



What Works for
Children's
Social Care

Catch Up[®] Literacy Evaluation report

May 2023





What Works for Children's Social Care

Acknowledgments

National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) and Institute for Employment Studies (IES) would like to extend our thanks to the carers and children who took part in this study. We would also like to thank the local authorities and Independent Fostering Association who supported this work. We are indebted to the project support officers at IES, Mandi Ramshaw and Lisa Tuffin, who programmed the surveys, supported recruitment to interviews and led formatting and proofing of this final report.

Funding

Funding for this report was provided by What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC). WWCSC receive their funding from the Department of Education. In their capacity as funders WWCSC reviewed and provided comments on the protocol and this report. The views expressed in this report are the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of WWCSC.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

IES	Institute for Employment Studies
IFA	Independent fostering agency
LA	Local authority
NIESR	National Institute of Economic and Social Research

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
Introduction	7
Research questions	7
Methods	7
Key findings	8
Discussion	9
Conclusion and recommendations	10
INTRODUCTION	12
Project background	12
Catch Up® Literacy	13
Previous evaluation	15
Context	15
Evaluation	15
METHODS	16
Research questions	16
Protocol registration and ethical review	16
Data collection	16
Sample recruitment and selection criteria	18
Data management and processing	19
Analysis	19
FINDINGS	21
Section 1. Recruitment to Catch Up® Literacy (RQ1)	21
Section 2: Catch Up® Literacy training (RQ1; RQ2)	23
Section 3: Delivery of the Catch Up® Literacy intervention (RQ1; RQ2)	27
Section 4: Carers' reading habits and attitudes to reading (RQ1)	35
Section 5: Carers' reading habits, attitudes, confidence and skills when reading with the child (RQ1)	38
Section 6: Literacy skills and knowledge of carers and children (RQ1)	48
Section 7. Children's survey responses (RQ1)	59
Section 8. YARC assessment (RQ2)	60
Section 9. Cost analysis (RQ3)	61
DISCUSSION	65
Discussion of findings	65
Limitations	68
Conclusions and recommendations	68
Directions for future research	70
REFERENCES	71

APPENDIX: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SURVEYED CARERS

72

Background of carer

72

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Children in care have reportedly poorer educational outcomes than their peers who are not in care. As such, it is vital that interventions are identified that can help to close this attainment gap. This study explores the delivery of Catch Up® Literacy – a reading intervention typically delivered by teachers or teaching assistants in schools for struggling readers. This evaluation was carried out to assess whether the Catch Up® Literacy intervention could be successfully delivered in the home by foster carers. This model of delivery is new to Catch Up® Literacy in terms of both the agents of delivery (i.e. foster carers) and the targeted children (i.e. children in care).

Recruited through local authorities and an independent fostering agency, any child currently in care and in school Years 5 or 6 was eligible to receive the intervention. Foster carers or kinship carers who agreed to participate in the study were trained by Catch Up® to deliver the intervention over a 19-week period. During that time, children would receive 2 15-minute structured reading sessions per week with their carer in the home. Catch Up® provided ongoing support for the carers as well as materials with which to carry out the programme.

Research questions

The study aims to address the following three research questions.

1. **Evidence of feasibility:** Can the intervention be successfully delivered by foster carers/kinship carers in the home?
 - a. Is the Catch Up® Literacy intervention feasible for foster/kinship carers to deliver in the home in terms of acceptability of the training and materials, time commitment and engagement of the children in their care?
 - b. Is the Catch Up® Literacy intervention perceived to have positive impacts on children's literacy skills, confidence in and attitudes to reading as reported by children and foster/kinship carers?
 - c. Is the Catch Up® Literacy intervention perceived to have positive impacts on foster/kinship carers' own skills and confidence in reading with children in their care as reported by foster/kinship carers?
 - d. Are there any unintended or negative consequences of the intervention?

2. **Readiness for trial:** Is Catch Up® Literacy scalable for a randomised controlled trial?
 - a. What are the resources needed for foster/kinship carers to deliver Catch Up® Literacy (e.g. time for training and support)?
 - b. How compliant are foster/kinship carers in implementing the intervention (e.g. do they make adaptations, do they deliver all sessions as planned)?
 - c. How appropriate is the primary outcome measure and how feasible is it to administer this measure remotely?

3. **Cost:** What is the cost per child of delivering the Catch Up® Literacy intervention?

Methods

Five local authorities and one Independent Fostering Association agreed to support the study. All families with children in Years 5 or 6 were invited to take part. No other eligibility

criteria were used. Forty-one foster carers took part in the programme, with 44 foster children receiving the intervention.

The study used mixed methods to address the key research questions. Baseline and endline surveys were sent to all foster carers, who were also invited to interviews towards the end of the intervention. Interviews were also carried out with the delivery partner. Endline surveys were sent to all of the children and they were all invited to take part in an endline reading assessment delivered via Zoom.

We carried out a cost analysis looking at fixed and variable costs and calculated a cost per child as well as a cost per carer to account for those carers who delivered to multiple children.

Key findings

Evidence of feasibility

1.a. Is the Catch Up[®] Literacy intervention feasible for foster/kinship carers to deliver in the home in terms of acceptability of the training and materials, time commitment and engagement of the children in their care?

- Foster carers were positive about the intervention. The online training was well received and the majority of foster carers felt confident in delivering the intervention. There were some concerns about the appropriateness of the language used in the training and materials, with some foster carers finding this difficult to access
- Most foster carers felt that the intervention could be fitted into a normal day. However, not all carers were able to deliver the full 19 weeks of intervention due to time constraints in addition to the additional needs of the children in their care
- Carers were generally happy with the materials received and felt the choice of books was appropriate. For some carers the books were either too easy or too hard for the child(ren) in their care, suggesting a wider range of books may be needed
- Most foster carers enjoyed delivering the intervention. However, a consistent barrier was the motivation and attitude of the child, particularly if the child had other needs or other commitments (e.g. Year 6 SATs).

1.b. Is the Catch Up[®] Literacy intervention perceived to have positive impacts on children's literacy skills, confidence in and attitudes to reading as reported by children and foster/kinship carers?

- Most children who completed the survey said they enjoyed reading more following the intervention than before it, but there was no change in their attitude towards school
- Carers reported children being more confident in phonics at the end of the programme and there was a positive change in their confidence in writing and spelling
- Carers reported children having increased skills in phonics and writing but not spelling at the end of the intervention
- The intervention appeared to have a positive impact on children's reading comprehension.

1.c. Is the Catch Up[®] Literacy intervention perceived to have positive impacts on foster/kinship carers' own skills and confidence in reading with children in their care as reported by foster/kinship carers and children?

- The intervention did appear to increase the frequency with which carers read to the child(ren) in their care, as well as their confidence and skill in doing so.

1.d. Are there any unintended or negative consequences of the intervention?

- There did not appear to be any negative consequences as a result of the intervention.

Readiness for trial

2.a. What are the resources needed for foster/kinship carers to deliver Catch Up® Literacy (e.g time for training and support)?

- Catch Up® Literacy training was successfully carried out remotely with little adaptation to the school delivery model. However, some concern was raised about the amount of information included in the training and whether this was appropriate for parents
- There were also concerns around digital exclusion for parents who had limited access to technology
- Some trainers and carers reported that a face-to-face element to the training would have been preferable to online-only training
- Post-training support in the form of drop-in sessions was reported to be useful by carers who attended, but they were not always scheduled at times convenient to carers and as such attendance was low.

2.b. How compliant are foster/kinship carers in implementing the intervention (e.g. do they make adaptations, do they deliver all sessions as planned)?

- Carers had to make adaptations to the programme to meet the needs of the children in their care.

2.c. How appropriate is the primary outcome measure and how feasible is it to administer this measure remotely?

- The primary outcome measure appeared to work well; assessors reported that they had little difficulty collecting this data remotely and the measures did not show any floor or ceiling effects, meaning that there was a good distribution of scores.

Cost of the intervention

- The cost per child for this model of delivery is higher than when the programme is delivered in school. However, once trained, the foster carers can deliver the intervention to any child in the home. In addition, a cost–benefit analysis was not possible within the constraints of this evaluation.

Discussion

The findings from the evaluation suggest that the Catch Up® Literacy programme is feasible to deliver by foster carers in the home. Carers reported increased confidence and skill in reading for the children in their care. There were some barriers to engagement, including time constraints and the needs and motivations of the children taking part. Online training delivered by experienced Catch Up® Literacy trainers was well received, although the level of training in terms of the language used and the amount of information delivered was of some concern to both carers and trainers. The cost of delivering the intervention with carers in the home is higher than with teachers in schools, but it is not possible in this evaluation to weigh that against the benefits of receiving the intervention.

Conclusion and recommendations

The findings of the evaluation are largely positive, particularly in terms of feasibility, and suggest that Catch Up® Literacy could use this model of delivery moving forward. However, there are some recommendations that would help to address some of the issues raised. These recommendations are proposed by the research team on the basis of the findings.

Key recommendations

Recruitment

- Establish eligibility criteria to ensure the programme is appropriate for the child. In the school-based trials (Rutt, 2015; Roy et al., 2019) the children were selected to take part because they were struggling with literacy. For this evaluation, WWCS made the programme available to any child in foster care who was in Year 5 or 6, so their fit to the programme was not established until the first assessment session. This meant that for some children the programme was either too hard or too easy, resulting in poor engagement or withdrawal from the programme. If eligibility criteria were set before programme delivery, the foster carer could be more confident that the programme would be appropriate for the child in their care. It would also be worth assessing whether the child has additional needs that may require an adaptation or more flexible approach to the sessions
- For future programme recruitment, allow more time for recruitment to ensure that carers understand the expectations of the programme and have plenty of time to fit the training into their schedules. It should also be made clear to those recruiting (e.g. social workers) that carers must understand that the programme is voluntary and they are under no obligation to take it up
- It may be helpful to avoid delivery in Year 6 when children also have SATs at school
- It may be helpful to deliver to younger cohorts, before they see themselves as not being able to read. Years 1 and 2 may be the most suitable year groups for delivery because the intervention fits with the Key Stage 1 curriculum and in particular phonics instruction.

Training

- It is important that a further review is undertaken of the language used in the training to ensure it is accessible to all carers
- For training, Catch Up® could consider some face-to-face element to help both trainers and carers check their understanding and develop a good supportive relationship. This is also important to address digital exclusion.

Ongoing support and delivery

- Delivery teams should have more regular touch points during intervention delivery to check in with carers, with a more proactive approach. For example, if carers are not attending online support groups, not emailing or phoning in, Catch Up® would contact them to check in and see if everything is all right. This may prevent some of the potential disengagement
- Clear communication about how foster carers request more books from Catch Up® may help keep families engaged
- Dates for drop-in sessions should be set further in advance and perhaps held more frequently so that more foster carers are able to attend. The carers who did attend found them extremely helpful, so more opportunities to ask questions and discuss

delivery of the programme may have prevented some foster families from disengaging

- Reconsider homework demands to ensure that all carers can complete the training flexibly and taking account of their other commitments
- Awareness and coordination between schools, social workers and families to support the children could help keep the children engaged
- For readers who are coping well with decoding, more emphasis could be placed on reading comprehension within the sessions.

INTRODUCTION

Project background

Recent government figures show that over 80,000 children in England are currently looked after by the local authority (Gov.UK, 2021). Of these, approximately 57,000 are placed in foster homes, either through the local authority (LA) or an independent fostering agency (IFA). Typically, looked-after children show poorer educational outcomes than their peers who are not looked-after. The *Education in England* report published by the Education Policy Institute (EPI; 2020) stated that “By the time they sit their GCSEs, looked after children are 29 months behind their peers” (p.24). Data from the Department of Education shows that 47% of looked-after children achieved a good level of development on the early years foundation stage profile (EYFSP) in 2018/19 compared with the national average of 72% (DfE, 2019). At the end of Key Stage 1 (KS1), 52% of looked-after children achieved expected levels in reading, 43% achieved expected levels in writing and 49% achieved expected levels in maths compared with the national average of 75%, 69% and 76% respectively (DfE, 2020). A smaller proportion of looked-after children achieved expected levels in reading, writing, maths and grammar, punctuation and spelling compared with non-looked-after children at the end of KS2 (DfE, 2020). In addition, the average Attainment 8 score (a combined score of 8 GCSE results) at the end of KS4 was lower for looked-after children than non-looked-after children (DfE, 2020). Looked-after children also have a greater likelihood of having a special educational need (SEN) compared with non-looked-after children, with 28.7% of looked-after children requiring SEN support compared with 11.9% of all children and 27.2% of looked-after children having an education, health and care (EHC) plan compared with 3.1% of all children (DfE, 2020). With this in mind, it is clear we need to identify and implement effective interventions to support the educational outcomes of looked-after children.

Catch Up[®] Literacy is a reading intervention typically delivered by teaching assistants or teachers in schools. Children receive 2 15-minute sessions per week using a book-based approach that allows children to work on both word recognition and language comprehension. The programme is designed for readers aged 6 to 14 years who are struggling with reading and whose reading age is below their chronological age. This programme has been trialled by the Education Endowment Foundation with an effectiveness evaluation (Rutt, 2015) and an efficacy evaluation (Roy et al., 2017). As such this programme has been identified by WWCS as a potential project for improving the outcomes of children in foster care. This report details a study of the Catch Up[®] Literacy programme implemented by foster carers in the home.

Initially, this evaluation was designed as a large-scale 2-arm randomised controlled trial (RCT) with 500 foster families across England randomly allocated to an intervention or a control group. WWCS led on the recruitment to the trial. Unfortunately, recruitment proved challenging and only 5 LAs/IFAs were willing to send information to families, and only 41 foster carers took part. As such, the research design was changed to an implementation and process study to understand how the intervention might work with this new group (foster/kinship carers) in a new setting (homes), with all interested families being offered the opportunity to be trained in delivery of the intervention.

Catch Up® Literacy

What was implemented?

Catch Up® Literacy is a reading intervention aimed at struggling readers between the ages of 6 and 14 in which children receive 2 15-minute structured reading sessions each week for a total of 19 weeks. Typically, this is delivered in schools by trained school staff, but the purpose of this study is to evaluate the feasibility of foster carers delivering these sessions in the home.

