Reviewer's report

Title: An internal pilot study for a randomized trial aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of iron interventions in children with non-anemic iron deficiency: the OptEC trial.

Version: 1 Date: 8 June 2015

Reviewer: Peter Alan Coventry

Reviewer's report:

This is a useful addition to the previously published protocol for this trial and includes key methodological description about the aims and analysis of the internal pilot study.

I only have a few minor essential revisions to propose:

1. It is worth clarifying on page 6 that the overall aim of the internal pilot is to inform the design of the full and definitive evaluation and to make clear whether or not the full trial follows on seamlessly from the internal pilot.

2. The primary outcome of the OptEC trial is the ELC - page 7 - but this is for the full trial and not the internal pilot. So perhaps just say this clearly here.

3. Did the internal pilot in effect have stopping rules? That is if the criteria for success were not met would the full trial been halted?

4. Did the authors treat the adherence threshold of 90% among 40% participants as a pre-specified success criteria in the same way as recruiting the relevant number of participants? I note that this was not achieved but the authors say that the rate of 86% among 44% is adequate - was this a decision reached by the study team alone or by an independent trial steering committee too?

5. Is data from the internal pilot going to contribute to the overall sample and outcomes analysis of the full trial? If not is this an external pilot?

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests