

## Better Start Bradford Innovation Hub

# Forest School Play Project End of Contract Report - November 2020

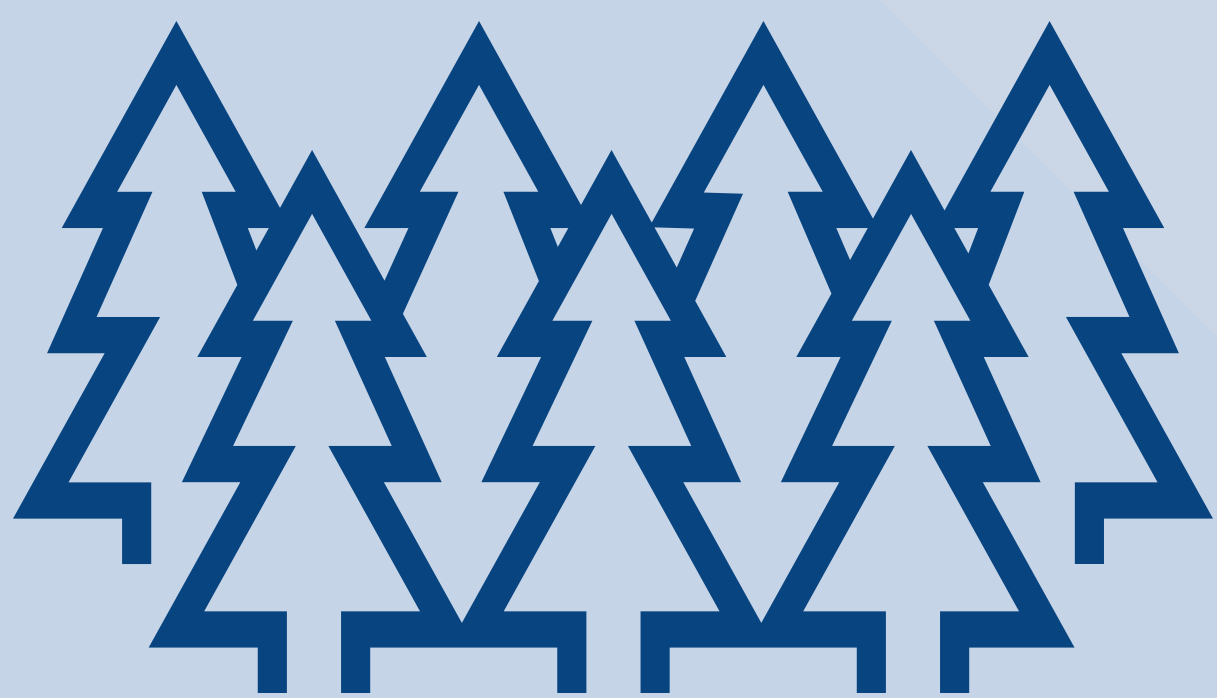
*This is a report provided by the Better Start Bradford Innovation Hub (BSBIH) for the Better Start Bradford (BSB) and the Forest Schools team. The document provides an overview of the Forest schools, its performance and findings from the implementation evaluation for the project's second contract period. The design of this evaluation is described in more detail in the Evaluation Plan Summary, which was approved by key stakeholders from the BSBIH and BSB in March 2018.*

Authors: Emma Ansell, Aiysha Khan, Kathryn Willan, Sara Ahern, and the Better Start Bradford Innovation Hub

Version 1.0

Approved by:

Sara Ahern Better Start Bradford Innovation Hub Programme Manager



Produced for Better Start Bradford

# Executive Summary

## Project Summary

The Forest School Play Project is a universal project within the 'Better Place' theme of Better Start Bradford, which aims to enable children to learn through play in a natural environment. The central component of the project is a programme of 10 weekly sessions delivered by trained facilitators for groups of 3 year old children attending nurseries. Sessions take place in local green spaces, parks, and woodlands. There is an opportunity for parents to attend programme sessions with their children. In addition to the 10 week programme, the project has also run stand alone Family Play Sessions for local families in parks and green spaces.

This report provides an evaluation of the project delivery between 1st April 2018 and 30th September 2020 in line with the agreed evaluation plan. It incorporates project monitoring data as well as a summary of an in-depth ethnography which was completed by the Innovation Hub in April 2019. It should be noted that due to Covid-19 and the associated lockdown measures delivery of the 10 week Forest Schools programme paused on the 16th March 2020 (shortly before the third year of the contract started). As a result we do not provide an assessment of the 10 week programme delivery in Year 3. We do provide a summary of delivery of Family Play sessions as these were able to continue, despite the lockdown.

## Project performance

### Data



A small number of data quality issues were identified during the preparation of this report. These are described in more detail on page 2 of the report. These are only minor issues and for this reason the project have been placed in **AMBER**.

### Implementation



Targets for implementation related to the number of programme sessions delivered. It was anticipated that 330 sessions would be delivered over three years. This target was adjusted to 203 to account for the length of the evaluation period and the impact of COVID-19 180 sessions were delivered (89% of target). This places the project in **AMBER** for this progression criteria.

### Completion



It was anticipated that 264 children would complete the 10 week programme over three years. This target was adjusted to 163 to account for the length of the evaluation period and the impact of COVID-19. 146 children completed Forest Schools (90% of the target). This places the project in **AMBER** for this progression criteria.

### Satisfaction



Targets for satisfaction related to the proportion of families with a median score of 4 or more on project satisfaction questionnaires. 132 families completed and returned satisfaction questionnaires for the project. 100% had median scores of 4 or more, demonstrating high levels of satisfaction with the project. This places the project in **GREEN** for this progression criteria.

### Recommendation 1

The Forest Schools Play project has shown to be a highly acceptable project to early years settings, children, and parents and caregivers. This has been demonstrated by the repeated participation of settings, high levels of recruitment and retention of children in the programme, and good levels of parent and caregiver involvement. The project should aim to maintain this level of engagement moving forward.

### Recommendation 2

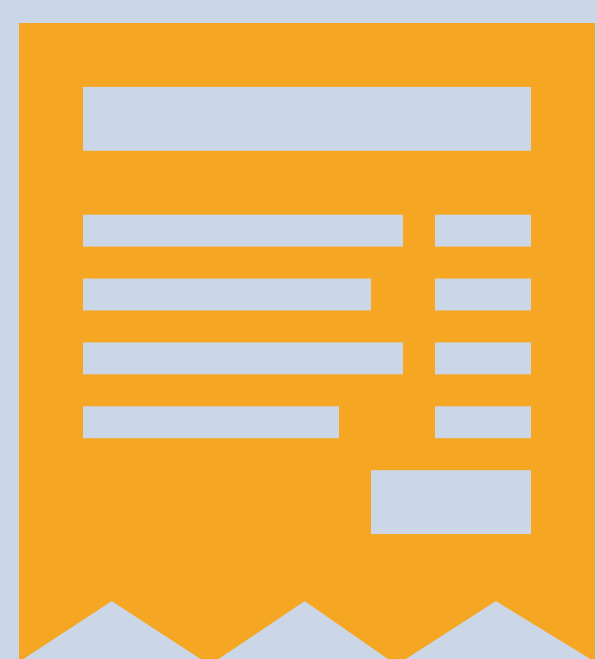
Outcomes for Forest Schools have been aligned with domains of the EYFS with the aim of supporting robust assessment of the impact of Forest Schools on children attending nursery. However, work by Better Start Bradford and the Innovation Hub should continue to explore if and how this data might be accessed so that quality of the data can be established

### Recommendation 3

It is recommended that the Get Out More and Innovation Hub teams revisit data capture to ensure that any outstanding issues are resolved and project data continues to be of a good standard.

