Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

Conducted by Stranmillis University College on behalf of Springboard for Children
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With acknowledgement to Dr Colette Gray for her advice and support with technical and methodological aspects of the project.

September 2009
Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude to those who supported this project including:

- Springboard for Children who funded the project;
- the school and teaching staff and principals who willingly participated in the research;
- the Springboard tutors who permitted us to observe their literacy sessions;
- the parents who contributed to focus group sessions and individual interviews; and
- the pupils, especially those who participated in focus group discussions,

Finally, we would like to express appreciation to the Principal and colleagues at Stranmillis University College: A College of Queen’s University for their support with the project.
Introduction

Springboard for Children (referred to hereafter as Springboard) is an educational charity which provides socially deprived inner-city children who have difficulties in literacy with additional educational support. The organisation aims to challenge the effects of underachievement and break the cycle of frustration and failure that can have a detrimental effect on children’s life chances.

Springboard was founded 16 years ago and today operates in 10 London schools and 2 Manchester schools. These schools are supported by:

- 26 paid staff (13.5 Fulltime equivalent) including CEO Margaret McVeigh; Finance Director; Education Director; Trust and Foundations Officer; Training Coordinator; Volunteer Recruitment Officer; Events Fundraiser and the school coordinators;
- a group of 65 part-time and 8 fulltime volunteers.

During the year 2008 – 2009, Springboard provided literacy support to well over 300 children involving more than 22,000 teaching sessions.

Springboard’s aims are stated as follows:

- to provide literacy tuition for children in inner city primary schools;
- to train volunteers and equip staff to identify and meet individual educational needs of children
- to raise funds to support the work of Springboard for Children on a local and national level.

Volunteers, supported by a Unit Coordinator and a Hub Manager, work in dedicated rooms within selected primary schools to provide children suited to the programme with the opportunity to develop essential literacy skills that will enable them to access the National Curriculum and fulfil their academic potential. The programmes are based on intensive, tailor-made multi sensory, one to one literacy tuition, delivered by highly trained members of the Springboard Team.

Springboard’s services are provided to children under the age of 11 years attending primary school. Each child has at least two 1 hour sessions (maximum) with their tutor each week for a minimum of one year, (often extending to a second year). Each week the same personal tutor provides not only teaching support, but also continuity of relationship.

The Springboard team work in close collaboration with each school’s SENCO/ Inclusion Manager in the referral of children who need help. In addition to literacy difficulties, the majority of the children referred to Springboard Units may be said to have low self esteem. The solid relationships children develop with their tutor bring about, not only the acquisition of literacy skills, but also a change in the children’s attitude to learning that has the potential to enhance their long term academic achievements.
The research

This report presents findings from a study commissioned by Springboard for Children and undertaken by a team of researchers at Stranmillis University College.

In evaluating the effectiveness of Springboard’s provision, the research team attempted to ascertain the views of teaching staff in the client schools (including Headteachers, teachers and SENCOs), parents and pupils and Springboard personnel (including the Education Director, Coordinators, Training Coordinator and Volunteer tutors); to analyse Springboard’s methodology through systematic, non-participant observation of teaching sessions; to assess the progress of pupils attending Springboard in the areas of reading, writing and spelling; to explore the training, use and supervision of its volunteers; to determine the extent of the liaison between the Springboard team and teachers and parents in each client school; and to examine Springboard’s policies and practice in relation to management issues.

Data was collected between October 2008 and July 2009 using a multi-method (quantitative and qualitative) and multi-source (client schools’ teaching staff, parents, pupils, and Springboard personnel) approach, thus providing methodological triangulation. The methodology employed included the use of questionnaires, individual and focus group interviews, systematic observations, case studies, standardised testing in reading and spelling, analysis of writing samples and archive information.

