



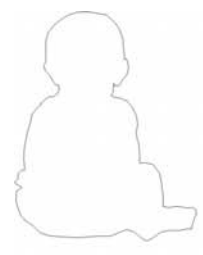
UNIVERSITY OF  
LIVERPOOL

**Summary report  
of the key themes from the  
Baby Matterz research project  
(December 2007 to July 2008)**



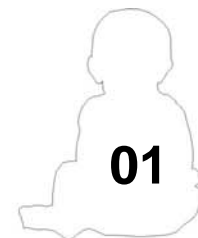
**innovation**

centre for lifelong learning



# Summary report of the key themes from the Baby Matterz\* research project

(December 2007 to July 2008)



## What is Baby Matterz?

The Baby Matterz project has been running in nine Liverpool schools over the course of the 2007/8 school year. A sister Baby Matterz programme has also been run in three schools in Dorset. The programme has involved parents bringing their babies, all under the age of one year, into the classroom to talk to pupil groups about aspects of the babies' growth, development, health and care. In Liverpool the pupil groups have ranged from Year 3 to Year 6 in primary schools. One Year 7 secondary school pupil group has also taken part in the initiative. Baby Matterz will continue to run in the Liverpool schools that have hosted it thus far and will also run in a small number of schools new to the programme during the school year 2008/9.

Baby Matterz has been supported by a consortium of agencies. Programme design and intellectual resources have come from The Learning Partnership. Liverpool Children's Services, as the main administrative body for Liverpool schools, has acted as the host organisation. Crucial input has come from children's health professionals within the Liverpool Primary Care Trust for guidance on the health content of the programme. Support for the parents involved has been provided by A Quiet Place. Research support has been provided by one researcher at the Centre for Lifelong Learning at the University of Liverpool, with the help of other Baby Matterz personnel. The funding for this research support was provided by The Innovation Unit<sup>†</sup>.

## The research

The research that has produced the key findings presented in this report commenced in December 2007. It was designed to focus particularly in the experience of parents who were volunteering for the programme. For this purpose three Baby Matterz research parents focus groups were organised on 27th February, 9th April and 11th June 2008. The presence of the Baby Matterz babies with the participating parents naturally meant that these events needed to be relatively informal. Nonetheless each event was given a theme. The first focus group was deliberately kept quite open



\* Trademarked as Baby Matterz for The Learning Partnership and The Innovation Unit.

<sup>†</sup> Formerly a part of the Department of Education and Skills, that has now been largely absorbed into the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

-ended and researchers were mindful of the fact that the parents were not only meeting the research team for first time, but also one another. This event was as much about establishing 'relationships for research' as it was about generating research insights. The second focus group took as its theme the Baby Matterz 'journey', from being asked to take part, to arriving at the school, to meeting the class for the first time and to leaving the school premises from the this first Baby Matterz session. Parents were asked to reflect upon their feelings at each of these stages. In the third and final focus group parents were asked to reflect upon what they had gained from taking part, as well as what they felt the pupils had gained. Discussions were facilitated through the use of fictionalised cartoon characters created by an professional illustrator. The themes that emerged in the discussion with parents were captured in tape recorded reflective research discussions that took place immediately after each focus group.

Three project papers were also produced from the research work. The first reported here, focuses on the professional perspectives of education and children's health professionals. For the purposes of this project paper, a further focus group was organised on 2 July 2008 for the teachers whose pupil groups had taken part in the programme. The theme of this reflective discussion was that of pupil benefits from the perspective of the class-room teacher. Senior and executive level Children's Services professionals were also interviewed as were the family health visitors who had had some involvement. The second project paper was an exercise in modelling approaches to cost-benefit analysis. The third project paper reported focuses upon the potential of a national data-base, the Millennium Cohort Study, for the development of Baby Matterz.

### **What the parents said**

The testimony of parents revealed that their involvement in Baby Matterz had produced the following outcomes for them:

- a greater sense of self-worth through having been approached to participate;
- improved self-confidence in communicating with teachers;



## Summary report of the key themes from the Baby Matterz research project

- improved confidence in the practical and emotional skills associated with parenting;
- improved focus upon their baby in terms of noticing changes and celebrating milestones;
- raised profile within the local community (in some cases);
- feelings of pride and satisfaction in being able to make an important contribution to the life of the school;
- feelings of validation in instances where a parent had been previously affected by anxieties about the baby or by low self-esteem.

Parents also explained that their babies had benefitted in the following ways:

- becoming more used to interaction with older children;
- greater awareness on the part of the parent about the importance of verbal interaction with, and reading to, the baby;
- becoming known to teachers and senior managers at the school ahead of attending the school;
- parental pride in the baby.

