

FAMILIES CONNECT: IMPACT REPORT

2018, UK WIDE



IMPACT DATA FOR SCHOOLS ACROSS THE UK IN 2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Delivery

Families Connect is an 8-week programme that helps support parental engagement in children's learning. Delivered in partnership with primary schools across the country, Families Connect helps empower, upskill and engage parents and support children growing up in disadvantaged areas.

In 2018, we delivered 243 cycles of the programme in 197 schools across the UK. 37% of these cycles were repeat cycles.

2,106 children and 2,121 adults attended one or more Families Connect sessions (our direct reach). 1,647 families completed the programme (attending 6 or more sessions).

An average of 78% of families completed the programme.

Our total reach during 2018 was 4,430 children. This includes siblings under 18 in the families who attended Families Connect.

Key findings

Findings from the evaluation of the programme reflected the enjoyment and positive impact of the programme for both the whole family and the school.

Within parent questionnaires parents reported on the enjoyment and satisfaction with the programme:

- 98% (928) of parents said they really enjoyed the programme
- 99% (933) of parents said their child really enjoyed the programme
- 95% (910) of parents perceived the influence of Families Connect on what they and child do together at home.
- 79% (769) of parents perceived an influence of the programme on other members of the family at home.
- 98% (923) said that they would recommend families connect

Analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data provided by parents and teachers in the questionnaires using standardised measures and free text reflections revealed the following intermediate outcomes of the programme:

Parent outcomes

For the parents participating in the evaluation and completing post-questionnaires, most felt that Families Connect had a positive impact on how they understand their child, communicate with their child and support their child's learning and development.

Findings about improvements in parental self-efficacy and confidence were expressed by parents and supported by reflections from teachers

Parents and teachers also reported improvements in parent and school relations, often describing how increases in confidence enabled parents to interact more at the school.

Statistically significant improvements were evident in parents' perceptions of self-efficacy, their belief in their ability to support their children's learning, between pre- and post-programme.

Statistically significant improvements were also evident in parents' perceptions of the home learning environment between pre- and post-programme.

Statistically significant improvements were evident in teachers' perceptions of parental engagement in their children's learning between pre- and post-programme.

Child outcomes

Teachers and parents provided reflections on the impact of the programme on the children involved and discussed increases in confidence and resilience. They reported changes in child behaviour, social interactions with others and progress in learning – particularly regarding communication and understanding of numeracy.

Significant improvements were evident in both teacher assessments of children's softer skills (attitudes towards school and learning such as motivation, concentration and enjoyment) and children's general behaviour between pre- and post-programme.

Significant improvements in parents' perceptions of child behaviour at home were also found between pre- and post-programme.

BACKGROUND AND DELIVERY

The need

For low-income families, creating a good learning environment at home – and crucially, increasing parents' skills and confidence to support their child's learning – can reduce the impact of poverty on their child's future. The better the 'home learning environment', the better the child's learning can be.

To support parents and help give children the best chance of achieving their full potential, Save the Children has created Families Connect. Delivered through eight weekly sessions within the school the programme recognises the role parents play in the education of their children and the value of creating a home environment that is conducive to learning. Designed around the needs of children aged four to six the programme uses play as the vehicle for learning and interaction and focuses on three key areas:

- Social and emotional development
- Literacy and language development
- Numeracy and mathematics

Theory and underpinning evidence

Save the Children is committed to ensuring that every child reaches their full potential. There is increasing evidence that many children from lower income homes tend to be further behind their better off peers when they start school.

Evidence tells us the engagement of parents in their child's learning contributes to a child's readiness to learn and has a positive impact on children's educational outcomes.¹ Children spend only 14% of their time in school, highlighting the

role that parents have in supporting their children's learning. Parenting practices such as reading to children, using complex language, responsiveness, and warmth in interactions are all associated with better developmental outcomes. Stimulating activities may enhance development by helping children with specific skills (for example, linking letters to sounds) but also, and perhaps most importantly, by developing the child's ability and motivation concerned with learning generally.

Parents' 'engagement' in their child's learning is seen to help in the following ways:

- Learning from the actual activity
- Contact time between parent and child
- Validation that 'learning' is important through the act of prioritising time for it (Sylva et al., 2012)

Typical activities that are deemed to define a 'positive home learning environment' include:

- Reading together
- Painting and drawing
- Going to the library
- Being taught numbers
- Being taught songs, poems and rhymes
- Being taught letters
- Playing with numbers (Sylva et al., 2004)
- Home computing
- Parent-child activities outside the home
- Parent-child one-to-one interactions at home

¹ Kiernan and Mensah (2011) uncovered 18 parenting practices that are related to early academic achievement. These include support with reading, home learning activities, library visits, attending parents' evenings, warm parent-child interactions and

maintaining regular schedules. According to this research, higher-quality parenting appears to improve children's early achievement at every level of family resource and household income (p. 323).

- Expressive play (Sylva et al., 2008)

Furthermore, studies have found that the activities parents do with their children at home have a greater impact on their child's attainment at school than socio-economic status or parents' education:

“For all children, the quality of the home learning environment is more important for intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income. What parents do is more important than who parents are.”
(Sylva et al., 2004)

Similarly Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) found that in the primary age range, the impact caused by different levels of parental engagement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools and that the scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups.

There is also a general consensus that parental engagement in children's learning has clearer educational benefits than involvement in other aspects of school life (such as volunteering in a classroom, fundraising or being a member of a Parent Council). This is not to say involvement in the school is not valuable, but that engagement in learning at home has a higher impact (Education Scotland, 2018).

