

THE LIFE CHANCES STRATEGY

Save the Children Submission

Introduction

Save the Children believes that every child, no matter their background, should have a fair chance in life. We warmly welcome the ambition, set out by the Prime Minister, for a life chances strategy which fights disadvantage and extends opportunity.

The evidence is clear that a child's chances in life are heavily determined by their development in their earliest years. The Prime Minister is absolutely right to highlight the importance of early learning and the impact that falling behind, particularly in early language development, can have on a child's chances of success.

Parents are the single biggest influence on their children in their early years and providing more support to them to promote early learning as part of good parenting must be an essential part of the life chances strategy. Early education is also a major influence on children's early development and can play a decisive role in children's school-readiness, preventing those who might otherwise struggle from falling behind before they reach school.

Thanks to reforms introduced by this government and the coalition government before it, more than nine in ten children aged three and four are currently in childcare for up to 15 hours of early education a week. In addition, significant progress has been made to raise the status of early education and its workforce – particularly the introduction of Early Years Teacher status in 2013.

The evidence shows that high quality childcare, led by EYTs, offers one of the most decisive routes to improving a child's early development and life chances. This effect is even more dramatic for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, many nurseries and other group settings are not led by EYTs – approximately one in five children aged three and four, and one in two of those in the private, voluntary and independent sector, attend a setting with no access to an EYT. By failing to ensure that all children have access to early education led by qualified EYTs or their equivalents, we risk missing crucial opportunities to close the early learning gap – which has a lasting impact on children's early learning and life chances.

The Government can demonstrate a strong record of childcare reform to boost social mobility and tackle disadvantage – both by increasing the entitlement to free hours to improve parental employment and delivering measures to improve nursery quality and workforce standards in order to boost early learning. However in order to see a significant impact on the outcomes of the poorest children, it now needs to make the quality of childcare central to its life chances strategy, prioritising support and investment to deliver a step change in the quality of early education they receive.

The forthcoming review of early years funding offers an important opportunity to ensure the funding system supports provision that drives better outcomes for children. Save the Children will be presenting detailed proposals in response to the review, when it is announced.

The links between early learning and life chances

Falling behind in early learning, particularly language skills, has a significant impact on children's attainment throughout school and their prospects in adulthood, including their earnings, mental health and wellbeing. Some groups are more likely to be affected by poor early language skills including boys, children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and those in certain geographical areas, including the North, rural and coastal areas. This pattern of

poor early language development is a significant driver of a similar pattern of underachievement at school.

The impact of poor early language development

One in five children aged five are affected by poor early language development, a figure that increases to almost one in three of the most disadvantaged children. Last year, more than 129,000 children began primary school without good early language developmentⁱ.

These children are likely to struggle to develop crucial skills like reading, and find it hard to learn in the classroom. Poor language development hinders their ability to listen or pay attention to others, understand simple instructions, express themselves effectively, use tenses correctly or explain events or ideas.

The evidence clearly shows that children who start school behind are significantly more likely to remain behind, with consequences into adulthood.

Save the Children's research has shown that:

- One in four children who struggled with language at age five struggled with reading at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2ⁱⁱ.
- One in four children who struggled with language at age five struggled with English at age 11. Those who had good early language development at age five were six times less likely to struggle with English at age 11ⁱⁱⁱ.
- But language skills also have much wider impact than English, communication and literacy. One in five children who do not have good early language development at age five go on to struggle with maths at age 11, but this number was 11 times lower for those with good language development; just 1 in 50 children with good early language at age 5 go on to struggle with maths at age 11^{iv}.

The impact of poor language development in the early years is not just educational – with studies showing the negative impact on earnings, literacy skills and mental health as adults^v, and even the life chances of their own children^{vi}.

The poorest falling the furthest behind

Whilst early years progress in language is a factor in the life chances of all children, the poorest remain significantly further behind. Our most recent analysis has shown that the most disadvantaged children are almost twice as likely to be behind as their better off peers when they begin school.

Our research has shown that the intersection between poverty and gender also has a real impact on children's early language skills – with poor early language acting as a significant contributor to the attainment gap for boys. Boys growing up in low income families are most likely to be behind; two out of every five of the most disadvantaged boys struggle with language, compared to one in four boys from better off families.

We have also shown that more than one in four girls from disadvantaged families struggle compared to one in six of the least disadvantaged girls^{vii}.

Poor early language development across the country also reflects, and is likely to be contributing to, emerging patterns of educational disadvantage at school age - with poor early language skills being most apparent in rural and coastal areas, the North and the East of England. In the North East, two in five of the most disadvantaged children are struggling with language when they start school compared to one in three of the most disadvantaged children in London. In the worst performing local authorities, half of the most disadvantaged children are struggling with language.

