Measuring of Holistic Learning Outcomes of Refugee and Ethiopian National Children in the Somali Region of Ethiopia

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PlayMatters: Background and Basics

- **Goal**: Improved holistic learning and well-being for 800,000 children ages 3-12+ in refugee and host communities

- **Approach**: Strengthening refugee and refugee-hosting education systems' capacity to train and support pre-primary and primary school teachers to use "Learning through Play" as an active teaching and learning method
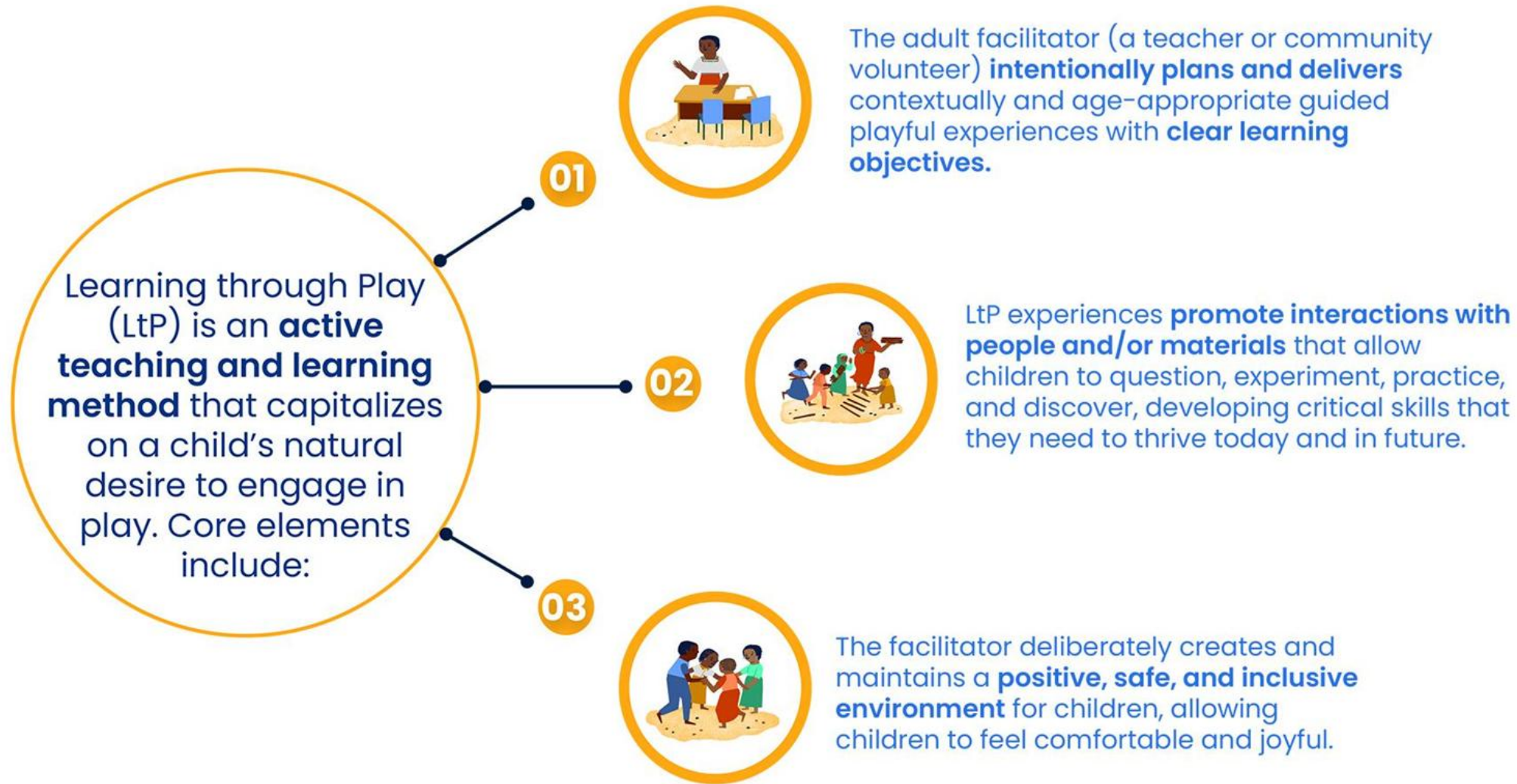
- **Duration**: 2020-2026