Initial scoping for the Families Connect programme supported this existing research. Parents from lower income families identified that they would like to support their children with their learning, but did not know how to do so effectively, or have the confidence or assurance that what they were doing was helpful. Scoping with head teachers in schools within areas of high deprivation also identified that whilst many parents wanted the best for their children, they were not always well equipped to provide support at home and many were uncomfortable coming into school to ask for help. The research also ascertained that families would most value support for their child's social and emotional development, literacy and numeracy.

Programme overview

Families Connect is a programme designed by Save the Children UK to support parents and carers to enhance their child's learning at home and in school. The programme recognises the role parents play in the education of children and the value of creating a stimulating home environment conducive to learning.

The programme aims to provide children aged four to six from lower income families with a greater chance of achieving their potential attainment. Using play as the vehicle for learning and interaction over eight weekly sessions, Families Connect provides a series of activities, techniques and games that parents and carers can practice with their children in order to consider how they can introduce these into their own home environments.

Families Connect is unique in that it focuses on three key areas:

1. Social and emotional development
2. Literacy and language development
3. Numeracy and mathematics

The programme's design is based on evidence that activities that support social and emotional learning, book sharing, storytelling and counting and number games are significantly associated with better than expected achievement at age five, taking social and demographic factors into account. To ensure the maximum impact on children's education, each of the modules has been written by an expert in their field. Table 1 below sets out the different workshop modules and themes, and the consultants who developed the session content.

The workshops sessions focus on:

- Children's emotional regulation, with children engaging in activities where they recognise and understand their feelings and communicate these to their parents.

- Developing parental practices such as positive reinforcement and good praise and listening skills;
- Good communication, developing parents' interest and confidence in literacy and reading.
- Developing parents' empathy, understanding, confidence and communication around children's learning of numeracy and maths and overcoming some of the common misconceptions around this.

Table 1: Families Connect workshop modules and themes.

Module	Workshop Theme	Consultant
Social and emotional development	Week 1: Focus on Feelings	Julie Casey, an educational psychologist who co-developed the SEAL Programme (Social Emotional Aspects of Learning)
	Week 2: The Importance of Praise	
	Week 3: The Importance of Listening	
Literacy and language development	Week 4: Book Talk	National Literacy Trust, a national charity dedicated to raising literacy levels in the UK, with a focus on families, young people and children
	Week 5: Beyond the Page	
Numeracy and mathematics	Week 6: The Importance of Counting	Edge Hill University, pioneers of the school intervention programme Every Child Counts to help boost attainment in mathematics
	Week 7: Number Talk	
	Week 8: Celebration and Evaluation	

Programme aims

Families Connect aims to:

- Stimulate the Home Learning Environment; including increasing the confidence and skills of parents and carers and enhancing the activities they do together with their children and their knowledge of how they support learning.
- Model how to approach, engage and work with families (parental engagement).
- Create opportunities for schools and parents to build relationships.

Expected impact and programme outcomes

The intended long-term effects of Families Connect are that children will have a greater chance of achieving their potential and doing better at school as their parents will do more in the home to support their education. We will do this by developing the skills and confidence of the parents and carers who take part in Families Connect and provide them with the resources needed to actively engage their children in learning in the home. Appendix A provides a diagram of the theory of change of the programme. It indicates how the programme supports change through its activities and outputs and the intended intermediary and longer-term outcomes of the programme at the parent, child and school levels as a result of engagement.

Intended outcomes for parents:

- Improvements in parent/child communication.
- Increase in understanding and empathy for their child's learning.
- Increase in parental motivation to support their child's learning.
- Increase in parent's confidence in supporting their child's learning.

- Increase in communication between parents and school

Intended outcomes for children:

- Improvements in child's softer skills with regards to education and motivation to learn.
- Improvements in child's social and emotional skills.
- Improvements in child's communication skills.
- Improvements in child's interest in and understanding of literacy and numeracy.

Intended outcomes for schools:

- Increase in parental engagement in the school community (including social capital).
- Strengthening of relationships between the school and parents.
- Positive changes within the school environment.

Delivery

This report covers data collected from delivery of Families Connect in 2018. During this time Families Connect was delivered in 243 cycles of the programme in 197 schools across the UK (37% of these cycles were repeat cycles). During this period 2,106 children and 2,121 adults attended one or more Families Connect sessions (our direct reach) and 78% (1,647) of families completed the programme (attended six or more sessions). The figures quoted for delivery were derived from Families Connect session registers submitted by schools delivering the programme. Where registers have not been shared with Save the Children, we have inputted the average figures, derived from the registers that were received that term.

Sign up and retention of families within the programme were high (78%) taking part in at least six of the eight weekly sessions. The success of delivery demonstrates how the programme was able to engage and sustain the interest of the participating families.

Table 2: Area-based reach:

	Cycles	Schools
North of England	41	35
South of England	36	30
Northern Ireland	43	34
Scotland	79	66
Wales	44	32

Table 3: Gender detail: Child Reach

	Unknown gender	Girls	Boys	Total
Attended one or more sessions	691	658	757	2,106
Completed (attended 6 or more sessions)	529	539	579	1,647

Table 4: Gender detail: Adult Reach

	Unknown gender or both male and female adults attending	Women	Men	Total
Attended one or more sessions	1,444	637	40	2,121
Graduated	1,117	493	29	1,639

The programme is offered universally to schools, with a focus on prioritising schools within more deprived areas and those taking part in Save the Children's community-based initiatives. Schools are encouraged to offer the programme to all children within the age range, to reduce stigma around

needs-based targeting, but are then supported to apply additional, sensitive targeting, such as phone calls to families to promote the opportunity. Peer modelling and learning is an important part of the programme model and therefore it is encouraged that schools recruit a range of different families within a school.

