

Doodle Den

Review: January 2019

Note on provider involvement: This provider has agreed to EIF's terms of reference, and the assessment has been conducted and published with the full cooperation of the programme provider.

Doodle Den is a literacy support after-school programme. It is a targeted-indicated programme for children between the ages of 5 and 7. It is delivered in primary school, community centres or libraries and aims to support children to fully participate in education, address delays, and to improve educational outcomes.

Each Doodle Den group offers 15 spaces to children who would benefit from additional literacy support or group work. The children's class teachers or support workers make referrals to the programme using a standard referral form. Parents can also make referrals to the programme.

These programmes have a family-inclusive approach and work with the schools to support inclusion and engagement. The Doodle Den programme encompasses a balanced literacy framework in the sense that the main elements include a combination of modalities of literacy instruction: phonics 'mini-lessons', sight vocabulary, shared reading, independent reading, shared writing, independent writing and comprehension. These elements are followed by supporting 'centres' or small group work activities/games.

Evidence
rating: **3**

Cost rating: **2**

EIF Programme Assessment

Doodle Den has evidence of a **short-term positive impact** on child outcomes from at least one rigorous evaluation.

Evidence
rating: **3**

What does the evidence rating mean?

Level 3 indicates **evidence of efficacy**. This means the programme can be described as evidence-based: it has evidence from at least one rigorously conducted RCT or QED demonstrating a statistically significant positive impact on at least one child outcome.

This programme does not receive a rating of 4 as it has not yet replicated its results in another rigorously conducted study, where at least one study indicates long-term impacts, and at least one uses measures independent of study participants.

Cost rating

A rating of 2 indicates that a programme has a medium-low cost to set up and deliver, compared with other interventions reviewed by EIF. This is equivalent to an estimated unit cost of £100–£499.

Cost rating: **2**

Child outcomes

According to the best available evidence for this programme's impact, it can achieve the following positive outcomes for children:

Enhancing school achievement & employment

Improved reading ability (word recognition, sentence structure and word choice)

Based on study 1

0.04-point improvement on the Drumcondra Reading Test

Improvement index: **+7**

This means we would expect the average participant in the comparison group who did not receive the intervention (ie, someone for whom 50% of their peers have better outcomes and 50% have worse outcomes), to improve to the point where they would have better outcomes than 57% and worse outcomes than 43% of their peers, if they had received the intervention.

Immediately after the intervention

Improved general literacy ability

Based on study 1

0.29-point improvement on the Adapted version of the National Assessment of English ERC 2004 and National Literacy Trust

Improvement index: **+11**

This means we would expect the average participant in the comparison group who did not receive the intervention (ie, someone for whom 50% of their peers have better outcomes and 50% have worse outcomes), to improve to the point where they would have better outcomes than 61% and worse outcomes than 39% of their peers, if they had received the intervention.

Immediately after the intervention

Improved concentration and behaviour in class

Based on study 1

0.14-point improvement on the ADHD rating scale

Improvement index: **+7**

This means we would expect the average participant in the comparison group who did not receive the intervention (ie, someone for whom 50% of their peers have better outcomes and 50% have worse outcomes), to improve to the point where they would have better outcomes than 57% and worse outcomes than 43% of their peers, if they had received the intervention.

Immediately after the intervention

Key programme characteristics

Who is it for?

The best available evidence for this programme relates to the following age-groups:

- Primary school

How is it delivered?

The best available evidence for this programme relates to implementation through these delivery models:

- Group

Where is it delivered?

The best available evidence for this programme relates to its implementation in these settings:

- Primary school

The programme may also be delivered in these settings:

- Primary school
- Community centre

How is it targeted?

The best available evidence for this programme relates to its implementation as:

- Targeted indicated
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Where has it been implemented?

Ireland

UK provision

This programme has not been implemented in the UK.

UK evaluation

This programme's best evidence does not include evaluation conducted in the UK.

Spotlight sets

EIF does not currently include this programme within any Spotlight set.

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About the programme

What happens during delivery?

How is it delivered?

- The child component of Doodle Den is delivered in 96 sessions of 1.5 hours' duration each (over the course of the school year) by one qualified teacher and one qualified youth worker/childcare professional to groups of 15 children.
- There is also a parent/carers component, which is delivered in six sessions of 1.5 hours' duration each (over the course of the school year) to groups of parents.
- There is also a parent/carers and child component which is delivered in three hour-long sessions (over the course of the school year) to groups of parents and children.