Catch Up® Literacy consists of four stages, which carers were trained to deliver via three two-hour online sessions:

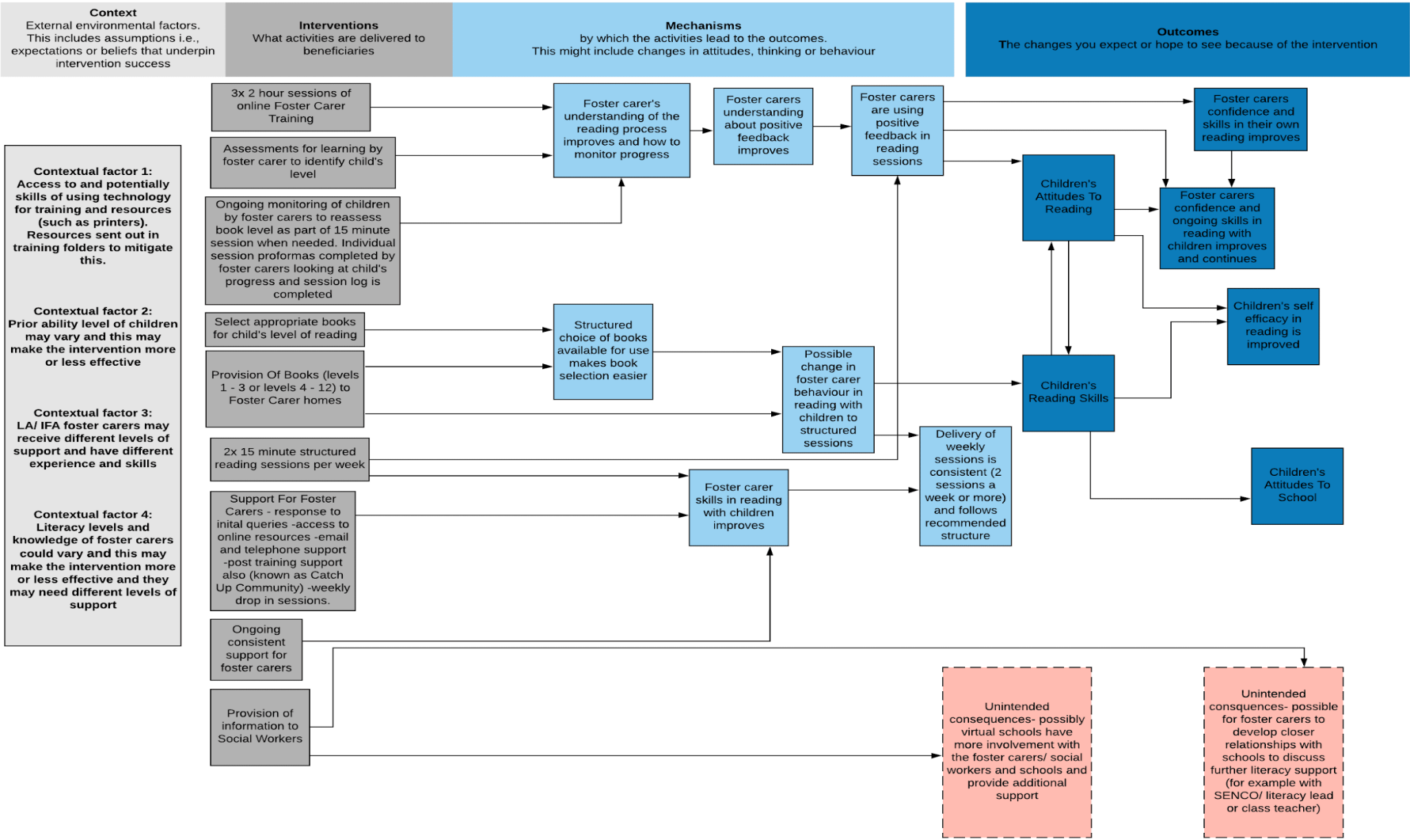
- Stage One: assessment of child's learning to establish the appropriate starting point using assessment materials provided by Catch Up® Literacy
- Stage Two: selection of a book at the appropriate level
- Stage Three: implementing the individual sessions
- Stage Four: ongoing monitoring of the child's progress using monitoring materials provided by Catch Up® Literacy.

Each individual Catch Up® Literacy session follows a consistent structure. Each session begins with prepared reading (three minutes), then reading and discussion of text (six minutes) and finally linked writing (six minutes).

Carers were provided with materials to carry out the assessment for learning, monitoring materials and a set of new books to use in the sessions. They also received ongoing support through the Catch Up® Community, with regular online group support sessions, newsletters, email and telephone support and access to online resources.

The logic model for the intervention is given in Figure 1. The logic model illustrates the context of the intervention, as well as the intervention activities and anticipated mechanisms of change, which lead to both intended and unintended outcomes. To summarise, the training and support from Catch Up® Literacy is expected to improve carers' understanding and skills in supporting the reading development of the children in their care. This will have a positive impact on children's literacy skills as well as their attitudes to reading and their attitudes to school.

Figure 1. Logic model



Who took part?

Five LAs and one IFA agreed to take part in the evaluation. These organisations identified foster carers/kinship carers in their areas who were looking after children eligible to take part in the intervention. Eligibility criteria were that the child had to be in foster care and in the right age range – i.e. aged 9–11 years. The children and families were situated across England. Forty-one carers agreed to take part in the programme, with 44 children eligible to receive the intervention. Where carers had more than one eligible child in the home, they selected one child to consider when completing the surveys but could deliver the intervention to all eligible children. All children who took part in the intervention were asked to complete the reading assessment and endline survey.

Previous evaluation

Catch Up® Literacy has not been evaluated for delivery in the home. Previous evaluations have focused on typical delivery in the school environment. An efficacy evaluation was carried out by the EEF and published in 2015 (Rutt, 2015). This trial focused on children in Year 6 who were transitioning into Year 7. Children were identified by their teacher as struggling readers and received 2 15-minute sessions per week for 30 weeks delivered by a trained teaching assistant (TA) employed specifically for the intervention. Children in the intervention group made more progress in reading than those in the control group but this was not statistically significant. They also showed more positive attitudes to school, higher confidence in reading and higher confidence and enjoyment in writing.

An effectiveness trial was published by the EEF in 2019 (Roy et al., 2019). Children in this study were in Years 4 and 5. Findings from this trial were less encouraging, with no evidence of impact on reading or reading comprehension. However, fidelity to the trial was poor and there were several methodological differences between the two trials, which may explain the disparity in results. Specifically, TAs delivering the intervention were nominated by the school, not specifically employed. In addition, children stopped the intervention when they had reached their expected reading age rather than completing a prescribed number of sessions.

Context

The project was carried out in the homes of foster carers across England. Five LAs and one IFA agreed to send information to their foster carers with eligible children and to the child's social worker to gain consent for the child to take part in the intervention.

Evaluation

This study aimed to establish whether a reading intervention designed to improve children's word-level reading and comprehension could be successfully delivered by foster carers and kinship carers in the home. This study evaluated Catch Up® Literacy delivered directly by foster carers or kinship carers to eligible children in their care. The intervention itself was not changed but the mode of delivery was different. For example, rather than being carried out in schools by teachers or TAs, the intervention was delivered by foster carers and kinship carers. In addition, the target group was different, with the children in this study not identified specifically as having reading difficulties, and being children in care. We looked at the implementation and process of delivery to establish any barriers/facilitators to delivering the intervention using this approach. We also assessed whether the proposed primary outcome was appropriate, and the feasibility of collecting the proposed primary outcome measures remotely.

METHODS

Research questions

We aimed to answer the following research questions. These were changed from the original research questions, which pertained to the planned RCT.

1. **Evidence of feasibility:** Can the intervention be successfully delivered by foster carers/kinship carers in the home?
 - a. Is the Catch Up® Literacy intervention feasible for foster/kinship carers to deliver in the home in terms of acceptability of the training and materials, time commitment and engagement of the children in their care?
 - b. Is the Catch Up® Literacy intervention perceived to have positive impacts on children's literacy skills, confidence in and attitudes to reading as reported by children and foster/kinship carers?
 - c. Is the Catch Up® Literacy intervention perceived to have positive impacts on foster/kinship carers' own skills and confidence in reading with children in their care as reported by foster/kinship carers?
 - d. Are there any unintended or negative consequences of the intervention?

2. **Readiness for trial:** Is Catch Up® Literacy scalable for a randomised controlled trial?
 - a. What are the resources needed for foster/kinship carers to deliver Catch Up® Literacy (e.g. time for training and support)?
 - b. How compliant are foster/kinship carers in implementing the intervention (e.g. do they make adaptations, do they deliver all sessions as planned)?
 - c. How appropriate is the primary outcome measure and how feasible is it to administer this measure remotely.

3. **Cost:** What is the cost per child of delivering the Catch Up® Literacy intervention?

Protocol registration and ethical review

This project received ethical approval from the ethics committee at the National Institute of Economic and Social Research. The protocol was registered on 8 December 2021 (10.17605/OSF.IO/93Z7F).

Data collection

Data was collected using the following measures. The research question(s) each measure relates to is indicated in brackets (e.g. RQ1):

Assessment of reading for comprehension (RQ2): (YARC; Snowling et al., 2009) – this was the primary outcome measure. The YARC is a standardised measure of reading and comprehension. To complete the measure, children are asked to read two passages and answer a set of eight questions after each passage. Having read the first passage children move to a passage that is more or less difficult depending on their performance. The YARC is relatively quick to administer (approximately 15 minutes) and score. The testing was carried out remotely via Zoom by an independent research company, Qa Research. This testing was done at a time convenient to the families with the foster/kinship carer. All families were able to complete the test in their own home and no testing in schools was required. The tests were marked by GL Assessment and scores returned to Qa Research, who shared them with NIESR. As a standardised measure, an average score on this test is 100 with a standard deviation of 15.

Attitudes to reading survey (RQ1) – this was the secondary outcome measure and was administered via email survey sent to foster/kinship carers to share with the children in their care (alongside the implementation and process evaluation (IPE) questions). We used the pupil survey used in the previous EEF effectiveness evaluation (Roy et al., 2019), which was adapted from a previous Catch Up® Literacy evaluation (Rutt et al., 2015) and consists of three subscales: attitudes to literacy, attitudes to school and self-esteem. We used only the first two subscales because the third (self-esteem) showed poor reliability in the EEF trial (Roy et al., 2019).

Online survey of children (RQ1) – this was carried out at the endpoint (July–September 2022) and covered attitudes towards literacy and school children’s experiences of the intervention, including their perception of changes in enjoyment of reading and abilities in reading over time. This bespoke survey accounted for the fact that some of the children in the sample may have low literacy skills for their age and was therefore quick and easy to complete (maximum 10 minutes), comprising engaging and quick questions with accompanying graphics. Carers were emailed the survey link to pass on to the child(ren) in their care. The survey was completed by the child online using a PC/laptop or phone/device by the child. Completion of the survey could be carried out at a time convenient for the family.

Online survey of foster/kinship carers (RQ1, RQ2) – this was administered at baseline before carers started the training (November 2021–February 2022) and at the endpoint 19 weeks post-training minus school holidays (June–September 2022) for all foster/kinship carers so that we could explore change over time. These bespoke surveys included questions on their own confidence in reading and their confidence and skills in reading with the children in their care. The endline survey also included questions on their perceptions of the intervention, including experiences of the training and associated assessment tools, challenges, feasibility and likelihood of continuing the activities. These surveys took approximately 15 minutes to complete. All surveys were emailed to the carers by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and completed on digital devices as above. The tables in the findings section below present the baseline and endline responses, and separately present the responses of those participants that filled in both the baseline and endline survey – referred to as longitudinal respondents. While the longitudinal participants responded to both surveys, they may not have answered all questions at both time points, meaning some tables may show that a different number of people answered baseline as answered endline for the longitudinal figures.

In-depth interviews with foster/kinship carers (RQ1, RQ2) – these enabled a detailed discussion with participating foster carers/kinship carers about their experiences of the full intervention (training and ongoing support), implementation, feasibility, perceptions of impacts on themselves and the children and associated monetary and time costs. All carers were invited to participate. The interviews lasted 30–45 minutes. All interviews suggested for the IPE were telephone or video call interviews (depending on interviewee preference) to reduce burden. They were recorded using Microsoft Teams recording if by video or using a Dictaphone if by telephone. Consent for recording was requested from the interviewee before the recording was turned on and repeated for the purposes of the recording.

In-depth interviews with (up to 5) trainers of Catch Up® Literacy (RQ1, RQ2) – these explored the training and support provided to the foster/kinship carers and feasibility of the project on a larger scale. This included a discussion about how the programme had been adapted from a school context to a foster/kinship carer programme and their perceptions of feasibility and scalability. These interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour.

Table 1. Data collected in this evaluation (percentage in brackets)

<i>Data collection type</i>	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endpoint</i>
Online survey of carers	35 (85%)	27 (66%)
Interviews with carers	N/A	20 (49%)
Interviews with Catch Up®	N/A	5 (N/A)
Online survey of children	N/A	10 (23%)
Reading assessment with children	N/A	22 (50%)

It should be noted that although the respondent population varies between baseline and endpoint (35 foster/kinship carers at baseline and 27 at endline), this does not indicate attrition between groups, because some foster/kinship carers took part in the endline but did not take part in the baseline. Their views did not necessarily change the direction of results, although where tables contain columns labelled “longit” it indicates the level of change between baseline and endlines for the group who took part in both surveys.

Sample recruitment and selection criteria

WWCSC was responsible for recruitment of LAs/IFAs. WWCSC contacted all LAs in England and IFAs to invite them to participate in the original RCT. However, few organisations were willing to take part in the RCT. Feedback from some LAs/IFAs approached suggested that they did not think it was appropriate for families to have a 50% chance of not receiving the programme. Following the change in the evaluation design, LAs/IFAs were contacted again with details of the new design. Following this change 11 organisations expressed interest in the study but the final sample consisted of 5 LAs and 1 IFA. Each of the five LAs and one IFA who agreed to participate signed a memorandum of understanding and a data-sharing agreement with the research team before sending details of the study to all families registered with them who had children of the target age group. Age of the child was the only eligibility criterion. Families received an information sheet, a consent form and a privacy notice. If the foster carer did not have parental responsibility for the child, the LA/IFA sent the information sheet and consent form to the relevant social worker who could give consent for the child to take part in the programme if the foster carer wanted to sign up. Families who had signed up to the original RCT were sent updated documentation when the design changed. Once consent had been received from the foster carer and social worker, the LA/IFA sent details of the foster carer and child to NIESR using a template designed by the research team. Once that data had been sent to NIESR, the LAs/IFAs were no longer involved in the project.

NIESR shared details of the foster families with (a) Catch Up® Literacy so that they could arrange training for the carers; (b) IES so that they could launch the baseline and endline surveys and arrange interviews; and (c) Qa Research so that they could carry out the reading assessments at the end of the intervention.

Recruitment of families was originally planned to end by December 2021 and training of foster carers was due to take place in December 2021. As a result of low take-up by families, recruitment remained open until January 2022 and training was carried out in five cohorts between December 2021 and February 2022. Families could start the programme as soon as training was complete, which meant the intervention started at different times for different families. Endline testing and foster carer interviews

were carried out in order of training – i.e. cohorts trained first received the endline survey and interviews first.

Surveys were sent to all foster/kinship carers by email for the foster/kinship carer surveys and also to pass on to children for their surveys at the endpoint. Questions were pitched using simple language and using images to engage children. Surveys were hosted online by Snap Surveys. The baseline survey indicated that the foster/kinship carers were experienced carers – only 6% had less than 1 year's experience in this role. Their educational backgrounds varied more – half were qualified to Level 4 or above, and nearly 2 in 5 possessed Level 2 or 3 qualifications. Around two-thirds fostered more than one child and two-thirds had other children at home (see appendix for more details).

All families were offered the opportunity to take part in the interviews. We were reliant on LAs/IFAs to ensure consent procedures were followed, otherwise we were not able to access the families or social workers. Every family was given a £50 shopping voucher after completing training. A second £50 voucher was provided after completion of the final survey and child reading assessment.

All children were invited to take part in the reading assessments at the end of the intervention.

Catch Up[®] Literacy interview requests aimed to cover those working in different regions and were contacted through the Catch Up[®] Literacy delivery team leads.

Data management and processing

In the context of this project, NIESR, IES and WWCS are joint controllers, Catch Up[®] and each LA/IFA association are independent controllers and Qa Research are data processors for the duration of the evaluation. Data was shared with NIESR by LAs/IFAs using NIESR's secure OneDrive. NIESR shared data with IES using ownCloud and with Qa Research using their secure OneDrive.

NIESR carried out analysis of YARC data using Excel to generate descriptive data. This data was anonymised by Qa Research and shared with NIESR in a password-protected Excel file. This was then stored on NIESR's secure OneDrive.