Families Connect is designed for parents and carers with at least one child who is aged between four to six years old. Up to 12 families attend a series of two-hour workshops delivered in school over eight weeks. The timings of the workshops are flexible to meet parents' and school needs. Parents attend some elements of the workshop by themselves and some with their children. The format for each week is the same but with different module content reflecting the different themes and messages.

This programme was initially delivered through our in-house model, before transitioning to community practitioner delivery in Summer 2018. Community practitioners can come from a range of different professional backgrounds but tend to be school-based staff such as class teachers and third-party partners who support the school and wider community such as family learning officers and learning and development workers. They attend a two-day Families Connect training course prior to running the programme, led by the SCUK trainers. This training is accompanied by a Families Connect delivery manual, which contains session plans and resource examples.

The community practitioners lead the delivery of each weekly session, preparing resources in advance and discussing with the co-facilitator which elements each lead on. At the end of each session the facilitators should reflect on the session and discuss what went well, what did not, any areas for reflection and feedback as well as check safeguarding concerns and any practicalities for the following week.

A site visit is carried out by the SCUK trainers at each site between weeks two to four of delivery, providing on-site support and guidance to the community practitioners delivering the programme as well as regular support offered throughout the

eight weeks. From Autumn 2018 onwards, SCUK trainers and Programme Managers were trained to offer both a site visit and coaching call, to 40% of all sites (20% site visit and 20% coaching call). During the site visits or coaching calls the quality and fidelity of programme delivery was also observed or assessed with reflections and suggestions made to the site in response.

EVALUATION METHODS

The evaluation

To generate our impact data, we analysed feedback from the schools and families participating in the programme (teachers and parents). The feedback was collected through two quantitative tools - a parent questionnaire and teacher questionnaire. These were administered before and after the programme. The evaluation has been designed to contribute evidence on the intermediate outcomes to the existing evidence of impact on the programme with a large sample of children families. It has been used to assess whether there is consistency across the sample in the findings from the standardised measures used. As a pre post questionnaire design the evaluation does not provide information on the longer-term outcomes of the programme nor is it robust in methodology to demonstrate causation or sustainability in intermediate outcomes. However, the evaluation will be able to demonstrate the potential effectiveness of the programme, at a relatively low cost and in a way that is relatively easy to deliver. Given the size of the sample included (population and missing data) we have undertaken subsample analyses and created targeted reports based on geographical regions and funder context. Furthermore, it also allows exploring inclusion variables at baseline and understanding differential impact in future analysis and subsequent reports. As the data was collected over a short time period and immediately after the programme, the measures look at the more intermediate outcomes expected from the programme. These intermediate outcomes focus

on changes in parental and child behaviours that are likely to lead to improvements in longer-term children's developmental outcomes.

The strength of the evaluation is also in the quantity and breadth of the qualitative data, the analysis of the reflections provided by many of the teachers and parents on the impact of the programme. These reflections provide context to the quantitative data and support the theory of change for the programme and illustrate and give new insights into the mechanisms of change of the programme.

However, given the evaluation was designed to be a population-based study (include all the families involved in the study) the findings are limited by missing data. Of those completing the programme 54% completed pre- and post-data.

Standardised measures were used to assess child and parent intermediary outcomes:

- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) teacher and parent report was used to measure children's behaviour – at pre- and post-programme.
- The Home Learning Environment Index (HLE) measured changes in parent reports on activities they do at home that support their child's learning and development.
- Parental Perceptions of Parent Efficacy (PES) measured changes in parents' beliefs about their ability to influence their child's educational outcomes.
- Parent Role Construction (PRC) measured changes in parent's belief about what they should be doing as regards their child's learning.
- Parent Involvement measured changes in teacher's belief about what parents were doing to support their children's learning.

Measures

A demographic questionnaire was administered to parents pre-programme. This questionnaire

included questions on age, gender, ethnicity, disability and special educational needs of the participating child, and age, gender, ethnicity, disability, educational qualifications and employment status of participating parent as well as questions family structure and family income.

The parent questionnaire was administered across two time points: pre- and post-programme delivery. It included a series of different measures to assess parents' perceptions of child behaviour, parental attitudes to involvement in their child's education and the quality of the home learning environment. The questionnaire also included questions on enjoyment of the programme and perceived influence on family interaction. The questionnaire included the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ: Goodman, 1997) to assess changes in parents' perceptions of child behaviour. The measure includes subscales, which assess emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems and pro-social behaviour. The questionnaire assessed parental attitudes to involvement in their child's education through a measure of parental role construction and of parental self-efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997). Parent role construction assesses parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do in relation to their children's education and the types of behaviours that follow. It is shown to be an important influencer on parents' decisions about involvement. Positive parent self-efficacy or belief in one's abilities to act in ways that will produce desired outcomes is associated with parents making positive decisions about their engagement in their child's education. The questionnaire assessed the quality of the home learning environment of the child through the Home Learning Environment Index for KS1 used within the Effective Pre-School and Primary Education 7-11 Project (the EPPE study) (see Sylva et al, 2008).

Parents were given the opportunity to provide context on what they felt the influence of the programme had been within free text response questions.

A demographic questionnaire was also administered to teachers pre-programme. This questionnaire included questions on age, gender, ethnicity, disability and special educational needs of the participating child.