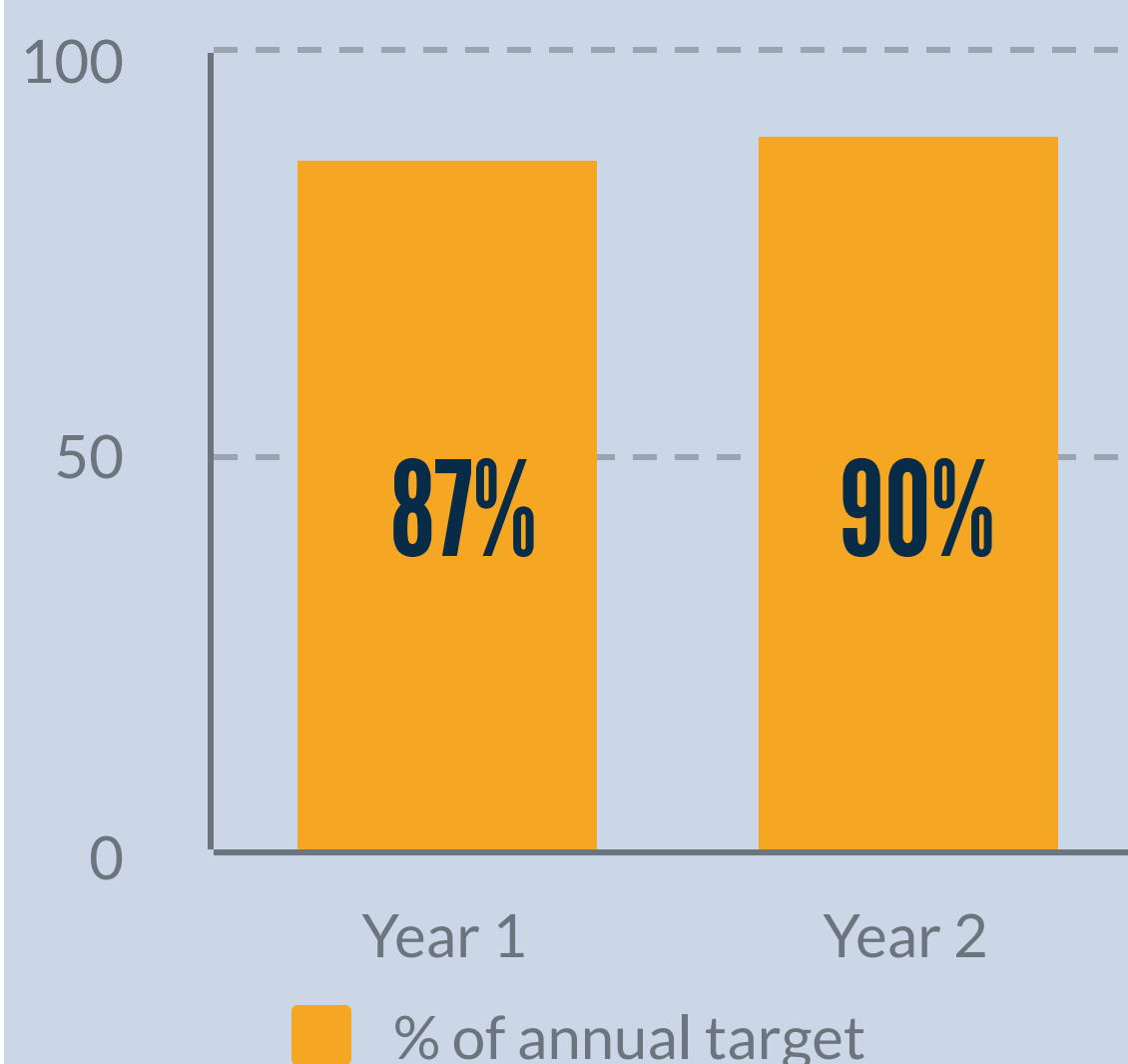
# Project Performance

## Data



The project have worked closely with the Innovation Hub and Better Start Bradford teams in developing effective data capture for the project. Data has been provided on time and to a good standard. However, a small number of data quality issues were identified during the preparation of this report. This specifically related to duplicate records identified in SystemOne and discrepancies between attendance data in the system and what is reported in project excel spreadsheets. For this reason the project are in **AMBER**. Work with the project team to ensure consistency in data recording would aid interpretation of data including as an example standardisation of how session venues are recorded.

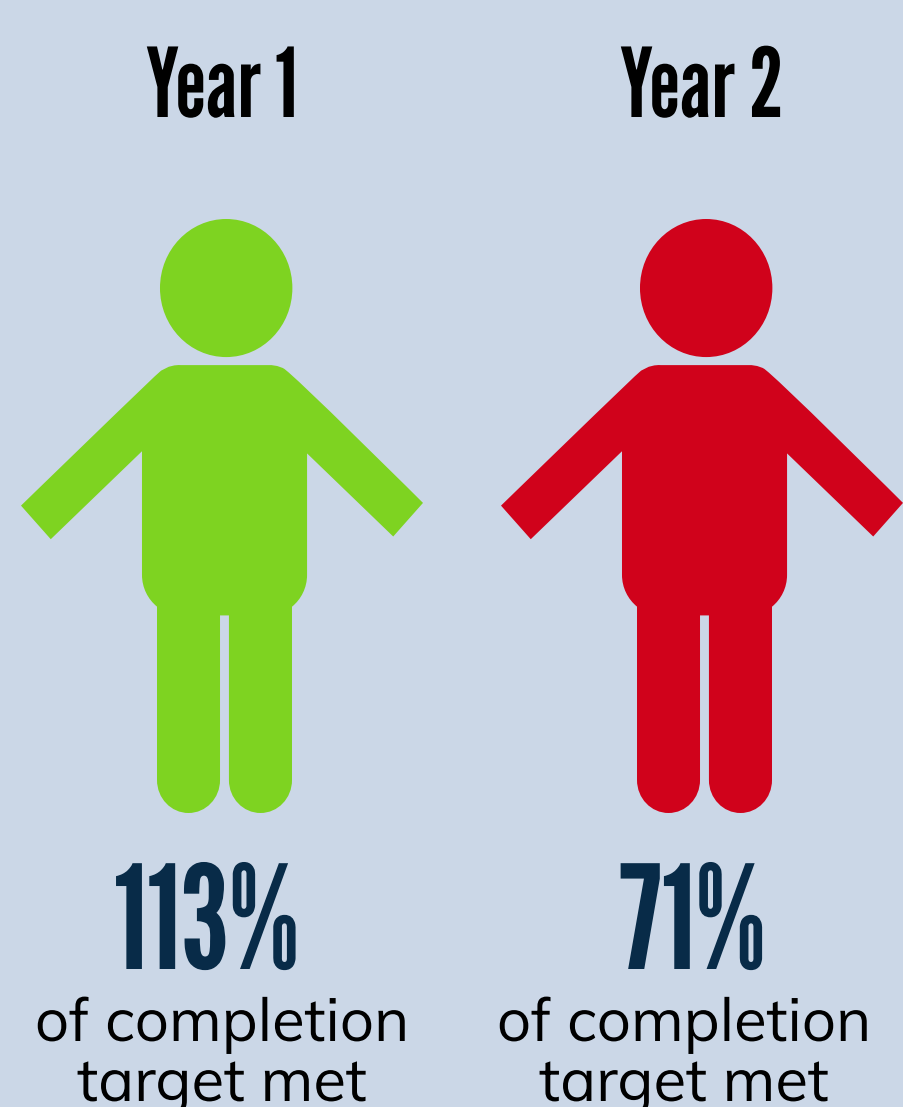
## Implementation



It was anticipated that the project would deliver 90 Forest School programme sessions in Year 1, and 120 in both Years 2 and 3. An overall target of 330 sessions delivered over the contract term. For the purposes of this report the overall target was adjusted to 203 sessions to account for the pause in delivery due to COVID-19 which occurred toward the end of Year 2 of the contract. The annual target for Year 1 remained the same (90 sessions), but the annual target for Year 2 was adjusted to 113.

In the first year Forest Schools delivered 78 sessions (87% of their target) and 102 sessions in Year 2 (90% of their target). Over the course of the evaluation period, the project met 89% of its overall anticipated session delivery. This puts the project in **AMBER** for this criteria.

## Completion



Children complete the Forest Schools programme by attending at least 7 of 10 sessions.

It was anticipated that 264 children would complete the programme over the contract term with annual targets of 72 children Year 1, and 96 in Years 2 and 3. For the purposes of this report the overall target was adjusted to 163 to account for the pause in delivery due to COVID-19 which removed opportunity for some children to complete. The annual target for Year 1 remained the same but was adjusted to 91 for Year 2.

In the first year the project exceeded their target, as 81 children completed the programme (113% of the target), placing them in **GREEN**. In Year 2, 65 children completed the programme (71% of the target) placing them in **RED**. This puts the project in **AMBER** overall as they achieved 90% of the overall target. More detail about completion can be found on page 5.