Results from the study are summarised here under the following headings:

- Headteachers, teachers and SENCO’s
- Pupils
- Literacy sessions
- Reading, spelling and writing
- Springboard volunteers
In summary the key findings from the teacher interviews were as follows:

- **Springboard** is an appropriate and highly effective intervention programme which caters for the needs of individual pupils who have literacy difficulties.
- Pupils benefit from the one to one teaching which Springboard provides.
- The process of referral operated by Springboard is perceived as well structured and managed efficiently.
- The teacher, often in collaboration with the school’s SENCO, liaises with the Springboard Coordinator during the referral process to ensure that the provision matches the needs of the child.
- Feedback on children’s progress from Springboard tutors is appreciated by teachers and is especially valuable to them for report writing and parent/teacher interviews.
- Springboard could be more fully integrated within some schools, especially in relation to shared joint training and to providing opportunities whereby teachers and Springboard tutors may observe the children at work in each other’s setting.
- In addition to raising literacy levels, Springboard is highly influential in raising children’s self-esteem and confidence.
- The timing of pupil withdrawal from class to attend Springboard is perceived as the main disadvantage.
- Springboard merits recommendation to other schools.
- Springboard represents very good value for money.

One Headteacher felt that Springboard provided:

> ‘a really good resource for our children in terms of a one-to-one support for a specifically identified area; it meets their needs and it meets them to a very high standard.’ and went on to say, ‘it is something they enjoy because we have quite large classes and we have children who are clamouring for your attention all the time, and our children with these additional needs get this sacred or sacrosanct 45 minutes or half an hour one-to-one slot and that’s something.’
Advantages perceived by Headteachers and teachers

When asked if there were any other advantages or unexpected gains, the following aspects were identified:

- “I think the attention, particularly for some of our children who perhaps don’t get the attention they deserve – they love going and they love being with that one person, they know it’s really special for them.”
- “The child is made to feel special, but not in a way that produces a stigma about attending Springboard.”
- “They are always proud of what they’ve achieved.”
- “The pastoral dimension; it’s not just another literacy strategy.”
- “Because the baseline is very low coming in from nursery, literacy, language skills are very low, so it is an issue in the school and I think Springboard definitely support that and raise standards.”
- “More willing to answer questions, more willing to put themselves out there, to ask the questions, to take the risk, even though it might be wrong they want to have a go.”

Clearly, Headteachers and teachers felt that the benefits of attending Springboard extended beyond improving pupils’ literacy skills. There was consensus among the Headteachers and teachers that the pupils who attended Springboard had gained in confidence and had improved self-esteem. They were more willing to ‘have a go’ at reading, writing and spelling and were more willing to participate in class.
The SENCOs were very positive about many aspects of the Springboard process/programme. One SENCO commented: ‘… they are very focused on delivering their programme, they are very focused on the children…a very positive attitude about the whole thing … There is a lot of reflection about what they are doing and they are analysing if it is working and if not why not?’

In summary the key findings from the SENCO interviews were as follows:

- The SENCO is the bridge between Springboard and the school.
- There could be more integration of Springboard within some schools in terms of:
  - shared joint training between schools and Springboard;
  - teachers and Springboard tutors observing their children in each other’s settings.
- The Springboard programme raises literacy levels in children.
- Springboard enhances a child’s well being in terms of confidence and self esteem.
- Springboard is a well organised, high quality intervention programme.
- Springboard is a good investment for a school and worthy of recommendation to other schools.

The SENCOs acknowledged that Springboard has a positive effect on the literacy levels of the children who attend. In the case of reading and attitude to reading it would appear that the programme was viewed as effective to highly effective depending on the child. It was recognised by some that effectiveness is measured by ‘the ability to transfer that skill back to the classroom’ and as one added ‘that is a skill in itself.’

In relation to improvement in spelling, again the Springboard programme was viewed as generally effective.

Would Headteachers and teachers recommend Springboard?

There was unanimity among the Headteachers and teachers in saying that they would recommend Springboard for Children to other schools.

‘Once you see that quality you have the confidence enough to enable you to recommend it to other colleagues and the authority.’

“Yes, I’d definitely recommend it. I think it’s really good and it’s brilliant for the children in our school who really struggle because there’s only so much you can do as a class teacher, especially with seven or eight year olds who are struggling; they need a lot of time and a lot of intervention and it’s brilliant to have that pressure taken off [because] I know that they’re getting some extra input on their phonic work.’