The teacher questionnaire was administered at two time points, pre- and post-programme. It included a series of different measures to assess child behaviour, child's softer skills at school, and level of parental engagement in education. The questionnaire included a bespoke developed scale of children's softer skills (see appendix B) and the teacher version of the SDQ (Goodman, 1997) to assess changes in perceptions of child behaviour at school. This measure also includes the subscales: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems and pro-social behaviour. The teacher assessment of parental involvement was taken from the Hoover-Dempsey studies of parental involvement (Hoover- Dempsey et al., 1992).

Teachers were given the opportunity to provide context on what they felt the influence of the programme had been within free text response questions.

Table 4: Measures for participants

	Pre	Post
Parent questionnaire	x	x
Demographics	x	-
Enjoyment/influence /impact	-	x
SDQ parent report	x	x
Role construction	x	x
Self-efficacy	x	x
HLE index	x	x
Free text impact		x
Teacher questionnaire	x	x
Demographics	x	-

Children's softer skills	x	x
SDQ teacher report	x	x
Parental involvement	x	x
Free text impact		x

Participants

We have collected some data on 1,437 children and their parents participating in the programme across the UK.

The children participating who were assessed at baseline had a mean age of 4.9 years ($SD=0.79$) with the majority of children (97%) ranged from 4 to 6 years of age. The gender of children attending was split 51% (629) male and 49% (597) female. In terms of ethnicity, 65% (827) were white British and 10% (124) did not speak English as their first language. 11% (134) of children were reported to have a disability and 17% (178) reported to have special educational needs (SEN was teacher reported).

The mean age of adults participating as assessed at baseline was 34.3 years ($SD=7.6$), with an age range of 21 to 84 years. The majority attending were female 94% (1185) and biological parents 94% (1186). The average family income was low, with 61% (598) of parents reporting a total household income of less than £19,999. The majority of parents attending were not in full-time employment, 38% (457) looking after the family home, 29% (355) in part-time employment and 10% (118) unemployed and seeking employment. In terms of ethnicity, the majority of parents participating were white British 66% (819). Of the parents participating 15% (190) reported a disability.

Procedure

Families that took part in the programme were invited to participate if they had a child between four and six years of age and were interested in taking part in a programme to support their children's learning. No inclusion criteria was set

for families or schools taking part, however most areas did put forward schools and families who would benefit the most. Many of the parents attended a coffee morning session in advance of the programme, which SCUUK trainers often supported. These recruitment events provided information for parents and an opportunity to collect pre data for those who agreed to participate (for those unable to attend coffee morning sessions, pre data was collected at the start of the first session). Teachers also completed a questionnaire on children participating in advance of attending the programme or within the same week of the first session.

Post-programme parent questionnaires were conducted in week eight of the programme. Schools were instructed to complete post-programme teacher questionnaires within a few weeks of programme completion.

Of the 1,242 participating families who completed parent questionnaires at baseline, 72% (892) completed post-programme parent questionnaires. Teachers completed pre-programme questionnaires for 1241 families participating. Pre and Post data was available for 926 families (5% those with pre-data).

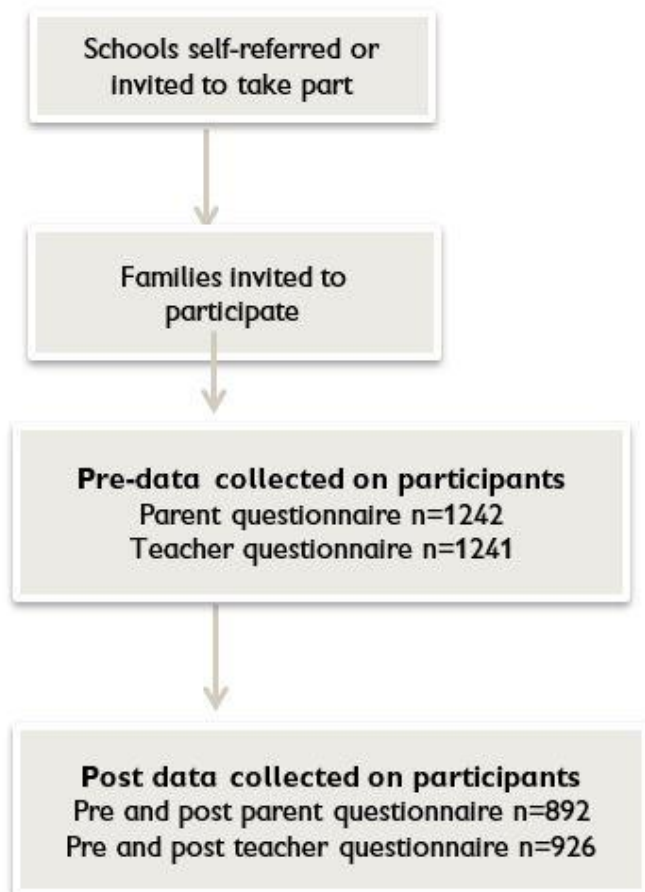
See Figure 1 for a flow chart showing progression of families through the study.

Analysis

The primary objective of the quantitative element of the evaluation was to assess the child and parent outcomes of those attending the programme over time. Significant differences in mean values for each of the child and parent outcomes were analysed at pre- and post-programme using paired t-tests.

Free text response from parents and teachers were coded and analysed using an existing thematic frame informed by the programme's theory of change and existing evaluation data. Quotes, the voices of parents and teachers, have been included in the report to provide additional context and bring the data to life.

Figure 1: Flow diagram of participants in the study



FINDINGS

For the parents participating in the evaluation and completing post-questionnaires, most felt that Families Connect had a positive impact on how they understand their child, communicate with their child and interact with their child's learning and development.

