



# FAMILIES CONNECT

## EVALUATION OF SUMMER DELIVERY 2016

### Executive Summary

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#### The need

In the UK, children from lower income families are 50% less likely to do as well at school as their wealthier classmates. For these 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:

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

*"I think it's different being in the school, than at home. At home you have got the dogs running around, you've got your two year-old that has mastered the staircase, trying to get the biscuits in the cupboard behind you, you've got dinner that's almost defrosted, you've got a lot on at home, but when you're at school you can concentrate on that individual's needs."*

#### The evaluation

Over the course of the 2016 summer term the Families Connect programme was delivered in nine schools across the UK. The report includes data on the 82 families participating in the programme (children and their parent(s)) as well as data from 51 children allocated as controls within six of the schools. The evaluation employed a mixed method design. It consisted of qualitative focus groups, one-to-one interviews with parents and interviews with school facilitators. It consisted of three quantitative tools: a parent questionnaire, teacher questionnaire and one-to-one teacher-child assessment (BPVS3), which were administered before and after the programme and at a three-month follow-up. Teacher questionnaires and assessments were conducted for a control set of children at the same time.

Standardised measures were used to assess children's outcomes in receptive vocabulary and behaviour.

- The British Picture Vocabulary Scale (BPVS3), a one-to-one teacher-conducted assessment, was used to measure the language development of the child – specifically the child's receptive vocabulary.
- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) teacher and parent report was used to measure children's behaviour – at pre-, post- and three-month follow-up.

### Key findings

#### Parent report

Most parents referred to discovering new strategies for learning, or being more involved in their children's learning, as the incentive for signing up to Families Connect. The high retention rate of the programme (69%) demonstrates the success of the programme to engage and sustain the interest of the participating families.

Furthermore, most of the parents participating in the qualitative part of the evaluation felt that Families Connect had a positive impact on how they communicate with their children and how they interact with their child's learning and development. Some parents felt the programme had provided new insights into ways of learning at home and had increased the amount of literacy, reading and numeracy incorporated into the home. Other parents mentioned how the programme had provided them and their children with new ways to express themselves. Almost all of the parents discussed trying all of the different activities from Families Connect at home and how the different tasks provided new ways to engage their children and help make learning at home fun and bring the family together.

Most 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.

*"He's... grown closer to me than he has over the last four years."*

Parents felt it was their role to encourage and award their children in terms of supporting their learning. They felt that they were making a difference in their children's learning.

*"I actually feel like the parent for a change."*

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Evaluation of Summer delivery 2016

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

- 95% (59) of parents said they really enjoyed the programme
- 95% (59) of parents said their child really enjoyed the programme
- 90% (57) of parents perceived the influence of Families Connect on what they and their child do together at home
- 78% (49) of parents perceived an influence of the programme on other members of the family at home
- 72% (28) perceived an impact of Families Connect on what they do with their child in the home, three months after the programme
- 67% (26) perceived an influence of the programme on other members of the family at home, three months after the programme

Statistically significant improvements<sup>1</sup> were evident in parents' perceptions of self-efficacy, their belief in their ability to support their children's learning, between pre- and post-programme and between pre- and three-month follow-up.

Some significant improvements in parents' perceptions of child behaviour were found at post programme and at three-month follow-up.

In addition to child and parent outcomes, the evaluation also sought to test the impact of the programme on parent-school relationships and interaction. Parents commonly reported improvements, with one mum describing how her confidence has grown to enable her to do volunteer work at the school.

*"I feel more comfortable with the school on a whole, so much so that I am actually after Christmas coming in to volunteer for a couple of days a week just to kind of build confidence and things."*

### Teacher Report

Statistically significant improvements were evident in teacher perceptions of parent engagement between pre- and post-programme scores for participants; however no significant effects were evident at three-month follow-up, suggestive

that impact may have faded over time. Moreover, caution should be taken as to whether changes in teachers' perception of parental involvement can be attributed to the programme as similar significant improvements were found for the control children between pre- and post-programme but not between pre- and three-month follow-up.

The BPVS3 assessment was used to ascertain children's receptive vocabulary. A statistically significant difference was evident between pre-programme and long follow-up receptive vocabulary mean standardised scores for the participating group. No significant difference was evident between pre-programme and post-programme, which is not unsurprising given the longer-term expectation of change for this outcome. Children from the participating group made significant improvements in their demonstration of receptive vocabulary, with the mean score moving approximately three points closer to the expected age-appropriate standard score of 100. Approximately one fifth of children (18.2%) moved from below age-appropriate standardised scores to reach or exceed the levels expected for their age. No significant differences in mean scores were found over time for the control children.

Teachers provided assessments of children's attitudes towards school and learning such as general progress, motivation, concentration and enjoyment. A significant difference was evident in these softer skills between pre- and post-programme assessment and sustained over time with a significant difference at three-month follow-up. A significant difference was also evident between the participating and control children in softer skills at pre-programme but not post-programme or at three-month follow-up. Participating children scored significantly lower pre-programme than control children but not at post-programme nor at three-month follow-up, providing evidence of the potential impact of the programme to sustainably improve the softer skills of participating children to those reported of their peers.

Significant improvements in teachers' perceptions of child behaviour were also found between pre- and post-programme (although not at three-month follow-up) for the participating children

Teachers also reported change between pre- and post-programme:

- 20% (9) of pupils improved in overall academic ability
- 45% (19) of pupils improved in reading ability
- 23% (10) of pupils improved in maths ability

<sup>1</sup> 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 result happens by chance.



# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Evaluation of Summer delivery 2016

### Conclusions and next steps

Results show that the Summer 2016 delivery of Families Connect secured most of the intended programme outcomes. The results of the quantitative analyses support the programme model and overall the evaluation provides evidence of the potential for programme effectiveness and sustainable impact for families. Both parent and child intended outcomes are being met as a result of participation in Families Connect. The overall perception from parents was that Families Connect provided an innovative opportunity to improve existing parenting skills at home, with support from the school, to provide their child with increased chances of succeeding at school.

*"I loved that some of the activities led us to explore other things, e.g. magic envelope led on to origami, or let us expand them further i.e. the spot the number picture. I found all the take-home activities useful for my child as it makes my child feel happy that it was an activity that we could do together."*

*"He did not previously enjoy homework, but now willing to attend homework club and sit down together to do things."*

The test has also generated rich learning, outlined in a series of recommendations in the main report that have and will continue to inform the programme development for ongoing implementation.

