



# FAMILIES CONNECT

## EVALUATION OF SUMMER DELIVERY 2016

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## Evaluation of Summer delivery, 2016

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# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Executive summary

### Executive summary

#### 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."*

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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.



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## Executive summary

### 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.



# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Background and description

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### Theory and underpinning evidence

Save the Children is committed to ensuring that every child reaches their full potential. There is increasing evidence around the importance of 'school readiness' and that many children from lower income homes tend to be further behind their better off peers when they start school.

Evidence tells us the engagement of parents in their child's learning contributes to a child's readiness to learn and has a positive impact on children's educational outcomes.<sup>2</sup> Children spend only 14% of their time in school, highlighting the role that parents have in supporting their children's learning. Parenting practices such as reading to children, using complex language, responsiveness, and warmth in interactions are all associated with better developmental outcomes. Stimulating activities may enhance development by helping children with specific skills (for example, linking letters to sounds) but also, and perhaps most importantly, by developing the child's ability and motivation concerned with learning generally.

Parents' 'engagement' in their child's learning is seen to help in the following ways:

- Learning from the actual activity
- Contact time between parent and child
- Validation that 'learning' is important through the act of prioritising time for it (Sylva et al., 2012)

Typical activities that are deemed to define a 'positive home learning environment' include:

- Reading together
- Painting and drawing
- Going to the library
- Being taught numbers
- Being taught songs, poems and rhymes
- Being taught letters
- Playing with numbers (Sylva et al., 2004)

- Home computing
- Parent-child activities outside the home
- Parent-child one-to-one interactions at home
- Expressive play (Sylva et al., 2008)

Furthermore, studies have found that the activities parents do with their children at home have a greater impact on their child's attainment at school than socio-economic status or parents' education:

*"For all children, the quality of the home learning environment is more important for intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income. What parents do is more important than who parents are."* (Sylva et al., 2004)

Similarly Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) found that in the primary age range, the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools and that the scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups.

There is also a general consensus that parental involvement in children's learning has clearer educational benefits than involvement in other aspects of school life (such as volunteering in a classroom, fundraising or becoming a parent governors). This is not to say involvement in the school is not valuable, but that engagement in learning at home has a higher impact (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2006).

Consequently, as part of wider attempts to close the social class achievement gap or 'poverty gradient' in education in the UK, schools are encouraged to identify interventions that are effective in supporting parental engagement, particularly for those parents who are not significantly involved in their children's education. Best practice guidelines have been produced to support schools to increase parental engagement in their schools and guidance and toolkits written on how to write a 'parent engagement' strategy produced alongside it (Grayson, 2013 and Education Endowment Foundation, 2016). This demonstrates the value placed on parental engagement and the role it can play to contribute to a child's achievement in school. However, schools often report that they know what they must do but they do not know how to go about it.

Initial scoping for the Families Connect programme supported this existing research. Parents from lower income families identified that they would like to support their children with their learning, but did not know how to do so effectively, or have the confidence or assurance that what

<sup>2</sup> Kiernan and Mensah (2011) uncovered 18 parenting practices that are related to early academic achievement. These include support with reading, home learning activities, library visits, attending parents' evenings, warm parent-child interactions and maintaining regular schedules. According to this research, higher-quality parenting appears to improve children's early achievement at every level of family resource and household income (p. 323).

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they were doing was helpful. Scoping with head teachers in schools with high proportions of families eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) also identified that whilst many parents wanted the best for their children, they were not always well equipped to provide support at home and many were uncomfortable coming into school to ask for help. The research also ascertained that families would most value support for their child's social and emotional development, literacy and numeracy.

### Programme overview

Families Connect is a newly developed programme designed by Save the Children UK to support parents and carers to enhance their child's learning at home and in school. The programme recognises the role parents play in the education of children and the value of creating a stimulating home environment conducive to learning.

The programme aims to provide children aged four to six from lower income families with a greater chance of achieving their potential attainment. Using play as the vehicle for learning and interaction over eight weekly sessions, Families Connect provides a series of activities, techniques and games that parents and carers can practice with their children in order to consider how they can introduce these into their own home environments.