## Satisfaction

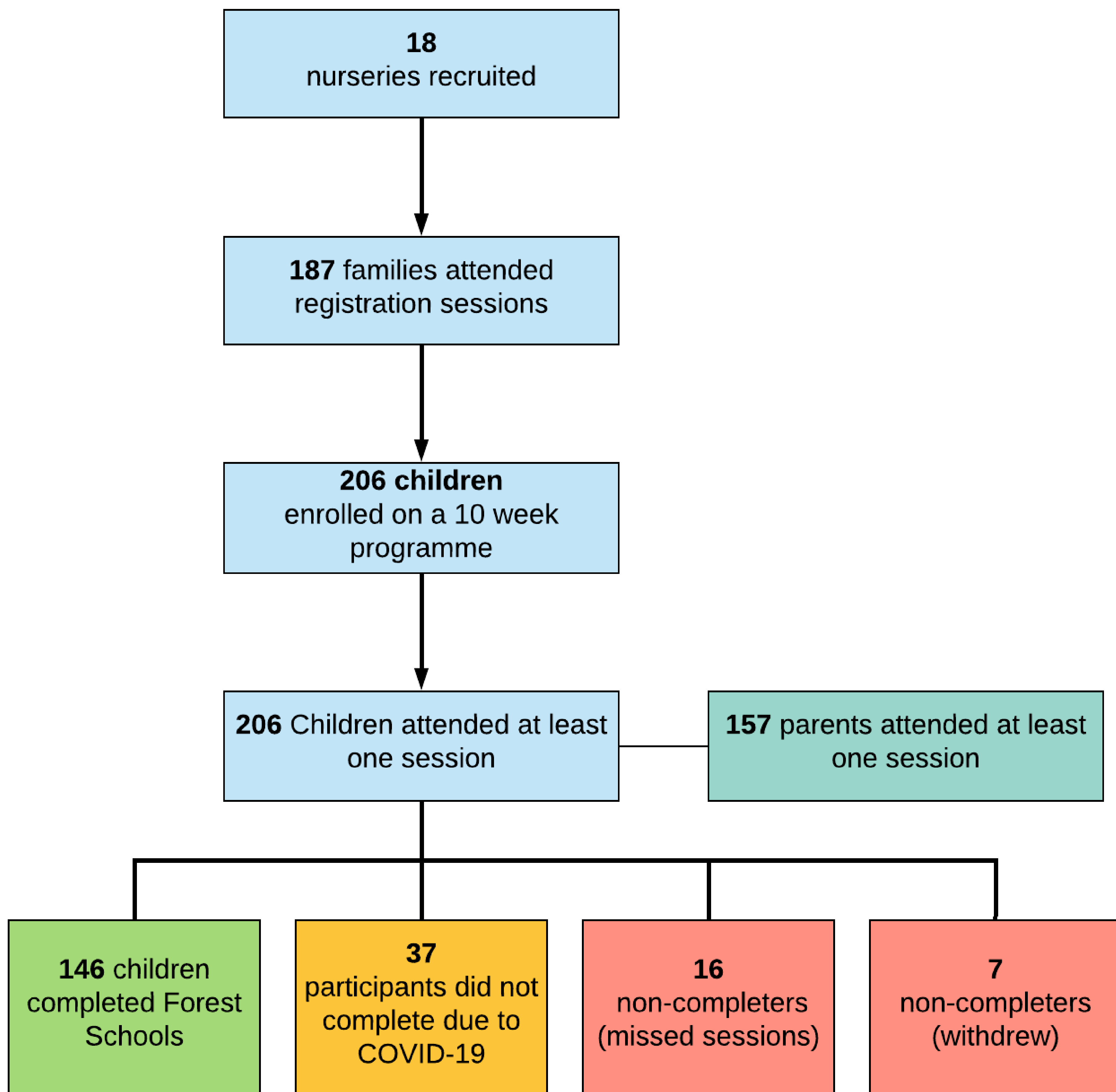


132 parents and caregivers completed and returned project satisfaction questionnaires after taking part in a Forest Schools programme. All 132 (100%) had median scores of 4 or more, demonstrating high levels of satisfaction with the project. Overall, this puts the project in **GREEN** for this progression criteria.

See the Satisfaction section in this report (page 10) for more detail around Satisfaction.

# Project Flow Diagram

How did families move through the project?



# Recruitment and attendance

## How many nurseries were recruited?

**18**  
 Nurseries recruited



It was anticipated that 9 nurseries would commit to participating in the programme in Year 1 of the project, with a further 12 in both Years 2 and 3.

Targets were met in Year 1 and 2 before delivery was paused in Year 3 in response to the COVID-19 lockdown and the closure of Early Years settings. The 21 times nurseries were recruited over the evaluation period related to 18 unique settings, meaning that 3 nurseries participated in the programme more than once.

## How many families were recruited?

**187**

Families attended registration Sessions

### Registration Sessions:

Families had the opportunity to attend a registration session before they enrolled children on the 10 week Forest Schools programme. All programmes ran a registration session, meaning 21 registration sessions were delivered in total. 187 families attended a registration session.

### Enrollees:

The anticipated number of children enrolling onto the Forest Schools programme in Year 1 was 90. In Year 2 and 3 it was 120.



Children attended at least one session

In Year 1, the project met their target and enrolled 90 children. In Year 2, they enrolled 116 children (97% of the target). No children were enrolled in Year 3 due to a pause in delivery. This meant the project met **98%** of their enrolment target.

### Participants:

Targets for participation were the same as for enrolment. Of the 206 children who were enrolled, **100%** attended at least one Forest School session and so can be classed as a participant of the programme. This meant the project met 98% of their target for participation.



### Attendance:

On average children attended 6 sessions..

Children spent an average of 78 minutes at outdoor venues during a session, with the minimum time spent at a venue of 58 minutes and a maximum of 102 minutes.

# Attendance and completion

## Who else attended Forest Schools?

The involvement of parents and other caregivers in sessions was detailed as a key activity in the logic model for Forest Schools. It was anticipated that 45 parents and caregivers would attend in Year 1 and 60 in Year 2. An overall target of 105.

157 parents and caregivers attended at least 1 Forest School session (excluding registration sessions) meaning the project exceeded their target (150% of target). 70% of caregivers who attended sessions were mothers, 26% were fathers the rest were grandparents, aunts, and uncles.

The average number of caregivers attending any session of a course was 5 (around half of those with children enrolled on each programme). 2 programmes ran with 10 caregivers attending at least 1 session each, and 2 ran with only 1 caregiver attending a session.



Caregivers attended at least 1 programme session

## Did children complete Forest Schools?

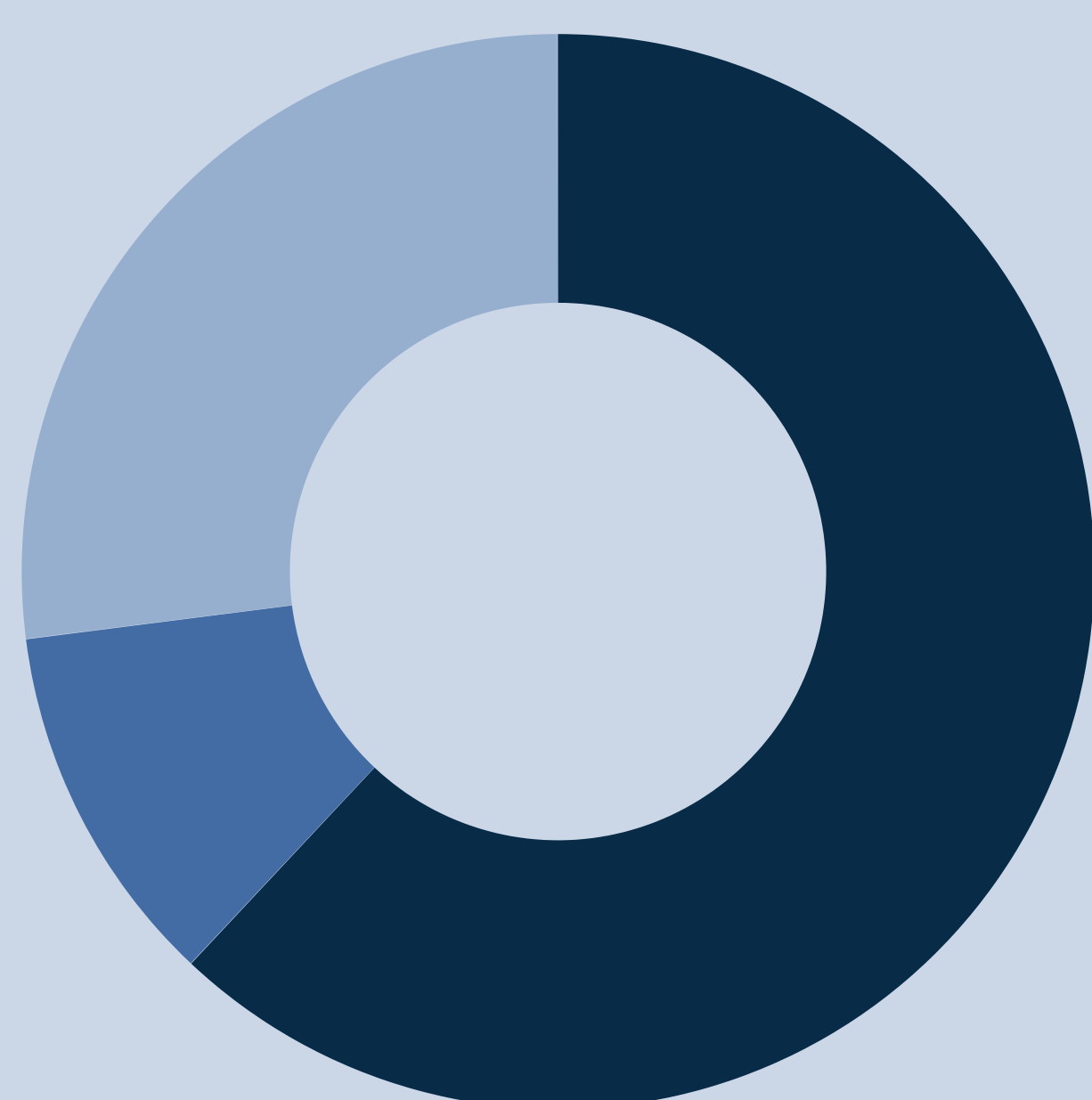
Completion of Forest Schools is defined as having attended at least 7 of the 10 programme sessions. It was anticipated that 264 children would complete the programme over the contract term with annual targets of 72 children Year 1, and 96 in Years 2 and 3. For the purposes of this report the overall target was adjusted to 163 to account for a two and a half year evaluation period as well as the pause in delivery due to COVID-19 which meant a number of children would not have opportunity to complete the programme.