In partnership with

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LtP Definition

Learning through Play (LtP) is an **active teaching and learning method** that capitalizes on a child's natural desire to engage in play. Core elements include:

01

The adult facilitator (a teacher or community volunteer) **intentionally plans and delivers** contextually and age-appropriate guided playful experiences with **clear learning objectives.**

02

LtP experiences **promote interactions with people and/or materials** that allow children to question, experiment, practice, and discover, developing critical skills that they need to thrive today and in future.

03

The facilitator deliberately creates and maintains a **positive, safe, and inclusive environment** for children, allowing children to feel comfortable and joyful.
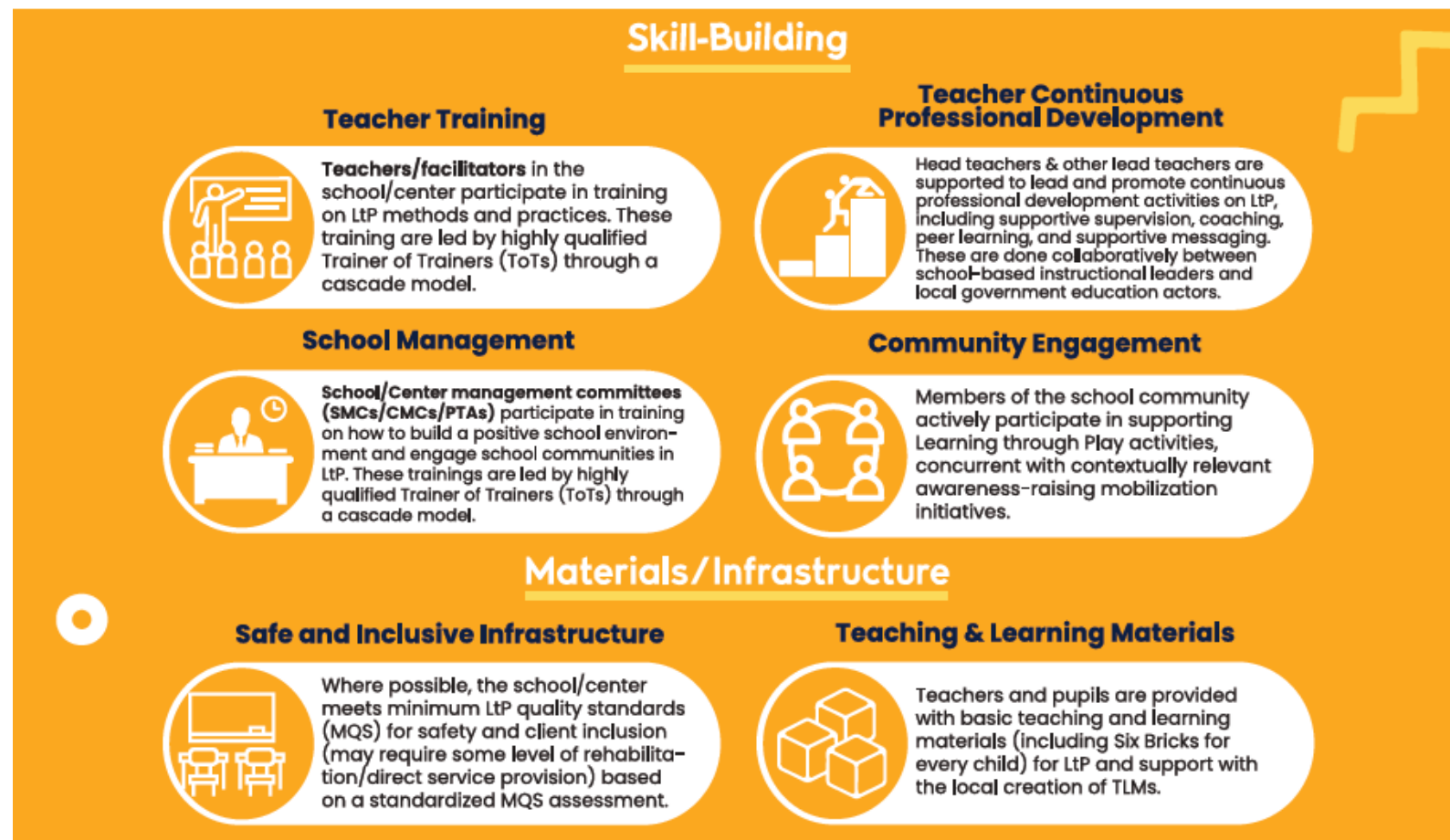
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Play and Child Holistic Development