Analysis

Qualitative data analysis

Interviews were digitally recorded (with the agreement of participants) and then notes were created from the recording. We analysed the data using a "framework" approach (adapted from Ritchie and Lewis, 2003), drawing themes and messages from an analysis of the interview notes using an Excel matrix with one interviewee per row and quotations for illustrative purposes. For the interviews with carers who did not continue with the intervention, which were very short, we carried out a simpler thematic analysis of the responses. The team had an emerging finding meeting to discuss the interviews' main themes and their perceptions of the IPE results before beginning writing the report in autumn 2022. A response matrix was also created in Excel, which logged engagement with each of the evaluation activities. This enabled us to check responses across the different methods of data collection.

Quantitative data analysis

YARC assessment data was collected by Qa Research and scored by GL Assessment, who then shared raw scores and standard scores for each child with NIESR. Descriptive analysis was carried out in Excel to explore the range of scores on each subscale, and explore any ceiling or floor effects.

The survey data was downloaded and saved into SPSS. Data cleaning was carried out and descriptive statistics were generated using SPSS.

FINDINGS

The findings from the IPE activities are presented thematically. The survey results for the carers' baseline survey are compared with the results from the carers' endline survey. Following analysis of the survey results, the findings from the interviews are presented. The findings are structured as follows. The research questions addressed in each section are indicated in brackets – e.g. (RQ1):

- Section 1 presents the results on the carers' experiences of the recruitment process (RQ1)
- Section 2 presents the carers' views on training for the Catch Up® Literacy intervention (RQ1; RQ2)
- Section 3 presents the carers' views on delivery of the Catch Up® Literacy intervention (RQ1; RQ2)
- Section 4 presents the results around carers' own reading habits (RQ1)
- Section 5 presents results on carers' habits, attitudes, confidence and skills around reading with the child (RQ1)
- Section 6 presents the results of the children's literacy skills (RQ1)
- Section 7 presents the findings from the children's survey (RQ1)
- Section 8 presents the findings from the implementation of the YARC assessment (RQ2)
- Section 9 presents the cost analysis (RQ3).

Section 1. Recruitment to Catch Up® Literacy (RQ1)

This section presents findings from the interviews with carers on their experiences of recruitment to the Catch Up® Literacy programme intervention.

Recruitment process

Recruitment to the project was iterative. An initial recruitment round was run for the originally planned RCT and when this proved unsuccessful, a second round was undertaken for the redesigned evaluation. The recruitment process was broadly reported positively by carers taking part in qualitative interviews. Carers mostly felt that they were given enough information and said they had frequent opportunities to ask questions about the intervention before the start of the training.

The reported routes to recruitment for this group were varied, although the predominant routes were being contacted and recruited through the local authority virtual school or their IFA social worker/wider IFA team. A few carers said they proactively joined the intervention because they were aware the child(ren) in their care required support. For some, this involved making requests to multiple sources, including schools and local authorities, which resulted in being added to the mailing list for the intervention and being able to sign up. Carers who took part welcomed any additional support they could secure, for them and the children in their care.

In most cases communications about recruitment took the form of emails. Carers reported that the information received before the training was informative and accurately reflected what was expected of them. Some had also been invited to an information session to “make an informed choice” about whether they should take part. Others echoed that they felt they had enough information to make an informed decision to participate in the intervention.

Although the response from participants to the invitation to take part was largely positive, there were several improvements to the process suggested by carers. Some carers noted there was an online

welcome event but little information to accompany this; they said other carers in their network were put off by this. Others said they needed more information about the length of the intervention, although indicated that the perceived long duration (19 weeks) may have discouraged participation. Some reported being told that participation was compulsory as training before Christmas 2021. In these cases, the Catch Up® Literacy trainer could reassure carers that this was not the case, although it represented a difficult start for some of the carers taking part. The flexibility on the timing of the training was not obvious to some carers, who found it pressurised to complete this in the run-up to Christmas. Other carers suggested that more training dates in closer succession would have worked better and offered greater flexibility given their constraints. For the most part, these difficulties did not affect engagement with the intervention.

In sum, these cases highlight the importance of a longer rather than short recruitment phase; clear, consistent and comprehensive information; and providing a variety of training dates in advance to enable fully informed participation.

Motivations and expectations

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the motivating factors for carers to join the intervention centred on wanting to support children in their care with reading and literacy activities. Many also related this to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the significant disruption to children's education during this time:

"I thought my little one was struggling a bit with comprehension and reading, so I wanted to get them up to speed, especially after COVID." Carer

As well as providing support for their foster child to improve their literacy, carers also discussed a more general desire to help children in their care improve their reading ability, especially where a support need had been identified. In this context, the intervention was identified as an additional method of support to complement and enhance their school activities.

Carers reported feeling that the intervention would be an effective additional mode of support for the child(ren) in their care, particularly where they struggled to reach the same literacy levels as their peers. Accordingly, the timeliness of recruitment was also a motivating factor, as child's needs were identified at a point where the carer felt able or ready to tackle them, and the intervention facilitated this in a timely way.

Although largely positive in their outlook and motivations, carers could also report some reservations before their participation in the Catch Up® Literacy intervention. This included initial concerns about their own abilities and confidence to deliver the intervention to the child they were caring for.

There were also concerns, before starting, about the time it would take to deliver the intervention, although where reported, this did not prevent participation in the training. There were also fears that participation could lead to expectations for additional involvement, despite no information indicating this:

"I did wonder when I agreed to the training whether we would be asked to do it with other children and that's what put me off ... not that I wouldn't want to, just that I don't have time." Carer

Despite their initial concerns around time constraints, carers who went on to deliver the intervention with the child(ren) in their care often reported a positive experience with the intervention.

Section 2. Catch Up® Literacy training (RQ1; RQ2)

This section discusses feedback from carers who responded to the endline survey and took part in the telephone interviews. The views and experiences of the programme leads and trainers who delivered the training are also included.

Table 2 presents carers' views on how training was delivered and the suitability of the training. Over three-quarters (77%) of carers agreed that the dates and timings of the training suited them. A third (33%) strongly agreed with these statements, and 7% strongly disagreed with them.

Overall, there was a preference for online training, with 82% of carers agreeing that online training fits in better with their other commitments, most of whom (52% of all carers) strongly agreed. Only 4% of carers disagreed with this statement and 15% neither agreed nor disagreed, which was a higher rate than seen for the other questions concerning how training was delivered. Nine out of 10 carers (89%) agreed that the training was relevant and appropriate to their needs, most of whom (48%) strongly agreed. However, 8% disagreed.

Four-fifths (81%) of carers agreed that after completing the training they felt confident to deliver the intervention, with over one-third strongly agreeing. However, 4% (1 person) strongly disagreed with this statement.

Table 2. Carers' views on how training was delivered

	<i>The dates of the training suited me</i>	<i>The timings of the training suited me</i>	<i>Online training fits in better with my other commitments</i>	<i>The training was relevant and appropriate to my needs</i>	<i>After completing the training, I felt confident to deliver the programme</i>
Strongly agree	33%	33%	52%	48%	37%
Somewhat agree	44%	44%	30%	41%	44%

Neither agree nor disagree	4%	0%	15%	4%	15%
Somewhat disagree	11%	15%	0%	4%	0%
Strongly disagree	7%	7%	4%	4%	4%
N	27	27	27	27	27

Source: IES survey

Carers taking part in the interviews reported attending Catch Up® Literacy training sessions from December 2021 onwards, with most carers completing training in either December 2021 or January/February 2022. A small number could not recall when their training had been completed. The training for the Catch Up® Literacy was reported positively by almost all those interviewed.

Structure and content of training

Carers reported few if any issues with the process, structure or content of the training. The structure and depth of learning achieved during the sessions contributed to making the training an effective and enjoyable learning experience.

“I thought training was really good, they gave you the opportunity to practice before the next session so you could try out and then go back to them if you couldn’t do it. So it was quite good.” Carer

Some carers found aspects of the content complex, especially where they did not have a lot of prior knowledge of a topic. This included phonics, particularly where this had not been a feature of their own education. Despite this lack of prior knowledge, through the thoroughness of the training and with practice, they were often able to build sufficient knowledge and so become confident delivering the intervention.

The training materials were also reported positively during interviews. Carers appreciated receiving a paper copy of the workbook, which facilitated their learning by giving them a point of reference for training content. They felt there was a lot of content to cover in the training sessions, so the workbook materials aided their learning process, enabling them to return later to and revise content. They also valued having their own copies so they could make notes and write comments.

Findings from the delivery team and trainers

The delivery team, during interviews, noted that apart from removing much of the school-based terminology from materials, the intervention was largely delivered as originally intended. They recognised that not all carers would be able to download and print training materials so printed and distributed hard copies in advance for all carers. This had helped to reduce burdens on carers as well as increase accessibility.

The team reported no difficulties in recruiting trainers to deliver the programme to carers as there was a lot of positivity around the programme and trainers were keen to be involved.

The trainers who delivered the training were all experienced in delivering the Catch Up® Literacy programme to schools. However, none had delivered the training to carers before. The key differences they reported between school-based training and training for the carers centred on carers not necessarily being well-versed in teaching-based language that was extensively used in the Catch Up® Literacy training. As such, examples of adapting the wording further during training were given as trainers recognised that carers would be unfamiliar with a lot of the vocabulary.

“As I was going through the training, I realised there was a lot of language that was very school-based and jargonised. So, I had to be careful about the wording and language I used as many trainees were on a different knowledge base. They’re not working in education, not necessarily up to date with educational talk. Things like assessments I had to think carefully about them as these were people who were not used to doing such assessments.” Trainer

The trainers during interviews said that the carers taking part in the training were in some ways more motivated than the school staff who they usually trained. This was because they were emotionally invested in the training, due to it being the child(ren) in their care who needed support to further their skills, rather than a few individuals in a class.

“I did feel, when a question was asked [in the chat function], it was very heartfelt, there was a very deep personal connection with why they were doing it. Most of the questions were also very specific as most of the carers had a specific child in mind, whereas teacher trainees may have to teach 20 or 30 children. The underlying difference was that the people on the course had the desire to make it work even though it would be difficult having to do it after school as well as having to deal with children who had difficulty with the education system.” Trainer

Length of training

The duration of the training was considered appropriate by most of the carers interviewed, and the timing and dates of training sessions were reported positively. However, some carers reported difficulties accommodating the sessions due to each being too long or the logistics of being able to find three days in a row free to attend the training sessions. It was pointed out by a number of carers that their lives are particularly busy because of the additional support and meetings required when looking after children in care. Some would have preferred shorter, more frequent, sessions to enable them to better process the large amount of information given. Others reported that they would have preferred sessions to be spaced further apart to allow them to process the training content:

“I felt the training was cramped, very cramped. I felt I was taking in a lot in a very short space of time. I felt that probably, three days wasn’t sufficient ...” Carer

Several carers reported they would have preferred more time (rather than the evening between the sessions) to do the activities. However, others reported positively on the practice activities in between sessions as they solidified knowledge, and they could ask for feedback if things did not work.

Mode of delivery

The carers taking part in the interviews had mixed views on the remote delivery method of the training and were evenly split in their preference for either a remote or in-person delivery, which contrasted with views expressed in the survey. For some in the interviews, the in-person delivery method would not be feasible due to the age and/or needs of the child(ren) in their care. However, others said that they were “Zoomed out” and would have welcomed the engagement of face-to-face training, although also understood the difficulties caused by the pandemic and saw online training as being better than no training at all:

“I would prefer face-to-face as then you can have more contact with the other participants and find common ground ... it was a little difficult to have a conversation online, as you must put your hand up.” Carer

A trainer also raised online delivery as an issue because it made communication harder. They felt face-to-face training would work better for carers.

Views of the trainers

During the interviews, carers were positive about the trainers, who they found not only helpful but knowledgeable and willing to support them with any issues they encountered. They felt able to ask questions in the chat or after the training via email or in the drop-in sessions:

*“The trainer was very approachable and very good. They were also very useful; when I did my initial assessment of the child, I realised that the books I had were outside of his age range, so I asked [the trainer] for some earlier books. That was really helpful.”
Carer*

Suggested improvements

Carers and trainers were asked during interviews to suggest possible improvements to the training. Some carers found the training quite prescriptive and lacking advice on how to adapt to a variety of situations such as working with children with special educational needs or behavioural scenarios for the home environment such as how to motivate children and maintaining their concentration. Some had not understood there would be homework to do between training sessions.

While recognising the importance of practising the material, some carers suggested improvements around homework. This included information that homework was expected between training sessions, as well as more flexibility on when it could be completed given the needs of some children, which might then entail spreading the sessions over a slightly longer period. There was also a suggestion that the workbook could be condensed.

“I also wasn’t aware there was a homework side to the training as well. Balancing all this as well as having a child with special needs, proved very difficult.” Carer

The trainers also raised concerns that too much information was included in training sessions, meaning it was hard for carers to take everything in.

The trainers reported points related to the digital inclusion of the carers and the resources available in their homes – some parents lacked technology to access the training from home and some of the training videos could not be viewed on mobile phones. The online delivery also made it more difficult for trainers to assess whether the carers were taking in the information that was being shared with them.

Section 3. Delivery of the Catch Up® Literacy intervention (RQ1; RQ2)

Carers were asked for their views on delivering the Catch Up® Literacy intervention in the endline survey and telephone interviews. This section covers these findings.

In response to the statement “The reading fits into a normal day”, two-thirds of the carers in the survey (65%) agreed, with 27% strongly agreeing (Table 3). One in six (16%) disagreed. On a scale where five indicates “strongly agree” and one indicates “strongly disagree”, this statement had the lowest mean score in this section of the survey.

Table 3. Carers’ views on whether the reading fits into a normal day and whether the project has given them ideas for reading that they would not have considered doing before

	<i>The reading fits into a normal day</i>	<i>The project has given me ideas for reading that I would not have considered doing before</i>
Strongly agree	27%	19%
Somewhat agree	38%	52%
Neither agree nor disagree	19%	22%
Somewhat disagree	12%	4%
Strongly disagree	4%	4%
N	26	27

Source: IES survey

On whether “The project has given me ideas for reading that I would not have considered doing before”, 7 out of 10 (71%) carers agreed, with one-fifth (19%) strongly agreeing. Eight per cent of carers disagreed.

Additionally, carers responding to the survey overwhelmingly agreed (96%) that they would recommend the project to other carers, with 59% strongly agreeing with this. Four per cent strongly disagreed. On a scale where five indicates “strongly agree” and one indicates “strongly disagree”, this statement scored the highest mean in this section of the survey.

The intervention was intended to have a 19-week delivery period following the completion of training for the carer. Just over half of the carers taking part in qualitative interviews said that they were able to deliver the full 19 weeks and the others reported partial delivery before the sessions stopped. The carers who reported halting delivery often cited time constraints, behavioural or emotional issues of the foster child or the occurrence of a significant life event, such as a bereavement, as impacting on their ability to continue delivering the intervention successfully. Some carers also reported that their foster child’s reading age was above the level of the books provided, which led to them dropping out or partially delivering the intervention. These constraints indicate the variety and complexity of the home environment and some of the issues foster children encounter that may prevent them from being able to engage fully with the programme delivery.

There were five interview respondents who were unable to successfully deliver the intervention to the child(ren) in their care. The primary barriers for this group were not being able to find enough time for session delivery in a busy household and significant behavioural and emotional needs of their foster child, which prevented them from being able to prioritise or persist with the intervention.