It was evident that all interviewees considered Springboard’s provision to be a worthwhile investment and they recognised the commitment of the Springboard team in their respective schools.
The key findings of the pupil interviews were:

- The children enjoy attending Springboard.
- Attending Springboard raises literacy levels.
- Attending Springboard helps with literacy activities back in the classroom.
- Stickers motivate the children.
- ‘Going on the computer’ is a favourite activity.
- The tutors have a supportive and encouraging relationship with the pupils.
- Children who have graduated from Springboard would like to go back.
- There is little that needs to be changed in Springboard.

A crucial element of any learning environment is, of course, the quality of the relationship between pupil and teacher. From the observations conducted across the five Springboard Units, the excellence of the rapport established between tutor and pupil was readily apparent. Indeed, in a number of instances there appeared to be a very strong bond between the two. Members of the project team were greatly impressed by the high level of commitment and professionalism demonstrated by all those involved in the day-to-day operation of the Units. Observations of the teaching sessions showed evidence of high quality tuition combined with a genuine concern for each pupil’s learning and welfare. It was evident from informal conversations with the tutors who were observed that they possessed detailed knowledge of their pupils’ backgrounds, their strengths, their difficulties, where they lacked confidence and where they needed the most support. From the time the pupil was collected from the classroom by his/her tutor until escorted back to class, he/she was guaranteed at least thirty minutes of the adult’s undivided attention in an extremely supportive environment dedicated not only to developing literacy skills, but also to fostering an attitude of ‘can do’ rather than ‘can’t do’, thereby empowering pupils in their learning.

The only suggested improvement to Springboard provision is an increase in the number of teaching sessions (i.e. more than two per week). The availability of Springboard provision at postprimary level would be valuable.
In view of the fact that the provision of accommodation for the Springboard Unit is at the discretion of the client school, it was not surprising to find considerable variation in this respect. However, whether afforded a suite of rooms or one of modest size, all of the Units visited reflected a child-centred approach and shared a number of common features which included a bright, welcoming, child friendly environment with appropriately sized furniture; examples of pupils’ work and instructional wall charts produced by staff members as well as commercially produced posters; individual work stations which were screened off to minimize distraction and provide privacy for pupil and tutor and a range of literacy-based learning and teaching resources.

Without exception, there was ample evidence in each location to indicate that a genuine effort was being made to create a learning environment which was safe (both physically and psychologically), positive, non-threatening and conducive to raising children’s self-esteem and confidence in their ability to learn. Photographic displays of staff and pupils conveyed a sense of belonging and of value being attached to each member of the Springboard community. This was reinforced by much of the wall space being devoted to displaying pupils’ work.

The key findings of the observations were:

- Praise, encouragement and support are integral to a Springboard session.
- Springboard provides children with a friendly, non-threatening learning environment.
- Most lessons cover all aspects of literacy.
- The content of a lesson is structured around the phonic needs of the child.
- Mistakes are perceived as learning opportunities by both pupil and tutor.
- Lessons are firmly grounded in the Soundworks and Junior Programme.
- Soundworks and the Junior Programme provide an excellent structure for the teaching session.
- A multi sensory approach is adopted in the lessons using a wide range of literacy resources.
The writing samples were analysed using an assessment tool adapted from the Indicators for Writing Developmental Continuum (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994).

The key findings of the writing samples were:

In both the November and June writing samples, all the children:

- had knowledge of the conventions of print, i.e. correct orientation of print and spacing between words, etc;
- were willing to have a go at spelling own words, some of which were beyond simple spelling structures;
- relied on sounds which were the most obvious in words they were attempting to spell;
- occasionally, when spelling a word, substituted incorrect letters for those with a similar pronunciation.

In general, the June writing samples showed evidence of improvement in:

- the use of capital letters and full stop;
- the legibility of their handwriting, especially in the size and shape of their letter formation;
- the inclusion of more complex language structures e.g. use of adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions;
- the length of writing;
- grapheme-phoneme correspondence, particularly, in medial vowels.