Enjoyment and satisfaction

Findings from the parent questionnaire reflected the enjoyment and positive impact of the programme for the whole family:

- 98% (928) of parents said they really enjoyed the programme
- 99% (933) of parents said their child really enjoyed the programme
- 95% (910) of parents perceived the influence of Families Connect on what they and their child do together at home.
- 79% (769) of parents perceived an influence of the programme on other members of the family at home.
- 98% (923) said that they would recommend families connect

"It has been a positive experience that we have all enjoyed as a family."

Families Connect Parent

"The children who participated really seemed to enjoy it and loved having their families come to their school."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"She has loved this especially the story card week where we used our imagination to make up stories together."

Families Connect Parent

"The mum really enjoyed the sessions and is currently in part-time work. I feel it has given the mum a boost to realise what a great parent she really is."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

Parental outcomes

Parents were given the opportunity to provide context on what they felt the influence of the programme had been in free text response questions.

Many parents felt the programme had provided new insights into ways of learning at home and had increased the amount of play based learning activities conducted in the home.

"it really helped me teach / learn, my child understand and describe their feelings. Learn to connect with my child through playful activities, reading etc."

Families Connect Parent

Parents described how the programme had provided them and their children with new ways to engage with each other and express themselves.

"It has been good to learn different ways of communicating and playing with my child educationally."

Families Connect Parent

"It helped me to learn how to help my child deal with his feelings and how to interact more through games and feeling cards."

Families Connect Parent

"I enjoyed the session regarding open and closed questions this was really beneficial."

Families Connect Parent

Parents explained how trying the different activities from Families Connect at home had provided new ways to engage their children and help make learning at home fun and how this had helped bring the family together. Central to this improvement was a better understanding of children's learning.

"It has given us lots of ideas to help us do learning at home."

Families Connect Parent

"By teaching me how children feel when learning new things makes me understand better how different it is for them and gives me more patience when helping with the homework."

Families Connect Parent

"Because it gives you a different way at looking at things from a child's viewpoint and new strategies to make things, more interesting for your children, puts fun back into learning."

Families Connect Parent

"It has opened my eyes to how a child learns, and how hard it can be for them to look at numbers."

Families Connect Parent

"It has really benefited myself and my other kids. I have learned to help them more with reading and taking our time with the story rather than me just taking the book of them and running through it quickly"

Families Connect Parent

"It has really helped me and my child to think of things in a different way towards reading, counting etc... and it's helped my child play games with his older sibling nicely"

Families Connect Parent

Many parents referred to the benefit and enjoyment of getting the one-on-one time with their children at Families Connect that they do not get at home. Others discussed a change in mindset, prioritising quality time with their children after the programme.

"Beneficial to spend time with your child on a 'one to one' basis esp. if other children at home."

Families Connect Parent

"The way you relate with your child must definitely change positively. It encourages spending more time with your child rather than with friends on phone."

Families Connect Parent

Some parents felt more strongly about their role in encouraging and rewarding their children in terms of supporting their learning. They also felt more confident and that they were making a difference in their children's learning.

"I talk to my son especially when praising him, always chat now about how his day was, how he feels."

Families Connect Parent

"It has been an opportunity to be reminded of how to do things like importance of praise which is sometimes neglected."

Families Connect Parent

"I was thinking I am doing good work with my child this program help[ed] me to do a lot of better."

Families Connect Parent



“Engaging more with [child] and his learning styles and understanding what I need to do as a parent.”

Families Connect Parent

“Feel more confident in myself to help my child learn.”

Families Connect Parent

“It can make you a better parent.”

Families Connect Parent

“Very beneficial inspires confidence to work with kids.”

Families Connect Parent

Parents and teachers provided specific examples and strategies in which parent and child engagement had improved or increased:

“Since attending Families Connect, I have broken down the element of education and play in easy sections for my son to understand easier. Focus on play within education.”

Families Connect Parent

“I listen more to my child and play more games with her.”

Families Connect Parent

“I pay that extra attention when my child talks to me.”

Families Connect Parent

“Parents more confident. Now have ideas on how to help - need for praise.”

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

“We both have learnt how to interact together with story reading counting numbers and role play. Also listening to one another.”

Families Connect Parent

“The way I praise her more positive praise. The way we read a book together we now discuss the book more and take time to look at the pictures and talk about the book rather than just reading it.”

Families Connect Parent

“I've benefitted from learning new, more playful ways to bring educational requirements into everyday life.”

Families Connect Parent

“I try to connect what happens at nursery with activities at home (they learned about potatoes and we planted some at home.”

Families Connect Parent

“We have been playing more number games when we're out. I'm making more of an effort to listen to my son by stopping what I'm doing and looking him in the eyes.”

Families Connect Parent

In addition, the evaluation also sought to test the impact of the programme on parent-school relationships and interaction. Parents reported improvements in parent and school relations, often describing how their confidence had grown to enable them to interact more at the school.



“Confidence about approaching teachers with any difficulties we are having at home.”

Families Connect Parent

“Feel more confident interacting within the schools.”

Families Connect Parent

“I am able to get more of a conversation out of my child knowing what questions to ask and how to get him to open up more about school. So I’m able to tell teacher how he is getting on and how we can move forward with his learning.”

Families Connect Parent

“I feel as I have learnt a lot about the values of the school, the input they provide to kids for their development. It provided an opportunity to understand the school better.”

Families Connect Parent

Findings about improvements in parental self-efficacy and confidence were supported by the reflections from teachers who described improvements in parental engagement with children’s learning and interactions at school.

