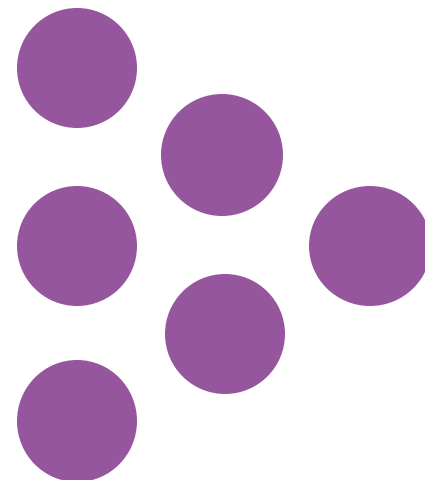

RCTs in early years research: practical implications

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4th March, 2021



Facilitated discussion outline (25 mins)

Designing RCTs in the early years (2 mins)

Some considerations from our RCT of Families Connect (8 mins)

Wider considerations (5 mins)

Discussion (10 mins)

Designing RCTs in the early years

- **Individually or cluster (school/setting) randomised?**
- **When do you randomise (e.g. Families and Schools Together)?**
- **The younger the children, the harder outcomes are to measure. Who completes the instruments?**
- **How do they link to the Theory of Change?**
- **Which participants do you want to measure – children, parents, school/setting staff?**
- **Is there a suitable measure(s)?**
- **What are the key aspects of implementation that you need to evaluate?**

Some considerations from our RCT NFER

National Foundation for Educational Research

Recruitment of schools and families (parent q'aies)