In the June writing samples, there was evidence of children beginning to use syllabification for longer words and simple homonyms.
Reading and spelling tests

Reading and spelling assessments were carried out at the beginning and end of the school year by Springboard staff in each of the five settings. For the purpose of the Evaluation Project, test results pertaining to the new referrals only were requested. Pupils up to the age of 9 years (n = 99) were assessed using the Word Recognition and Phonic Skills (WRaPS) test and the reading component of the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) was administered to pupils over 9 years of age (n = 16). The WRAT (Spelling) was used to assess all age groups.

Overall there was a highly statistically significant difference between pupils’ scores at the beginning and the end of the year.

Examined by year group the pattern of results indicated that younger pupils in Year 1 made significant but modest gains, whereas the older Year 3 group made highly significant gains.

Some gains were made by pupils in Years 4 and 5.

The low number of pupils in Year 6 did not allow statistical analysis to be carried out on the test results.

Referring to Springboard’s impact on writing and spelling, a teacher recalled how one child in her class had started the year with writing that ‘did not make a lot of sense, a lot of mistakes in it and the spelling was quite poor.’ By the end of the year, ‘her writing, well you wouldn’t have thought it was the same child. From the beginning to the end it made sense, her spelling was much better … by the end of the year … she had the tools then to stop and think, “How am I going to spell this word? What sounds do I need to use? Do I know the spelling pattern?”’ She went on to describe how the child had graduated from Springboard, having only attended for the one year. In her words, ‘She really flew with Springboard … having that little extra made all the difference to her so she’s now gone into Year 5 much more equipped than she would have been if she hadn’t had Springboard.’
The key findings of the volunteer questionnaires and focus group discussions were:

- All of the respondents (100%) claimed that they enjoyed their volunteer work with Springboard.
- The most significant motivational factor for Springboard volunteers was the importance of helping others, followed by the opportunity to learn new skills. Younger volunteers tended to value more highly the potential career benefits and skills development of their volunteer work than their older colleagues.
- The Christian ethos of the organisation is reflected in the fact that almost half of respondents (48.2%) ‘agreed’ or ‘agreed strongly’ with the statement “By helping others I am carrying out an act of Christian service to others.” Only 13% of respondents disagreed with the statement.
- Volunteers rated highly the impact of their work on the children in terms of gains in self-esteem, motivation to learn and academic progress (especially in reading).

- Volunteers showed high levels of satisfaction with four key areas of the organisation: 96.2% were ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with workshops and training; 96.2% were ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the resources provided; 94.1% were ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the level of support offered generally by Springboard; and 76% were ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the level of paperwork associated with their work.
- A minority of survey respondents (42.6%) were satisfied with the coordination between the Springboard Unit and the classroom. Almost one third of respondents (31.5%) were either ‘unsatisfied’ or ‘very unsatisfied’ with the level of coordination. Dissatisfaction was greater among part time than full time volunteers. Only a minority of respondents (42.3%) was satisfied with the communication with the class teacher.
Literacy failure causes many problems for individuals and for society. It is widely reported that every year in England 35,000 children (6%, including nearly one in ten boys) go into secondary school unable to read or write. Most are from socially disadvantaged environments. A range of government interventions has been implemented to address these challenges and the methodology employed by Springboard complements and supplements these interventions.

This study clearly demonstrates that a trained Springboard volunteer can work successfully with individual pupils to raise the achievements of the lowest groups of children and impact on their progress when they return to the classroom. The level of this impact on achievement over a sustained period of intervention suggests that the goal of preventing literacy failure becomes demonstrably attainable and that Springboard can make a meaningful contribution. In addition there is evidence to suggest that children gain the added advantage of increases in self-esteem and confidence as a result of working with Springboard volunteers.

Based on the evidence presented we recommend strongly that:

- The nature of Springboard’s work merits extension in terms of hours and the number of volunteers within current schools and we support its plans to extend the current model to schools in other UK cities.

- Given appropriate training and resourcing, there are undoubtedly opportunities to develop and continue the work with post-primary children. In its strategic development plan for the future Springboard should consider seriously continuing its work in the post-primary context.