

Independent evaluation of Booktime – Northern Ireland

Executive Summary

The Booktime Programme

The overall consensus in Northern Ireland is that Booktime is an excellent project and has been welcomed by parents/carers, teachers, and other professional stakeholders and most importantly by the children.

“This is an excellent programme with immense potential for development”

The Booktime book pack

All of the children interviewed said that they liked the *Mr Big* story. 78% of teachers reported that they had read *Mr Big* to their class. 87.5% of the children said that someone at home had read the story to them.

95% of the teachers said that they thought the *Mr Big* book was either quite good or very good. They all agreed that the story was age appropriate in terms of interest level and great for shared reading. 95% of the teachers said that the Booktime book pack links very well with the Foundation Stage curriculum, particularly in relation to Literacy, Music and Personal Development.

There was a variation in response to the Activity Card with 58% of the children interviewed reporting that they had not used it. 82% of parents/carers said that they liked or quite liked the activity card, 79% of teachers thought that it was good and 62% of the other professional stakeholders said that they quite liked or liked the Activity Card a lot. There was a feeling among the other stakeholders that for some children the tasks may be too difficult and hence put pressure on parents and carers about expectations of children.

Approximately 79% of teachers, parents and carers said that they liked the Parent Information Leaflet however, 54% of the professional stakeholders did not like it much or at all. They felt that there was a missed opportunity to inform parents and carers more about the importance of sharing books for pleasure in the home. There may have been an over ambitious assumption that parents/carers would visit the Booktime website.

18% of parents/carers said that they had visited the Booktime website. 37% of teachers said that they visited the Booktime website and availed of the online resources.

22% of the parents/carers surveyed said that they had attended a Booktime event in their primary school.

Impact of Booktime book pack on children’s attitudes and dispositions towards reading for pleasure

Almost 50% of parents/carers said that the pack made a little bit more or a lot more difference to theirs and their children’s attitude towards reading for pleasure. Almost 50% of teachers said that the Booktime pack had effected some improvement in the children’s attitudes and dispositions towards reading.

Collaboration of services in the promotion of a love and enjoyment of books and reading in the home

Currently there are a variety of strategies used by a range of organisations in Northern Ireland to link with parents/carers, schools and other services in order to promote the importance of sharing and

reading books in the home. However, there is currently little collaboration between organisations around the distribution and promotion of the Booktime book pack. Libraries, up to 2010, had the strongest link with schools and other services in relation to the promotion of the Booktime programme. In 2010 schools had the main responsibility for promoting the Booktime book pack.

Professional stakeholders have welcomed the appointment of the National Development Manager for Booktrust in Northern Ireland and have reported a positive impact already. They view this role as central to creating more collaborative and consistent working arrangements between services. The ELBs acknowledge that a process has just begun and with the support of the National Development Manager are confident that this partnership working will develop. They believe that there are opportunities to develop strong strategic links and it is important that Booktime is now incorporated into action plans at a regional level.

Recommendations

The Booktime book pack

- Produce books and accompanying materials in other languages – Polish and Irish were mentioned in particular
- Draw greater attention of teachers and parents/carers to www.booktime.org.uk
- Include a second, non-fiction title in book packs ('The Booktime Book of Fantastic First Poems' was the second title for 2009-10 in England, funded by additional government support) - would be a valuable resource for Year One children in Northern Ireland
- Make greater use the Activity Card to promote interaction opportunities between parents/carers and children and link experiences to the theme of the Booktime story
- Utilize information leaflet to support parents/carers with strategies on how to read for pleasure with their children, how to ask questions about books and stories, how to make time for stories and how to talk about the pictures with their children

Collaboration between services in Northern Ireland

In order to mediate the Booktime message consistently to parents/carers, the following has been recommended:

- Continue to develop the role of the National Development Manager to enable an interboard approach where each of the 5 Education Boards would adopt similar strategies to promoting the Booktime pack and its message
- Deliver Booktime message through ELBs at Foundation Stage training across Northern Ireland
- Utilize the role of the National Development Manager to develop partnership working at all levels and across many services because of the growing scale of parenting needs
- Hold launch events involving major stakeholders and services – involve local press
- Provide guidance/seminar packs for presenters/teachers/librarians who would be promoting and presenting the Booktime packs to parents/carers of Year One children
- Encourage schools to organise and host Booktime events in partnership with their local libraries

Concept, distribution and presentation of Booktime book packs

- Continue to distribute packs to the schools but encourage a parents/carers meeting in school or library to present the contents and benefits of the pack
- Provide schools with the book earlier in the year so that teachers could incorporate all of the potential for learning across the curriculum into their planning. They could also plan more thoughtfully for home/school links with parents/carers.