“A great way engaging children and their parents and involving parents in their children’s learning [and] development. I can see so much more confidence since attending families connect. Self-esteem has gone from strength to strength and so much happier since attending.”

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

“I believe it has given the parent more confidence to support their child. It has given them the positive experience of mixing with other parents.”

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

“I saw the load between parent and child grow every week. Mum much more aware of the positive roles she can play.”

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

“Parent actively writes in diary regarding how homework went.”

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

There were also reflections from both parents and teachers on how Families Connect provided opportunities for fathers and working parents to engage with their children’s learning, the school and other parents.

“Some weeks the dad came along also which was a special time (family time) for the family to work together in school. This gave dad a chance to work with his daughter in a different context. It was also a chance for him to become more involved.”

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

“This is the first time there has been a ‘men’s group’ I would say that more men groups need to be ‘set up’.”

Families Connect Parent

“My husband has found interaction with parents that he normally wouldn’t experience.”

Families Connect Parent

“[Child] has in the past & sometimes presently shown challenging behaviours at home. Through talking with both [Child] & Dad it is clear that dad is trying to use his families connect strategies as his ‘go to’. Dad is taking a more active role in what [Child] is exposed to at home.”

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"As I work full-time I am rarely at the school so the programme has given me the opportunity to meet and speak with other parents"

Families Connect Parent

Teachers and parents also described how the programme promoted communication between the family and school and how this had benefitted both the school and home learning environment particularly with regards to improvements in children's behaviour and parental responses to this.

"We now communicate daily with [Child's] parents to feedback on how his behaviour has been that day."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"Families connect promotes positive relationships between school staff and parents. Issues in class can be resolved quickly by effective communication."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"Communicate any issues or concerns to teacher also get updates from teacher regarding my child's learning and accomplishments."

Families Connect Parent

"Mum has benefited - she is less stressed and feels more able to cope with [Child's] behaviour."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"Mum is aware of ways to support her child's personal, social and emotional development. I have seen an improvement in the child's

acceptance of boundaries and emotional regulation."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"Parent found that getting an insight into how their child's day worked in school/how they learned in school was very helpful and interesting. Many strategies taken on board to use at home."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"It has helped us become more focused as a family at home, helping our child through play and creating happier relationships."

Families Connect Parent

Both parents and teachers also provided examples of how the programme had improved parent's social capital. Helping parents to make friends and develop support systems. Parents discussed how they had learnt and benefitted from hearing other parents on the programme.

"This family are new to the country with little spoken English and support. They have been able to interact with others and this has helped them to discover other support systems and contacts to help their family."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"Through families connect this child and her family have made a very strong friendship with another family. The friendship is evident within the classroom."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"It aides a really good base to interact with the school and enhances both parent and child's experience of the school. We have loved it"

Families Connect Parent



“It helps you get to know teachers, mums, dads and makes you feel comfortable at school”

Families Connect Parent

“It’s good contact with other families in the same position.”

Families Connect Parent

“I feel more welcome in school and find the teacher more approachable.”

Families Connect Parent

“Mam has requested other family engagement and information from school she has really enjoyed it.”

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

“You can hear other’s stories and can take bits from there way of explaining and apply it to your way.”

Families Connect Parent

“You can pick up different ways of learning from other parents which gives your child more options”

Families Connect Parent

The results of the standardised measures, included in both the parent and teacher pre- and post-questionnaires - assessing change over time, also demonstrated positive improvements in parent outcomes and support the qualitative findings

based on the parent and teachers reflections on impact of the programme.

Statistically significant improvements² were evident in parents’ perceptions of self-efficacy, their belief in their ability to support their children’s learning, between pre- and post-programme.

Statistically significant improvements were also evident in parents’ perceptions of the home learning environment between pre- and post-programme scores for participants.

Statistically significant improvements were evident in teachers’ perceptions of parental engagement in their children’s learning between pre- and post-programme.

Parental involvement and engagement in education was measured through self-report scales of parent role construction and parent self-efficacy. No significant differences were found for parental role construction between pre- and post-programme. Significant improvements were evident in parent’s perceptions of self-efficacy between pre- and post-programme mean score = 31.5 (SD= 5.17) compared to mean score = 33.3 (SD= 4.86), ($t = -10.3$ (759) $p < .001$).

Teacher perception of parent engagement in education and efficacy was also measured. Significant improvements in teacher perception of parent engagement were evident between pre- and post-programme scores for participants mean score = 32.7 (SD= 6.43) compared to mean score = 34.4 (SD= 6.24), ($t = -9.7$ (794) $p < .001$).

Significant improvements were found for parental reports on the home learning environment index (HLE) total between pre- and post-programme scores for participants mean score = 32.0 (SD= 5.35) compared to mean score = 32.8 (SD= 4.78),

² Statistically significant improvements were measured through paired t-tests which assess the difference in means between two related (pre and post test scores). Statistical significant difference

suggests that there is only a very small probability that this results happens by chance.

($t = -5.2$ (759) $p < .001$). Significant differences were also found for the HLE subscales: enrichment activities mean score = 6.7 ($SD = 2.09$) compared to mean score = 7.0 ($SD = 1.87$), ($t = -5.9$ (833) $p < .001$); and interaction mean score = 9.6 ($SD = 1.79$) compared to mean score = 10.1 ($SD = 1.58$), ($t = -7.2$ (812) $p < .001$). No significant differences were found for the subscales of home computing or expressive play.

Child outcomes

The main measure of child outcomes assessed in the evaluation are changes in child behaviour as measured by the teachers and parents.

Teachers and parents provided reflections on the impact of the programme on the children involved and discussed increases in confidence and resilience. They have reported changes in child behaviour, social interactions with others and progress in learning – particularly regarding communication and understanding of numeracy.

