data were analysed using the Wilcoxon Signed–Rank Sum test.

[24] ($Z = -4.28$, $p = < .001$)

[25] ($Z = -5.20$, $p = < .001$)

[26] ($Z = -3.53$, $p = < .001$)

[27] ($Z = -4.83$, $p = < .001$)

[28] ($Z = -4.56$, $p = < .001$)

4.3 Impact Across Gender

Analysis was completed to check if boys and girls made similar levels of improvement in both Early Talk Boost and Talk Boost Key Stage 1. This was undertaken by considering the children's speech and language skills at the beginning of ETB and TBKS1, different groups of children showed similar amounts of improvements after the programme. For both Early Talk Boost[29] and Talk Boost Key Stage 1[30], no significant difference was found for gender. Both genders were found to have made similar amounts of improvement throughout the programme.

4.4 Practitioner Feedback

There were 10 forms returned by teachers and educators providing feedback on their experiences of Talk Boost feedback with their classes. Each service is required to give feedback from one person involved with delivering Talk Boost in that year, either a teacher or the Early Years Practitioner. From this feedback, 90% (n=9) reported improved understanding of language delay following implementation of the programme. All 10 practitioners responded "yes" when asked if Talk Boost was beneficial for the children in their setting, and all 10 also agreed (agree/strongly agree) that the programme met their expectations, that the programme format was clear, and that they were supported by **Chit Chat**'s SLTs to deliver Talk Boost. The written feedback was organised by question, summarised into common and noteworthy feedback, and representative quotes were selected to support the simple analysis.

Practitioners reported that they learned about the importance of teaching early, foundational skills of speech and language, and that speech involves more skills than just talking.

"I have learned the importance of having a good foundation of both speech and language. Without a good standard of both it can be challenging to move onto other curricular areas, i.e. phonics, handwriting etc."

When asked about what concerns they had about Talk Boost, the most common responses revolved around lack of resources with staff, time, and balancing Talk Boost with other curriculum areas. A few teachers also noted issues with running the programme with their full class, and they resolved this by splitting off a smaller group to receive Talk Boost.

"My initial concern was fitting the Talk Boost Programme into the daily routine alongside our own programmes. Other concerns were children's engagement in the programme."

Regarding the most challenging part of programme implementation, the most common challenge reported was keeping children focused. Other challenges noted were the level of need present with certain classes, the work involved with preparation and consistent implementation, and one practitioner noted that the programme did not suit children with English as an additional language.

"The attention span of the children, some sessions ran long causing most of the children to lose attention halfway. Under 4s found it hard to keep interest."

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[29]   A QUADE non–parametric ANCOVA was conducted. $F_{(1,69)} = 1.511$, $p = .223$
[30]   A mixed between–within subjects ANOVA was conducted. $F_{(1,64)} = .526$, $p = .47$

When asked about what differences, if any, they saw in attention, listening, and language skills, practitioners often reported that most, if not all their students improved in these skills, but some of their students did not due to higher needs and issues with attention.

"There's a change to their interpersonal skills, eye–contact, pragmatics, communication skills. The rhyme awareness development has been notable as well."