What happens during the intervention?

Each session begins with a snack and sign-in routine, followed by various aspects of literacy teaching and activities, and concludes with a 'fun' element (such as art, physical education, drama or music). A sample outline of each element of the programme is given below:

- **Snack and sign-in (10 minutes):** The evidence-based Doodle Den manual outlines links between nutrition, behaviour and learning. Therefore, the children sit together to eat a snack. During this time, they are also exposed to environmental print, defined as 'print of the everyday world of the child' which 'allows children to gain an initial level of comfort within the group'.
- **Shared reading (Big Book reading; 20–30 minutes):** This element includes subsections on 'before reading activities', 'during reading activities', 'after reading activities' and 'reflection'. A Big Book is used over several weeks, taking a different focus or revisiting previous learning outcomes.
- **Shared writing (10–30 minutes):** The time allocated to the shared writing element gradually increases throughout the year. This element includes specified focus vocabulary, a list of comprehension skills and guidelines on the 'introduction', 'writing' and 'reflection' subsections of the mini-lesson, such as sequencing events and sentence structure.
- **Phonics mini-lesson (10 minutes):** The phonics section progresses from the individual sounds letters make to blending two, three and four-phoneme words and segmenting two, three and four-phoneme words into word families. Each mini-lesson has a 'focus sound' with details on the activities to be used. Jolly Phonics flashcards are used, as well as mini whiteboards, magnetic letters, sound pictures, oral segmentation boxes and word family flashcards.

- **Sight vocabulary (10 minutes):** This mini-lesson focuses on whole words and, for example, involves placing them in sentences or on an alphabetical 'word wall' or playing word games/rhymes. Each mini-lesson has a 'focus word' and the words become more difficult as the programme progresses.
- **Reading independently (10 minutes):** Facilitators are directed to listen to two or three children reading independently from an appropriate book within a 'levelled text scheme'. Children also select a new book to take home.
- **Centres (10–20 minutes):** These are small-group work activities/games involving combinations of reading, writing, sight vocabulary and phonics work, using a variety of fun, educational and interactive resources.
- **Fun elements (art/music/drama/physical education, 20–30 minutes):** Each of these activities is carried out at least once a week and involves a variety of games/activities. Art and drama are Big Book-related; music reinforces sounds and rhymes covered; PE promote physical activity and incorporate games using letters, sounds and words.
- **The parent sessions are entitled:** Introduction to Doodle Den; Reading is Fun; Making Story Sacks; Picking Books; Using the Library Service; and Writing and Supporting your child after Doodle Den. These sessions are designed to inform parents about what their children are doing in Doodle Den, and to provide information about using the local library and tips for supporting their children's reading and writing at home.
- **Parent and child sessions:** As well as encouraging parents to read and engage with the books sent home with their children, the Doodle Den programme also has a parent/family element aimed at promoting enhanced confidence among parents and children, celebration of achievements, and enhanced relationships. This element is made up of six parent sessions and one family day (for example, involving a visit to the local library, attending plays or story-telling sessions).

What are the implementation requirements?

Who can deliver it?

- The practitioners who deliver this programme are a primary school teacher with NFQ-7/8 level qualifications, and a youth worker (or social care or child worker) with NFQ-7/8 level qualifications.

What are the training requirements?

- Practitioners have seven hours of programme training. Booster training of practitioners is recommended.

How are the practitioners supervised?

- Practitioner supervision is not required.

What are the systems for maintaining fidelity?

Programme fidelity is maintained through the following processes:

- Training manual
- Other printed material
- Other online material
- Face-to-face training
- Fidelity monitoring
- Site visit observations, monitoring and progress reports, printed and online implementation guide, dedicated Doodle Den portal and website, communities of practice meetings.

Is there a licensing requirement?

Yes, there is a licence required to run this programme.

How does it work? (Theory of Change)

How does it work?

- Children's improved literacy skills are a gateway to general academic achievement and broader social outcomes, including improved concentration, reduced problem behaviours in school, more regular school attendance, and ultimately reduced risk of lifelong poverty.
- Doodle Den focuses on improving children's literacy through a wide range of methods in a literacy-rich afterschool setting which promotes parental engagement and enables children to develop their literacy, oral language and social skills through fun activities.
- In the short term, children will have improvements in overall literacy ability including writing, text comprehension, phonics, sight vocabulary, independent reading and fluency.
- Ultimately, these outcomes reduce the likelihood of lifelong poverty and increase the chances of fulfilling and productive lives.