Where carers reported time constraints affecting their ability to continue the programme, they often shared that having other children in the home meant that they were balancing their family caring responsibilities alongside the intervention delivery, indicating a barrier to delivery in the home environment. Again, the behavioural or emotional issues of the child, including refusal to participate in sessions, were mentioned. Some carers reported that lack of concentration and focus of the child(ren) in their care was the biggest issue in carrying out the sessions, meaning they could not engage with the activities long enough for delivery to be successful. The often multiple and complex additional needs experienced by the foster children had an impact on both carer confidence and ability to deliver the intervention, as well as the child’s receptiveness and ability to participate.

Delivering the programme

For those carers in the interviews who delivered all or some of the intervention, there were many elements of the programme that worked well with their foster child(ren). Carers reported facilitators of successful delivery included the simplification of tasks, not forcing activities if the child is not motivated or engaged, as well as being able to access the online ongoing drop-in sessions and the availability of books at the right reading level for the child. Carers also reported that the consistency of the session timings was helpful; incorporating it into their routine ensured that their sessions were always completed; some said this was best achieved by incorporating it into the child’s bedtime routine.

Several carers also reported that the foster child engaged positively with the novelty of having “special” time with their carer. This was motivating and encouraging for the child, and made the delivery an enjoyable experience that they would look forward to:

“Because they were different to normal reading sessions, they felt quite special. It was our special time to go and read together. And because it was special books which I put in a special box ... she thought it was quite good.” Carer

The engaging nature of the intervention sessions was also reported by several carers as the key to their success. Some carers included elements of gamification in their delivery to motivate and engage foster children to participate in the sessions.

Others reported building incentives to engagement based on the interests of the child(ren) in their care. For example, one described the 90-minute football game that the child would enjoy playing after a 15-minute literacy session. Throughout the interviews a high degree of personalisation of delivery was reported based on what the carer felt would motivate the child to complete the sessions.

Carers also reported that tips offered in the support sessions by other foster parents on behaviour management and literacy learning were helpful in providing techniques they had not encountered previously. This included reading with children all the time while you are out, such as reading car number plates and then making up a word together. Carers also reported material incentives such as buying a chalkboard and scented pens to enrich writing activities of the child(ren) in their care.

The difference between the home and school environment was also discussed by a few carers, who noted a concern about blurring the boundaries between home and school and not wanting to be seen as teachers, especially where the child(ren) in their care had had a negative experience of education. A carer who also works as a teacher noted that the difference between the classroom and home environment made the delivery of the intervention noticeably different, highlighting that the carer–child relationship strongly influenced the child’s engagement and motivation:

“I haven’t got any children, so fostering [child’s name] as a teacher was completely different. Because in class you have 30 children, you are there to teach 30 children, they are there to learn. But at home, you’ve got that relationship of, no, they don’t want to do it, they are at home. It’s a completely different feel, different relationship, I found it quite interesting.” Carer

How carers took forward delivery

The frequency and structure of sessions was discussed by carers and most reported that the structure worked well for them. Carers were asked to estimate the time taken to complete the sessions weekly and it was common to have spent between one and two hours per week on the intervention and preparation time (often split over several days of the week). Examples were also given of much shorter sessions (5 minutes) or much longer sessions (30–40 minutes) than the intended 15 minutes. This was often influenced by the motivation of the foster child to participate.

Carers also reported a range of barriers in delivering the programme. The most common of these was being able to find enough time each week to action the activities, compounded further by school activities, or extra-curricular activities, as well as preparation for the SATs for children in Year 6. There were suggestions to start the intervention in the autumn term, because over winter and into spring, carers had struggled to find time for delivery due to the volume of schoolwork in the spring term that overlapped with SATs.

Some carers reported that their foster child had disengaged or that they didn't always feel like reading. This was commonly reported in the group of carers who were not able to complete the full 19 weeks of delivery. Several explained that their foster child's school already had reading requirements in place, so Catch Up® Literacy on top of this felt too much sometimes for both carer and child. Some carers also felt that if the child did not want to do the activity, it was not effective or helpful to force them. Others reported that monitoring the activities can be difficult, and that recording and scoring activities were not always helpful for children's morale or learning. Some kept this element private from the child(ren) in their care.

Carers were also asked if they had been able to continue delivering the Catch Up® Literacy intervention over the school holidays, which generated mixed responses. Most did not attempt this due to having other commitments or a desire to allow the child(ren) in their care to rest from academic learning and take up leisure activities during this time. However, some carers did continue in the school holidays, albeit to a different timetable to accommodate their other activities during the school break. Flexibility for this group was a key consideration, so sessions would be on irregular days, at different times of the day or be shorter during this time. Some welcomed the opportunity to carry on over the school holidays, mainly because it encouraged the child(ren) in their care to read regularly and brought some structure to the holidays. Some used the holidays to catch up with their reading (and reach the 19-week target), either because they had been busy or something had happened with the child to disrupt their "normal" routines during term.

Adaptations and compliance

As well as the gamification and incentives described above, carers discussed making adaptations to the structure of the intervention to make delivery with their foster child more effective. This mostly involved adaptations to the session timings; this could be according to the length of book, where there was a natural end or where carers reported focusing on areas that their foster child struggles with (such as reading comprehension or phonics), resulting in a longer session length. Some carers said it was unnecessary to always talk about the book beforehand and there was some indication that they felt this was better for less advanced readers, whose comprehension was less developed.

Compliance with the intervention model was not always achieved, as evidenced by the multiple adaptations reported, which diverge from the intended structure of the delivery. Where the session length, delivery length or activities were curtailed by carers, this was commonly reported as being due to concentration or motivation issues of the foster child. This prevented all activities from being undertaken – for example, not doing the assigned reading at the start of the session, or conversely carers feeling the need to spend additional time before the session to get the child(ren) in their care in the right frame of mind to be able to participate. Where foster children had additional needs, whether diagnosed or undiagnosed, such as autism, dyslexia, ADHD, behavioural or emotional needs, this impacted on their carers' ability to deliver the entire intervention and the child's participation.

Some carers reported increasing the frequency of intervention delivery to every day and saw positive outcomes linked to this change of practice. These carers believed more frequent sessions helped improve the literacy skills of the child(ren) in their care. In some cases, they saw this improvement where the child in their care had previously had a learning need identified. Others reported an increased frequency of reading sessions but were unsure of whether they should do this because it was not required by the programme, although their foster children were happy to engage every day:

“We were reading every day anyway so those sessions just became part of the reading we would normally do. She wanted to do the special reading every day. I didn’t know whether to let her do it whenever she wanted or just twice a week. We did tend to do it a little more often.” Carer

Other carers reported they had adapted elements of the programme delivery to respond to SEN of the child(ren) in their care or to enable the child(ren) in their care to remain motivated over the delivery period. An example included a carer who said the child(ren) in their care had difficulties with writing due to problems with their fine motor skill, which were being addressed in therapy sessions. Accordingly, they felt that writing activities would not be appropriate, so they did not complete the writing element of the intervention.

Children’s enjoyment of the sessions

Carers were asked during the interviews whether their foster child enjoyed the Catch Up® Literacy sessions. Some reported that despite a slow and reluctant start from the child, they came to eventually enjoy the sessions, and this in turn had led to an improved enjoyment of reading.

“Not at the start, but he did get used to it and now we read to him every night. He loves the praise, he smiles. It’s the norm now.” Carer

Others, however, reported that their foster child did not enjoy the sessions. Carers attributed this to the child’s existing frustration with, or lack of enjoyment of, reading. Several carers said that motivating the child(ren) in their care to participate took a significant amount of time and that this negatively impacted the child’s enjoyment of literacy activities. In some cases, foster children were less engaged with the intervention activities because they recognised them as similar to school activities. Where children were having difficult or negative school experiences, they were also less willing to engage.

Carers’ enjoyment of the sessions

In the interviews, carers were asked about their own enjoyment of the intervention sessions with their foster child. Most who delivered the intervention reported they had. Notably, carers said that dedicated time with their foster child working on their literacy skills also had a concurrent positive impact on their relationship with their foster child. In this way it could be described as a mutually beneficial scheme that improved carers’ and the foster child’s enjoyment of reading together. Carers also in some cases enjoyed learning new literacy skills.

Some carers who enjoyed the sessions said that it took some time for them to build an enjoyment of the activities, due to the time it took to motivate their foster child to fully participate, saying for example that it was rewarding, but initially “challenging” or “tricky”.

Materials and support

In the endpoint survey, carers were presented with statements about the books they were provided with to read with/to the child as part of the project as well as the other materials provided by Catch Up® Literacy. Table 4 shows that carers were mostly satisfied with the resources. Nine out of 10 (89%) agreed that the books were easy to use, with over half (56%) strongly agreeing with this statement. The

majority (85%) agreed that the books were age-appropriate, with over one-third (37%) strongly agreeing. Eight per cent disagreed with this statement. Again, the majority (89%) agreed that a good range of books were available, with three-fifths (59%) strongly agreeing. Eight per cent disagreed with this statement. Three-quarters (74%) agreed that they felt confident using the materials provided in the Catch Up® Literacy file, including the progress booklet, and that it was useful to have books provided, with 37% strongly agreeing.

Table 4. Carers' views on the resources they were provided with

	<i>The books are easy to use</i>	<i>The books are age-appropriate</i>	<i>A good range of books are available</i>	<i>I felt confident using the materials provided in the Catch Up® Literacy file, including the progress booklet</i>
Strongly agree	56%	37%	59%	37%
Somewhat agree	33%	48%	30%	37%
Neither agree nor disagree	7%	7%	4%	22%
Somewhat disagree	0%	4%	4%	0%
Strongly disagree	4%	4%	4%	4%
N	27	27	27	27

Source: IES survey

Catch Up® Literacy books

Interviewees were asked their views on the materials and support provided by Catch Up® Literacy, alongside the additional support such as the online drop-in sessions provided by the trainers, emails and newsletters.

In interviews, carers said that the books supplied were good in terms of choice, quantity and appropriateness of reading level. The quantity and variety of books supplied were cited by many carers as one of the most positive aspects of the intervention. Examples of this included how the books gave their foster child “licence to use their imaginations” as they enabled the children to visualise themselves in situations encountered during their reading activities. The diverse topics covered, from astronauts, adventure books or dealing with relevant issues such as bullying at school, were also seen as positive. The quality and diversity of books were seen as key to improving foster children’s reading level in some examples. The books also had unexpected benefits related to behaviours that carers were addressing, which could be timely and helpful – one carer discussed a book about sharing, something the child(ren) in their care struggled with, which they read together several times to support the child’s development.

Discussions with carers also show how in multi-child households, other children had been able to make use of the books alongside the foster child in the intervention. This was seen as a further benefit and way of extending the reach of the intervention. It was an unexpected impact for some carers, who had been surprised by the other child in their household becoming interested to take part.

Some issues were reported with the level of books not meeting the reading requirements of their foster child, either being at a level too high or too low for the child’s abilities. This led to some carers purchasing additional books in order to complete the intervention delivery with appropriate materials. Others indicated that they would try to use the books with other children in their household. There was also a view raised that the books were gendered more towards boys, and a foster child was reported as observing that “all the children pictured in the books received were boys”.

Trainers too were concerned about the books meeting the differing needs of the children on the programme, in particular if a child progressed faster than expected. They also raised the difficulties of assessing the level of access that carers had to books and the carers’ confidence in reading. These concerns were corroborated by some carers who complained of difficulties in accessing more books once the child had completed the first set, as well as some finding the length of the books inappropriate for the child(ren) in their care.

Assessment and monitoring materials

Carers were asked in interviews about the completion of the individual record sheets (IRS), session logs and assessment sheets as part of the intervention. These were documents provided by Catch Up[®] Literacy to help carers keep track of children’s progress. Most reported being able to complete these, but some only partially completed the IRSs or session logs. Reasons for this centred on either only completing delivery of a small number of consecutive weeks before dropping off or only completing one type of record – either the session logs or the IRSs but not both. This could be due to lack of confidence in completing the forms for some. For example, some found the forms confusing and had to go back to the manual to “rejig” the assessment, reporting that as they were not doing it on a regular basis it was tricky to remember how it should be completed. Some of the carers who partially completed assessment materials reported being influenced by the motivation of the child(ren) in their care. Some wanted to avoid the child(ren) in their care becoming frustrated by assessing them too early, so took a gradual approach until they felt comfortable moving their reading level up.

Carers who reported completing all assessment and monitoring materials typically indicated that they had few problems doing this, although some said that the forms could be simplified, with fewer boxes,

and others reported needing to take a long time to familiarise themselves with the various materials and forms before starting.

“[You’re] refreshing in your head all the time while you’re doing it ... it’s manageable but depending on the type of child you’ve got it can be difficult to juggle that in between all the other bits and pieces you’ve got to do.” Carer

In contrast, some who delivered the intervention in full did not complete the assessment and monitoring materials, due to time constraints and/or a lack of interest from the child in this element of the intervention.

Use of online and other resources

Carers were asked in interviews about their use of ongoing support, online drop-ins, email/telephone support and the regular emails and newsletters. Emails and newsletters were reported as an effective communication and support method although, when probed, many did not recall the details of them and many reported receiving a lot of emails in their roles as carers.

Carers in interviews who attended online drop-in sessions found these useful, especially where they had a particular concern or question, or a concept they needed help with:

“It was really helpful that someone was there each week ... if we were having difficulties, we had drop-in sessions where we could ask questions and see how others were getting on. When you go through all the training, sometimes you forget. So, it was nice to have someone there to say go through it again with you. To make sure you are doing it all correctly.” Carer

Some carers also reported sharing effective techniques and practices with other carers during the drop-in support sessions, with some finding this peer learning aspect to be a valuable, unexpected, source of support.

It also led some carers to form separate peer networks to discuss the issues they were dealing with, more generally, which some found helpful: “It was mostly about sharing and caring.”

Carers also appreciated being able to phone or email trainers with follow-up questions after the training sessions, although fewer reported accessing the phone and email support. Some had called the phone line for technical support when first accessing the online training and quickly received support. Others said email support was helpful when requesting more books: “They were great about it.”

Some carers said that although they would have liked to attend the online support sessions, they were unable to due to the timings conflicting with existing commitments. In line with the findings around the training, carers have busy and time-poor lives, with their roles as carers involving multiple other meetings and activities, in addition to usual commitments such as school and after-school activities.

Accordingly the delivery team reported that attendance at the drop-ins was variable and some were concerned about carers not accessing the online drop-ins, which they thought might be due to a lack of confidence.

Section 4. Carers’ reading habits and attitudes to reading (RQ1)

Carers were asked about their personal reading habits and attitudes to reading in the surveys and in the interviews. Their views are reported in this section.

On how often they read to themselves in a “normal” week, including books, newspapers, magazines, journals and electronic books, Table 5 shows that at baseline, two-thirds of carers (66%) would normally read most days of the week; however, this rose to 78% at endline. Over one-third (37%) reported reading every day at baseline, and this increased to nearly two-thirds (63%) by the end. The proportion who reported never reading stayed fairly constant.

The columns for baseline and endline longitudinal survey respondents shows results for the carers who took part in both the baseline and endline survey. The table shows broadly similar results for longitudinal respondents to those for the whole sample. Three-quarters (75%) of carers would normally read most days of the week at baseline and endline. Two-fifths (40%) reported reading every day at baseline, and this increased to over half (55%) by the end. The proportion never reading stayed the same (10%).

Table 5. How often carers read themselves in a “normal” week

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
Every day	37%	63%	40%	55%
Six times a week	6%	0%	5%	0%
Five times a week	9%	11%	10%	15%
Four times a week	14%	4%	20%	5%
Three times a week	11%	7%	5%	5%
Twice a week	9%	4%	5%	5%
Once a week	6%	0%	5%	0%
Never	6%	7%	10%	10%
Other	3%	4%	0%	5%
N	35	27	20	20

Source: IES surveys

At baseline, over four-fifths (84%) of carer respondents who normally read said they read for both work and pleasure, with slightly more saying they read for pleasure only (9%) than work only (6%) (Table 6). At endline, 92% of carers who normally read said they read for both work and pleasure, with equal numbers (4%) saying they read for pleasure only and work only respectively.