- Why this research on **child holistic development**?

  ☐ Play is a natural child activity

  ☐ Child development is integrated, not in silos

  ☐ Lessons on the effectiveness of LtP from low income and refugee context is thin.

  ☐ There is a shift from academic/cognitive to holistic development due to several issues (crisis, climate change and technology induced changes in human activities).

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PMs 2.0: The Core Package for Schools includes six intervention components.

The Core Package should be implemented in a school for **one full school year (beginning of school year to end of school year),** including foundational teacher training at the beginning of the school year, a follow-up training midway through the year, and continuous professional development (i.e., observations, coaching and peer learning) provided throughout the school year

Skill-Building

Teacher Training

Teachers/facilitators in the school/center participate in training on LtP methods and practices. These training are led by highly qualified Trainer of Trainers (ToTs) through a cascade model.

Teacher Continuous Professional Development

Head teachers & other lead teachers are supported to lead and promote continuous professional development activities on LtP, including supportive supervision, coaching, peer learning, and supportive messaging. These are done collaboratively between school-based instructional leaders and local government education actors.

School Management

School/Center management committees (SMCs/CMCs/PTAs) participate in training on how to build a positive school environment and engage school communities in LtP. These trainings are led by highly qualified Trainer of Trainers (ToTs) through a cascade model.

Community Engagement

Members of the school community actively participate in supporting Learning through Play activities, concurrent with contextually relevant awareness-raising mobilization initiatives.

Materials/Infrastructure

Safe and Inclusive Infrastructure

Where possible, the school/center meets minimum LtP quality standards (MQS) for safety and client inclusion (may require some level of rehabilitation/direct service provision) based on a standardized MQS assessment.

Teaching & Learning Materials

Teachers and pupils are provided with basic teaching and learning materials (including Six Bricks for every child) for LtP and support with the local creation of TLMs.