“[Child] has always been a fantastic worker in class but she is becoming more resilient when she makes a mistake. She loves to accept a challenge and is aware of how this will help her to learn instead of giving up if something is too difficult.”

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

“[Child] appears to be more motivated to learn and engaged in academic experiences. She is willing to attempt various tasks independently and is not afraid to ask for clarification if she is uncertain of what is expected of her. Furthermore, she is able to identify certain areas of development”

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

“Her behaviour has improved since doing Families Connect”

Families Connect Parent

“I find [child] is a bit better with recognises bigger numbers.”

Families Connect Parent

“It has been great - has helped my child feel really settled in school and been a highlight of our week.”

Families Connect Parent

“[Child] has made friends through attending families connect.”

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

“It has helped bring [Child] out of her shell with new friends.”

Families Connect Parent

“[Child] has always been a great worker in class but she is becoming much more responsible and helpful with others. Her concentration is improving and she is very keen to learn and receive praise.”

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

“Confidence has grown. Especially within whole class activities. Copes well with activities and learning experiences.”

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

“Copes better in competitions / teamwork. Making positive steps to support peers if upset or unsure.”

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

“Great progress in reading and writing - more confident.”



Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"[Child] appears to really enjoy going to families connect. She often comes back to tell me the children/class what she has made and loves that little bit of time out of class with her mum."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"He has a calmer approach to tasks. He is much better at listening to advice about how to improve his work. He takes greater delight & pride in his work."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"He has become less upset if he has forgotten something or made a small mistake."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"He is beginning to form friendships and use language to help him eg. "Can I please play with you"."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"This child has consolidated what they have learned in Literacy and they can confidently identify some phonemes/graphemes."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"I feel it has helped me be more involved in the transition process and bringing on his confidence for starting school"

Families Connect Parent

"Getting to spend some 1-1 time with her mum."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"Has discovered more fun and enjoyment in her learning. It has helped to develop her patience in more frustrating situations."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"Knowledge of sight words and phrases has improved."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"has been using the feeling/emotion fans at home and school to help her communicate how she is feeling."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

"The child is over-achieving in both maths and literacy became of the mother's input at home."

Class Teacher at Families Connect School

Teachers provided assessments of children's attitudes towards school and learning (softer skills such as motivation, concentration and enjoyment) and assessments of general behaviour. A significant improvement was evident in both softer skills and general behaviour between pre- and post-programme.

Parents also provided assessments of children's general behaviour. Significant improvements in parents' perceptions of child behaviour at home were also found at post-programme.

Child softer skills were measured within the teacher questionnaire using a bespoke scale developed to be an age appropriate assessment of children's attitudes and behaviours towards school and learning such as general progress, motivation, concentration and enjoyment. The scale includes a range of statements such as 'Child wants to learn new things' and 'Child can concentrate and work independently', to which the teacher rates on a six point likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree (a full version of the scale is included in appendix A). Significant improvements were assessed based on paired t-test comparison of means across pre- and post-programme. A significant difference was evident in child softer skills as reported by teachers between pre-programme assessment and post-programme assessment for the 875 children where measures

were completed at pre- and post-programme time points. Pre-programme mean score =54.6 ($SD=10.35$) and post-programme mean score =58.0 ($SD=9.48$), ($t= -12.8$ (874) $p<.001$).

Child behaviour at school was assessed using teacher reported version of the SDQ³. Significant improvements in behaviour were found between pre- and post-programme for the children participating on the teacher reported SDQ. Total difficulties score mean = 8.5 ($SD= 6.10$) compared to mean = 7.3 ($SD= 5.87$), ($t=9.8$ (832) $p<.001$) and subscales: emotional problems mean = 2.1 ($SD= 2.29$) compared to mean = 1.7 ($SD= 2.08$), ($t=6.0$ (892) $p<.001$); conduct problems mean = 0.9 ($SD=1.44$) compared to mean = 0.7 ($SD= 1.32$), ($t=4.3$ (907) $p<.001$); hyperactivity mean = 4.1 ($SD= 3.08$) compared to mean = 3.6 ($SD= 3.08$), ($t= 7.8$ (888) $p<.001$); peer relationship problems mean = 1.6 ($SD= 1.81$) compared to mean = 1.3 ($SD= 1.62$), ($t= 6.3$ (886) $p<.001$); and pro-social behaviour mean = 7.1 ($SD= 2.56$) compared to mean = 7.7 ($SD= 2.30$), ($t=-8.7$ (849) $p<.001$).

Significant improvements in behaviour were found between pre- and post-programme for the children participating on the parent reported SDQ⁴. Total difficulties score mean = 9.9 ($SD= 5.8$) compared to mean = 9.0 ($SD= 5.7$), ($t=5.7$ (736) $p<.001$) and subscales: emotional problems mean = 2.6 ($SD= 2.24$) compared to mean = 2.3 ($SD= 2.16$), ($t=3.4$ (845) $p<.01$); conduct problems mean = 1.3 ($SD=1.33$) compared to mean = 1.1 ($SD= 1.23$), ($t=3.2$ (835) $p<.01$); hyperactivity mean = 4.3 ($SD= 2.6$) compared to mean = 4.0 ($SD= 2.5$), ($t= 4.3$ (831) $p<.001$); peer relationship problems mean = 1.9 ($SD= 1.80$) compared to mean = 1.6 ($SD= 1.71$), ($t= 5.0$ (828) $p<.001$); and pro-social behaviour mean = 7.9 ($SD= 1.91$) compared to mean = 8.3 ($SD= 1.73$), ($t=-6.2$ (840) $p<.001$).