When asked for any further comments and ways to improve, most practitioners stated that they found the programme effective and good, and that they appreciated the freely available Talk Boost resources. One practitioner recommended that the availability of Talk Boost resources should be made immediately aware to schools. One practitioner noted that the programme was mostly successful with children without additional needs, and another noted that they slowed the programme down to accommodate the current needs of their class.
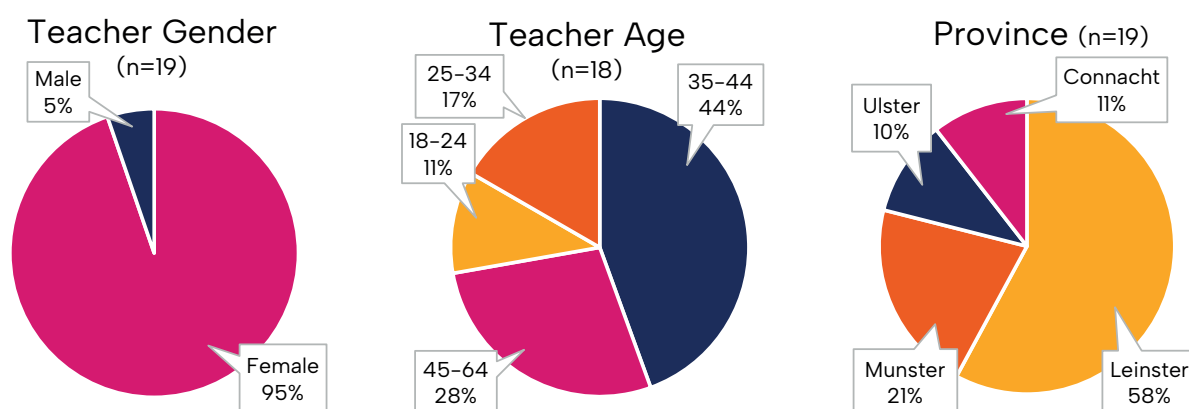
"Good support from CDI therapist when needed. All materials were readily available to us. Even when we requested a 2nd set of materials that was no problem."

4.5 Summer Course Pre/Post Surveys

Demographics

Out of the 20 total participants, 19 completed both the pre and post Chit Chat summer course surveys. All participants were working in primary schools and were White Irish[31], and 42% (*n*=8) worked in DEIS[32] status schools. Of note, no participant was based in Tallaght. Of the 18 participants that reported their reason for attending, 83% (n=15) attended on their own, and 17% attended on behalf of their school. Other demographic and school information is presented in Figure 5 and Figure 6 below, and full details, refer to Appendix III: Demographic Breakdown below.

Figure 5: Teacher Demographics

Teacher Gender (n=19): Male 5%, Female 95%

Teacher Age (n=18): 35–44 44%, 25–34 17%, 18–24 11%, 45–64 28%

Province (n=19): Connacht 11%, Ulster 10%, Munster 21%, Leinster 58%

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[31] Only n=18 participants chose to disclose ethnicity.

[32] Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) status indicates schools with a designated disadvantaged status by the Department of Education.

Figure 6: Teaching and School Characteristics (n=19)

Years of Teaching Experience	
Average	14.68
Range	1–39
Standard Deviation	9.78

Teaching Post

- Language Class 5%
- Special Class 5%
- Mainstream Teacher 32%
- Learning Support/Resource 58%

School Location

- City 16%
- Rural 42%
- Town 21%
- Suburban 21%
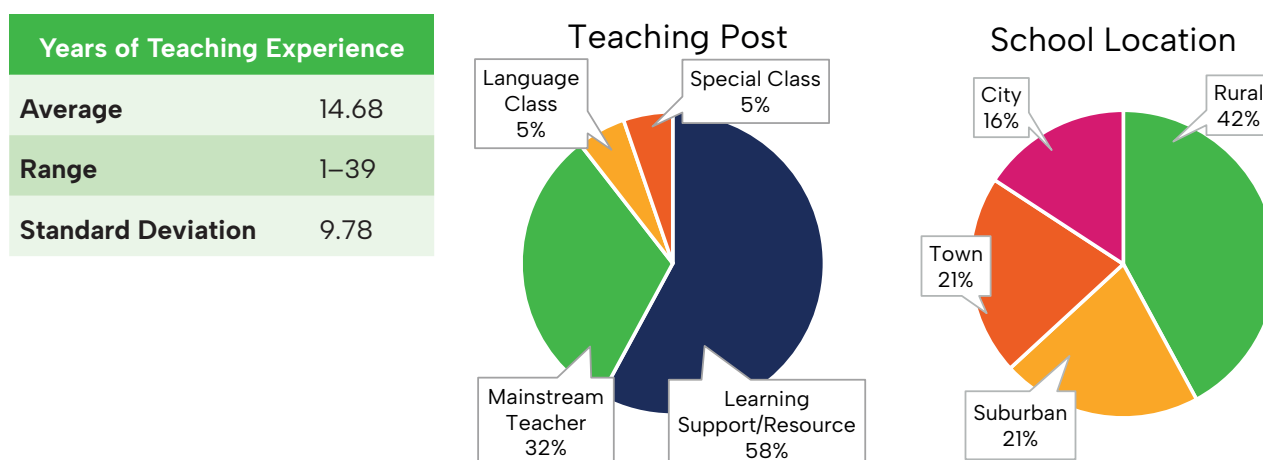
Participant knowledge: Participants were asked to rate their knowledge on the numerous subjects covered in the course module on a scale of Poor, Fair, Good, Very Good, and Excellent. The data were organised into two groups, Poor (Poor & Fair), and Good (Good, Very Good, and Excellent). Full percentage breakdown of participants self–reporting their knowledge on the eight course modules before and after the course is displayed in Table 5 below. Because this was a subjective measure (rate your knowledge) of an objective concept (knowledge), no statistical tests were run, and results were reported descriptively to evaluate participants' perception on the quality of learning from the course. Upon entering the course, participants felt more sure of their knowledge in general topics (reflective practice, the components of oral language, and literate language) than the other, more niche speech and language subjects. After the programme, almost every single participant rated their knowledge of every subject as Good, suggesting that participants viewed the quality of the course's ability to teach these subjects well.