Existing research has shown the impact of the 'London effect' in primary and secondary school^{viii}, but our data shows that these regional gaps in attainment begin much earlier in life.

Improving early learning with quality early education

The evidence is clear that there are significant benefits for the developmental outcomes of children who attend settings offering quality early education and that the workforce is the main driver of quality. The impact on outcomes is more pronounced for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Quality early education

The highly regarded Early Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) study has shown that children who attended high quality early education settings saw benefits to their literacy, language, and mathematics as well as in their social and behavioural skills.

Analysis of the long term impact has also shown that attending good quality childcare in the early years has a positive impact until the end of primary school and into secondary school^x.

Another major study following over 5,000 families with children in childcare has shown clear benefits for children and their families, from attending good quality nurseries – these include not only improvements to early language development but also benefits from a less chaotic home learning environment^x.

Importantly, the EPPE study has also shown that good quality, graduate-led, childcare has particular benefits for boys and for children from disadvantaged backgrounds not only in the short term but also right through primary school^{xi}. This finding is reflected in international evidence, including from Germany^{xii} and Norway^{xiii}.

The role of the workforce in boosting quality

The evidence shows that an EYT (and staff with equivalent qualifications) can play a critical role in creating a high quality learning environment in a nursery, yet the 2015 Early Years Census found that only around half (47%) of private, voluntary and independent (PVI) providers (which represent three quarters of all providers) providing the free childcare offer had staff with EYT status working with three and four year olds. Save the Children has calculated that an additional 11,000 early years teachers are needed to place one in every early education setting¹.

Early Years Teachers and those with equivalent qualifications provide additional support for child development by:

- **Leading the development and delivery of the early years curriculum in nurseries.** They plan developmental activities for children including promoting non-verbal conversations which enable young children to develop their sense of self, their well-being and their attention, which act as precursors to later language. As children learn to speak, EYTs have the knowledge to further develop children's language skills through informal conversations, songs and rhymes, with shared reading and the use of narrative^{xiv}. Research shows that early childcare settings where children made more developmental progress were characterised by strong leadership in curriculum planning and creating a shared teaching philosophy amongst staff.
- **Observing children's progress, identifying any weaknesses in development and designing tailored packages of support for children at risk of falling behind.** They are

¹ 'Provision for children under 5 years of age' (Department for Education, 2015) reports that there are just over 15,000 EYPs/EYTs and over 26,000 settings delivering free childcare to three and four year olds in the PVI sector. If we were to achieve an EYT in every nursery, we would need a minimum of 11,000 additional EYTs.

trained to cope and engage with issues faced by children and families in poverty or with multiple needs^{xv}.

- **Engaging parents and working in partnership with them to improve the home learning environment^{xvi}.** Children who are likely to be lacking stimulation at home require highly qualified staff with specialist pedagogical knowledge, and the capacity to extend children’s vocabulary in a way which recognises their developmental starting points.
- **Leading the professional development across the nursery staff, modelling good practice and helping to improve the skills of less qualified staff through observation and feedback.** Research shows that on-the-job learning from mentors and peer support helps staff become more effective childcare professionals^{xvii}. The EPPE study reinforces this view with evidence that less qualified staff were significantly better at supporting learning when they worked with qualified teachers^{xviii}. The evaluation of the graduate leader fund showed that Early Years Professionals (the predecessor to EYTs) also found this, reporting that EYPs implemented systems to supervise and appraise staff, which helped to identify staff’s development needs.

Substantial evidence also shows that nurseries operating in low-income neighbourhoods in England were only able to provide the same quality and improve school standards to the same degree as nurseries in wealthier neighbourhoods if they were graduate-led^{xix}. We know that PVI settings, particularly in deprived areas, are much less likely to be graduate led or of high quality, which means that the children attending these are less likely to be receiving the quality support for early learning that they need. The evidence shows that, on average, PVI settings in deprived areas score 9% lower in the quality of language support and 7% lower in the quality of literacy support^{xx}.

Where a graduate teacher is present, the difference in the quality of provision between settings in the most and least deprived areas is almost completely wiped out^{xxi}.

It is important to note that the skills of the entire early years workforce, not just EYTs, matter as the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY) set out in a briefing of January this year^{xxii}. Better qualified early years practitioners deliver higher quality care. That is why the government’s Early Years Workforce Strategy that is currently in development must include action to improve professional development and progression routes for early years staff at all levels as well as steps to increase the number of EYTs in the workforce.

Conclusion: early education at the heart of boosting life chances

Whilst Save the Children concurs with the focus on parenting and the home learning environment for a child’s early learning that was set out in the Prime Minister’s January speech, we believe that this must be accompanied by the third pillar of quality early education.