146 children completed the Forest Schools programme over the course of the evaluation period (87% of the overall target). This means that 71% of children who participated in the programme went on to complete it.



of participating children completed the programme

### Reasons for non-completion



- COVID-19 cancellation (62%)
- Withdrew from programme (11%)
- Missed sessions (27%)

It is worth noting that of 60 children who did not complete their programme, 37 children were unable to complete because of the COVID related pause to delivery, which led to cancellation of programmes.

16 further children did not complete due to non-attendance and/or the cancellation of individual programme sessions, and the other 7 withdrew from the programme.

If we exclude children whose programmes were cancelled because of COVID-19, 89% of children who enrolled on a programme went on to complete it.

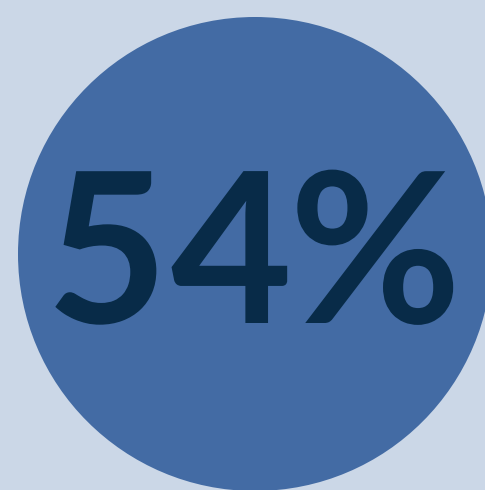
This shows a good level of programme completion.

## Reach and implementation

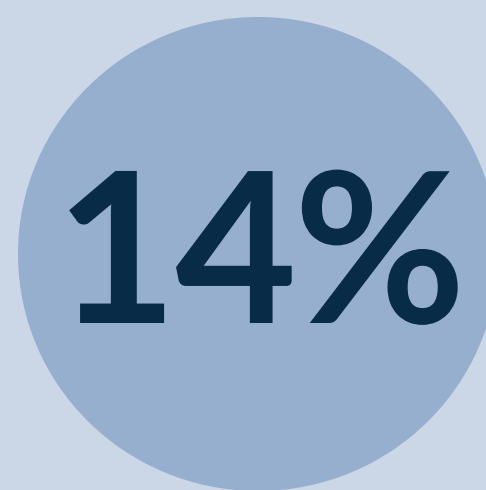
### Who were the children who took part in Forest Schools?



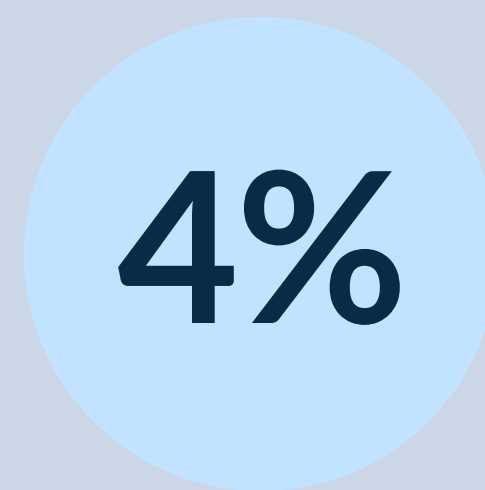
#### Ethnicity



ASIAN  
PAKISTANI



WHITE  
BRITISH



WHITE  
OTHER

#### Gender



54%  
male



46%  
female

Demographic data was available for all 206 children who participated in programmes. 111 (54%) of the children who attended Forest Schools sessions were male and 95 (46%) of the children were female.

54% of the children were from an Asian Pakistani background, 3% were from Black/ African/Caribbean/Black British ethnic groups and 11% from Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups. 18% were from White British or White Other backgrounds.

### How many registration sessions were delivered?

Registration sessions were intended to give families an opportunity to experience Forest Schools before enrolling on the programme.

The anticipated number of registration sessions to be delivered was 9 in Year 1, and 12 in both Years 2 and 3.

In Year 1 the project delivered 9 registration sessions (100% of the target) and in Year 2 they delivered 12, again 100% of the target. Registration sessions were paused alongside programmes in Year 3 because of COVID-19. A total of 21 taster sessions were delivered across the evaluation period.

**100%**  
of anticipated  
registration sessions were  
delivered

### How many programmes were delivered?

The core component of the project set out in the logic model is a 10 week programme of Forest School sessions. During a 10 week programme, the project provides 10 weekly 2 hour sessions.

It was anticipated that 9 programmes would be delivered in Year 1 with a further 12 in Year 2 and another 12 in Year 3. Targets were met in Years 1 and 2, but the pause in delivery because of COVID meant no programmes could be delivered at the beginning of Year 3.

Each 10 week programme should have consisted of 10 sessions. Of the 21 programmes delivered, 5 (21%) were delivered in full (all 10 sessions delivered). 4 were cut short because of COVID-19.

Discounting programmes cut short because of COVID-19, the average number of sessions delivered as part of a programme was 9 (with a minimum of 7).



delivered



delivered in  
full  
(10 sessions)

