

Randomised Controlled Trial of Families Connect: Information for schools¹

What is Families Connect?

Families Connect is a parental engagement programme for families with children aged 4–6, delivered in schools with a high proportion of children on Free School Meals (FSM), or similar indicators of disadvantage, across the UK. The programme uses play as a vehicle for learning and interaction with, and between, parents and children. 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 in the home environment, build relationships between parents and schools, and make a difference to children's communication, literacy, numeracy and social and emotional outcomes.

How is it delivered?

Families Connect is delivered through a series of two-hour sessions in school over eight weeks. 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.

Who delivers Families Connect?

Save the Children UK (SCUK) trains two members of staff from each school over two days, to deliver the eight sessions independently. These staff, known as Community Practitioners (CPs), need to be teachers, teaching assistants or family support workers from your school who **do not currently** teach Reception or Y1 in England/Wales, Y1 or Y2 in Northern Ireland, or P1 or P2 in Scotland, in 2018/19. SCUK provides the CPs with programme manuals, coaching calls and site visits to ensure that they are confident and supported in their delivery.

What activities are involved?

Each session involves a range of activities, techniques and games that parents and carers discuss, try out and practise with their children, in order to consider how they can introduce them into their home environments. SCUK developed the programme in conjunction with experts from the SEAL Programme, the National Literacy Trust and Edge Hill University, to ensure they are grounded in theory and good practice around young children's learning.

Which schools can take part in the trial?

Country	Required age groups	Level of disadvantage
England	Reception and Year 1	Over 20% eligible for FSM
Wales	Reception and Year 1	Over 25% eligible for FSM
Scotland	P1 and P2	Consult local SCUK manager
Northern Ireland	Y1 and Y2	Over 40% eligible for FSM

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

Which families 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 2018/19 can take part. The trial can run with between 12 and 20 families per school. **Families must not have taken part in Families Connect before.**

Can schools take part if they've done Families Connect before?

Schools in the trial must be new to Families Connect or only have run it once before in their school. If schools have previously run Families Connect more than once, they cannot take part in this trial.

What are the aims of the trial?

Families Connect is being evaluated through a randomised controlled trial (RCT) to explore the impact of the programme on children's literacy, numeracy, social and emotional outcomes, and on parents' role with their child's learning. The evaluation will also investigate children's, parents', teachers' and school leaders' views on the programme and its benefits.

Who is conducting the trial?

The Nuffield Foundation is funding the Families Connect trial. Save the Children UK (SCUK) is overseeing the delivery of the programme. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) is conducting the trial, with colleagues from Queen's University Belfast (QUB) supporting with school visits and interviews that run alongside the trial.

What will the trial involve for schools?

Joining the trial: Each school will nominate a member of staff as the point of contact for the trial; and sign a Memorandum of Understanding, which should then be returned to SCUK. Schools that join the trial will identify **two members of staff** to be trained to deliver the programme, providing the contact details to SCUK. Schools will then recruit between **12 and 20 families** to take part.

Baseline data: Schools will provide some school information and a list of the families and pupils taking part to NFER. Parents will complete a short questionnaire when they sign up to the trial. Each pupil will complete a short vocabulary assessment administered by a test administrator who will visit your school. Teachers will complete a baseline soft skills and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire for each pupil in the trial.

Random allocation: Within each school, families will then be **randomly allocated** by NFER to either the intervention group or the control group. Intervention group families will take part in Families Connect in the summer term (Apr-Jun) 2019. Control group families will take part in Families Connect in the spring term (Jan-Mar) 2020. **It is very important that families do not switch groups.** CPs will complete an attendance register for each session for the summer term group.

Follow-up data: Parents from both groups will complete a short questionnaire at the end of the summer term 2019. A test administrator will visit your school at the start of the autumn term 2019 (Scotland) or the end of the summer term 2019 (rest of the UK), and again at the start of the spring term 2020, to administer a vocabulary and a numeracy assessment to all the trial pupils, and collect teacher completed questionnaires about each child. Schools will also provide some implementation and follow-up information about taking part. **It is important to have assessments and questionnaire data about every child and family in the trial at baseline, first follow-up and second follow-up.**

Some schools will take part in evaluation observations, interviews and case studies involving parents, children, Community Practitioners and other teachers.

Schools will need to provide a weekly snack for children, crèche facilities where needed, and play resources such as magnifying glasses. A small budget will be provided to support with these. All printed programme materials are provided by SCUK.

When will my school need to get involved?

Date	Activity
February 2019	Sign-up to the trial with SCUK and NFER, and identify two members of staff to be Community Practitioners (CPs).
February – early March 2019	Recruit families to take part including parental opt in, parent baseline questionnaires, pupil lists and school information
During March 2019	CPs attend training where needed
Mid March 2019	Pupil baseline assessments and questionnaires.
Late March 2019	Families randomly allocated by NFER to summer term 2019 (intervention) or spring term 2020 (control) group. Schools informed of which families and pupils are in each group.
April – June 2019	Families Connect runs for the intervention group. Site support visits and calls to schools. Interviews and observations in a case study school. Schools provide implementation data. All parents complete follow-up questionnaire.
August/September 2019 (Scotland) July 2019 (rest of UK)	First pupil follow-up assessments and questionnaires completed.
Early January 2020	Second pupil follow-up assessments and questionnaires, and school information completed.
Late January 2020	Control group families take part in Families Connect.

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. Two members of staff will receive full training and support from SCUK to deliver Families Connect. Taking part also provides an opportunity for staff who have an interest in educational research or methodology to develop their professional learning. Once trained the CP can run Families Connect in your school going forward.

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

A family, child or school 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. However, in a randomised controlled trial all data is important. It is really helpful if we can collect data about all families even if they do not attend all of the programme. The trial team really appreciate schools' and participants' support for the data collection.

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, and will be treated in the strictest confidence by the NFER, SCUK and QUB. Your school's key contact details and school-level information for the trial will be shared securely



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between NFER, SCUK and QUB. All pupil and family-level information and data will be stored securely by NFER, and by QUB where relevant, and only shared with SCUK anonymously. A Privacy Notice for the study is available.

No school, family or child will be named in any report arising from this work.

How will the findings be used?

The findings from the trial will be freely available on SCUK, NFER and QUB websites. Publications will include a report, academic papers and policy documents. The findings will be used to inform the development of Families Connect, as well as to help SCUK, schools and other organisations to make evidence-based decisions to support schools and families in improving children's learning in the early years.

Who can I contact for more information?

Pippa Lord, Senior Trials Manager at NFER, is very happy to answer any questions you might have. Please contact her on 01904 567633 p.lord@nfer.ac.uk. If your query is about data collection or your wish to withdraw, please contact Michael Neaves, NFER Researcher on 01753 637014 FCTrial@nfer.ac.uk.