Baseline: vocab assessment, SDQ



Randomise families



Intervention group



Control group

8-week programme

Business as usual



First follow-up: vocab and numeracy assessments; SDQs; parent q'aies



Second follow-up: vocab and numeracy assessments, SDQs



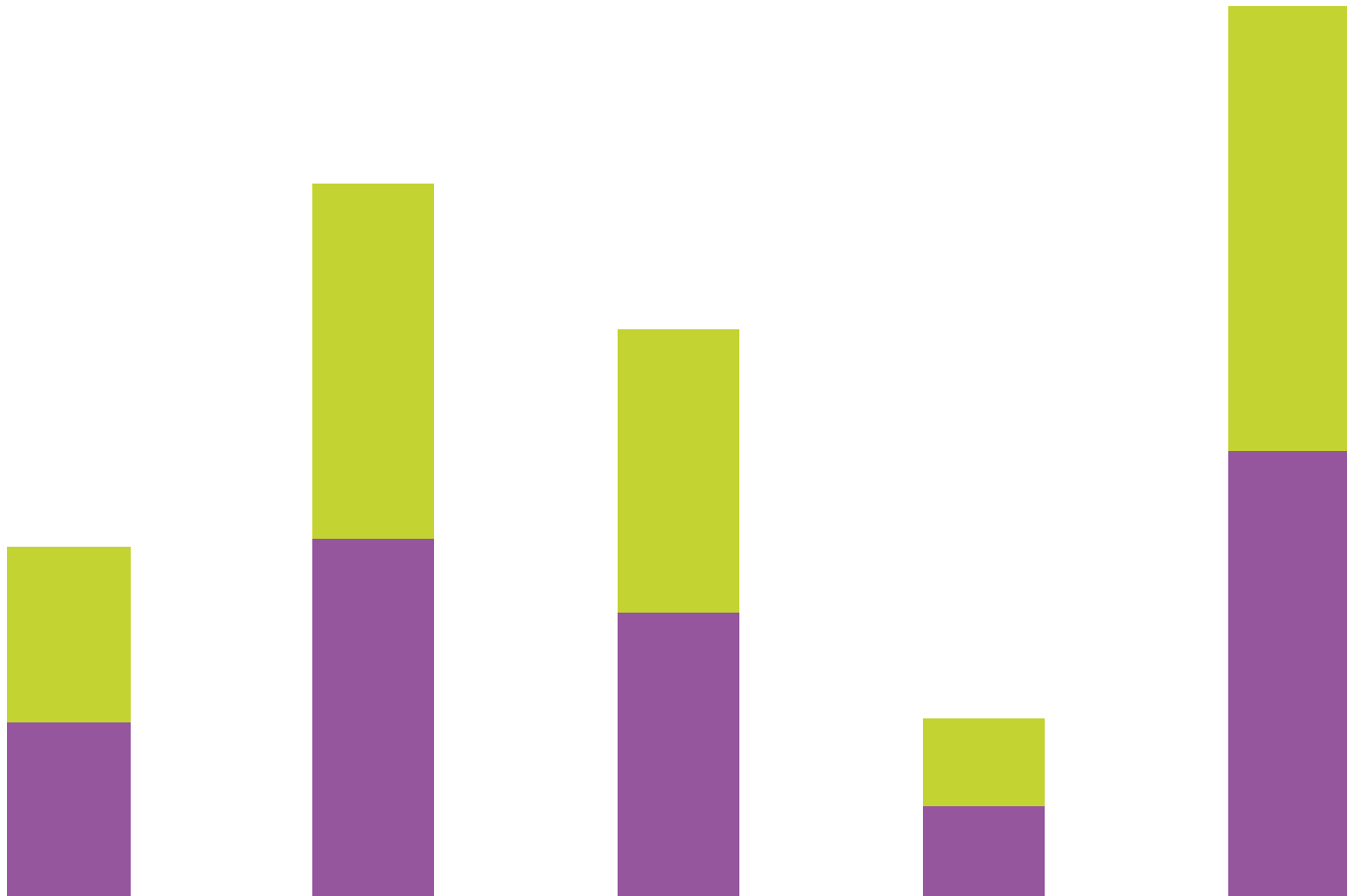
Waitlist: 8-week programme

Multi-site trial (aka randomised block)

- Concerns about contamination
- Care needed over increased analysis options
- Three-level (time, pupil, school) repeated-measures model with the possibility of exploring a site x treatment interaction