### What the professionals said

Classroom teachers who have been directly involved in Baby Matterz said that the pupils benefitted in the following ways:

- pupil focus and general attention to what was happening in the classroom were greatly improved during the sessions;
- behaviour improved markedly even



with pupils known for being difficult to manage;

- improved dynamics across the pupil-group with normally dominating pupils becoming quieter, and normally subdued pupils becoming more vocal (an 'equalising' effect);
- a more conducive atmosphere within the classroom for discussing themes such as vulnerability, bullying, difficulties at home *etc*;
- a general content for learning that was adaptable to a wide range of curriculum areas;
- a content for learning that is highly suitable for the social and emotional aspects of learning and personal, social and health education;
- motivation for learning through the pupils' positive engagement and desire to interact with the baby;
- greater acceptance of pupils who have caring responsibilities at home;
- improved sibling relationships;
- improved attitudes amongst boys (Year 7) towards the meaning and consequences of being a parent.

The health professionals who have provided input into the programme gave the following positive assessments of Baby Matterz:

- that it has a potential to improve the engagement of children's and family health specialists with individuals in groups that are considered 'hard-to-reach';
- that it provides a means by which to convey important health messages to parents in an empathetic and non-judgemental manner;



## Summary report of the key themes from the Baby Matterz research project

- that it creates an opportunity for the parent to focus on their baby and to reflect upon their relationship with it;
- that the structure of Baby Matters needs refinement in order to allow a more systematic input from health agencies across all the schools running Baby Matterz sessions;
- that the sources of information for the health content of the programme need to be Department of Health approved.

### Cost-benefit modelling

The research included a modelling exercise for the purposes of cost-benefit analysis. The modelling exercise proceeded through a consideration of the feasible benefits of Baby Matterz. Broadly, these lay in the areas of social and emotional support and those types of work that are designed to engage pupils who could otherwise remain disengaged and possibly at risk of exclusion.



Having identified these areas as providing one criteria by which to construct a cost-benefit model, the Education Budget Statement (Section 52) for Liverpool Children's Services (2007/8) was considered. The following categories were selected as likely to be those for which Baby Matterz might prove beneficial:

- work with special educational needs pupils;
- support for inclusion;
- behaviour support services;
- educational psychology support;
- and education welfare services.

The complexity of all of these areas was acknowledged within the research, as was the deliberate simplification involved in a necessarily speculative assessment of the kinds of benefits Baby Matterz might bring. For these reasons a putative Baby Matterz effect of just 10% was suggested as the basis of the calculations for this modelling exercise. With this notional 10% effect a cost-benefit ratio of 1:3 was calculated, meaning that, in this scenario, for every £1 spent on Baby Matterz, £3 might plausibly be saved for the service. The simplifications involved in this scenario-based calculation were deliberately chosen to skew the outcome towards a conservative assessment of the possible cost-benefits.

Health professionals interviewed for this part of the research also suggested ways in which Baby Matterz might produce savings to service budgets. Principally these were premised upon the expectation that, through their involvement in Baby Matterz, participating parents would become better informed about their babies' and children's health, and that they would also become more able and willing to engage with health agencies.

### **Using national statistics**

One research element comprised an assessment of the potential of a large scale, national data-set, the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), for Baby Matterz. There was an interest within the consortium in the usability of the extensive data from this cohort study in providing an intelligence base for the future development of the Baby Matterz model.

The assessment firstly described the limitations of the potential of the MCS for Baby Matterz. This exercise was organised through four criteria. These were:

- representativity;
- methodology;
- ethics;
- and feasible benefits.



## Summary report of the key themes from the Baby Matterz research project

In terms of representativity the obvious scalar mis-match between the MCS (involving nearly 19,000 children) and Baby Matterz (involving only a handful of babies) was highlighted. Methodological concerns arose from the absence of either a targeted sampling strategy or any in-depth profiling of parents for Baby Matterz. Ethical considerations were connected to areas of questions for profiling that inform the MCS, but that would not be permissible to ask parents participating in Baby Matterz in its present form. Finally, by considering what benefits might flow from Baby Matterz for parents and babies, and which would not, more areas of the MCS were ruled out in terms of their usefulness to the programme.

This 'ruling-out' exercise, was also, in effect then, one of 'ruling-in' those areas of the MCS data set that could be useful. Broadly, this meant two things: assessing the data in terms of its relevance and appropriateness for Baby Matterz; and considering the usefulness of the MCS published findings. On this basis certain lines of inquiry from the following MCS questionnaire 'modules' were considered to be of potential use:

- Module A (non-residential parents);
- Module D (baby's health and development);
- Module E (childcare);
- Module F (grandparents and friends);
- Module K (housing and local area);
- Module L (interests and time with baby).

The published findings from the MCS that can be considered as being relevant and useful fall into the following categories:

- cognitive development;
- housing,
- neighbourhood and community;



- family demographics;
- child health;
- child behaviour;
- parenting;
- parental health and well-being;
- employment and education.