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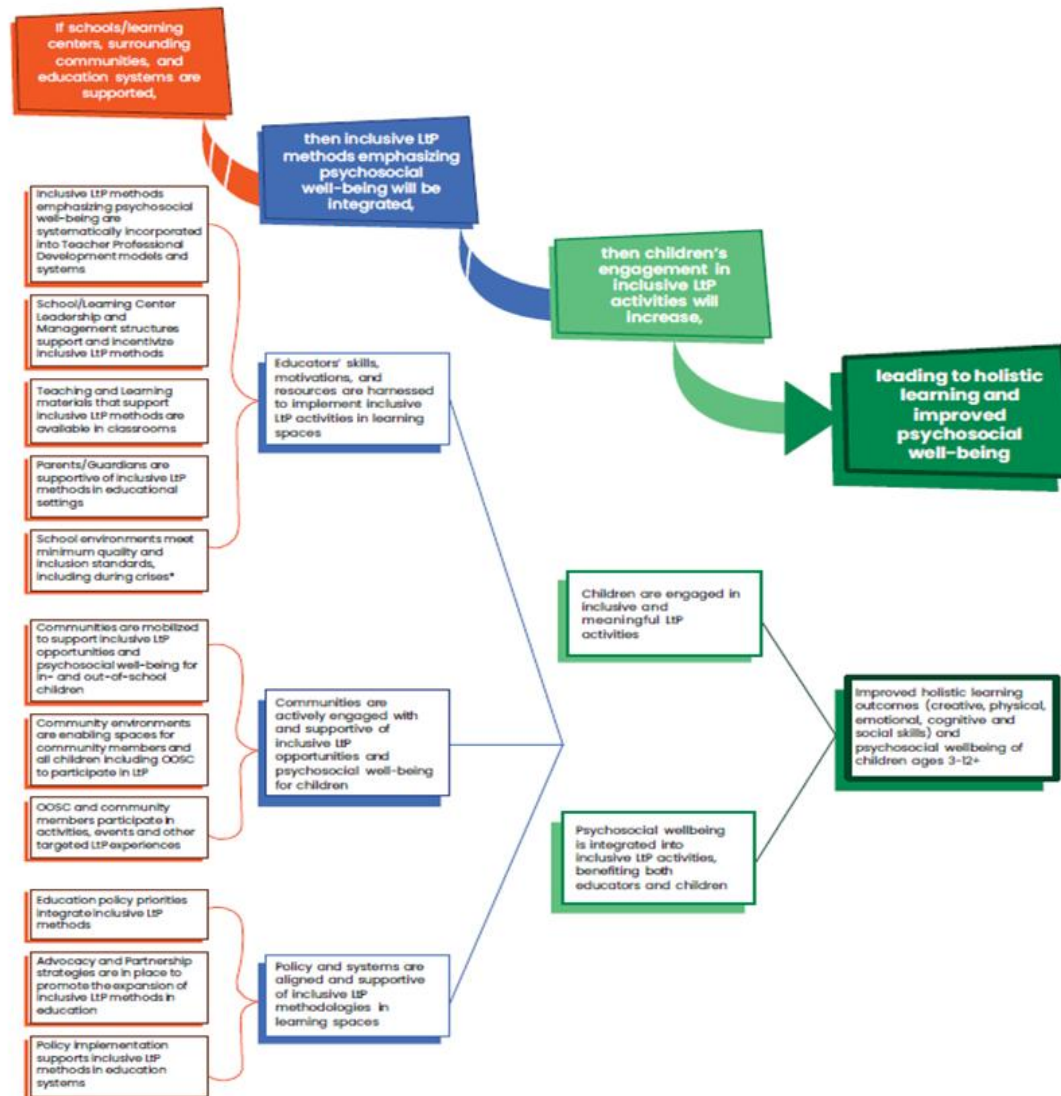# Teacher Professional Development for PlayMatters

Three Levels of Support for a Whole School Approach:

1. Trainers/TOTs – local education authorities

2. School leaders – TCPD/technical and administrative

3. Teachers – pre-primary and primary level

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Theory of Change of PlayMatters

PlayMatters 2.0 Theory of Change

If schools/learning centers, surrounding communities, and education systems are supported,

then inclusive LtP methods emphasizing psychosocial well-being will be integrated,

then children's engagement in inclusive LtP activities will increase,

leading to holistic learning and improved psychosocial well-being

Inclusive LtP methods emphasizing psychosocial well-being are systematically incorporated into Teacher Professional Development models and systems

School/Learning Center Leadership and Management structures support and incentivize inclusive LtP methods

Teaching and Learning materials that support inclusive LtP methods are available in classrooms

Parents/Guardians are supportive of inclusive LtP methods in educational settings

School environments meet minimum quality and inclusion standards, including during crises*

Communities are mobilized to support inclusive LtP opportunities and psychosocial well-being for in- and out-of-school children

Community environments are enabling spaces for community members and all children including OOSC to participate in LtP

OOSC and community members participate in activities, events and other targeted LtP experiences