Table 5: Self–report knowledge as good before and after the summer course

Knowledge Topic	Self–Reported as Good*		% Increase
	Pre (n=)	Post (n=)	
Reflective practice	74% (14)	100%	26%
The components of oral language	74% (14)	100%	26%
Literate language	63% (12)	100%	37%
Strategies to support speech and language in the classroom	37% (7)	100%	63%
Supporting children with SLCN in the classroom	37% (7)	100%	63%
Language and social disadvantage	42% (8)	100%	58%
Developmental language disorders	21% (**)	95% (18)	74%
Family literacy	37% (7)	100%	63%

*Note. N=19 total sets of data. * Good represents participants that chose good, very good, or excellent. ** is used when the number was less than five participants.

Participants' confidence: Participants were asked to rate their confidence in using 4 Speech and Language skills: approaching a parent to discuss concerns, identifying a child with SLT needs, making referrals to Speech and Language therapists, and supporting parents. They could rate their confidence from Not at All Confident, Slightly Confident, Moderately Confident, to Very Confident, and these answers were used to create an overall confidence score by converting, respectively, these answers to values of one, two, three, and four, and then adding them together. This means the minimum possible score, four, would indicate that participants felt not at all confident, and the max score, 16, would mean the participants felt very confident in using these skills. Only 14 participants completed this part of their questionnaire, and there was a significant[33] difference[34] between participants'

average confidence of 10.74 (*SD* = 3.14) before the course, to the average confidence of 14.07 (*SD* = 1.59) after the course. Overall, 13 out of the 14 of participants improved on their confidence scores.

Participants' Satisfaction: After the summer course, participants were given numerous statements regarding their experience of the summer course and asked to rate their level of agreement with each on a scale from Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Don't Know, Agree, to Strongly Agree. The data were organised into three groups, Disagree (Strongly Disagree, Disagree), Don't Know, and Agree (Agree, Strongly Agree). No participant reported as Disagree to any statement. Full breakdown of statements percentage of agreeance is presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Participant satisfaction with the summer course

Quality Statement	Agree (*n=*)	Don't Know (*n=*)
I achieved the stated learning outcomes of this course	95% (18)	5% (*)
This course was professionally enabling and relevant to the work of schools	100%	0%
This course has improved my teaching or leadership skills	95% (18)	5% (*)
The tutor ably led the learning and ensured there were good levels of engagement	100%	0%
The tutor provided me with appropriate feedback on my assignments/activities and tasks	79% (15)	21% (*)
The course was well structured and effectively managed	100%	0%
This course made meaningful links with school self–evaluation and Information and communications technology	95% (18)	5% (*)
This course was of good quality	100%	0%

*Note. N=19 total sets of data. * is used when the number was less than five participants.

[33] A paired–samples t–test was performed to assess the difference between participants' confidence in these before and after participating in the summer course.