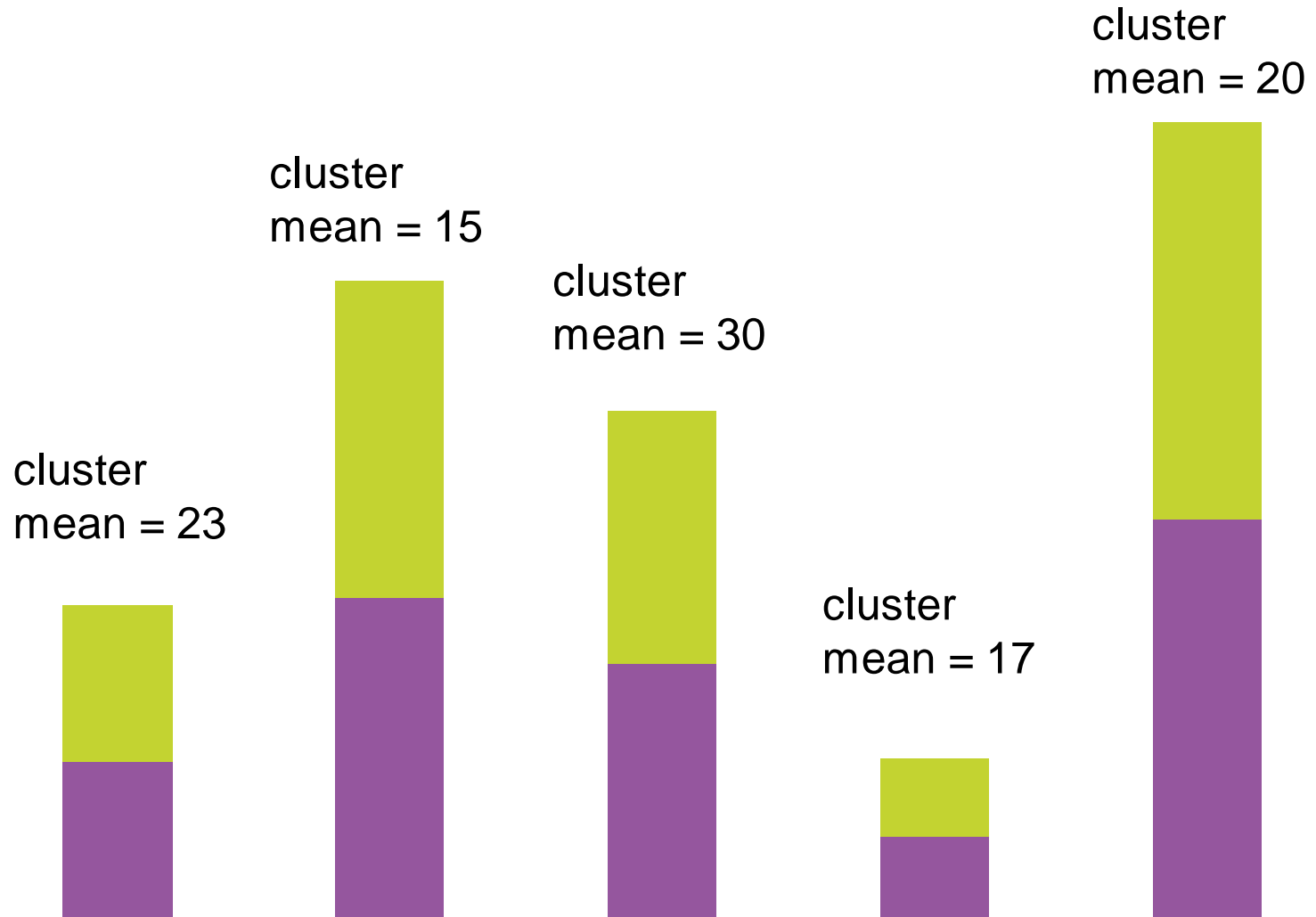


Randomised block design

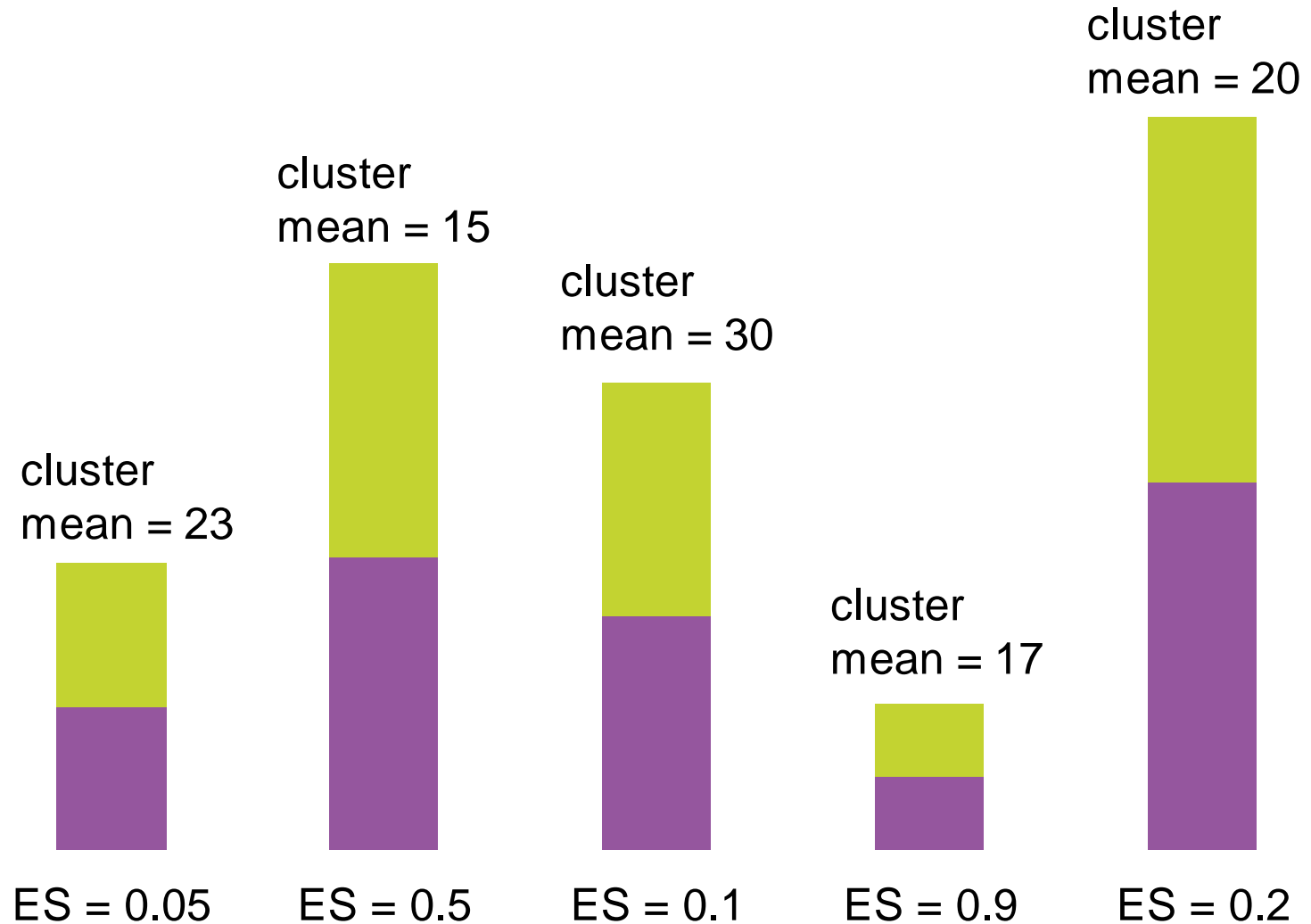


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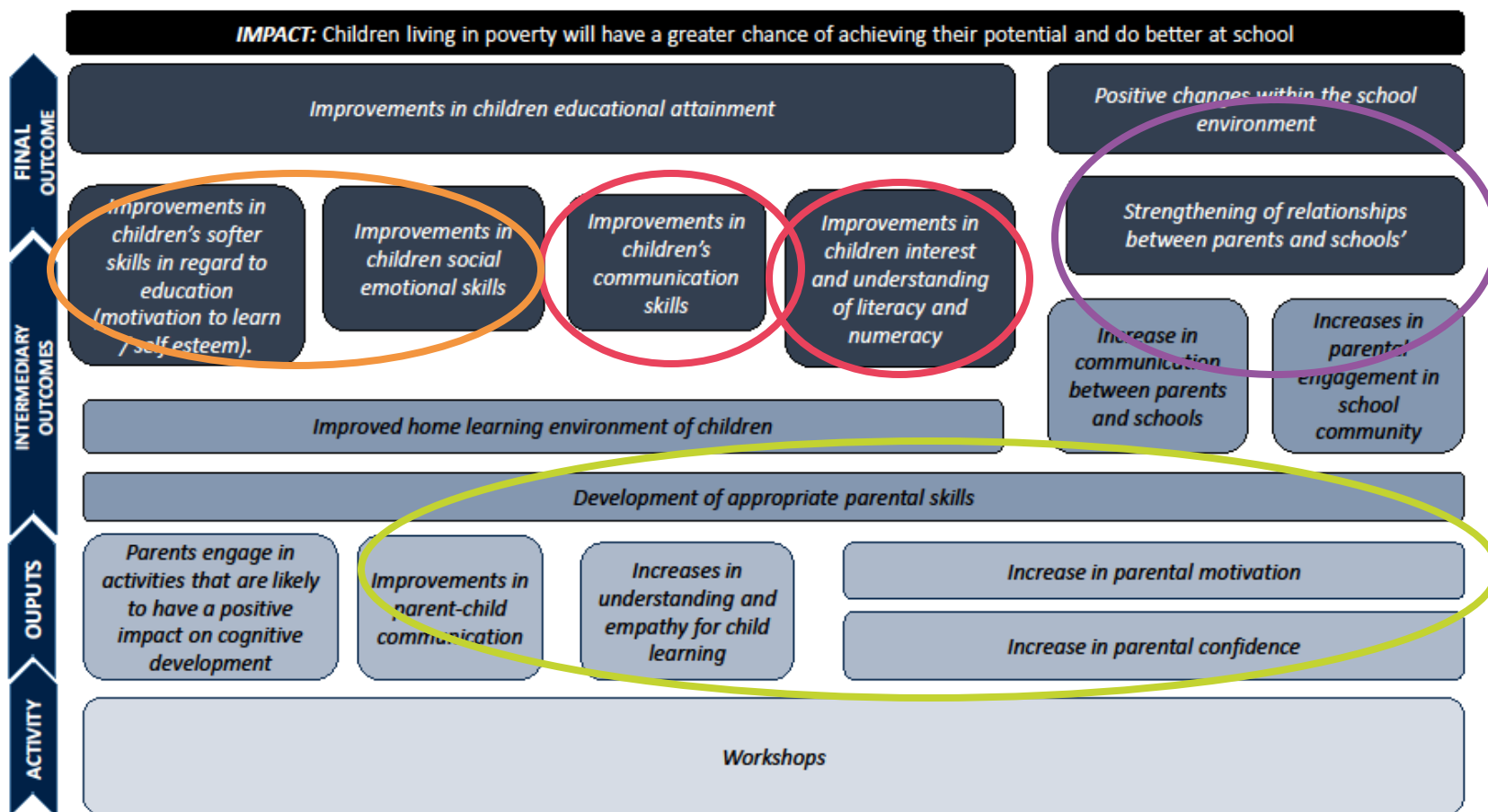
Randomised block design



Randomised block design



How did we incorporate investigating the ToC?



What issues did we encounter?

Recruitment

- Challenge of recruiting parents?: coffee mornings, balloons, T-shirts
- Opt-in consent; baseline parent q'aire
- We ran two blocks (as we just missed the recruitment target in the first block)

