Reviewer’s report

Title: The effectiveness of the Inspiring Futures parenting programme in improving behavioural and emotional outcomes in primary school children with behavioural or emotional difficulties: study protocol for a randomised controlled trial

Version: 1 Date: 16 Sep 2017

Reviewer: Sophie Havighurst

Reviewer’s report:

This trial describes a sound study of good clinical practice. Use of a randomised controlled trial of an intervention will enable an evaluation of the practice of this service to be evaluated well. It would have been strengthened by also gaining evaluation data from other sources - currently the primary outcomes is limited by use of parent-data only (other than implementation data) that is subject to expectancy bias. However, this is a pragmatic trial and will still provide useful information about group differences.

From the beginning there was a sound theoretical rationale provided. Great to see attention to family of origin and broader issues that impact parenting rather than just offering behavioural aspects of parenting which are usually limiting for a clinical service. The broader theoretical origins of the intervention provide an eclectic intervention (therefore being difficult to discern the key components of the intervention) that perhaps better reflects what is often delivered in services.

The inclusion of a partner is clinically sensible but may mean the study is compromised by have some families getting a more optimal (and different) dosage than those with only one parent involved.

I was surprised by the exclusion criteria of parent mental health difficulties which will occur at a much higher rate in this sample - and are likely to be casually related to the problem. For example anxiety and depression might occur in 20-30% of parents and should not prohibit group involvement. In addition how does one rule out those with low self-esteem which again is likely a part of the cause of the child's problems? These criteria seemed in-exact as exclusion criteria.

The Intervention was well explained. Origins of the intervention components were not always clear - and seemed more generic.

Measures matched model and hypotheses and were well described.

Design clear. Figures describing Participant flow were also clear.

Power analyses seem appropriate and accurate. Proposed statistical analyses comprehensive. Randomisation clear.
Overall, a well described RCT trial of a clinical service delivering a parenting intervention.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

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Acceptable

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