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Results show that the 2018 delivery of Families Connect secured most of the intended intermediary programme outcomes. The overall perceptions from parents were that Families Connect improved the quality and quantity of their interactions with their child and provided them with confidence and skills to support their child's learning at home. Central to this were reflections on improvements in parent-child communication, understanding of children's learning and prioritising quality time. Parents reflected on the importance of social capital from the programme - the benefits of their increased engagement with the school and teachers, as well as other parents.

Teachers largely reflected on the changes in interactions between schools and families and the direct impact the programme has had on the children involved. Important for both parents and teachers were the changes in behaviours of the children involved both general behaviour and progress and attitude in learning. The results of the quantitative analyses support the programme model in terms of the measured intermediate parent and child outcomes and the overall evidence of the potential for programme effectiveness.

Save the Children UK has adapted Families Connect to be suitable for three-year-olds. The activities within the sessions have been adapted to be more flexible to a child's interests and level of development. The updated programme for three-to-six-year-olds will be available to schools with nursery provision and Children's Centres from 2021 onwards.

³ One item was accidentally excluded from the conduct problems subscale of the SDQ for both teacher and parent questionnaires at both time points.

⁴ One item was accidentally excluded from the conduct problems subscale of the SDQ for both teacher and parent questionnaires at both time points.

Families Connect is currently being evaluated as part of a UK wide Random Efficacy Control Trial of the programme. Thirty schools have participated in the trial across the UK. This more robust methodology has measured the same intermediary child and parent outcomes through randomly allocating families to an intervention and control group to be more confident in the attribution of these positive outcomes to the programme. The evaluation has also assessed longer term expected outcomes of the project measuring potential changes in children's receptive language and numeracy over a six-month period. The results of the trial will be published late Autumn 2020.

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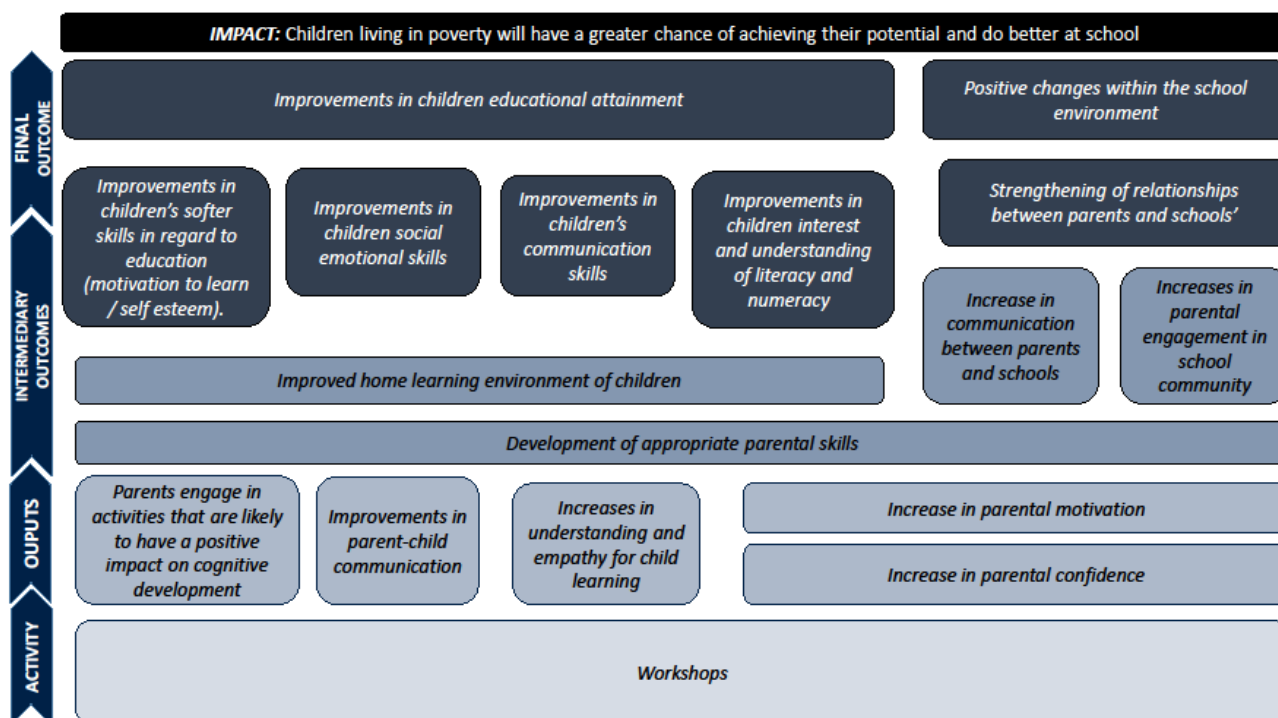
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A: THEORY OF CHANGE OF THE PROGRAMME



B: CHILDREN'S SOFTER SKILLS, BESPOKE SCALE

In this section, please indicate how much you **AGREE** or **DISAGREE** with each of the statements.

	1 Disagree very strongly	2 Disagree	3 Disagree just a little	4 Agree just a little	5 Agree	6 Agree very strongly
The child is interested in solving problems.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The child wants to learn new things.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The child can concentrate and work independently.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The child seeks help when they don't understand.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The child deals well with mistakes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The child accepts criticism or corrections.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The child behaves well in class.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The child gets on well with their peers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The child is proud of their work and achievement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The child is generally positive about learning.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The child is adaptive to new tasks and challenges.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The child makes progress in learning.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