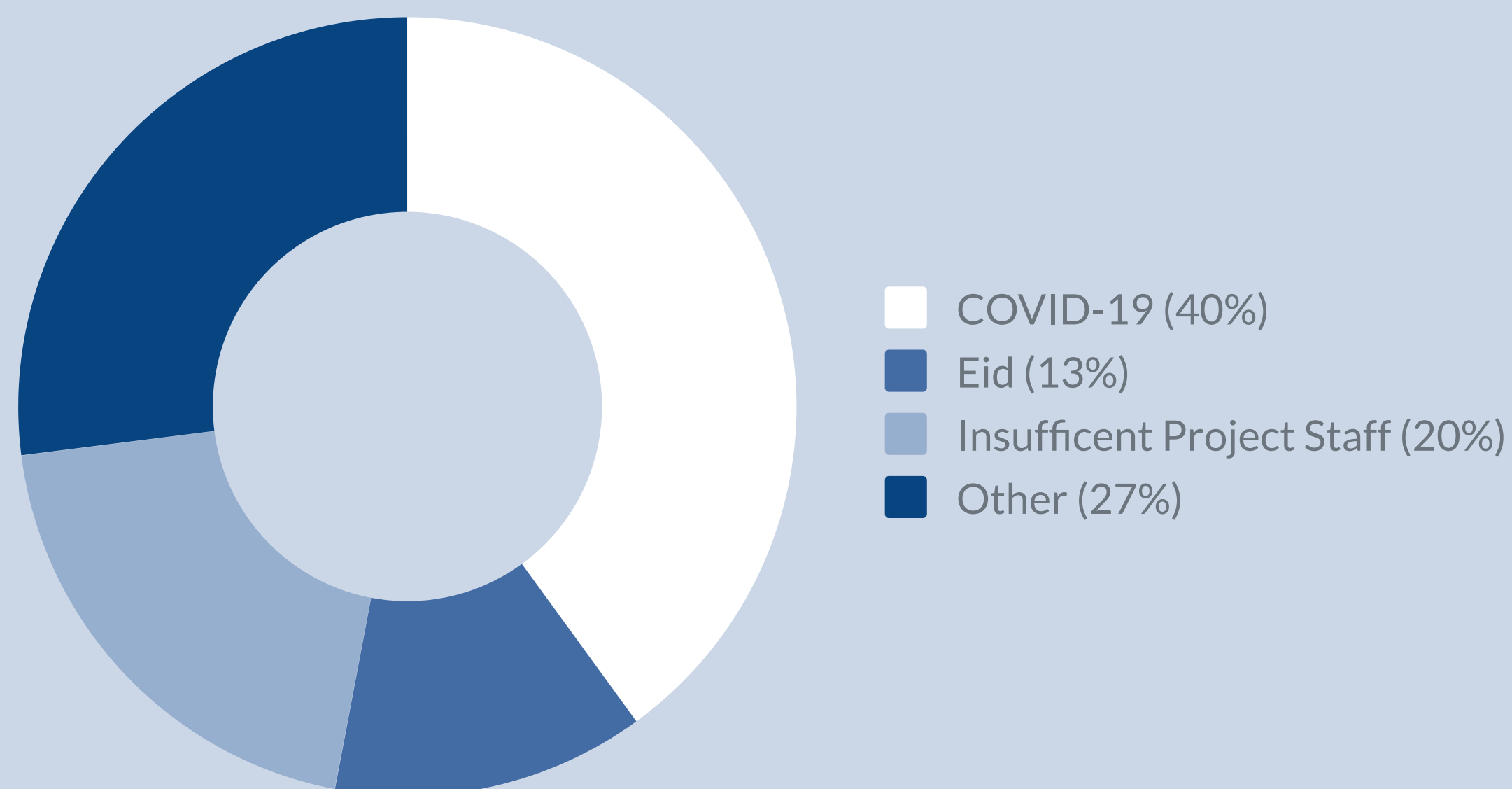
# Implementation

## How many sessions were delivered?

The anticipated number of sessions that would be delivered was 90 during Year 1, and 120 in Year 2 and Year 3. The Year 2 target has been adjusted to 113 to capture when nurseries could no longer receive external visitors, due to Covid-19. In the first year the project delivered 78 sessions (87% of the target) and in Year 2 it delivered 102 sessions (90% of the target). The pause in delivery meant no sessions were delivered in the first part of Year 3.

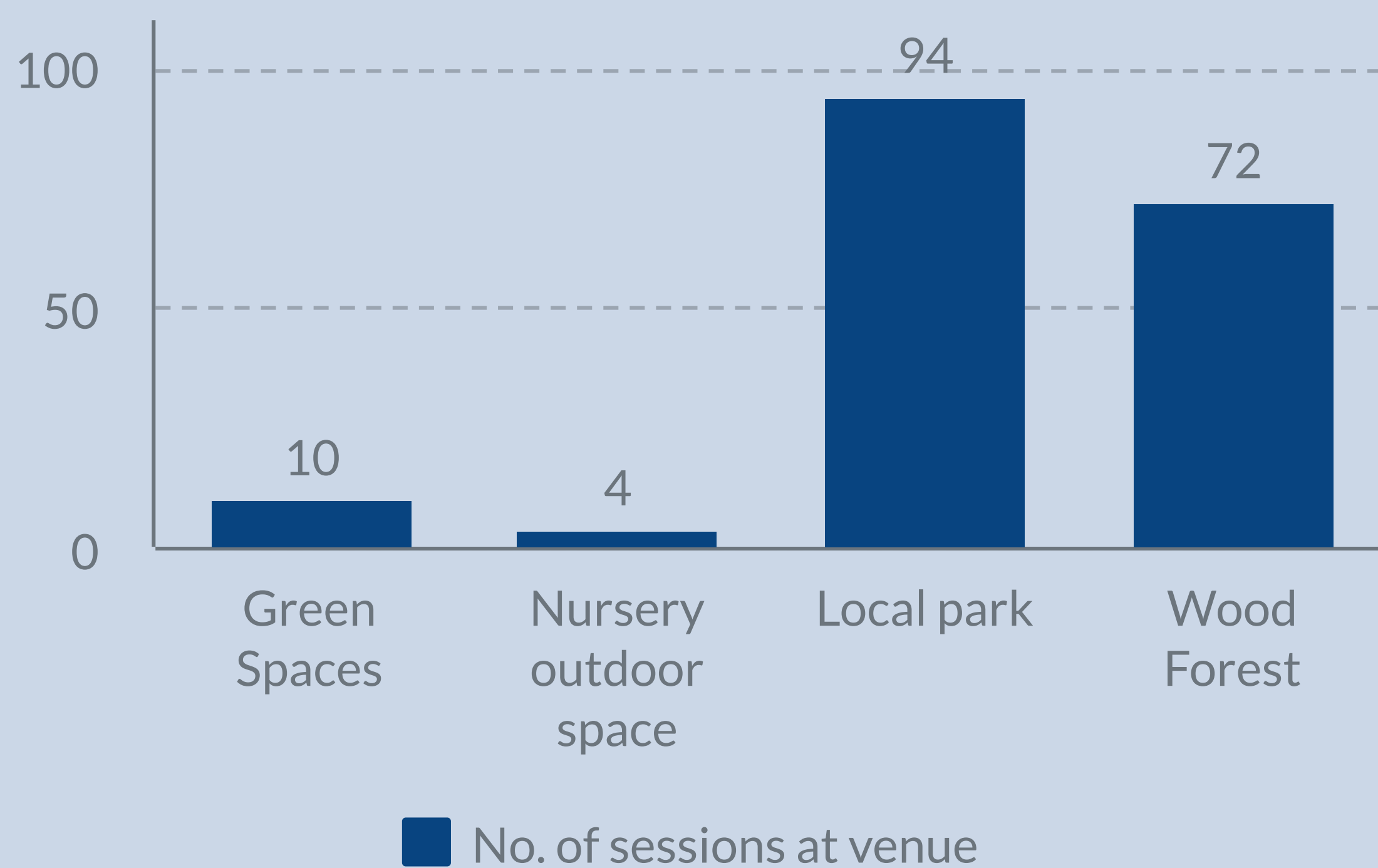
30 sessions were cancelled in total (12 in Year 1 and 18 in Year 2). Two thirds of sessions cancelled in Year 2 were because of COVID-19. Other reasons for session cancellation included Eid, insufficient project staff, poor weather, insufficient Early Years staff, the setting cancelled session, lack of venue, too few children attending.

### Reasons for session cancellation



## Where were sessions held and how long were they?

### Session venues



The project recorded venue information for all 180 sessions. The project carried out the majority of its sessions in local parks (52%), followed by sessions in a wood/forest (40%).

Very few sessions took place at the Early Years settings and shows children and those caregivers attending sessions were given opportunities to become familiar with local green spaces.

### Duration of sessions:

On average, children spent 77 minutes at the outdoor venue during a Forest Schools session, with a minimum of 58 minutes and a maximum of 102 minutes).

When preparing children for the session and travel time to the venue were also taken into account, Forest School sessions were on average 111 minutes long. (a minimum of 97 minutes and a maximum of 121 minutes).

This suggests children spend just over two thirds of the Forest School session at the venue, engaged in play.

During a 10 week programme Forest Schools deliver an average of 18 hours of sessions.



## Implementation

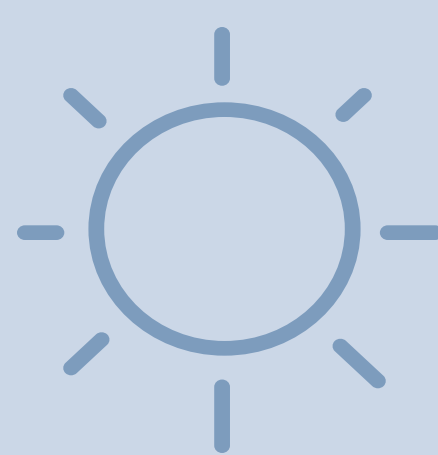
### Weather

The project recorded data about the weather for 174 sessions. This data specified the type of weather during the session and the temperature.

The minimum temperature recorded was 2 degrees Celsius and the maximum temperature recorded was 26 degrees Celsius. The most prevalent weather type was sun. Only 7 sessions had a change of venue from the planned venue and this was mostly due to unsafe high winds or torrential rain. This suggests that children were being encouraged to be outdoors in all sorts of weather conditions.



12% of sessions recorded  
Light Rain



34% of sessions recorded  
Sunny weather



29% Cloudy of sessions recorded cloudy  
weather

### Training Activities

Training for parent volunteers and Early Years staff was another key activity described in the logic model. The training available included Level 1, Level 3 accredited outdoor training.

In relation to Level 1 19 people were recorded as having completed this training across the evaluation period. A further 5 people had completed Level 3 training.

### Family Sessions

In addition to those activities described in the project logic model, the project began delivering 'Family sessions' in October 2019. They were delivered independently of Early Years settings and were intended to provide additional opportunities for families to participate in facilitated outdoor play sessions held in local parks and green spaces. Individual level data was not collected for families attending these sessions so it is not possible to report on the number of unique families or how frequently families attended.

Sessions were open to anyone before March 2020 when they were suspended because of COVID-19. In July 2020 Family sessions resumed with a significantly reduced capacity and were used as a way of continuing to offer sessions to parents and caregivers who were not able to attend a 10 week course through their child's EY setting. They have therefore targeted families from the Better Start Bradford area since July.

Period	No. of family sessions delivered	No. of families recorded as attending	No. of BSB families recorded as attending	No. of 0-4s attending
Oct 19 – Mar 20	47	165	119 (72%)	233
Mar 20 – Sep 20	13	56	56 (100%)	16



Dads accounted for  
**12%**  
of all adult attendance

Family sessions mainly took place in local parks or the grounds of local primary schools. Peel Park, Peel Park Primary School, St Stephens Primary School and Bowling Park were the most popular and well attended venues for family sessions.