Overall, this assessment, whilst cautioning against a comprehensive and simplistic use of the MCS data, did highlight aspects of it that can be seen as being both relevant and appropriate to draw upon. These areas may prove to be valuable for any future and more mainstreamed re-modelling of Baby Matterz.

## Summary

This research has revealed a story of success for the Liverpool Baby Matterz programme for the school year 2007/8. Parents, based upon their own testimonies, have hugely enjoyed taking part. Classroom teachers report an 'amazing' affect upon pupils during Baby Matterz sessions in terms of behaviour and engagement for learning. Senior Children's Services professionals see in Baby Matterz a programme that not only can provide excellent curriculum content, but that can also contribute powerfully to the social inclusion agendas that are increasingly informing education practice. Children's health professionals see in Baby Matterz an initiative that can help improve the reach of health services into the community as well as a way of promoting public health messages. These health professionals also advise a close regard for the quality of the health information going out through Baby Matterz, as well as careful consideration of the kinds of structures required to ensure consistent high quality professional health input.



The broadly positive assessments that have been forthcoming from parents and service professionals, have helped the decision that has been made to introduce Baby Matterz into some more schools in Liverpool for the school year 2008/9. There is a general consensus that as the Baby Matterz programme develops, matures and becomes more embedded in Liverpool schools, the benefits it will bring to parents and their babies, pupils and schools may be great.

## Recommendations

1. The achievements of the Baby Matterz programme over the course of each school year should be show-cased and celebrated in the schools and communities in which it runs.
2. The professionals involved in Baby Matterz, from all the agencies involved, should form a practitioner group as part of a programme of professional support that, as well as being a vehicle of project development, also provides joint training opportunities.
3. The parents participating in Baby Matterz should be brought together as a cohort more systematically for the purposes of mutual support and encouragement.
4. Proper attention needs to be paid to the quality of the experience of the parents taking part in Baby Matterz.
5. Attention needs to be given especially to the quality and clarity of what is communicated to the parent about Baby Matterz at the earliest stages of their engagement.
6. Attention needs to be given for properly thought-through exit strategies for any parent who wishes to withdraw from active involvement. These need to be designed so that critical perceptions of the parent by any party are avoided, and that negative effects for pupils are minimised.
7. A full ethical audit of the programme is needed

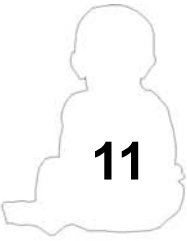


in order to ensure that possible scenarios in which harm or detriment to the parent or baby could result from their participation, are anticipated and avoided.

8. Consideration needs to be given to how to realise the full potential of the role of the family health visitor team in the programme. Principally this will mean moving towards a model in which the family health visitor is far more integrated into the running of Baby Matterz sessions.
9. Consideration needs to be given to a potential role for the school nurse service.
10. A full evaluation of Baby Matterz should be conducted in order to demonstrate the impact that it has for parents and their babies, pupils and communities. This evaluation should be designed with the future up-scaling and mainstreaming of Baby Matterz in mind. To this end it needs to incorporate appropriate performance indicators from the relevant priority agendas of Children's Services and health agencies.



**Summary report of the key themes from the Baby Matterz research project**



12



## Summary report of the key themes from the Baby Matterz research project

### Accessing research findings

The published research findings are available from the website of The Innovation Unit (see URLs for each publication below) and are available from Dr Mark O'Brien at the Educational Development Division of the Centre for Lifelong Learning, at the University of Liverpool.

**Research digest 1** (April 2008):

[http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/baby\\_matterz\\_digest\\_1.pdf](http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/baby_matterz_digest_1.pdf)

**Research digest 2** (May 2008):

[http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/baby\\_matterz\\_digest\\_2.pdf](http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/baby_matterz_digest_2.pdf)

**Research digest 3** (June 2008):

[http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/baby\\_matterz\\_digest\\_3.pdf](http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/baby_matterz_digest_3.pdf)

***Parents, babies, schools and national statistics: the Millennium Cohort Study and the Liverpool Baby Matterz initiative*** (July 2008):

[http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/baby\\_matterz\\_and\\_the\\_mcs.pdf](http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/baby_matterz_and_the_mcs.pdf)

***Cost-benefit analysis and small scale service intervention involving parents and babies: the Liverpool Baby Matterz initiative as a pilot case study*** (August 2008):

[http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/cost\\_benefit\\_text\\_final.pdf](http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/cost_benefit_text_final.pdf)

***Parents, babies and cross-agency working within schools: the case of the Liverpool Baby Matterz initiative*** (September 2008):

[http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/cross\\_agency\\_working\\_-\\_09\\_2008.pdf](http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/cross_agency_working_-_09_2008.pdf)



**Educational Development Division  
The University of Liverpool  
128 Mount Pleasant  
Liverpool  
L69 3GW**

**October 2008**