The Prime Minister points out that if poorer children are lucky they go to an ‘*outstanding school, with dedicated, inspiring teachers*’ and reiterates the government’s ambition to bring ‘*the best schools to some of our most deprived neighbourhoods*’, to transform the educational attainment and life chances of the children they serve.

Save the Children believes we cannot wait for disadvantaged children to get to school before they receive the best support, by which time they may already have fallen behind – and will remain likely to stay behind. The learning environment in early education should be very different from the classroom and will always be focused on learning through fun activities and play. But, in order to address the gaps in early language and school readiness, and to contribute to meeting the Government’s ambitious targets on attainment and literacy, the same ambition and drive on school standards must be applied to bringing the best nurseries, led by early years teachers and supported by skilled staff at all levels, to the most deprived areas.

The life chances strategy must include measures to promote high quality early education, alongside support for parenting and learning at home. The coalition Government made significant progress in boosting the status and training of the early years workforce. This work must be built upon to ensure all nurseries, particularly those in the poorest areas, have access to the leadership of an Early Years Teacher.

Save the Children urges the Government to ensure that raising nursery quality is a core part of its life chances strategy - using the forthcoming fair funding review of early education funding and the early years workforce strategy to focus resources on ensuring nurseries in the poorest areas have access to highly trained staff, including graduate Early Years Teachers.

ⁱ Department for Education (2015a) *Early years foundation stage profile results: 2014 to 2015*. Department for Education: London. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-2014-to-2015>

ⁱⁱ Save the Children *Lighting up young brains: How parents, carers and nurseries support children's brain development in the first five years*. Forthcoming 2016, contact Save the Children for an advance copy.

ⁱⁱⁱ Save the Children (2016) *Early language development and children's primary school attainment in English and Maths: New research findings*. Save the Children: London.

^{iv} Save the Children (2016)

^v Parsons, S. & Schoon, I. (2011) *Long-term Outcomes for Children with Early Language Problems: Beating the Odds*. Children & Society Vol. 25, pp. 202-214; Schoon, I., Parsons, S., Rush, R. & Law, J. (2010a). 'Childhood language skills and adult literacy: A 29-year follow-up study'. Pediatrics, Volume 125, No. 3, pp. e459-e466; Schoon, I., Parsons, S., Rush, R. & Law, J. (2010b). 'Children's language ability and psychosocial development: A 29-year follow-up study'. Pediatrics, Volume 126, No. 1, pp. e73-e80

^{vi} de Coulon, A., Meschi, E. & Vignoles, A. (2011) *Parents' skills and children's cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes*. Education Economics, pp. 1 – 24

^{vii} Save the Children 2015

^{viii} Burgess, S. (2014) *Understanding the success of London's schools*. The Centre for Market and Public Organisation: Bristol. Available: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/cmppo/migrated/documents/wp333.pdf>

^{ix} Sammons et al 2008

^x Speight, S., Maisey, R., Chanfreau, J., Haywood, S., Lord, C. & Hussey, D. (2015) *Study of Early Education and Development: Baseline survey of families*. Department for Education: London. Available: http://www.seed.natcen.ac.uk/media/5645/Study_of_early_education_and_development_survey_of_families.pdf

^{xi} Sylva et al 2004, Sammons et al 2008

^{xii} Felfe and Lalive 2013

^{xiii} Havnes and Mogstad 2009

^{xiv} Mathers et al 2014

^{xv} Siraj-Blatchford, I. & Siraj-Blatchford, J. (2010). *Improving children's attainment through a better quality of family-based support for early learning*. London: centre for excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young people's Services.

^{xvi} Mathers et al 2014

^{xvii} Whitebook, M., Gomby, D., Bellm, D., Sakai, L., Kipnis, F. (2009) *Preparing teachers of young children: The current stats of knowledge, and a blueprint for the future*. Part 2: Effective teacher preparations in early care and education: Toward a comprehensive research agenda. University of California, Berkeley: Centre for the Study of Child Care Employment, Institute for Research on Labour and Employment.

^{xviii} Sylva, K., Melhuish, P., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I and Taggart, B (2003). *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from Pre-school to end of Key Stage1*. Institute of Education, University of London

^{xix} Mathers S, Eisenstadt N, Sylva K, Soukakou E and Ereky-Stevens, K (2014) *Sound Foundations: A Review of the Research Evidence on Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care for Children Under Three, Implications for Policy and Practice*. The Sutton Trust. University of Oxford

^{xx} Gambaro, L., Stewart, K. & Waldfogel, J. (2013) *A question of quality: do children from disadvantaged backgrounds receive lower quality early years education and care in England?* CASE: London. Available: <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cp/CASEpaper171.pdf>

^{xxi} Mathers et al 2014

^{xxii} Kalitowski, Susanna, *Towards and Early Years Workforce Development Strategy for England*, PACEY (2016)