For longitudinal participants, there was no change from baseline to endline with the vast majority (94%) of carers saying they read for both work and pleasure and 6% said they read for work only.

Table 6. Do carers mostly read for work or pleasure?

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
Work only	6%	4%	6%	6%
Pleasure only	9%	4%	0%	0%
Both	84%	92%	94%	94%
N	32	24	18	17

Source: IES surveys

Before the intervention, the carers were already confident readers, with over two-fifths (43%) choosing the top score of 10, which was extremely confident (Table 7). By the endline, the carers were marginally more confident as readers. Over half of readers (56%) chose the top score of 10. At baseline 6% of carers rated their confidence in reading at 1, while at endline no carers rated their confidence at reading below a score of 6. The average score at baseline was 8.6, whereas the endline mean average was 9.2. Longitudinal respondents were more confident than all carers at baseline and endline. Nearly two-thirds (65%) chose the top score of 10 at baseline and endline (average score increased from 9.1 to 9.4).

Table 7. Carer’s confidence as a reader (0 is “not confident”, 10 is “extremely confident”)

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
0	0%	0%	0%	0%
1	6%	0%	5%	0%
2	0%	0%	0%	0%
3	0%	0%	0%	0%
4	0%	0%	0%	0%
5	0%	0%	0%	0%
6	0%	4%	0%	5%
7	11%	11%	5%	5%
8	14%	7%	10%	0%
9	26%	22%	15%	25%
10	43%	56%	65%	65%

Mean score	8.6	9.2	9.1	9.4
N	35	27	20	20

Source: IES surveys

At baseline, carers scored highly as readers, with two-fifths (40%) choosing the top score of 10 which was very good at reading (Table 8). At endline, two-thirds (63%) of readers chose the top score of 10. At endline no carers scored below five, compared with 6% at the baseline. At endline the mean score was 9.3, in contrast to the baseline average score of 8.7.

Longitudinal respondents scored slightly higher as readers than all carers at baseline and endline. At baseline, three-fifths (60%) chose the top score of 10 while at endline, three-quarters (75%) chose the top score of 10. The mean score increased from 9.2 to 9.5.

Table 8. Are carers good readers? (0 is “I struggle with reading”, 10 is “I am very good at reading”)

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
0	0%	0%	0%	0%
1	0%	0%	0%	0%
2	0%	0%	0%	0%
3	3%	0%	5%	0%
4	3%	0%	0%	0%
5	0%	4%	0%	5%
6	0%	0%	0%	0%
7	11%	7%	0%	0%
8	20%	7%	15%	5%
9	23%	19%	20%	15%
10	40%	63%	60%	75%
Mean score	8.7	9.3	9.2	9.5
N	35	27	20	20

Source: IES surveys

During interviews, carers indicated that the intervention had little impact on their own reading habits outside the intervention, with few reporting any change in their reading habits. Some explained this was due to already having a keen interest in reading as a leisure activity.

Where carers did report a change in their reading habits, these centred on understanding more about the “science” of reading, through their learning from the training. Although some would like to read more, having very young children in the household and a busy lifestyle prevented them from doing so.

Section 5. Carers’ reading habits, attitudes, confidence and skills when reading with the child (RQ1)

Carers were asked about their habits, attitudes, confidence and skills around reading with the child(ren) in their care who is currently in Year 5 or Year 6 at school. They were also asked about the habits, confidence and skills of the child and any barriers to reading with them. Views from both the survey and telephone interviews are reported here and, where relevant, this section also includes self-reported data from the children’s endline survey.

Table 9 shows that at endline, carers reported reading to the child more frequently than at baseline. Before the intervention started, one-third of carers (34%) reported reading to the child most days of the week and 1 in 6 (17%) carers reported reading to the child every day. At endline, over half (52%) read to the child most days of the week, and two-fifths (22%) reported reading to the child every day. At endline just one carer (representing 4%) said they never read to the child, compared with almost a quarter (23%) at baseline.

Before the intervention, 45% of longitudinal respondents reported reading to the child most days of the week, which increased to 70% at endline. At endline only one carer (representing 5%) said they never read to the child compared with 20% at baseline.

Table 9. How often carers read to the child at the moment

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
Every day	17%	22%	25%	15%
Five times a week	9%	19%	5%	25%
Four times a week	9%	11%	10%	10%
Three times	14%	19%	5%	20%

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
a week				
Twice a week	17%	7%	20%	10%
Once a week	9%	7%	10%	5%
Never	23%	4%	20%	5%
Other	3%	11%	5%	10%
N	35	27	20	20

Source: IES surveys

Findings from the children's survey

In the children's survey (endline only), the majority (78%) remembered taking part in the Catch Up[®] Literacy programme (N=9). Over half (57%) said they read with their carer one or two days a week (N=7). Two-thirds of children (67%) said their carer reads with them more now than before starting the Catch Up[®] Literacy programme (N=9).

Carer confidence and skills in reading with the child

Table 10 shows that before starting the intervention, carers were very confident in their ability to read with the child, with nearly half (47%) of carers rating themselves as 10, extremely confident. By endline, over half of carers (56%) rated themselves as 10, extremely confident, an increase of 9 percentage points (and 4 percentage points for the group that took part in both surveys). At endline no carer scored themselves below 8, compared with 10% at the baseline, and the mean score increased from 9.1 to 9.4.

At baseline, nearly three-fifths (59%) of longitudinal respondents rated themselves as 10. By endline, this increased to 63% (the mean score increased from 9.3 to 9.5).

Table 10. Carer confidence in reading with the child (0 is "not confident", 10 is "extremely confident")

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
0	0%	0%	0%	0%
1	0%	0%	0%	0%
2	0%	0%	0%	0%

3	0%	0%	0%	0%
4	0%	0%	0%	0%
5	0%	0%	0%	0%
6	3%	0%	6%	0%
7	7%	0%	0%	0%
8	17%	16%	12%	11%
9	27%	28%	24%	26%
10	47%	56%	59%	63%
Mean score	9.1	9.4	9.3	9.5
N	30	25	17	19

Source: IES surveys

Carers generally reported being skilled in their ability to read with the child, and this increased by endline. At the baseline, two-fifths (40%) of carers felt they were extremely skilled in their ability to read with the child, recording a score of 10 (Table 11), which increased to around half (48%) at endline. No carers scored below 8 at endline, compared with nearly a quarter (23%) of carers at baseline who scored between 5 and 7. The mean score at endline had increased by 8% from 8.3 to 9.1.

Longitudinal respondents were reportedly more skilled than all carers. At baseline three-fifths (59%) recorded a score of 10, which increased to 63% at endline. The mean score at endline increased from 8.8 to 9.3.

Table 11. Carer skills in reading with the child (0 is “no skills”, 10 is “extremely skilled”)

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
0	0%	0%	0%	0%
1	0%	0%	0%	0%
2	0%	0%	0%	0%
3	0%	0%	0%	0%
4	0%	0%	0%	0%
5	13%	0%	12%	0%
6	3%	0%	0%	0%
7	7%	0%	6%	0%
8	30%	36%	18%	26%

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
9	7%	16%	6%	21%
10	40%	48%	59%	53%
Mean score	8.3	9.1	8.8	9.3
N	30	25	17	19

Source: IES surveys

At the baseline, carers reported being less skilled in assessing what the child can and cannot do in their reading, compared with their skills in reading with a child. Table 12, which displays carers skills in assessing what the child can and cannot do in their reading, shows that by the endline they reported their skills had generally increased. At baseline nearly a fifth (18%) of carers scored the highest score of 10, meaning they felt extremely skilled, this rose to 26% at endline. No carers felt they had low skills (that is, scoring zero to four) by the endline, compared with 12% at baseline, including 6% scoring 0, meaning they had no skills. However, some carers still scored themselves around the middle of the scale, with 11% scoring five. At endline the mean score was 8.0, whereas at baseline the mean was 6.9.

At baseline, nearly a third (32%) of longitudinal respondents scored 10, compared to 18% of all carers. At endline the mean score for longitudinal respondents had increased from 7.1 at baseline to 7.8 at endline.

Table 12. Carer skills in assessing what the child can and cannot do in their reading (0 is “no skills”, 10 is “extremely skilled”)

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
0	6%	0%	11%	0%
1	0%	0%	0%	0%
2	0%	0%	0%	0%
3	6%	0%	5%	0%
4	0%	0%	0%	0%
5	12%	11%	5%	15%
6	9%	7%	11%	10%
7	24%	15%	16%	15%
8	21%	33%	16%	30%
9	6%	7%	5%	5%

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
10	18%	26%	32%	25%
Mean score	6.9	8.0	7.1	7.8
N	34	27	19	19

Source: IES surveys

Table 13 shows that nearly a fifth (18%) of carers at baseline reported the highest score of 10, meaning they felt extremely skilled in determining which books were appropriate for the child. At endline, carers felt slightly more skilled in determining what type of books were appropriate for the child. A quarter (26%) of carers reported the highest score of 10. No carers reported having low skills (that is, 0 to 4) at endline, compared with 12% at baseline. The endline mean score was 8.5 compared with the baseline mean of 7.1.

Longitudinal respondents scored similarly to all carers. At baseline, 21% scored 10, compared to 25% at endline.

Table 13. Do carers have the skills to determine what types of books are appropriate for the child? (0 is “no skills”, 10 is “extremely skilled”)

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
0	0%	0%	0%	0%
1	0%	0%	0%	0%
2	3%	0%	5%	0%
3	6%	0%	5%	0%
4	3%	0%	0%	0%
5	9%	4%	11%	5%
6	15%	7%	21%	10%
7	18%	7%	16%	5%
8	26%	22%	16%	20%
9	3%	33%	5%	35%
10	18%	26%	21%	25%
Mean score	7.1	8.5	7.0	8.5
N	34	27	19	20

Source: IES surveys

In the qualitative interviews, carers reported mixed views on whether their confidence in their own ability to read with the child had improved. Some said it had not improved, although this was primarily because they already felt confident in reading with their foster child.

Others said their confidence reading with the child(ren) in their care had improved following the intervention and that this was due to the impact of the training, particularly in areas such as phonics, which helped carers feel more confident in reading with the child and directing their learning. For example, a carer explained that they had last assisted a child with literacy activities around 20 years ago, when phonics was not emphasised as a learning approach, so the training had given them the confidence to use this “new” approach:

“So with children we’ve had since it’s a new way for us ... It gave me more of an insight into what to do really and how to do it. Doing it more like how school does it. Sounding things out is good. Knowing what to do and what to work on rather than thinking ‘Where do I start?’” Carer

As discussed above (regarding delivery), one of the carers was a teacher; however, they also found that their confidence needed building up, particularly in areas of behaviour management and motivation.

Child’s attitude to reading

Before and after starting the intervention, as well as between children, there was a wide variety in children’s enjoyment in reading according to carers, with scores ranging from 0 to 10 (Table 14). Overall there was an upward trend on enjoyment between baseline and endline. At baseline 6% of carers scored the highest score of 10, which means they thought the child greatly enjoys reading. This increased to 12% of carers at endline. One carer scored the lowest score of zero which means the child has no enjoyment of reading at baseline and endline. Overall, the baseline mean was 5.4, whereas the endline mean was 6.4. Scores were similar for longitudinal respondents.

Findings from the children’s survey

Findings from the endline survey of children (N=10) around their enjoyment of reading found that half (50%) enjoyed reading a bit more since they started reading with their carer as part of the Catch Up® Literacy project, while one-fifth (20%) said they enjoyed reading a lot more. The remaining three (30%) said they enjoyed reading the same amount. None said they enjoyed reading less.

In respect to their enjoyment of school, the findings were not so positive. While a couple of children said they enjoyed school a lot more since they started the Catch Up® Literacy project, 8 (80%) said they enjoyed school the same amount. None said they enjoyed school less (N=10). It must be noted that enjoyment of school was not a direct outcome of the programme and can be affected by numerous other factors, including SATs. Therefore, it is difficult to attribute any differences directly to involvement with the Catch Up® Literacy project.

Before and after starting the intervention there was a wide variety in children’s confidence in reading (according to carers), with scores ranging from 0 to 10 (Table 14). Only 6% scored the highest score of

10 at baseline, which increased to 11% at endline. Overall, the endline mean score of 6.2 compared with the baseline mean of 4.9.

Five per cent of longitudinal participants scored 10 at baseline, and this increased to 15% at endline. Mean scores showed similar increases to the whole sample (up from 4.7 to 6.1).

Table 14. The child’s enjoyment of reading (0 is “no enjoyment”, 10 is “extremely enjoys”) and the child’s confidence in reading (0 is “not confident”, 10 is “extremely confident”)

	<i>Baseline</i>		<i>Endline</i>		<i>Baseline longitudinal</i>		<i>Endline longitudinal</i>	
	<i>Enjoyment</i>	<i>Confidence</i>	<i>Enjoyment</i>	<i>Confidence</i>	<i>Enjoyment</i>	<i>Confidence</i>	<i>Enjoyment</i>	<i>Confidence</i>
0	3%	6%	4%	4%	6%	10%	0%	5%
1	9%	11%	8%	4%	17%	15%	11%	0%
2	3%	9%	0%	0%	6%	5%	0%	0%
3	12%	6%	4%	4%	6%	0%	5%	5%
4	9%	14%	4%	15%	6%	15%	5%	20%
5	12%	14%	12%	22%	11%	15%	11%	25%
6	12%	3%	12%	0%	11%	5%	11%	0%
7	12%	17%	19%	15%	11%	15%	21%	15%
8	15%	11%	15%	11%	17%	15%	11%	0%
9	6%	3%	12%	15%	6%	0%	16%	15%
10	6%	6%	12%	11%	6%	5%	11%	15%
Mean score	5.4	4.9	6.4	6.2	5.1	4.7	6.4	6.1
N	33	35	26	27	18	20	19	20

Source: IES surveys

At baseline, over three-quarters (77%) of carers thought the child(ren) in their care was at a lower-than-expected level of reading for their age, suggesting the intervention was largely appropriate for this group (Table 15). At endline, this proportion decreased to 63%. The greatest change was for the “at expected level for age”. One in 10 (11%) of carers reported the child(ren) in their care was at a higher-than-expected level at endline, from the baseline score of 9%. These changes could indicate that children’s reading level has increased, or that carers could more accurately calculate how good at reading the child(ren) in their care is.

For longitudinal participants, three-quarters (75%) of carers thought the child(ren) in their care was at a lower-than-expected level of reading for their age compared with 70% at endline. There was no change in those recording “at expected level for age”. One longitudinal respondent (representing 5%) reported the child(ren) in their care was at a higher-than-expected level at baseline, compared with 10% at endline (2 cases).

Table 15. How good at reading the child is

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
Lower-than-expected level for age	77%	63%	75%	70%
At expected level for age	14%	26%	20%	20%
Higher-than-expected level for age	9%	11%	5%	10%
N	35	27	20	20

Source: IES surveys

In the qualitative interviews, the foster child’s attitude to reading since participating in the intervention was explored and carers were asked about any changes following the intervention. This included any changes in the child’s confidence, skill in reading and any reported changes in their enjoyment of school.

Some carers reported positive impacts on foster children’s confidence levels, while others did not see impacts on the level of confidence their foster children had towards reading, or said that they were already a confident reader.