Education policy priorities integrate inclusive LtP methods

Advocacy and Partnership strategies are in place to promote the expansion of inclusive LtP methods in education

Policy implementation supports inclusive LtP methods in education systems

Educators' skills, motivations, and resources are harnessed to implement inclusive LtP activities in learning spaces

Communities are actively engaged with and supportive of inclusive LtP opportunities and psychosocial well-being for children

Policy and systems are aligned and supportive of inclusive LtP methodologies in learning spaces

Children are engaged in inclusive and meaningful LtP activities

Psychosocial wellbeing is integrated into inclusive LtP activities, benefiting both educators and children

Improved holistic learning outcomes (creative, physical, emotional, cognitive and social skills) and psychosocial wellbeing of children ages 3-12+

*In acute crisis contexts, PlayMatters will deploy the Emergency Response Mechanism (ERM), which has its own embedded Theory of Change. A contextualized ERM Theory of Change will be developed upon ERM deployment outside of Ethiopia.

*Gender, Inclusion and Psychosocial Wellbeing are incorporated throughout PM activities.

A theory of change describes the strategies, actions, conditions and resources needed to achieve a desired outcomes

It's an explicit theory of what a program assumes needs to do to make change happen.

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Theory of Change (If-Then)

If pre-primary and primary teachers, schools/ECD centers, surrounding communities, and education systems are equipped with critical inputs to develop inclusive LtP practices,

then inclusive LtP methods promoting psychosocial well-being will be sustainably integrated into teaching and learning environments and systems,

then children's engagement in inclusive and meaningful LtP activities will increase over time,

leading to holistic learning and improved psychosocial well-being

Study Questions

1. What baseline/endline changes do we observe on children's literacy, numeracy, social-emotional, and creative skills and on their mental health and wellbeing?

How do changes in learning, mental health, and wellbeing vary by students' age, grade, gender, socioeconomic status, displacement, and disability and site?

2. To what degree do variations in the quality and fidelity of implementation affect students' literacy, numeracy, SEL, creativity, and mental health. How and why?

3. What ToC paths relationships between implementation, participant response, and baseline-endline changes- were confirmed? Which ones were not? Why?

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Method – Design of Evaluation

Mixed-methods Sequential Design with qual, quant and cost data
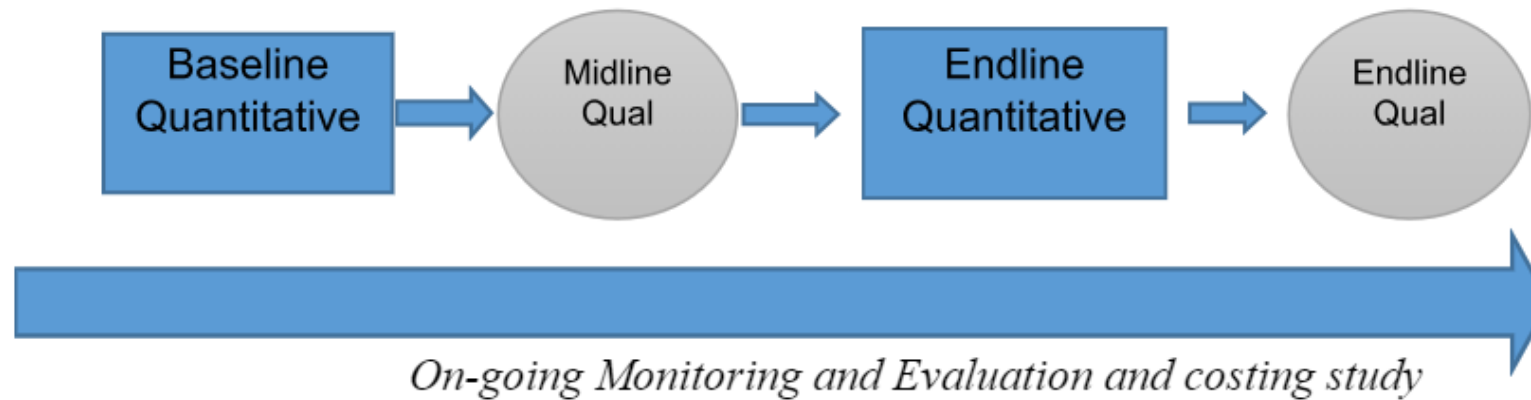
Participants