[34] *t* (13) = 4.63, *p* < .001

Participants' Comments: Participants were also asked to comment on what worked well about the summer course. Feedback highlighted the practical activities, video material and supplied resources as engaging and effective. Some exemplary comments from the participants are below:

> *"I liked the practical activities provided and videos that showed activities in progress in the classroom."*

> *"The training was effective due to its practical, hands–on approach, interactive sessions, and real–life examples. Collaborative activities and comprehensive resources facilitated easy integration of strategies into daily teaching practices, making the training highly beneficial."*

Participants were also asked to make suggestions for the future improvement of the course. Some participants noted that more interaction with other participants would have benefitted their learning, while others noted that more concrete examples of classroom activities would have been helpful. A selection of suggestions from the participants are below:

> *"More interaction between participants to share their experiences and resources."*

> *"Perhaps provide examples of activities being carried out in class settings."*

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

During the 2023/24 academic year, the Chit Chat service was fully staffed (one Chit Chat Coordinator, two Senior SLTs), and successfully delivered services across three schools and seven ECECs. The programme reached 80 children through Loving Listening, 135 children through Talk Boost interventions, and 56 children via Episodes of Care. A statistically significant improvement in children's speech and language skills was found for both the Early Talk Boost (ETB) and Talk Boost Key Stage 1 (TBKS1) interventions. Practitioner feedback on Talk Boost indicated that most educators believed that delivering the intervention improved their own understanding of speech delays. They also noted that the abundance of Talk Boost resources helped them to successfully deliver the programme, and that they were able to integrate the Talk Boost sessions alongside their class curriculum despite some difficulties. Teachers that took the online summer Chit Chat training course reported that the programme improved their knowledge and confidence in the SLT topics and skills covered, and they were satisfied with the quality of implementation of the course.

The results from both the ETB and TBKS1 interventions suggest that significant improvements were seen across all subscales, such as attention and listening, understanding words and sentences, speaking, and social communication skills. Additionally, no significant differences in outcomes between boys and girls were found, suggesting that the interventions were equally effective for both genders. ETB and TBKS1 have been subjected to randomised controlled trials (Lee & Pring, 2016; Reeves et al., 2018) and are considered evidence-based interventions. Furthermore, ETB has been recently evaluated in an Irish context (Moloney et al., 2024). In this study, 23 ECEC settings delivering ETB took part, with pre and post tracker data for 179 children. Children demonstrated significant, positive changes on the four subscales of speech and language in this study. This is comparable to our 2023/24 academic year data demonstrating

similar, positive changes. Across the 23 ECEC settings in the study, they found 45–63% of children across age groups were achieving age expectations after completing ETB. This is comparable to the 60% of children in our sample achieving age expectations after completing ETB. TBKS1 has not yet been formally evaluated in the Irish context; however, our findings demonstrate the potential for replication and further rigorous evaluation with a randomised controlled trial in Irish primary schools.

Feedback from early years practitioners and teachers who co-delivered ETB and TBKS1 highlights the challenges and successes met during the delivery of the interventions. In addition to the success of ETB and TBKS1 in improving children's language and communication skills, participant feedback suggests that the programmes contributed to enhancing their professional knowledge of communication delays. Every participant reported that the programme improved their students' language skills and met their expectations, suggesting that ETB and TBKS1 provided valuable opportunities for educators continued professional development. One of the challenges reported is that the programme was not effective for some children with additional needs, and children with English as an additional language (EAL). These issues are expected as ETB and TBKS1 are not designed for children that need specialist SLT intervention, and these programmes were not originally created for children with EAL. Speech and Language UK (2024) included children with EAL in their pilot studies; these children's results have not yet been analysed separately from the English-speaking cohort. Moreover, the authors reported anecdotal evidence from Early Years Practitioners that ETB has a positive impact on EAL children. It is therefore recommended that a child should always be assessed in their first language to determine their language development needs. See recommendations section for ideas on how this can be achieved.

Moreover, educators reported difficulties in balancing the programme with curriculum demands, the preparation time involved in delivering the programme and maintaining children's attention. The pressure on practitioners'/teachers' time and resources to meet all the demands of early years education is often an issue with integrating additional programmes or supports in ECECs and schools. Further research could be done to understand how to improve the logistical aspects of programme–delivery to better support practitioners/teachers dealing with this challenge. In addition, some teachers reported they alleviated this pressure by utilising smaller groups pulled from their class. It should be noted that all Talk Boost programmes recommend a small group size of 6–8 children for the intervention. This suggests that implementation of Talk Boost was not always followed according to guidelines. Thus, group size is something that the Chit Chat service should consider exploring in the next academic year to determine best practice for each individual setting's needs.

