



DfE 4 Grant Holders Newsletter 4 Children

New Early Years scheme improves children’s vocabulary and supports school readiness

Children, who are falling behind their peers in understanding spoken language in the lead up to starting school, can catch up, thanks to a new early year’s literacy scheme – *Early Words Together*. An independent evaluation of the National Literacy Trust two-year pilot programme published 24/3 also shows that 86% of parents who took part, now talk more with their preschool children, which will have a big impact on their school readiness and ongoing attainment. To view the Impact brochure visit www.literacytrust.org.uk/ewt

Early Words Together is a National Literacy Trust programme that develops young children’s communication, language and literacy through the support of families by peer volunteers. Over six weeks, the programme brings practitioners and volunteers together to enable target families to improve their home learning environment for children aged two to five.

The programme is delivered through small group sessions of one and a half hours, and includes an important peer support factor that helps parents:

- Understand why they are important to their child’s reading and language development
- Adopt effective activities to enrich their play, engagement and attachment with their child
- Benefit and increase their child’s literacy, communication and language development

Childcare Minister Sam Gyimah said:

“All children should join primary school with a good level of literacy and a love of books.

“Learning to read and write is a key stepping stone to helping children express themselves in life. In turn, these skills are vital if they are to fulfil their potential.

“That’s why I am pleased that we have supported the National Literacy Trust and those working on the Early Words Together programme in this vital scheme.”

The two year pilot programme, funded by the Department of Education, was rolled out in 120 children’s centres and early years settings from April 2013 and March 2015, involving 1,000 volunteers and 1,850 parents.

Evaluation of the programme by Coventry University’s Centre for Research in Psychology, Behaviour and Achievement, shows that **on average children who took part in the programme have caught up with their peers.**

Children's standardised scores¹ increased from 77 to 83 in approximately four months, bringing them significantly closer to the normal range of 85 or higher.

Early Words Together had a particular impact on the reading enjoyment, frequency and listening ability for families with the highest need:

- Families who started the programme with the lowest levels of enjoyment of sharing stories showed a 77% increase in reading enjoyment
- Families who started with lowest frequency of book sharing showed a 91% increase in reading frequency

An overall analysis of 776 parent responses shows:

- **An increase in children's enjoyment of sharing books, songs and rhymes**
 - 87% families reported high levels of enjoyment in sharing books (previously 72%)
 - 88% families reported high levels of enjoyment in joining in with songs and rhymes (previously 76%)
- **An improvement in home learning environment**
 - 86% parents reported they now talked more to their children
 - 80% parents said their children listened and joined in with stories more
 - Two-thirds of parents (66%) felt more confident about sharing books with their child
 - 89% families were more likely to buy or borrow books, increased library visits being a key factor
 - 73% parents now read with their child every day (previously 53%)
 - 99% parents would recommend Early Words Together to others

External Evaluation

The publication of the external evaluation report **Early Words Together: Impact on Families and Children**, coincides with an Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) toolkit, showing that a child's progress can be boosted by five months extra progress over a year if their parents get involved in their education – by reading and talking with them at home. Poorest children can be up to 19 months behind their wealthiest classmates when they start school at age five, according to a recent study by the Sutton Trust.

Clare McGread, Head of Programmes at the National Literacy Trust says:

“Early Words Together raises parents’ confidence and gives them activities and strategies to promote their child’s early learning. We’re enthused by this first look at the impact of the programme which has had a distinct effect on families most in need of crucial literacy support. Early Words Together supports parents to realise their input is one of the most vital factors in their child’s educational development, which will ultimately give them the best start in life.”

Parents’ comments:

“I do read with her more than before because I understand the importance of reading.”

“When he goes into nursery he already knows about structure and discipline from other people, but also to be aware of other people’s emotions. It is all those elements that have benefited him.”

Schools and settings

“Early Words Together has meant that not only have the pupils and their families benefitted from much needed support, but this has had the desired ‘knock on’ effect in the classroom in

¹ Measured using Pearson's pre-school vocabulary test

raising standards. Families now have the necessary skills to support their child's learning development." Head Teacher, Anker Moor Primary School

Ofsted: *"Some activities, such as Early Words Together, focus very specifically on promoting children's communication and language development, and tracking shows that good progress is being made."* Ofsted Report, Staffordshire: Lichfield District Group, May 2014

To view the full Evaluation report – visit <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/ewt/impact>

For further information about delivering Early Words Together in your school or setting, please contact: ewt@literacytrust.org.uk or call 0207 820 6278.