Area	Baseline			Endline			Retention (%)
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	
Jigjiga	74	88	**163**	63	59	**122**	74.9
Melkadida	119	143	**261**	91	109	**200**	76.6
Total	193	231	**424**	154	168	**322**	**76.0**

Children's Baseline-Endline Changes in Wellbeing

Percentage of Children Exhibiting Different Levels of Wellbeing at Baseline and Endline
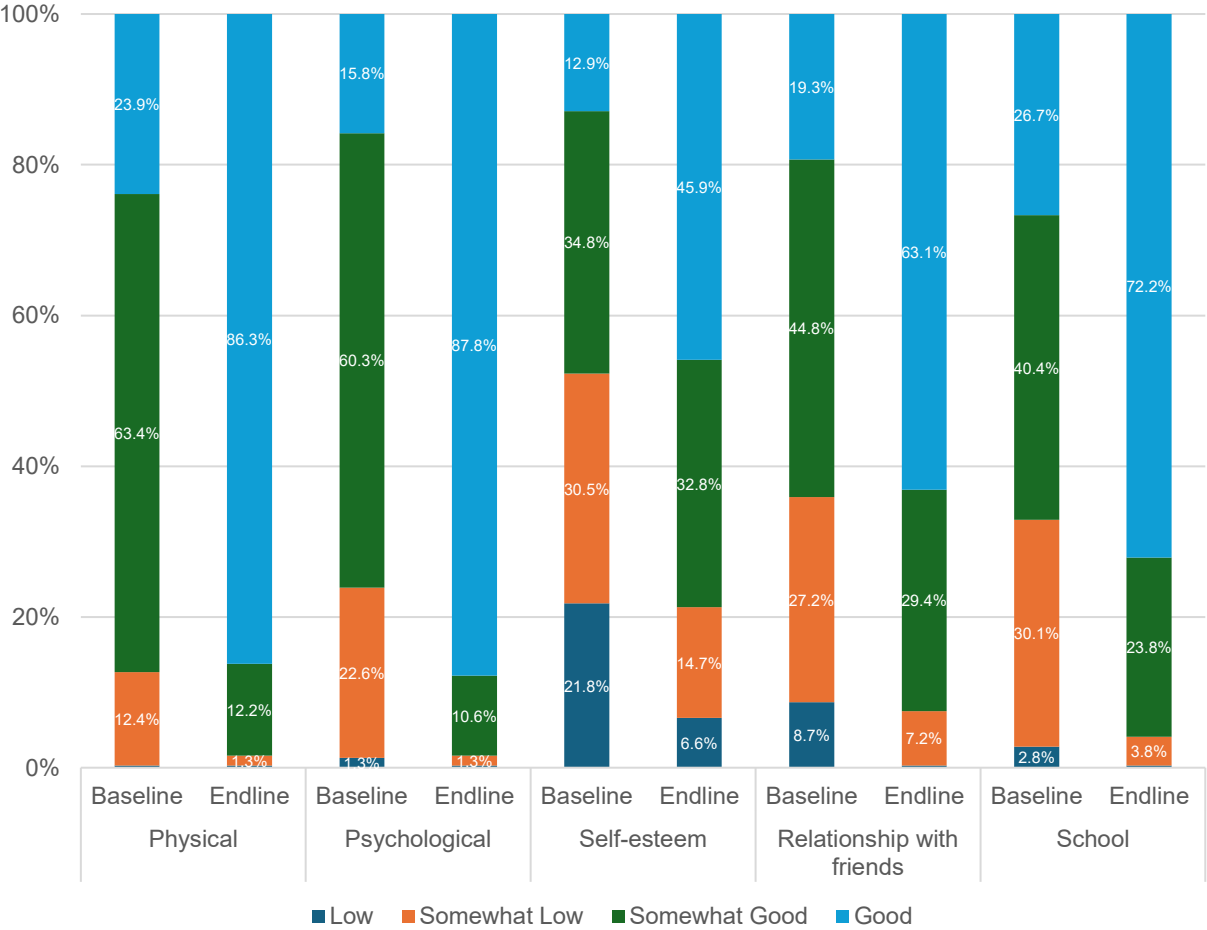
Change in Average Wellbeing Scores from Baseline to Endline
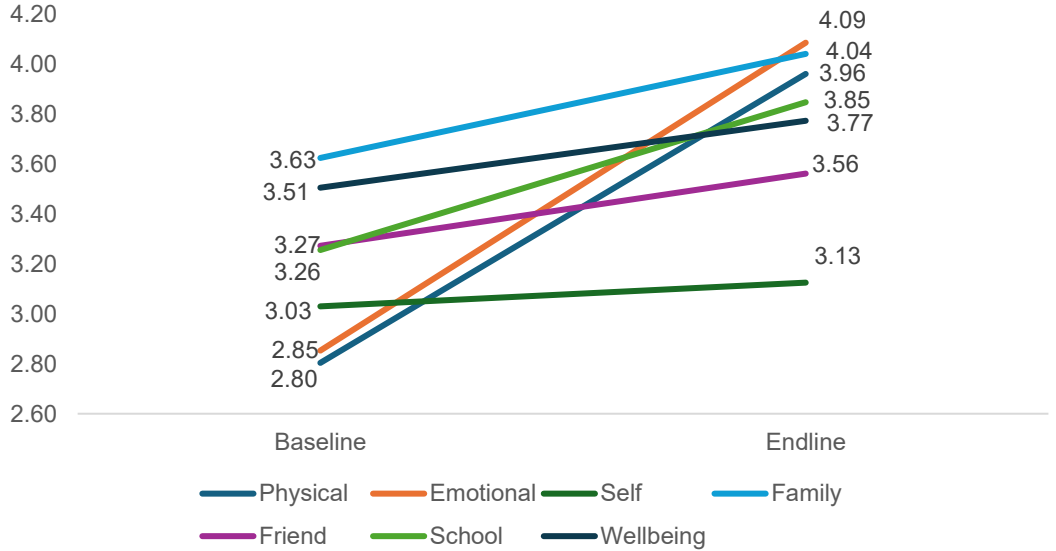
We observe positive and statistically significant improvements in overall wellbeing, and each sub-dimension