Of note, the percentages of children reported as not having English as their first language was unexpectedly low (14% of children in ETB and 4% in TBKS1). The most recent census results from the Central Statistics Office (2022a, 2022b) reported about 20% of South Dublin respondents identified as speaking a language other than English or Irish at home. Comparatively, in the same academic year another CDI programme, Powerful Parenting, reported that 26% of parents primarily spoke a language other than English in the home. There is an overlap of families participating in Powerful Parenting and Chit Chat, as Chit Chat operates in ECECs which hosts Powerful Parenting's Parent Carer Facilitators. These discrepancies suggest that there may be a misrepresentation of EAL children within Talk Boost groups. It is important to note that in data collection for Talk Boost programmes, the educators record the data on language, and they may be unfamiliar with the language(s) the children use at home. Additionally,

the Talk Boost question is phrased "what is the child's first language", which may not capture multilingual families, and children who primarily speak English outside of the home, and another language inside of the home. Demographics are collected as a part of the Talk Boost programme with standard questions set by the intervention developers; therefore, CDI cannot change the phrasing of this question. These issues limits CDI's ability to monitor and compare programme efficacy with non–EAL and EAL children.

Regarding Chit Chat's summer course, the positive feedback on the course's structure, content, and delivery suggests that the course was well–received by participants. The high satisfaction rates reflect the quality and value of the course. However, the desire for more interaction between participants and more concrete examples of classroom activities suggests that the course could include additional collaborative elements or practical demonstrations of strategies. Moreover, the geographic breakdown on the school locations is of note. There were 42% participants reporting as being located rurally and 21% suburban, suggesting there may be a strong interest or need for support in speech and language development outside of urban areas, and may reflect a lack of speech and language supports in these areas. Alternatively, the low numbers in city and town locations may suggest a need to investigate barriers to participation in these areas, including Chit Chat's operating area, as no participants identified themselves as working in Dublin 24.

While current available data and analysis overall suggests success of the Chit Chat programme, it should be noted that various components of the programme do not collect outcome data for analysis, and only reports output numbers i.e., Talk to Your Baby Cube, Loving Listening, Toddler Talk, and the targeted speech and language therapy sessions. These numbers indicate both interest and demand in these supports, but this report

cannot evaluate the efficacy of these supports with participating children and parents during the 2023/24 academic year. We can however state that all of Chit Chat's interventions are evidence–informed, and that Chit Chat's SLTs are experienced, senior practitioners that utilise evidence–based SLT strategies in the targeted SLT sessions and Loving Listening sessions. All Chit Chat SLTs are registered with CORU[35] and are therefore bound by CORU's code of Professional Conduct and Ethics to stay current with research, apply effective and proven therapy methods, avoid outdated or unproven practices, and engage in continuing professional development (CPD). Although there were efforts to monitor the impact of the Talk to Your Baby Cube, survey uptake was very low, and thus the data were not subject to analysis. Moreover, it is important to note that further funding for Talk to Your Baby Cube has not yet been secured and therefore may impact future implementation of this component. However, attempting to measure the efficacy of and satisfaction with these other components should be considered.

Overall, implementation and efficacy of the Chit Chat programme was successful in the 2023/24 academic year. Talk Boost continues to be an effective, evidence–based intervention, and the variety of supports offered along the three–tiers of intervention are fully utilised. Monitoring of the programme was also successful at identifying potential areas for minor improvement in programme implementation with Talk Boost and the Chit Chat summer course. While attempts to evaluate the other components of Chit Chat not captured in current monitoring and evaluation efforts should be considered, current evaluation efforts are successful in evaluating the components that are monitored.

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[35] CORU is Ireland's health regulator. All Speech and Language Therapists must register with its Therapy Board, which maintains the professional register, approves training, and sets conduct and practice standards.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Chit Chat service should continue to engage ECECs and primary schools in Dublin 24, and the wider community with all three layers of intervention and attempt to expand into more services.