Intended outcomes

Supporting children's mental health and wellbeing
Enhancing school achievement & employment

Contact details

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www.doodleden.ie
<https://www.twcdi.ie/what-we-offer/doodle-den/>
<https://www.twcdi.ie/members-area/doodle-den/>

About the evidence

Doodle Den's most rigorous evidence comes from an RCT which was conducted in Ireland.

This study identified statistically significant positive impact on a number of child outcomes.

This programme is underpinned by one study with a level 3 rating, hence the programme receives a level 3 rating overall.

Study 1

Citation: Biggart et al., 2012; Biggart et al., 2013

Design: RCT

Country: Ireland

Sample: 623 children between 5 and 6 years old identified by teachers as pupils who would benefit from additional literacy support or group work.

Timing: Post-test

Child outcomes:

- Improved reading ability (word recognition, sentence structure and word choice)
 - Improved general literacy ability
 - Improved concentration and behaviour in class
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Other outcomes:

- None measured
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Study rating: 3

Biggart, A., Kerr, K., O'Hare, L., & Connolly, P. (2012). Evaluation of the effectiveness of the Childhood Development Initiative's 'Doodle Den' literacy programme. Childhood Development Initiative, Dublin.

Available at <http://hse.openrepository.com/hse/bitstream/10147/299260/1/DoodleDen+Report.pdf>

Biggart, A., Kerr, K., O'Hare, L., & Connolly, P. (2013). A randomised control trial evaluation of a literacy after-school programme for struggling beginning readers. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 62, 129-140.

Available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0883035513000815>

Study design and sample

The first study is an RCT. This study involved random assignment of children to a Doodle Den treatment group and a wait-list control group.

This study was conducted in Ireland with a sample 623 children between 5 and 6 years old identified by teachers as pupils who would benefit from additional literacy support or group work. The pupils' teachers defined 16% of children in sample as coming from a minority ethnic background. The sample was almost evenly split between girls and boys.

Measures

- Children's reading ability was measured using the Drumcondra Reading Test (direct assessment).
- Children's general literacy ability was measured using the National Assessment of English ERC 2004 (teacher-report).
- Children's concentration and behaviour in class was measured using the Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Rating Scale (teacher-report).
- Children's attendance at school was measured using school records (administrative records).

Findings

This study identified statistically significant positive impact on a number of child outcomes.

This includes:

- Children's reading ability (Drumcondra Reading Test).
- Children's general literacy ability (National Assessment of English ERC 2004).
- Children's concentration and behaviour (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder).

Other studies

The following studies were identified for this programme but did not count towards the programme's overall evidence rating. A programme receives the same rating as its most robust study or studies.

Childhood Development Initiative (2014) Doodle Den Implementation Guide. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative (CDI)

Kelly, M. & Reid, A-M. (2013) Doodle Den: A Community Led Literacy Intervention. Reading Association of Ireland Journal.

CDI (2012) Policy Brief: Improving Literacy Outcomes in Early Childhood through the Doodle Den After-School Programme, The Childhood Development Initiative Dublin 24.

Guidebook

The EIF Guidebook provides information about early intervention programmes that have at least preliminary evidence of achieving positive outcomes for children. It provides information based on EIF's assessment of the strength of evidence for a programme's effectiveness, and on detail about programmes shared with us by those who design, run and deliver them.

The Guidebook serves an important starting point for commissioners to find out more about effective early interventions, and for programme providers to find out more about what good evidence of impact looks like and how it can be captured. As just one of our key resources for commissioners and practitioners, the Guidebook is an essential part of EIF's work to support the development of and investment in effective early intervention programmes.

Our assessment of the evidence for a programme's effectiveness can inform and support certain parts of a commissioning decision, but it is not a substitute for professional judgment. Evidence about what has worked in the past offers no guarantee that an approach will work in all circumstances. Crucially, the Guidebook is not a market comparison website: ratings and other information should not be interpreted as a specific recommendation, kite mark or endorsement for any programme.

[How to read the Guidebook](#)

[EIF evidence standards](#)

[About the EIF Guidebook](#)

EIF

The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) is an independent charity and a member of the What Works network. We support the use of effective early intervention for children, young people and their families: identifying signals of risk, and responding with effective interventions to improve outcomes, reduce hardship and save the public money in the long term.

We work by generating evidence and knowledge of what works in our field, putting this information in the hands of commissioners, practitioners and policymakers, and supporting the adoption of the evidence in local areas and relevant sectors.

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