Randomisation

- Siblings need to stay in same group: randomise families
- Questions: can I stay with my friends? can I swap groups?

What did we measure and how?

Outcome instrument	Completed by	Measured by	Baseline	Follow-up 1 immediate	Follow-up 2 after six mths
BPVS3	Pupils	Administrator	Y	Y	Y
PUMA	Pupils	Administrator	N/A	Y	Y
SDQ / CSS	Teacher	Teacher	Y	Y	Y
HLE, PRC, PSE	Parent/guardian	Parent/guardian	Y	Y	N/A

Issues in longer term follow up

Follow-up response rates

	PQ	TQ		BPVS3		PUMA	
	Follow-up 1	Follow-up 1	Follow-up 2	Follow-up 1	Follow-up 2	Follow-up 1	Follow-up 2
Control rate	85%	96%	92%	94%	89%	92%	89%
Intervention rate	80%	93%	84%	87%	85%	85%	83%
Total rate	83%	95%	88%	91%	87%	88%	86%

Summary: considerations in early years RCTs

Some learning from Families Connect

- **Recruitment – incl. of parents**
- **Randomisation**
- **Measurement**
- **Incentives**
- **Longer-term follow-up: staff turnover, tracking parents?**
- **Contamination**
- **Analysis**

Discussion



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