## Families' experiences

### What were families experiences of taking part in Forest schools?

In the first year of delivery of the Forest Schools project, one of the Innovation Hub research team joined and observed 2 of the 9 Forest School programmes. These observations provided a detailed picture of children's and parents' experiences when taking part in the project. The focused ethnography report can be made available upon request. Below some key findings are presented:

Children participating in Forest Schools programmes took part in a range of activities in outdoor spaces. Over 80 different activities were recorded.

There was an emphasis on child-led activities. Children were asked what they wanted to do and where they wanted to go when they arrived at the wood or park. Activities became child-led on an individual level, such as choosing a small tree to climb, but also involved children collectively making decisions. Examples of the types of activities included:



- **Sensory activities** (seeing, feeling, hearing and smelling nature through play)
- **Examining and experimenting**(e.g.. exploring the woods; shaking tree to get leaves off)
- **Physical activity** (e.g. climbing trees; running and chasing; rolling down slope)
- **Searching, collecting, and hiding** (e.g. collecting sticks for a den; collecting treasure for a box)
- **Building and destroying** (e.g. making a den; rock piles; destroying leaf pile)
- **Social** (e.g. leaving a hidden message for next group; talking to the community)
- **Art** (e.g. making leaf kites; nest building; boot prints; leaf crown; natural bouquet)
- **Caring** (e.g. feeding birds and squirrels; looking after each other; managing conflicts)
- **Relaxing** (e.g. lying in a hammock; lying on grass cloud watching)



Attending parents were initially hesitant to participate in activities but were encouraged by Forest School leaders and children to get involved. Some parents became very engaged in the activities. Examples include a dad helping a group of children to find sticks to make a pretend fire, a mum climbing the tree the children had been climbing, and a mum running around a fountain while children tried to catch them.

Over the period of observation, changes and improvements were observed in a number of aspects of children's behaviour. It was not possible to determine whether these observations were a result of programme participation; however, based on the findings, the project logic model has been updated with suggested outcomes for children. These were:

Social and emotional outcomes: confidence; attention; cooperation; anxiety; independence; overcoming fears; caring for and understanding themselves and others, and social skills and relationships

Language and communication outcomes: vocabulary; use of words and full sentences; listening skills

Physical development: physical activity; fine and gross motor skills; ability to move and be safe in the diverse and complex physical environment of natural spaces

Work is ongoing to establish which of these outcomes, if any, are measurable.

## Satisfaction

### What did families say about the support they received?

132 families had completed and returned questionnaires at the time that analysis was conducted. A summary of responses can be found below.