- **Physical wellbeing:** % of children with good levels improved by 59.5 percent points
- **Psychological wellbeing:** % of children with good levels of psychological wellbeing improved by 72 points.
- **Self-esteem:** % of children with good self-esteem improved by 33 points
- **Relationship with friends**: % of children with good relationship with friends improved by 48.8 points
- **Relationships at school:** % of children with good relationships at school improved by 45.5 points

The Big Picture:

We have found strong evidence to support the PlayMatters Theory of Change

Implementation: We observe high fidelity of implementation, improvements in the quality of the learning environment, leadership support for LtP, availability of teaching and learning materials.

Changes in teachers: We observe positive and statistically significant changes in teachers' instructional practices, classroom management practices and children's engagement. Teachers started addressing challenges in their own capacity

Changes in students: We observe positive and statistically significant impacts on every child outcome across different dimensions: Literacy, numeracy, SEL, wellbeing, and mental health.

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Limitations

Despite the many positive changes, we cannot yet attribute positive changes in learning and wellbeing outcomes to PlayMatters, because some of these changes can be due to other factors.

A Randomized Controlled Trial Sept 2024-June 2025 will:

- Identify a causal link between changes observed and PlayMatters intervention: To what extent changes are caused by PlayMatters

- Assess cost-effectiveness: Are the impacts worth the cost, when compared to other similar interventions available?

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