Improved confidence in reading aloud was a notable theme emerging from the interviews, with carers reporting that their foster child had been able to read aloud in a public setting (such as at school, church or theatre group), which they would not have been able to do previously. Some carers said that these improvements have been incremental “baby steps”, but positive improvements, nonetheless. Elements of the programme that were highlighted by carers were the walk-through elements and the story discussion. For example, a carer reported that the walk-through was great for building confidence and enjoyment of reading. Another said that having the foster child explain what a story is about prompted them to express their own opinions about the story and even make up their own stories.

Carers also reported significant changes in their foster child’s skills in reading, with many being very positive in nature. Improvements in reading levels were reported by carers, who reported moving through the level of supplied books as the foster child’s reading skill level improved. Some noted changes in attitude and enjoyment of reading, especially in how the child now approaches reading as an enjoyable activity:

“She’s definitely more confident now and will pick a book up – there are lots of books in the house – and read it, not just look at the pictures!” Carer

Another said the child(ren) in their care's confidence in knowing what kind of books they enjoy reading, as well as the one-to-one time between the carer and the foster child, promoted these improved skills and confidence levels. Some carers also reported that improving the foster child's vocabulary had also contributed substantially to the improvement in reading level.

There was no requirement on schools to support the programme; however, some carers had informed the school that the child(ren) in their care was taking part in this intervention.

Those carers taking part in interviews with children in Year 6 said that as the intervention had taken place during the SATs period, the child(ren) in their care's enjoyment of school had been negatively impacted. Some said the child(ren) in their care was experiencing significant issues with the school at the time of the intervention, and they felt that the child was not getting the support they needed or were entitled to from school (as looked-after children).

The complementarity of the Catch Up[®] Literacy intervention with school activities was reported positively by some carers, as it enabled them to maximise learning from activities in both contexts. However, the complementarity was also seen as a barrier by some carers who were experiencing time constraints in being able to support the child with both aspects of their learning.

"It complements it really well because the assessments gave me a really good idea of where I was as well as supplying her with books that were on her level with many of the books supplied being in her home reading journal." Carer

Barriers to reading with the child

Carers were asked if there were any barriers that apply to reading regularly with the child(ren) in their care, selecting from the options below (Table 16). Of the carers who identified barriers before starting the intervention, over half (53%) said that lack of confidence of the child was a barrier. The attitude of the child taking part (38%) and lack of skills of the child (31%) were the next most highly reported barriers at baseline. Lack of time was identified as a barrier by 9% of carers. One in eight (13%) carers identified other factors including their own health or the health of the child, while one-fifth (19%) specified other barriers including (suspected) special educational needs of the child. Two carers said the child(ren) in their care had ADHD, which led to them struggling or refusing to sit still and/or read; another carer said that autism, ADHD and lack of schooling for the child(ren) in their care were a barrier, while one carer said they were themselves dyslexic.

A small number of carers also identified barriers related to the intervention and the books that were issued. These indicated that either the books were not age-appropriate or ability-appropriate (9%), there were not enough books (6%) or the books were not interesting (3%).

At endline, the attitude of the child taking part was the most highly reported barrier, with three-fifths (60%) of carers identifying it. This was an increase from the baseline (38%), the largest increase from all the identified barriers. Lack of confidence and lack of skills of the child were reported less frequently at endline, decreasing to 32% and 16% (from 53% and 31% respectively). Lack of time was also an important barrier, reported by a third (32%) of carers (increasing from 9% at baseline). The interviews found that carers were becoming better at identifying what the barriers were with the children, as a direct result of the training and doing the programme. A number told us that they had come to realise that the

issues were less about skills and confidence in reading and more about their general attitude (possibly due to what they had been through and why they were in care).

“He was very reluctant to take part [in the programme] and emotional issues affected his engagement. Reading with me just seemed too much for him to contemplate.”

Carer

“It depends on his mood and what is happening with his family. I would have to see how he felt and what his frame of mind was. Any issues during the day could affect his focus. This all needed to be considered; even though it’s just a 15-minute session, it’s a long time for the foster child.” Carer

Around one in six carers identified other factors including their own health or the health of the child, an increase from baseline (16% compared with 13%). At endline, 8% of carers identified external factors, such as COVID-19 and school closures/home-schooling, as a barrier, compared with none at baseline. Of the nine carers at endline who specified “other barriers”, six reported the following barriers: after-school activities, anger at being in care, the child’s ADHD affecting their engagement, the child’s autism affecting their concentration, the children refusing to read and only engaging if being read to, and the child likes to read at night only.

Similar results were recorded for longitudinal respondents. However, the attitude of the child taking part was significantly higher for longitudinal respondents at baseline (72% compared to 38% for all carers) but in contrast this decreased at endline (to 63%).

Table 16. Barriers to reading with the child²

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
Lack of time	9%	32%	11%	37%
Lack of skills yourself	0%	0%	0%	0%
Lack of confidence yourself	0%	0%	0%	0%
Attitude of the child taking part	38%	60%	72%	63%
Lack of confidence (of the child)	53%	32%	44%	32%
Lack of skills (of the child)	31%	16%	33%	16%
Lack of support – from others at home	0%	0%	0%	0%
Books not interesting	3%	4%	0%	0%

² This excludes three carers at baseline and two carers at endline out of the respondents to the whole survey who did not answer. This may be because they had no barriers or it could be that they did not want to answer.

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
Books not age-appropriate or ability-appropriate (too hard or too easy)	9%	0%	11%	0%
Lack of books	6%	4%	11%	5%
Other factors including your health or health of the child	13%	16%	11%	21%
External factors – e.g. COVID-19 and school closures/home-schooling	0%	8%	0%	11%
Barriers (other – specified)	19%	36%	22%	26%
N	32	25	20	19

Source: IES surveys

Section 6. Literacy skills and knowledge of carers and children (RQ1)

Carers were asked how confident they felt in supporting the child in three aspects of literacy – phonics, spelling and writing. They were then asked how skilled they felt in supporting the child in these three aspects. Carers were also asked to rate how confident they felt the child was in these three aspects of literacy, and then how skilled.

Views from both the survey and telephone interviews are reported here.

Carer confidence and skills in supporting with literacy

Carers had relatively high confidence in their ability to support the child in phonics before and after the intervention (Table 17). The modal score was 10, which means extremely confident, which 29% of carers chose at baseline, increasing to 35% at endline. The lowest score recorded was 3 at baseline, which 6% of carers scored, increasing to 4 at endline (8%). By endline the mean score had increased from 7.5 to 8.1.

In contrast, half of longitudinal respondents chose the highest score of 10 at baseline but this decreased to 40% at endline (although still five percentage points higher than the endline for all carers). By endline the mean score for longitudinal respondents was similar to all at 8.0.

Table 17. Confidence in supporting the child in phonics (0 is “not confident”, 10 is “extremely confident”)

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
0	0%	0%	0%	0%

1	0%	0%	0%	0%
2	0%	0%	0%	0%
3	6%	0%	10%	0%
4	9%	8%	10%	10%
5	0%	4%	0%	5%
6	9%	8%	10%	5%
7	24%	15%	15%	15%
8	24%	19%	5%	25%
9	0%	12%	0%	0%
10	29%	35%	50%	40%
Mean score	7.5	8.1	7.8	8.0
N	34	26	20	20

Source: IES surveys

Carers also had relatively high confidence in their ability to support the child in spelling before the intervention began, and this did not change after the intervention had been delivered (Table 18). Again, the modal score was 10 at baseline and endline, signifying extremely confident, and approximately the same percentage of carers chose this at baseline and endline (37% and 38%). The lowest score at baseline was 5 (7%) but this dropped to 1 at endline (4% of carers). The mean score stayed roughly the same (8.3 and 8.5). Out of the three aspects of literacy, the mean score for confidence in supporting the child was highest for spelling (at baseline and endline).

Longitudinal respondents were more confident than all carers at baseline. However, by endline their confidence had dropped, with 42% choosing the highest score of 10 compared with 53% (the mean score decreased from 8.7 to 8.4 at endline).

Table 18. Confidence in supporting the child in spelling (0 is “not confident”, 10 is “extremely confident”)

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
0	0%	0%	0%	0%
1	0%	4%	0%	5%
2	0%	0%	0%	0%
3	0%	0%	0%	0%
4	0%	0%	0%	0%

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
5	7%	0%	6%	0%
6	7%	4%	0%	0%
7	20%	8%	24%	11%
8	23%	31%	12%	37%
9	7%	15%	6%	5%
10	37%	38%	53%	42%
Mean score	8.3	8.5	8.7	8.4
N	30	26	17	20

Source: IES surveys

Carers had relatively high confidence in their ability to support the child in writing before the intervention began (Table 19). Around a quarter of carers scored 10, meaning extremely confident, at baseline (25%) and endline (27%). However, the lowest score recorded at endline was 1 (compared to 3 at baseline), there were more carers with poorer confidence (12% scoring 0 to 4 compared with 3% at baseline) and the mean score only increased slightly from 7.9 to 8.

Again, longitudinal respondents were relatively more confident than all carers at baseline, with 39% of carers choosing the highest score of 10 compared to 25% of all carers. However, the mean score decreased from 8.4 at baseline to 8.0 at endline.

Table 19. Confidence in supporting the child in writing (0 is “not confident”, 10 is “extremely confident”)

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
0	0%	0%	0%	0%
1	0%	4%	0%	5%
2	0%	0%	0%	0%
3	3%	0%	6%	0%
4	0%	8%	0%	5%
5	6%	0%	0%	0%
6	6%	4%	6%	0%
7	22%	12%	17%	16%

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
8	25%	19%	17%	26%
9	13%	27%	17%	21%
10	25%	27%	39%	26%
Mean score	7.9	8.0	8.4	8.0
N	32	26	18	19

Source: IES surveys

Carers felt confident supporting the child in reading comprehension at endline (Table 20). Over one-third (37%) scored 10, meaning extremely confident. Only 4% of carers had poor confidence (that is, scores of 0 to 4). The mean score was 8.3.

Table 20. Confidence in supporting the child in reading comprehension (0 is “not confident”, 10 is “extremely confident”)

	<i>Endline</i>
0	0%
1	4%
2	0%
3	0%
4	0%
5	0%
6	11%
7	11%
8	19%
9	19%
10	37%
Mean score	8.3
N	27

Source: IES surveys

Carers largely reported having skills to support the child in phonics at baseline, which increased by endline (Table 21). At baseline, a quarter (24%) of carers rated themselves as 10, meaning extremely skilled, and this increased to over a third (37%) by endline. Around 1 in 7 (15%) carers reported having low skills (0 to 4) at baseline, with 3% rating themselves as 0. At endline this percentage decreased to 4%, and the mean score was 8.5, an increase from baseline at 7.1.

Longitudinal respondents were relatively more skilled in phonics than all carers at baseline, with 40% of carers choosing the highest score of 10 compared with 24% of all carers. The mean score increased from 7.5 to 8.5 at endline, the same as that for all carers.

Table 21. Skills in supporting the child in phonics (0 is “not skilled”, 10 is “extremely skilled”)

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
0	3%	0%	5%	0%
1	0%	0%	0%	0%
2	3%	0%	0%	0%
3	3%	0%	5%	0%
4	6%	4%	10%	5%
5	9%	4%	0%	5%
6	9%	4%	5%	5%
7	24%	7%	25%	5%
8	12%	30%	5%	25%
9	9%	15%	5%	10%
10	24%	37%	40%	45%
Mean score	7.1	8.5	7.5	8.5
N	34	27	20	20

Source: IES surveys

Carers reported having the necessary skills to support the child(ren) in their care in spelling at the baseline and endline (Table 22). The modal score was 10 (extremely skilled) and 30% of carers chose this at baseline, increasing to 41% at endline. No carers reported having low skills (zero to four). The mean score increased from 8.0 to 8.9 by endline.

Longitudinal respondents were relatively more confident than all carers at baseline, with 47% of carers choosing the highest score of 10 compared with 30% of all carers. The mean score increased from 8.5 at baseline to 9.0 at endline.

Table 22. Skills in supporting the child in spelling (0 is “not skilled”, 10 is “extremely skilled”)

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
0	0%	0%	0%	0%
1	0%	0%	0%	0%
2	0%	0%	0%	0%
3	0%	0%	0%	0%
4	0%	0%	0%	0%
5	10%	0%	12%	0%
6	10%	0%	0%	0%
7	17%	11%	18%	10%
8	23%	26%	18%	25%
9	10%	22%	6%	20%
10	30%	41%	47%	45%
Mean score	8.0	8.9	8.5	9.0
N	30	27	17	20

Source: IES surveys

Carers also reported having skills to support the child in writing at baseline and endline (Table 23). The modal score was 10 again, meaning extremely skilled, which a quarter (24%) of carers chose at baseline, increasing to over a third (37%) at endline. No carers reported having low skills (zero to four). The mean score increased from 8.0 to 8.8 by endline.

Longitudinal respondents were relatively more skilled than all carers at baseline, with 42% of carers choosing the highest score of 10 compared with 24% of all carers and the mean score increased from 8.5 at baseline to 8.8 at endline.

Table 23. Skills in supporting the child in writing (0 is “not skilled”, 10 is “extremely skilled”)

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline longit</i>	<i>Endline longit</i>
0	0%	0%	0%	0%
1	0%	0%	0%	0%
2	0%	0%	0%	0%
3	0%	0%	0%	0%
4	0%	0%	0%	0%

5	6%	4%	5%	5%
6	15%	0%	11%	0%
7	18%	7%	11%	10%
8	21%	26%	16%	25%
9	15%	26%	16%	20%
10	24%	37%	42%	40%
Mean score	8.0	8.8	8.5	8.8
N	33	27	19	20

Source: IES surveys

Carers also reported having the skills to support the child(ren) in their care in reading comprehension at baseline. Again the modal score was 10 (extremely skilled) with over two-fifths (44%) of carers indicating this (Table 24). No carers reported having poor skills (0 to 4) and the mean score was 8.8.

Table 24. Skills in supporting the child in reading comprehension (0 is “not skilled”, 10 is “extremely skilled”)

	<i>Endline</i>
0	0%
1	0%
2	0%
3	0%
4	0%
5	0%
6	8%
7	12%
8	16%
9	20%
10	44%
Mean score	8.8
N	25

Source: IES surveys

In the qualitative interviews carers were asked if their confidence in supporting their foster child with phonics, writing, spelling and reading comprehension had improved. Often, carers thought that the training had increased their confidence in supporting the child(ren) in their care with literacy skills. Some carers felt their confidence had improved because they now understood exactly what the child(ren) in their care struggles with and feel able to help them more effectively. Others reported that their confidence had particularly improved with phonics (as discussed above in relation to their skills) because this was a method they were not familiar with either personally or when their own children were younger. These carers reported being better equipped with this new knowledge, which enabled them to feel confident helping the child(ren) in their care.

Some carers, despite participating fully in the intervention training, reported that they still felt a lack of confidence in their own abilities. Some reported being unsatisfied in their own confidence to support and motivate the child(ren) in their care, especially around writing. It may be that, as a result of the training, the carers had a better understanding of what they could and **could not** do. This could explain the apparent drop in confidence in supporting the child's writing reported above in the surveys (Table 19).

Child's confidence and skills in literacy

Table 25 shows that before the intervention, carers generally felt that the child(ren) in their care was not very confident in phonics. Over two-fifths (45%) of carers said the child(ren) in their care had low confidence (0 to 4). This had more than halved (to 20%) at endline. At baseline 6% scored 0, while at endline no carers marked 0 and 12% marked 10 (double that of baseline). The mean score of 5 at baseline increased to 6.3 at endline (the highest across all these statements).