**100%** of respondents had a median score of 4 or more

**100%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the project was helpful to them

**99%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the support they received

**99%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the project provided useful information

**98%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the project was easy to access

**100%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the project to friends and family

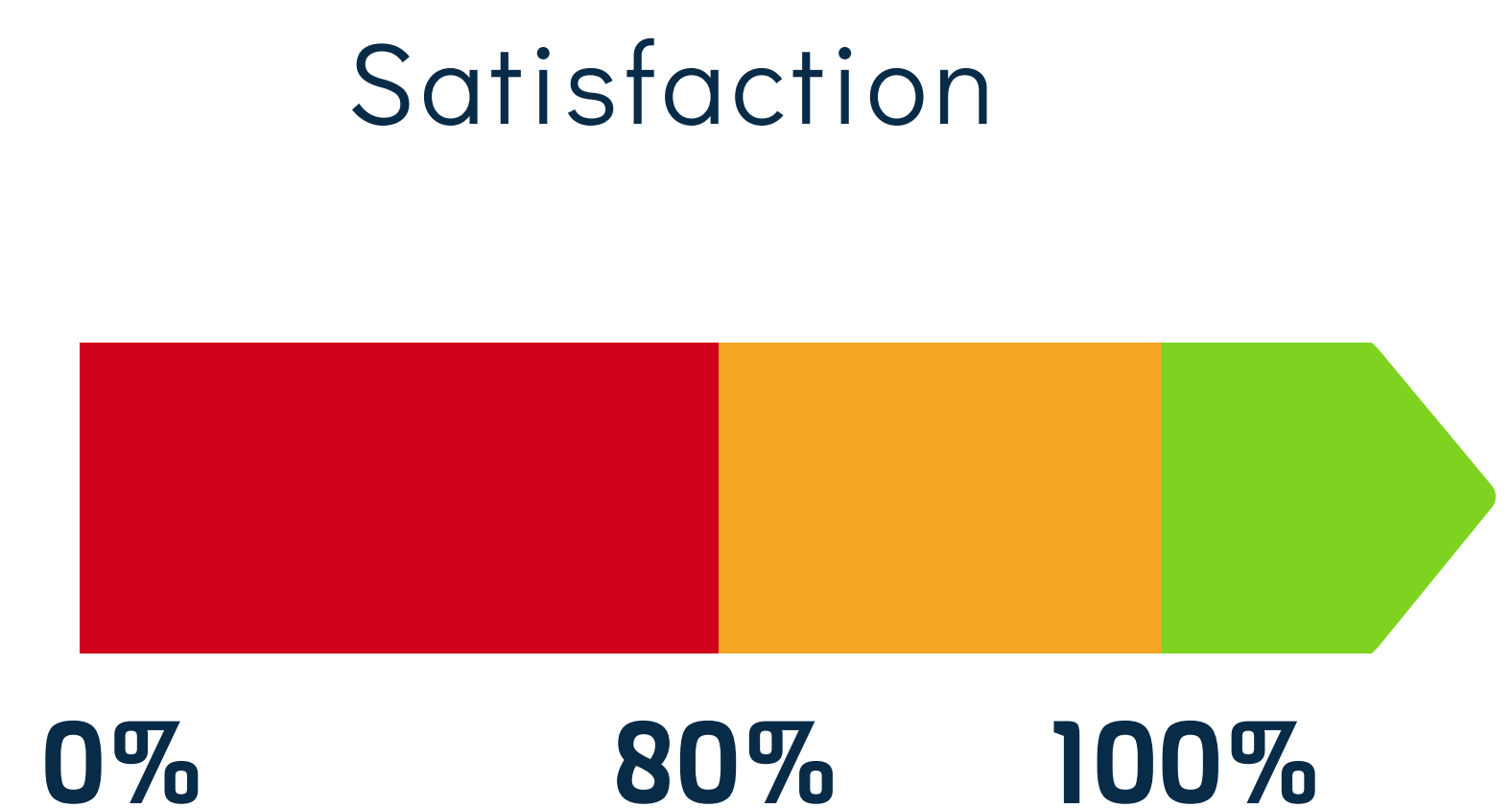
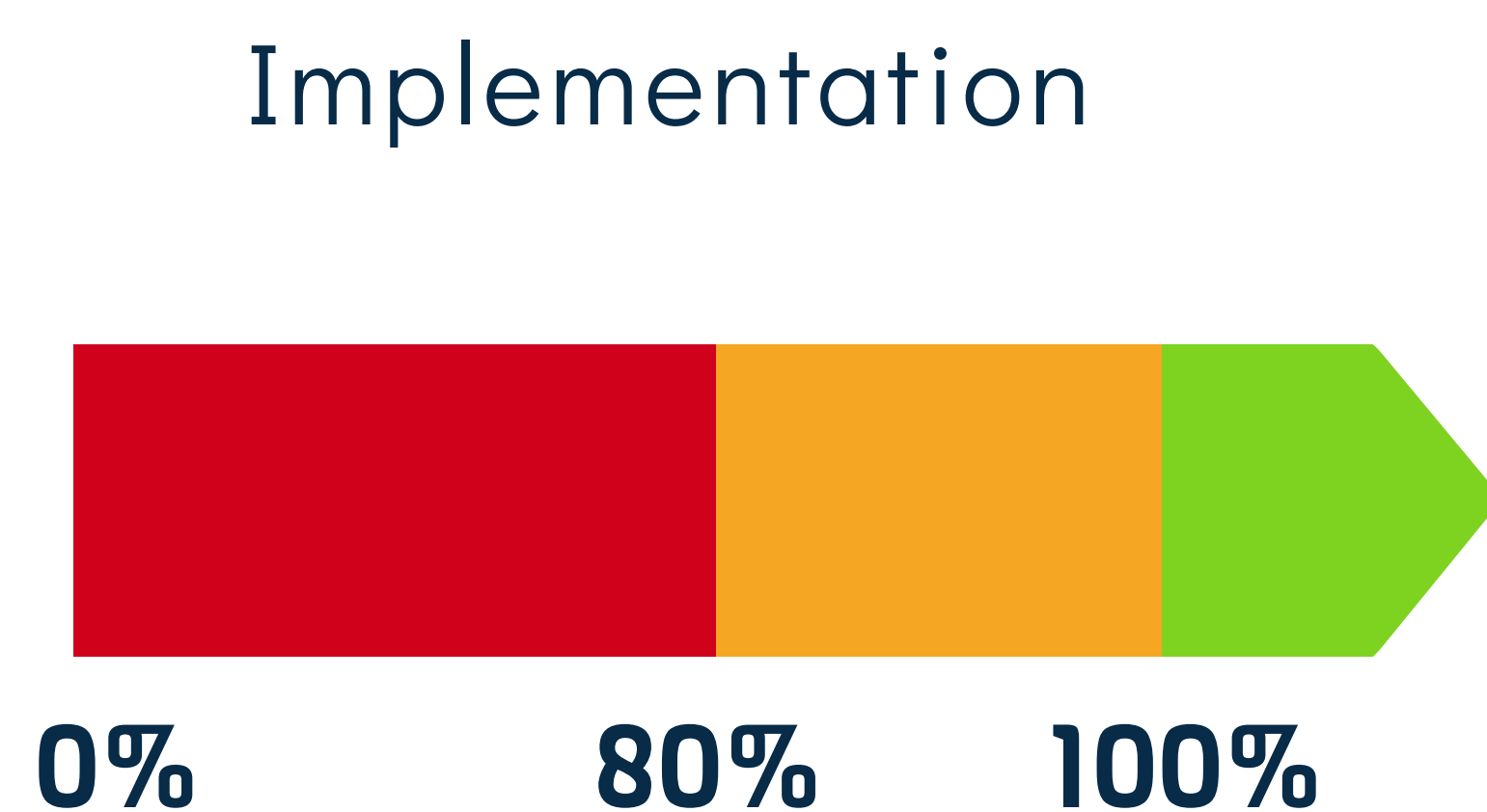
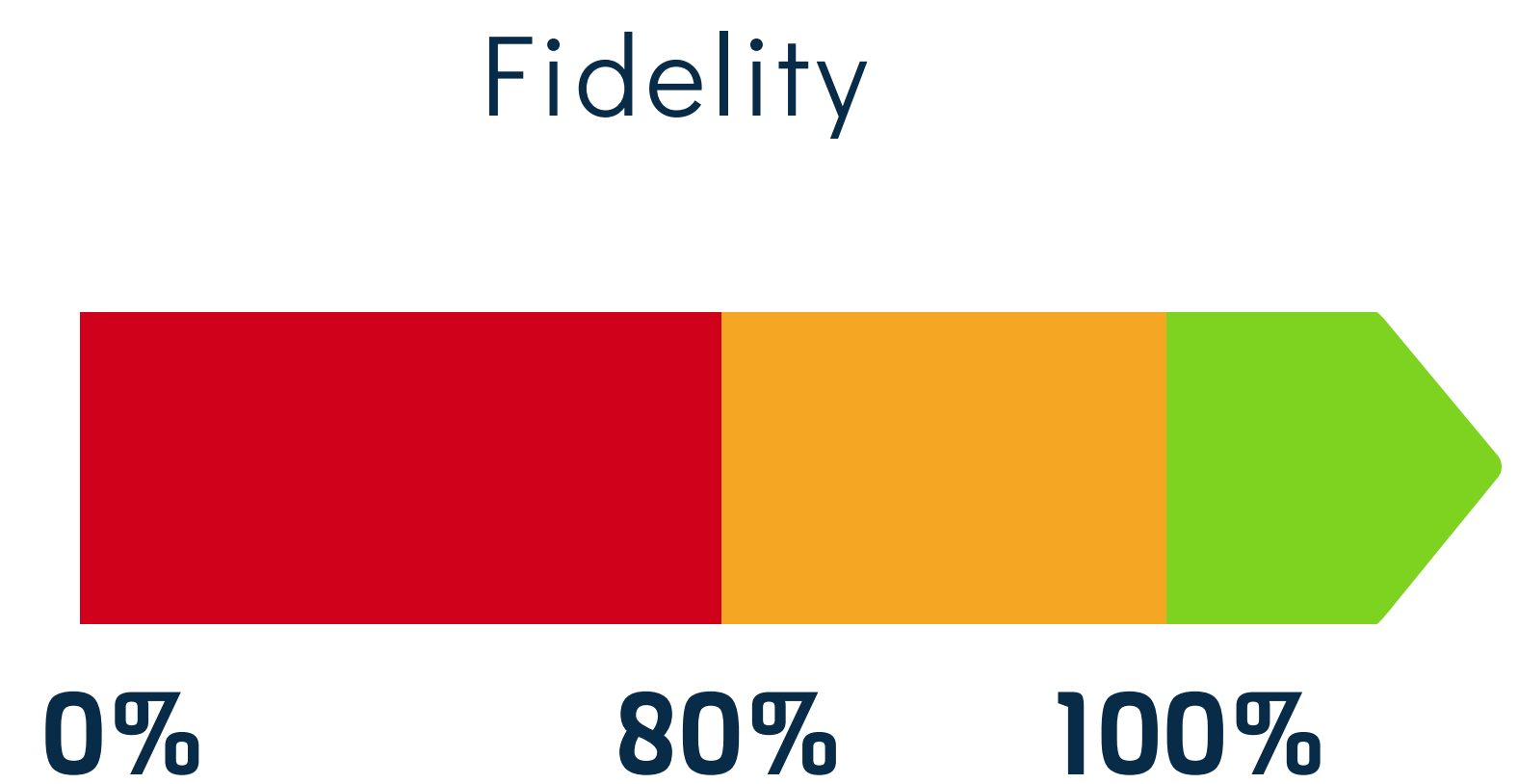
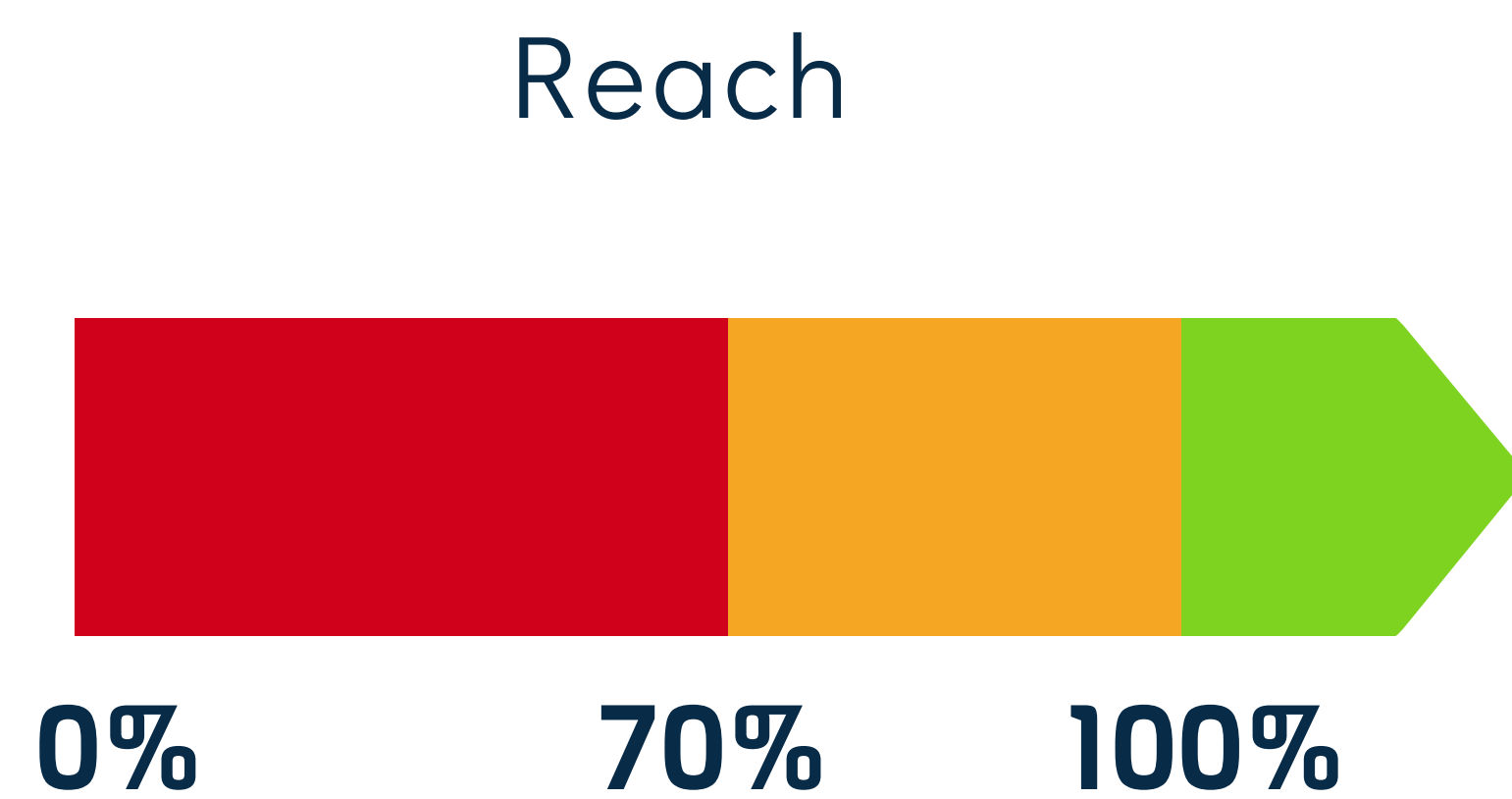
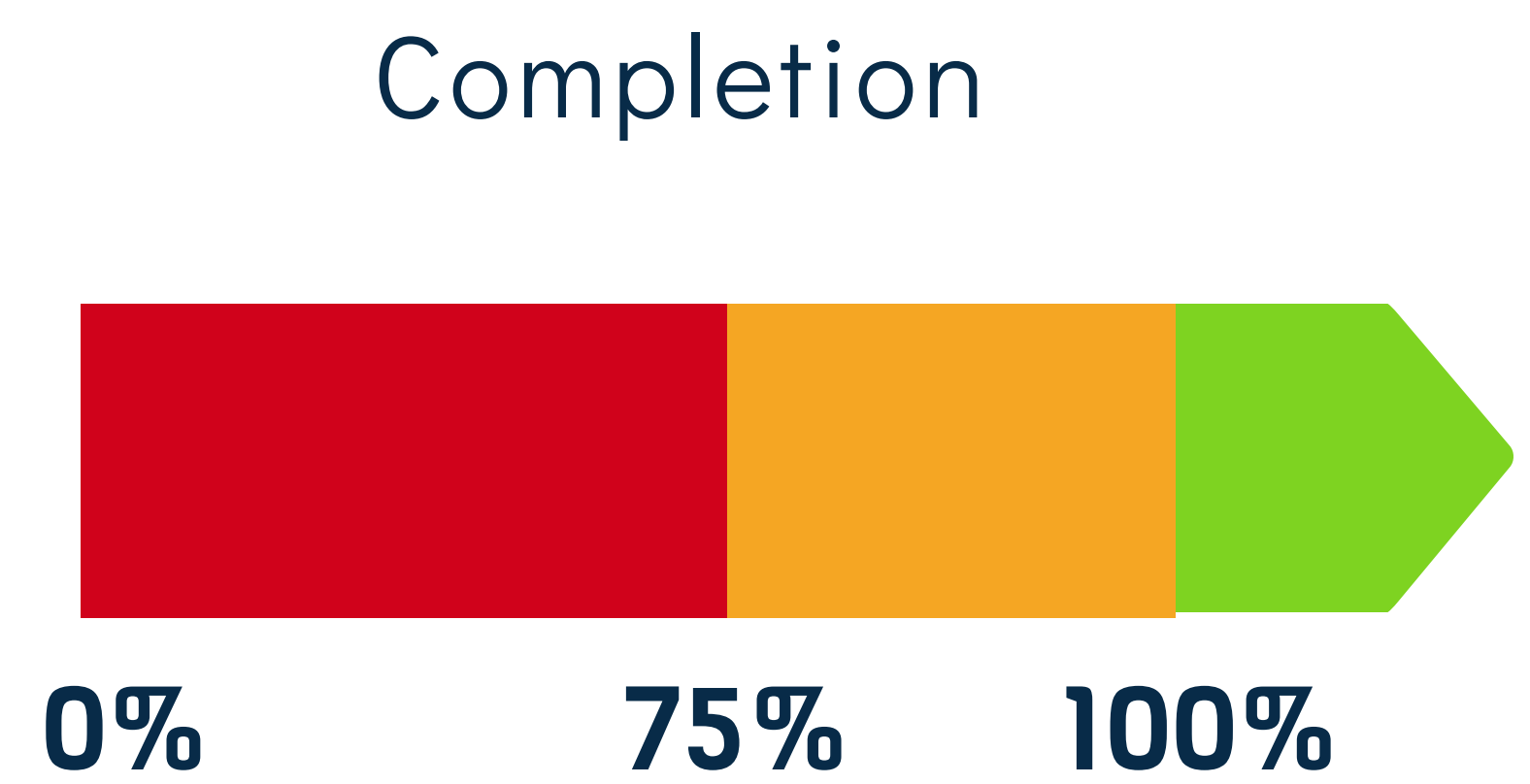
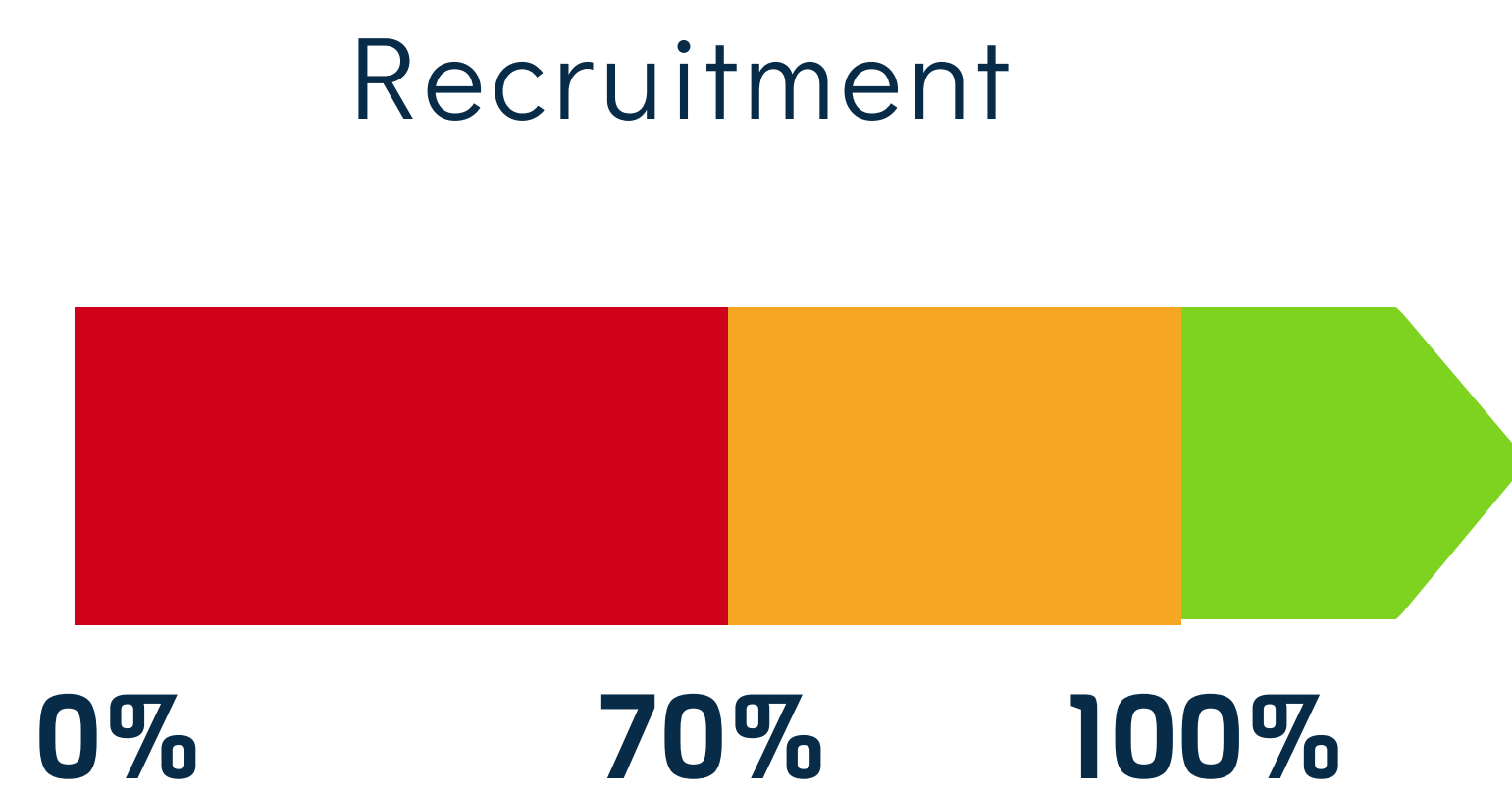
**100%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were happy with the project overall

*Since my daughter has been to Forest School I feel she is a lot more confident and enjoys going to local parks*

*The forest school project has helped my child. He is more confident in school and he also has developed a love for insects as before he would be scared to touch them.*

*Fantastic opportunity for children and parents. Would be brilliant in the summer too.*

## Appendix - Progression Criteria Cutoffs



For more information on how progression criteria and associated cut-offs have been developed please see Bryant, et al., 2019 Use of progression criteria to support monitoring and commissioning decision making of public health services: lessons from Better Start Bradford. BMC Public Health