- Chit Chat should aim to expand the number of children engaging with Talk Boost, and ensure supports are in place for educators to facilitate the Talk Boost Programme.

- Training for staff and teachers who co–facilitate Talk Boost should continue to ensure staff and teachers feel confident in their delivery of the programme. Chit Chat SLTs and staff/teachers should continue open lines of communication to ensure that the best possible approach to programme delivery is achieved

- Further research could be done to investigate ways to alleviate the pressure on time and resources that practitioners/teachers facilitating Talk Boost face.

- Education for early years practitioners and teachers surrounding the differences between language delays and learning English as an additional language should be provided by Chit Chat to support identification of appropriate children for Talk Boost interventions.

- Monitoring and evaluation efforts of other components of Chit Chat, namely Loving Listening, Toddler Talk, and targeted SLT sessions should be considered and enhanced.

- Funding for the Talk to Your Baby Cube should be secured to continue the programme, and methods for gathering user feedback from parents using the cubes should be revised to enable more effective monitoring.

- The Chit Chat Summer Course onboarding experience should be reviewed to ensure all participants are aware of the feedback process on assignments and to avoid technical problems which may impact their participation.

- The Chit Chat Summer Course participant surveys should be reviewed to ensure appropriate measures of pre– and post–course knowledge are utilised.

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23/24 Academic Year

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Appendix I: Surveys and Measures

Practitioner Feedback Survey:

Knowledge and Understanding:

1. Understanding of language delay before Talk Boost (rate 1–10)

2. Understanding of language delay after Talk Boost (rate 1–10)

3. What have you learned about speech and language from your settings participation in Talk Boost? (open feedback question)

Programme Implementation:

4. How did you find the implementation of Talk Boost in your setting?

5. What concerns (if any) did you have about running the Talk Boost programme in your setting? Did you adapt the programme to facilitate these concerns?

6. What did you find most challenging about implementing the programme?

Programme Impact:

7. Did you find the Talk Boost programme beneficial for the children in your setting?

8. What differences in attention, listening and language skills (if any) have you observed in the children participating in Talk Boost?

9. The programme met my expectations
   Strongly disagree ☐   Disagree ☐   Don't know ☐   Agree ☐   Strongly agree ☐

10. The programme format was clear
    Strongly disagree ☐   Disagree ☐   Don't know ☐   Agree ☐   Strongly agree ☐

11. I was supported by CDI's Speech and Language therapist to deliver Talk Boost
    Strongly disagree ☐   Disagree ☐   Don't know ☐   Agree ☐   Strongly agree ☐

12. Would you recommend Talk Boost to other Early Learning and Care Settings / Primary Schools? (Yes/No)

13. Any Further comments?

14. We are always looking for ways to improve our work. Do you have any suggestions for Chit Chat's Talk Boost programme going forward?

Table 7: Summer course survey: knowledge subscale

The following statements ask you to rate your knowledge of areas that were covered during the training. Rate each statement using the options provided. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.

Please rate your knowledge in the following areas upon completion of the training:	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Reflective practice					
The components of oral language					
Literate language					
Strategies to support Speech and Language in the classroom					
Supporting children with SLCN in the classroom					
Language and social disadvantage					
Developmental language disorders					
Family literacy					

Table 8: Summer course survey: confidence subscale

The following statements ask you to rate your confidence in the skills that were covered during the training. Rate each statement using the options provided. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.

Please rate your confidence with regard to the following skills you learned in this training	Not at all confident	Slightly confident	Moderately confident	Very confident
Approaching a parent to discuss concerns regarding speech, language, communication				
Identifying a child with Speech Language and Communication needs				
Making a referral to Speech and Language Therapist				
Supporting parents with regard to Speech Language and Communication needs				

Table 9: Summer course survey: quality subscale

The following statements ask you to rate the quality of the training and how the training met your expectations and goals. Rate each statement using the options provided – there are no right or wrong answers.