Results were similar for longitudinal respondents, with a mean score of 4.7 at baseline increasing to 6.1 at endline.

Before the intervention, carers generally felt that the child(ren) in their care were not very confident in spelling (Table 25). Two-fifths (46%) of carers said the child(ren) in their care had low confidence (0 to 4), but this had fallen to 28% at endline. Six per cent scored 0 at baseline, dropping to 4% at endline; however, 6% scored the highest score of 10 at baseline, whereas none scored 10 at endline. The mean score at baseline was 4.8, which increased slightly to 5.5 at endline. Despite this increase, confidence was still relatively low by endline.

Results were similar for longitudinal respondents, but with mean scores being slightly lower at baseline and endline than for all carers. The mean score of 4.6 at baseline increased to 5.2 by endline.

Before the intervention, carers generally felt that the child(ren) in their care was not very confident in writing (Table 25), with over half (56%) of carers reporting that the child(ren) in their care had low confidence (0 to 4), although this did decrease to 44% at endline. At baseline 6% scored 0, but by the endline no carers scored 0. Although the mean score increased from 4.3 to 5.0, this was the lowest scoring across all the statements for children.

For longitudinal respondents, no carer recorded above eight at baseline or endline and the mean scores at baseline and endline were lower than for all carers. The mean score at endline was 4.6, compared with 5.0 for all carers and 4.1 at baseline.

Table 25. Child’s confidence in phonics, spelling, writing and reading comprehension (0 is “not confident”, 10 is “extremely confident”)

	<i>Child’s confidence in phonics</i>		<i>Child’s confidence in spelling</i>		<i>Child’s confidence in writing</i>		<i>Child’s confidence in reading comprehension</i>
	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Endline</i>
0	6%	0%	6%	4%	6%	0%	4%
1	0%	8%	3%	4%	6%	7%	4%
2	13%	4%	9%	4%	9%	7%	4%
3	10%	8%	22%	8%	16%	15%	8%
4	16%	0%	6%	8%	19%	15%	4%
5	6%	15%	16%	17%	19%	11%	8%
6	16%	8%	6%	17%	6%	11%	15%
7	16%	23%	13%	8%	6%	15%	15%
8	10%	15%	13%	25%	9%	15%	19%
9	0%	8%	0%	4%	0%	4%	15%
10	6%	12%	6%	0%	3%	0%	4%
Mean score	5.0	6.3	4.8	5.5	4.3	5.0	6.2
N	31	26	32	24	32	27	26

Source: IES surveys

Before the intervention, carers generally felt that the child(ren) in their care were not very skilled in phonics, as demonstrated in Table 26. A third (33%) of carers said the child(ren) in their care had low skills (0 to 4), but this had decreased to 18% at endline and the mean score increased from 5.2 to 6.2.

For longitudinal respondents, the mean scores at baseline and endline were lower than for all carers. The mean score at endline was 5.8, compared with 6.2 for all carers and 4.9 at baseline.

Before the intervention, carers generally felt that the child(ren) in their care was not very skilled in spelling (Table 26). Two-fifths (42%) of carers said the child(ren) in their care had low skills (0 to 4) at baseline, but this halved to one-fifth (22%) by the endline. At baseline 6% scored 0 and 6% scored 10. By endline, 4% scored 0; however, none scored 10. This may be as a result of the carers having a clearer awareness of their abilities in spelling, rather than a reduction in the child’s skills. The mean score stayed at around 5.0.

For longitudinal respondents, the mean score at baseline (4.3) was lower than for all carers (5.0) but saw a larger increase by endline (5.3, the same as for all carers).

Before the intervention, carers generally felt that the child(ren) in their care was not very skilled in writing (Table 26). Half (48%) of carers said the child(ren) in their care had low skills (0 to 4), which decreased to 37% at endline. At baseline 6% scored 0 and 3% scored the highest score of 10, meaning extremely skilled. However, at endline none scored zero or 10 and the mean score had increased (from 4.4 to 5.3).

The results for longitudinal respondents reflect a feeling that children were relatively less skilled in writing than for all carers. The mean scores at baseline and endline were lower than for all carers but the increases between the time-two points were the same size (nine).

Table 26 shows that after the intervention, just over one-quarter of carers (28%) said the child(ren) in their care had low skills in reading comprehension (0 to 4). Four per cent scored 0 and 8% scored the highest score of 10, meaning extremely skilled. The mean score at endline was 6.2, the same as the child’s skills in phonics. Improvements to children’s skills in phonics and in writing were particularly notable from their foster carers’ perspective.

Table 26. Child’s skills in phonics, spelling, writing and reading comprehension (0 is “not skilled”, 10 is “extremely skilled”)

	<i>Child’s skills in phonics</i>		<i>Child’s skills in spelling</i>		<i>Child’s skills in writing</i>		<i>Child’s skills in reading comprehension</i>
	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Endline</i>
0	6%	4%	6%	4%	6%	0%	4%
1	0%	7%	0%	7%	3%	11%	8%
2	9%	0%	12%	0%	12%	4%	0%
3	15%	7%	18%	7%	18%	7%	8%
4	3%	0%	6%	4%	9%	15%	8%
5	18%	11%	18%	19%	21%	11%	8%

	<i>Child's skills in phonics</i>		<i>Child's skills in spelling</i>		<i>Child's skills in writing</i>		<i>Child's skills in reading comprehension</i>
	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>	<i>Endline</i>
6	15%	15%	6%	7%	15%	15%	8%
7	21%	22%	21%	22%	12%	19%	15%
8	0%	19%	9%	22%	3%	11%	27%
9	6%	7%	0%	7%	0%	7%	8%
10	6%	7%	6%	0%	3%	0%	8%
Mean score	5.2	6.2	5.0	5.3	4.4	5.3	6.2
N	33	27	34	27	34	27	26

Source: IES surveys

In the qualitative interviews the child's reading comprehension was discussed. The degree of improvement reported varied across carers, largely depending on the reading ability of the child(ren) in their care before the intervention. Some reported that the child(ren) in their care was behind the expected reading age at the beginning, and they still struggled with reading comprehension but that improvements had been made from their initial starting point. An element of the programme that aided this improvement was the story discussion activities – focused on what was happening in the story and giving an overview of what was happening. Based on the perceived effectiveness of the reading comprehension element of the intervention, a carer felt that reading comprehension could be a bigger part of the programme, especially at the higher levels of reading, with the structure being adjusted as children work through the levels.

Carers were also asked if they felt the intervention had impacted on the child's skills in phonics, writing and spelling. Views were mixed on phonics skills. This perhaps reflects the lack of confidence some carers reported in their understanding of phonics and/or carers struggling with the training content and pace of delivery. This could be a valuable area of further investigation. Some carers were able to provide insight into the particular elements of the programme that helped in improving phonics skills of the child(ren) in their care, such as asking the child to sound out words and break down words to simplify them. A carer also reported an improvement in pronunciation skills of the child they care for and that improved phonics skills may have been the cause:

“He’s pronouncing the words a lot better. We read the same book for one or two weeks and the difference at the end of the week is huge. He reads easy books but is now pronouncing normally and reading quickly. It’s all about improving his pronunciation.”
Carer

Writing and spelling skills were reported by carers as improved for many of the children; however, they were often unable to say which elements of the programme were most useful for this. For some, reviewing and rewriting words the child struggles with was particularly helpful in improving the child’s writing ability. Others indicated that over the course of the intervention, children were more willing to attempt spelling and happier to get things wrong, which had helped anxiety and ultimately helped them to improve. Some mentioned that their left-handed children had since improved their writing following the scheme.

Some outcomes were unexpected, such as knock-on effects on the child of incorporating literacy skills into daily activities and improvements to the child’s life skills. For example, a carer noticed how much more their foster child read the things they saw when they are out and about like road signs and train times and at home with things like medicines and ingredients for cooking:

“It’s not just about books either but life skills. We’ll be walking around the supermarket and she’s reading out the signs for which aisles we need to go down.” Carer

Section 7. Children’s survey responses (RQ1)

In the endline survey, children were asked to respond to a broad range of statements on an agreement scale. Due to the small numbers, the responses have been combined and the frequency is shown rather than the percentages (Table 27). In the table, the “Yes” column combines the answers “Definitely” and “Sometimes”, the “No” column combines the answers “Not really” and “Definitely not”, and the final column shows the total number of respondents for each question.

Table 27. Children’s survey responses

	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>N</i>
It is important to do well at school	8	1	0	9
I try hard at school	8	1	0	9
I enjoy school	7	1	1	9
I enjoy reading	7	1	1	9
I always do my homework	6	2	0	8
I can work out how to read words that are difficult	6	2	1	9
I am doing well in reading	5	3	1	9

	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>N</i>
I feel confident about doing my work in lessons	5	2	1	8
I behave well in lessons	5	3	0	8
I feel confident reading out loud to the class	4	2	3	9
I enjoy reading in my own time	4	2	3	9
I am doing well in writing	4	2	3	9
I find writing easy	3	2	4	9
I feel confident about writing in whole sentences	3	3	3	9
Reading is one of my favourite things to do	2	3	4	9
I enjoy talking to my friends and family about the books I have read	2	4	3	9
I enjoy writing	2	3	4	9
Writing is one of my favourite things to do	2	3	4	9

Source: IES surveys

The children who responded to the survey thought school was important and that they worked hard in school (eight positive cases). A number of them said that they enjoyed school and enjoyed reading (seven positive cases), while six said that they can work out how to read difficult words. There was no baseline survey of children so we cannot compare the results over time to say what influence the intervention had on them. However, the results of the parent surveys and interviews support the case that the programme had a positive impact on the reading elements (children's enjoyment of reading, phonics abilities and how well they are reading). The writing aspects were proving more difficult, which is shown in the more negative scores for those questions (covering enjoyment, ease and confidence).

Section 8. YARC assessment (RQ2)

Qa Research invited all children (N=44) to complete the YARC assessment. Twenty-three of the children agreed to take part. The remainder either refused or did not respond to the invitation. Of those who refused, nine had not completed the programme, five were not able to be contacted, one was not reading at an appropriate level and did not like using video software, and four had either personal circumstances or special educational needs that prevented them from taking part. Of those who agreed to take part, the assessment for five children was not recorded and had to be discarded. One family did not attend the

assessment and on the third attempt it was assumed that they did not want to take part. One child refused to read the passages and three children found the assessment too challenging.

Table 28 shows the descriptive data for the remaining 18 children. Assessments were scored by GL Assessment, who provided standard scores for each passage read by the child rather than an overall score. An average standard score on this measure is 100 with a standard deviation of 15, meaning scores between 85 and 115 are in the average range. The data in Table 28 is the average standard score achieved by each child across the two passages read. The data shows the comprehension measure to be the most challenging, with the mean standard score below 90. The reading accuracy mean score was close to average and the reading rate standard score was average. The maximum and minimum standard score show no ceiling or floor effects and a range of scores from below to above average. Feedback from the assessors suggested that the majority of children were happy to complete the assessment via Zoom, with only two stating that they would prefer to do it face-to-face.

Table 28. Descriptive statistics for YARC assessment (n=18)

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>
Reading accuracy	96.67	16.75	70	125
Reading comprehension	89.03	12.98	70	115
Reading rate	99.08	8.77	111	80

Section 9. Cost analysis (RQ3)

Table 29 presents the cost of the Catch Up® Literacy programme. This has been separated into fixed costs (i.e. training costs and materials that are not subject to change) and variable costs. Specifically, variable costs refer to additional books for foster carers, additional material and additional time for Catch Up® Literacy to support foster carers. These costs may not be applicable to all families or in all instances. We then provide a cost per carer and a cost per child, both with and without the variable cost. Cost per child is slightly lower than cost per carer because a small number of carers were able to deliver to more than one child, which reduces the cost of the intervention. The cost per child is slightly higher than reported in the initial efficacy trial in school settings (£769 per pupil; Rutt, 2015), although it is significantly higher than the cost per child reported in the effectiveness trial in school (£146.12 per pupil in the first year and reducing in subsequent years; Roy et al., 2019). However, it is not clear whether staff costs were included in the latter trial as they were in the former. In addition, it is not clear whether the benefit outweighs the cost – this was outside the scope of the current evaluation. Future research should consider embedding a cost–benefit analysis in the design. Importantly, while this cost evaluation focuses on the children taking part in the study, carers trained by Catch Up® Literacy can deliver the intervention to any child in the home moving forward, thereby spreading the cost further. This long-term cost is not possible to calculate as part of this evaluation but may be an area of further exploration in future research.

Table 29. Catch Up® Literacy cost evaluation

Catch Up® Literacy: cost evaluation				
Fixed costs				
Staff costs	Description	Number	Item cost	Total cost
Training costs				
	Training carers to deliver the intervention at a cost of £450 per person.	41	£450	£18,450
Drop-in sessions				
	Scheduled drop-in sessions to allow carers to raise issues or ask questions about the delivery of the intervention. These sessions were attended by both an administrator and a trainer.	19	£200	£3800
Equipment and materials		Number	Item cost	Total cost
Book collection				
	Each foster carer provided with books used for the intervention.	41	£354	£14,514
Total fixed costs				£36,764
Variable costs				
Staff costs	Description	Number	Item cost	Total cost
Administrative support				
	Time (days) spent coordinating with carers to organise training, implementation and follow-up.	6	£200	£1200

Equipment and materials		Number	Item cost	Total cost
Book collection				
	Foster carers can request another set of books in addition to the original set provided. The item cost includes packaging and postage.	1	£228	£228
Additional support materials				
	Additional costs incurred while delivering the intervention, such as purchasing stationery or costs associated with photocopying.	-	£530	£530
Total variable costs				£1,958
Total cost of programme	Total cost of delivering the intervention to 41 carers and 44 participating children.			£38,722
Cost per carer				£944.44
Cost per child				£880.05
Programme cost evaluation without cost of additional equipment and materials				
Cost per carer				£925.95
Cost per child				£862.82

DISCUSSION

Discussion of findings

This discussion is structured around the research objectives of feasibility, readiness for trial and cost.

1. Feasibility

- a. Is the Catch Up[®] Literacy intervention feasible for foster/kinship carers to deliver in the home in terms of acceptability of the training and materials, time commitment and engagement of the children in their care?

Drawing on the findings from the surveys and interviews, the findings suggest that the Catch Up[®] Literacy intervention can feasibly be delivered by foster/kinship carers in the home. Carers were generally happy with the online training delivered by Catch Up[®], although a few would have preferred face-to-face. The majority of carers felt confident delivering the intervention following training and appreciated the training materials. There was some feedback suggesting that the terminology could be altered to make it more accessible to people without a teaching background.

In terms of delivery of the intervention, the majority of carers felt that the intervention fitted in to a normal day, although some found the time constraints difficult to manage. Not all carers were able to complete the full 19 weeks of intervention due to these time constraints in addition to behavioural and emotional needs of the children. Some foster carers felt that they needed more support and training in delivering the intervention to children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

In terms of the materials provided, the assessment and monitoring materials were largely viewed positively, and the online resources and drop-in sessions were reported as being helpful. In particular, carers reported sharing their experiences with other carers delivering the intervention was a valuable source of support. However, not every carer attended drop-in sessions and this was largely because of difficulties with the scheduling of sessions. In terms of the books, carers reported that there was a good choice and quantity of books and these were largely at an appropriate reading level. A small number of carers reported the books being either at too low or too high a reading level, which meant they had to buy additional books to complete the intervention.

For the most part carers enjoyed delivering the sessions and felt that they helped to develop a closeness with their foster child. However, carers indicated in interviews that the children in their care did not always enjoy the sessions. Some children were frustrated with the programme, not wanting to read and not being motivated to continue, particularly if they had busy periods at school – e.g. Year 6 SATs. Some carers had to adapt elements of the programme to meet the needs of the children in their care.

