

Randomised Controlled Trial Evaluation of Families Connect: Information for parents¹

What is Families Connect?

Families Connect is a parental engagement programme for families with children aged 4–6, delivered in schools across the UK. The programme involves parents and children, and uses play as a vehicle for learning. It focuses on three key areas: social and emotional development; literacy and language development; and numeracy and mathematics. It aims to provide parents with confidence and skills to support their child's learning, build relationships between parents and schools, and make a difference to children's communication, literacy, numeracy and social and emotional outcomes.

How long are the sessions?

Families Connect involves a set of two-hour sessions in school over eight weeks. There are eight sessions in total. The timings of the sessions are flexible to suit the families involved (for example, during school, after school or straddling the end of the school day). One hour of each session is for parents only; the other hour is for parents and children together. A snack and crèche facilities are usually provided.

What activities are involved?

Each session involves a range of activities and games that parents and carers discuss, try out and practise with their children. Each week, parents can then try them out at home with their children.

Who delivers the sessions?

Usually, two members of staff from your school will deliver the sessions. They will have been trained by Save the Children UK (SCUK) to do this. Staff from Save the Children UK (SCUK) will also visit your school to support some of the sessions.

Which families and children can take part?

Families with child(ren) in Reception or Year 1 in England and Wales, Y1/Y2 in Northern Ireland, and P1/P2 in Scotland, in the current school year (2018/19) can take part. **Families must not have taken part in Families Connect before.**

What are the aims of the evaluation?

Families Connect is being evaluated to explore if the programme makes a difference to children's literacy, numeracy, social and emotional outcomes. It will also explore if it makes a difference to parents' engagement with their child's learning. The evaluation will also investigate children's, parents', teachers' and school leaders' views on the programme.

Which organisations are involved in the evaluation?

Researchers from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) are carrying out the evaluation. Researchers from Queen's University Belfast (QUB) will also conduct some of the visits and interviews. Save the Children UK (SCUK) is overseeing the programme. The Nuffield Foundation has provided funding for this Families Connect RCT.

¹ This information sheet is for parents involved in the Spring 2019 recruitment to the Families Connect trial, for intervention delivery in Summer 2019 and control delivery in Spring 2020.

What does the evaluation involve?

Families Connect is being evaluated through a randomised controlled trial (RCT). This means that families will be randomly split into two groups. One group will take part in Families Connect in the summer term 2019, and the other group will take part in Families Connect in the spring term 2020. By evaluating Families Connect in this way, researchers are able to see what difference the programme makes. **It is very important that families do not switch groups.**

What data will be collected about me and my child(ren) and how?

Opt-in consent: Parents will need to read a parent letter and complete a consent form on behalf of themselves and their child when they sign up to the trial of Families Connect. They will be asked for their opt-in consent for themselves and their child/ren to take part in and provide data for the RCT evaluation of Families Connect. This includes both personal and special data, as set out in the letter and the [Privacy Notice for parents](#).

Data for the trial:

- Schools will provide a list of the families and pupils taking part to NFER – this will include pupils' names and dates of birth.
- Parents will complete a short questionnaire when they sign up to the trial, and again at the end of the summer term 2019.
- Each pupil will complete a short vocabulary assessment at the start of the trial – a test administrator will visit your child's school to do this.
- Each pupil will then complete a short vocabulary assessment and numeracy assessment at the beginning of the autumn term 2019 (Scotland) or the end of the summer term 2019 (rest of UK), and again in January 2020 – with a test administrator who will visit your child's school to do this.
- Teachers will also complete a Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire for each pupil at the start, middle and end of the trial. This questionnaire collects special personal data, and will only be used by researchers using IDs (no names will be attached to the file that researchers use).

Other data: An attendance register will be completed for the 8-week programme. Parents and children may also be invited to take part in interviews about their experiences and views of the Families Connect programme. This will be with researchers from NFER or Queen's University Belfast (QUB).

How will schools and families benefit from taking part?

Families allocated to both groups will take part in Families Connect – just in different terms, so no one misses out. By taking part in the evaluation you will be helping to find out if and how Families Connect helps children and parents, and how to develop the programme further for other families in future. As a thank you for contributing to the study, families will receive from SCUUK:

- £20 for participating in the project (this is for intervention and control group families, and will be given out after the follow-up parent questionnaire at the end of the summer term 2019)
- a book for each family.

When will I need to get involved?

Date	Activities for intervention group	Activities for control group
February - March 2019	Parents to complete consent forms and baseline questionnaires	
Mid March 2019	Children to take baseline assessment with test administrator Teachers to complete baseline questionnaires about each child	
Late March 2019	Families randomly allocated by NFER to summer term 2019 (intervention) or spring term 2020 (control) group	
April – June 2019	All intervention families take part in the Families Connect programme. Parents complete a questionnaire in week 8 of the programme	Parents in control families complete the parent questionnaire at the same time as the parents in the intervention group
August/September 2019(Scotland) July 2019 (rest of UK)	First follow-up – all children to take follow-up assessments in language and numeracy with test administrator Teachers to complete follow-up questionnaires about each child	
Early January 2020	Second pupil follow-up – all children to take follow-up assessments in language and numeracy with test administrator Teachers to complete follow-up questionnaires about each child	
Late January 2020		Control group families take part in Families Connect

What happens if a family or child wants to withdraw from the trial?

A family or child can withdraw from the programme at any point. They can also withdraw their consent for their data to be used in the trial at any time, by contacting FCTrial@nfer.ac.uk.

How will NFER use and protect the data collected?

All data gathered during the trial will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR 2016/679, and will be treated in the strictest confidence by the NFER, SCUK and QUB. All child and family information and data will be stored securely by NFER, and by QUB where relevant, and only shared with SCUK anonymously. Data from the trial will be stored in the UK Data Archive and in the SCUK Programme Archive at the end of the study. **This data will not have any names on.** You can view a [Privacy Notice for parents](#) by following this link.

How will the findings be used?

The findings from the trial will be available in a report and academic papers. The findings will be used to help develop the Families Connect programme, and help schools and other organisations to improve children's learning in the early years. **No school, family or child will be named in any report arising from this work.**

Who can I contact for more information?

If you have any queries about the evaluation of Families Connect, please contact Michael Neaves, NFER Researcher at FCTrial@nfer.ac.uk.