Please record the extent to which you agree with the following statements:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
I achieved the stated learning outcomes of this course					
This course was professionally enabling and relevant to the work of schools					
This course has improved my teaching or leadership skills					
The tutor ably led the learning and ensured there were good levels of engagement					
The tutor provided me with appropriate feedback on my assignments/activities and tasks					
The course was well structured and effectively managed					
This course made meaningful links with school self–evaluation and Information and communications technology					
This course was of good quality.					

Table 10: Summer course survey: open questions

Some final feedback…

Please mention one message that you have taken from this training	(Open Question)
What worked well about the training?	(Open Question)
How could we improve the training?	(Open Question)

Appendix II: Data Analysis

For the Talk Boost data, in the initial step of analysis the data were tested for parametric assumptions. Where assumptions (i.e., normality, heterogeneity of variance) were violated, non–parametric (i.e., Wilcoxon Signed–Rank test, Quade's ANCOVA) instead of parametric (i.e., paired–samples t–test, ANCOVA) tests were conducted. For the Summer Course, the data were reviewed for demographics. Secondly, participants' pre– and post–scores of the confidence subscale of the survey were compared using a parametric paired–samples t–test (data met parametric assumptions), and the knowledge subscale data were presented descriptively. Lastly, participants' satisfaction scores, which were only obtained in the post–survey, and their qualitative feedback regarding the summer course were presented descriptively.

Appendix III: Demographic Breakdown
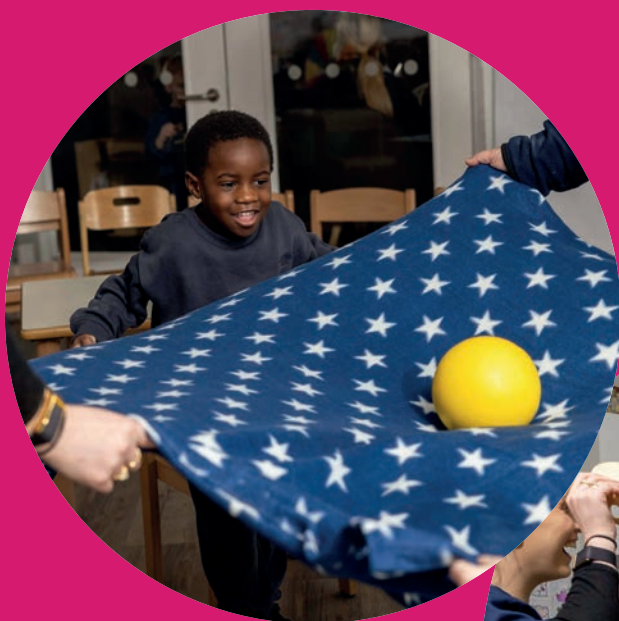
Table 11: Talk Boost Children Demographics

Early Talk Boost			Talk Boost Key Stage 1		
Gender	n=78	%	Gender	n=54	%
Male	32	41%	Male	25	46%
Female	46	59%	Female	29	54%
First Language	n=77	%	First Language	n=54	%
English	66	86%	English	66	96%
Polish	*	5%	Polish	*	2%
Lithuanian	*	1%	Romanian	*	2%
Portuguese	*	1%			
Urdu	*	1%			
Other	*	5%			

Note. * Indicate a number less than 5, and these have been censored to remove the potential for identification.

Table 12: Teacher Summer Course Demographics

Speech Language and Communication in the Classroom and Beyond					
Gender	**n=19**	**%**	**Teaching Post**	**n=19**	**%**
Male	*	95%	Learning Support/Resource	11	58%
Female	18	5%	Mainstream Teacher	6	32%
Province	**n=19**	**%**	Language Class	*	5%
Leinster	11	58%	Special Class	*	5%
Munster	*	21%	**School Location**	**n=19**	**%**
Ulster	*	10.5%	Rural	8	42%
Connacht	*	10.5%	Suburban	*	21%
Age Range	**n=18**	**%**	Town	*	21%
18–24	*	11%	City	*	16%
25–34	*	17%			
35–44	8	44%			
45–54	*	22%			
55–64	*	6%			

Note. * Indicate a number less than 5, and these have been censored to remove the potential for identification.

Chit Chat
Speech and Language Therapy Service CDI

TÚSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
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