The majority of carers said that they would recommend this programme.

- b. Is the Catch Up[®] Literacy intervention perceived to have positive impacts on children's literacy skills, confidence in and attitudes to reading as reported by children and foster/kinship carers?

There was a lot of variation among the participating children in their attitudes to reading before the intervention started and the survey data suggests that more carers thought the child(ren) in

their care enjoyed reading at the end of the intervention than at the beginning. From the children's survey data, most children said they enjoyed reading more having taken part in the intervention than before the intervention, although most children did not think the intervention had led them to enjoy school more. The interview data from foster carers suggested that the intervention had had a particular impact on children's confidence in reading aloud. In terms of specific areas of literacy, carers reported more children being confident with phonics at the end of the intervention and there was some positive change in confidence in writing and spelling at the end of the intervention. In terms of skills, carers reported more children being skilled in phonics and writing at the end of the intervention, but not spelling. Interview data suggested that the programme had a positive impact on reading comprehension.

There were some barriers to reading with the child perceived by foster carers. These were largely around children's attitudes to reading or the child's lack of confidence or skills in reading, or a lack of time to complete the sessions. In addition, some of the children had additional needs that made it difficult to complete the intervention. These were reported at the beginning and end of the intervention.

- c. Is the Catch Up[®] Literacy intervention perceived to have positive impacts on foster/kinship carers' own skills and confidence in reading with children in their care as reported by foster/kinship carers?

Although the logic model anticipated that it would, the intervention did not have a big impact on carers' own reading habits. Before the intervention most carers read frequently and were confident readers, and this was the same at the end of the intervention with only a small increase. Nonetheless, the intervention did increase the frequency with which the carers read to the child(ren) in their care, as well as the confidence and skill in reading with the child(ren) in their care. The surveys suggested in general that the skill and confidence in supporting children with specific areas of literacy (i.e. spelling, writing and phonics) were relatively high at the beginning of the intervention and this did not change at the end of the intervention. However, interview data suggests that the training and delivery of the intervention did improve their confidence and skills, particularly in phonics. Interestingly, participants who responded to both the baseline and endline survey reported a reduction in confidence in some areas, possibly due to an increased awareness of their lack of knowledge of some topics such as phonics and spelling.

- d. Are there any unintended or negative consequences of the intervention?

The programme did not seem to increase carers' involvement with social workers or their LAs/IFAs. With regard to the question of whether the intervention resulted in more engagement with schools, some carers did inform the schools that the children were taking part in the programme, although there was no requirement for schools to take part. For some carers, the programme complemented what was happening at school, which was seen as positive, although for others the complementarity was a barrier because it meant the carer could not focus on other areas of learning. Others reported that where children were in Year 6, taking part in the intervention had a negative impact on the enjoyment of school because it had taken place during SATs. Some carers reported the child(ren) in their care was having issues at school at the time they were taking part in the intervention.

Importantly, data from the interviews emphasised the complexity of working with these families in terms of the complex needs of many of the children and the busy home lives of the families. Many of the children had behavioural and emotional needs that made it difficult to carry out the intervention. These factors acted as barriers to delivering the intervention.

2. Readiness for trial

- a. Is Catch Up[®] Literacy scalable for a randomised controlled trial?

All of the trainers who participated in this evaluation were experienced Catch Up[®] Literacy trainers and therefore did not need any additional training before running the sessions with carers. Catch Up[®] did not have difficulties recruiting trainers to this evaluation, although none had delivered training to carers before. For the most part, the training was delivered as per the usual model, although some adaptations were made to remove wording that was more relevant to school-based delivery.

Trainers raised concerns about the amount of information included in the training sessions and whether this was appropriate for carers. They also raised concerns about the online training, particularly around digital inclusion and some parents lacking adequate technology to fully take part in the training. They also felt that face-to-face training would have enabled more useful interaction and helped them to support trainees better.

Support was available for trainees following the online training in the form of online resources and drop-in sessions. Although carers reported that these were useful, they did not access them equally, and drop-in sessions were not always scheduled at a time carers could attend. However, the carers did report that peer-to-peer support either in drop-in sessions or in their own networks was very valuable.

Carers reported that they had to adapt the sessions to meet the needs of the child(ren) in their care, either because of time constraints or because the child(ren) in their care had behavioural, emotional or special educational needs. These adaptations were not captured systematically and could have had an impact on the success of the programme.

The primary outcome measure appeared to work well remotely, with only a small number of children stating that they would have preferred face-to-face assessment. Of the children who did not attempt the assessment, only one of these was because the assessment was being carried out online. The descriptive data showed a good range of scores and no floor or ceiling effects.

3. Cost

- a. What is the cost per child of delivering the Catch Up[®] Literacy intervention?

The costs were calculated using fixed and variable costs. The final costs are presented as cost per carer as well as cost per child, because the carer may have more than one child in the home. Cost per child is slightly higher than the original efficacy trial carried out in a school environment at £880.05 (with fixed and variable costs). Although this is significantly higher than the EEF effectiveness evaluation, it may not be a useful comparison because a teacher or teaching assistant trained to deliver a school-based intervention can support a large number of children,

thereby lowering the cost per child. A cost–benefits analysis would help to fully explore the cost implications of this home delivery model.

Limitations

This evaluation was originally designed as a two-arm randomised controlled trial. Unfortunately, difficulties with recruitment meant that the project was redesigned, dropping the randomisation component and editing the evaluation questions it sought to answer. This limits the conclusions that can be made about the impact of the Catch Up® Literacy programme. Although the response rate for the carer survey was high (85%) at baseline, this had reduced to 65% at endline, and only a small number of carers completed both surveys. In addition, response rates to the child survey were low and only 49% of children took part in the reading assessment. Many families were difficult to contact and had ongoing extenuating circumstances that made it difficult for them to fully engage with the programme and the evaluation. As such, these considerations should caveat the results reported here. We don't have information on the families who chose not to complete the training and deliver the intervention, which means there may be additional barriers to taking part in the Catch Up® Literacy programme that haven't been identified in this report. The challenges involved with recruitment and attrition would need to be considered in any future trials.

Conclusions and recommendations

The project was initially proposed in light of findings from previous studies funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). Unfortunately, direct comparisons between the current study and those previous evaluations are difficult, given the significant difference in study design. Both previous EEF evaluations had much larger sample sizes and used RCT methodology. In addition, in both previous trials the intervention was carried out in schools, whereas in this current study the intervention was carried out in the child's home. These are very different environments, not least because the relationship between the child and the teacher is not the same as the relationship between the child and the foster carer. As such, the factors that might influence the outcomes of the intervention are vastly different, making it hard to compare the findings from an intervention carried out in a school with those from an intervention carried out in the home. However, although we cannot directly compare the impact outcomes, there are commonalities across projects that provide an interesting perspective on our findings.

The EEF studies found conflicting results, with the promising findings from the efficacy trial (Rutt, 2015) not being replicated in the effectiveness evaluation (Roy, et al., 2019). However, looking at the process evaluations in both of those studies, we can identify similar themes to the present study. Specifically, teaching assistants involved in delivery of Catch Up® Literacy were largely positive about the programme, in particular the training, and they felt the programme had had a positive impact on both the children and their own skills, knowledge and professional development. Similar concerns were raised around selection of the most appropriate children to take part, with Roy et al. (2019) reporting that only half of the schools felt that the right children had been selected, as well as time being a significant barrier to delivery of the programme. In addition, as in the current study, participants in both EEF evaluations adapted or tailored the programme to suit their needs and the needs of the children.

A key point of learning from this study was the unease of LAs/IFAs about asking families to take part in an RCT and with the subsequent low take-up of families to the evaluation. This may make it difficult if further research was planned and work would need to be carried out to resolve these recruitment issues. However, families who did take part were very positive about the Catch Up® Literacy programme. They

were motivated to take part in order to support the children in their care. The training and materials were received positively and the programme appears to be acceptable using this delivery method – i.e. through foster carers in the home, rather than in a school context. The main barriers to delivery were the motivations, attitudes and abilities of the children, and the time constraints, with some families not able to complete the full 19 weeks. However, with some adaptations to recruitment, ongoing support and flexibility of the programme, these issues could be addressed to improve feasibility. The cost of the programme is relatively high but at this stage it is not possible to balance that against the benefit of the programme, nor any ongoing delivery of the intervention to other children in the home over the long term.

Key recommendations

These recommendations are proposed by the research team on the basis of the findings.

Recruitment

- Establish eligibility criteria to ensure the programme is appropriate for the child. In the school-based trials (Rutt, 2015; Roy et al., 2019) the children were selected to take part because they were struggling with literacy. For this evaluation, WWCS made the programme available to any child in foster care who was in Year 5 or 6, so their fit to the programme was not established until the first assessment session. This meant that for some children the programme was either too hard or too easy, resulting in poor engagement or withdrawal from the programme. If eligibility criteria were set before programme delivery, the foster carer could be more confident that the programme would be appropriate for the child in their care. It would also be worth assessing whether the child has additional needs that may require an adaptation or more flexible approach to the sessions
- For future programme recruitment, allow more time for recruitment to ensure that carers understand the expectations of the programme, and have plenty of time to fit the training into their schedules. It should also be made clear to those recruiting (e.g. social workers) that carers know the programme is voluntary and they are under no obligation to take it up
- It may be helpful to avoid delivery in Year 6 when children also have SATs at school
- It may be helpful to deliver to younger cohorts, before they see themselves as not being able to read. Years 1 and 2 may be the most suitable year groups for delivery, as the intervention fits with the KS1 curriculum and in particular phonics instruction.

Training

- It is important that a further review is undertaken of the language used in the training to ensure it is accessible to all carers
- For training, Catch Up® could consider some face-to-face element to help both trainers and carers check their understanding and develop a good supportive relationship. This is also important to address digital exclusivity.

Ongoing support and delivery

- Delivery teams have more regular touch points during intervention delivery to check in with parents, with a more proactive approach. For example, if carers are not attending online support groups, not emailing or phoning in, Catch Up® will contact them to check in and see if everything is all right. This may prevent some of the potential disengagement
- Clear communication about how foster carers request more books from Catch Up® may help keep families engaged

- Dates for drop-in sessions should be set further in advance and perhaps held more frequently so that more foster carers are able to attend. The carers who did attend found them extremely helpful, so more opportunities to ask questions and discuss delivery of the programme may have prevented some foster families from disengaging
- Reconsider homework demands to ensure that all carers can complete the training flexibly and taking account of their other commitments
- Awareness and coordination between schools, social workers and families to support the children could help keep the children engaged
- For readers who are coping well with decoding, more emphasis could be placed on reading comprehension within the sessions.

Directions for future research

This evaluation suggests that the Catch Up® Literacy programme can be run in the homes of foster/kinship carers. However, further research is needed to explore some of the issues and recommendations identified, particularly around engagement both of the carers and of the children taking part. In particular, future evaluations would benefit from being aware of the multiple adaptations foster carers made to their implementation of the programme. Given the complexity of the home and school contexts of children in care, more flexibility may be needed within the programme and systematic recording of adaptations would help to understand the impact of these on children's outcomes. Related to this, more information about children's experience of school – e.g. any negative experiences of schools or changes of schools – should be recorded and explored to understand how this may negatively affect their engagement with the programme. It would also be beneficial to revisit the training provided by Catch Up® Literacy and the foster carers/kinship carers, and the opportunity for post-training support to ensure this meets the needs of the carers. Finally, a cost–benefit analysis should be embedded in future research and an analysis of the future use of Catch Up® Literacy with children in the home.

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Appendix: characteristics of the surveyed carers

Background of carer

The baseline survey ascertained the carers' experience and educational backgrounds, as well as the number of children they had in their care. The endline survey repeated questions to capture any changes in the number of children the carers were looking after. N shows the number of respondents to the survey question. Findings from the telephone interviews are reported, which provide illustrative and explanatory context.

Carer experience

Participants in the programme had significant experience as carers (Table A1). A quarter (26%) of the survey respondents had been carers for 10 years or more, with only six per cent having less than one year's experience.

Table A1. Length of time as a carer

	<i>Baseline</i>
Less than 1 year	6%
1–4 years	31%
5–9 years	37%
10 years or more	26%
N	35

Source: IES surveys

As shown in Table A2, carers had a variety of educational backgrounds, with all respondents having some qualifications (although one carer preferred not to say). Half (50%) reported having qualifications above Level 4 or equivalent, and just under 2 in 5 (39%) had Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications or equivalent.

Table A2. Highest qualification of carer

	<i>Baseline</i>
Entry level 1–3 qualifications	3%
GCSE or GCE O Level grades A*–C / NVQ Level 2 / Intermediate apprenticeship qualifications or equivalent	24%
A Level/AS Level / Advanced apprenticeship / International Baccalaureate or equivalent Level 3 qualification	15%
CertHE / higher apprenticeship / HNC or equivalent Level 4 qualification	6%
Foundation degree / Level 5 NVQ / HND or equivalent	15%

Degree with honours / degree apprenticeship or equivalent Level 6 qualification	26%
Postgraduate certificate / master's degree/ doctorate or equivalent	9%
Prefer not to say	3%
N	34

Source: IES surveys

Children in the carer's home

At baseline, two-thirds (66%) of carers had two or three children in their care (Table A3). This changed little by the endline and the effect of carers dropping out of the survey is not accounted for below.

Table A3. How many children the carer was fostering at the time of the survey

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>
1	34%	30%
2–3	66%	63%
4 or more	0%	7%
N	35	27

Source: IES surveys

At baseline, most carers (91%) had only one child starting Year 5 or 6 in September 2021 (Table A4). Nine per cent of carers (n=4) had more than one foster child in this age group.

Table A4. How many of the carer's looked-after children started Year 5 or 6 in September 2021

	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Endline</i>
One child	91%	93%
More than one child	9%	7%
None	0%	0%
N	35	27

Source: IES surveys

The interview findings indicated that carers delivered the Catch Up® Literacy intervention to one child in either Years 5 or 6 in September 2021. However, two described delivering the intervention to two children in care in their home: one of these households had a foster child in Year 5 and another in Year 6, and the other had a foster child in Year 6 and one in Year 4, who, although out of the age parameters for this evaluation, was interested in participating following delivery of the intervention to the older child. There was a further example of a carer delivering the intervention to a foster child as well as their own child who was of the same age. It was common for other children to also live with the carers: two-thirds

(66%) had at least 1 other child (under 18) living in their home, and most of whom (40%) had one other child (Table A5). Three per cent had four or more other children living with them.

Table A5. How many other children live in the carer’s home

	<i>Baseline</i>
1	40%
2–3	23%
4 or more	3%
None	34%
N	35

Source: IES surveys

Of the carers who had other children (under 18) in their house, 41% reported that at least 1 of these **other** children was in Year 5 or 6 (Table A6).

Table A6. How many of these other children in the carer’s home are in Year 5 or 6

	<i>Baseline</i>
One child	23%
More than one child	18%
None	59%
N	22

Source: IES surveys

Although during interviews carers were not directly asked about the number of other children in their care, many readily volunteered this information and understanding the number of children in the household was beneficial in understanding the home environment and the barriers to delivery of the intervention. A common theme emerging from the interviews was the substantial time constraints facing those carers with multiple children in the home (whether these were children in care or their own children). These time constraints appeared more pronounced than for interview participants with a smaller number or no other children living in their household.

Caring responsibilities that limited available time for the intervention were a significant issue for the carers in interviews who had dropped out of the intervention. The constraints on their time affected the structure and frequency with which they could deliver the intervention.



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