Families Connect is unique in that it focuses on three key areas:

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

The programme's design is based on evidence that activities that support social and emotional learning, book sharing, storytelling and counting and number games are significantly associated with better than expected achievement at age five, taking social and demographic factors into account. To ensure the maximum impact on children's education, each of the modules has been written by an expert in their field. Table 1 below sets out the different workshop modules and themes, and the consultants who developed the session content.

**Table 1: Workshop structure and development**

Module	Workshop Theme	Consultant
<b>Social and emotional development</b>	Week 1: Focus on Feelings	Julie Casey, an educational psychologist who co-developed the SEAL Programme (Social Emotional Aspects of Learning)
	Week 2: The Importance of Praise	
	Week 3: The Importance of Listening	
<b>Literacy and language development</b>	Week 4: Book Talk	National Literacy Trust, a national charity dedicated to raising literacy levels in the UK, with a focus on families, young people and children
	Week 5: Beyond the Page	
<b>Numeracy and mathematics</b>	Week 6: The Importance of Counting	Edge Hill University, pioneers of the school intervention programme Every Child Counts to help boost attainment in mathematics
	Week 7: Number Talk	
	Week 8: Celebration and Evaluation	

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## Background and description

The workshops sessions focus on:

- Children's emotional regulation, with children engaging in activities where they recognise and understand their feelings and communicate these to their parents.
- Developing parental practices such as positive reinforcement and good praise and listening skills;
- Good communication, developing parents' interest and confidence in literacy and reading.
- Developing parent's empathy, understanding, confidence and communication around children's learning of numeracy and maths and overcoming some of the common misconceptions around this.

### Programme aims

Families Connect aims to:

- Stimulate the Home Learning Environment; including increasing the confidence and skills of parents and carers and enhancing the activities they do together with their children and their knowledge of how they support learning.
- Model how to approach, engage and work with families (parental engagement).
- Create opportunities for schools and parents to build relationships.

### Expected impact and programme outcomes

The intended long term effects of Families Connect are that children will have a greater chance of achieving their potential and doing better at school as their parents will do more in the home to support their education. We will do this by developing the skills and confidence of the parents and carers who take part in Families Connect, and provide them with the resources needed to actively engage their children in learning in the home.

Intended outcomes for children:

- Improvements in child's softer skills in regards to education and motivation to learn.
- Improvements in child's social and emotional skills.
- Improvements in child's communication skills.
- Improvements in child's interest in and understanding of literacy and numeracy.

Intended outcomes for parents:

- Improvements in parent/child communication.
- Increase in understanding and empathy for their child's learning.
- Increase in parental motivation to support their child's learning.
- Increase in parent's confidence in supporting their child's learning.
- Increase in communication between parents and school

Intended outcomes for schools:

- Increase in parental engagement in the school community (including social capital).
- Strengthening of relationships between the school and parents.
- Positive changes within the school environment.



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## Delivery overview

### Delivery overview

Families Connect works with families in targeted schools. Identification is based on the percentage of children in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) or through area based knowledge of schools with greater need. In Scotland schools are identified through the Social Index of Multiple Deprivation and local knowledge of Save the Children Programme staff, who work closely with Local Authorities to target schools with the greatest need.

Families Connect is designed for parents and carers with at least one child who is aged between four to six years old. Approximately 10 families attend a series of two-hour workshops delivered in school over eight weeks. The timings of the workshops are flexible to meet parents' and school needs. Parents attend some elements of the workshop by themselves and some with their children. The format for each week is the same but with different module content reflecting the different module themes and messages.

This Summer 2016 test was delivered through our 'in house' model of delivery; with the programme being delivered by Save the Children UK (SCUK) Trainers and co-facilitated by school-based staff. SCUK Trainers attend a two-day Families Connect delivery training prior to running the programme, led by the central team; the Families Connect Manager and Families Connect Training Project Manager. They then cascaded delivery information through a one-to-one briefing with the school co-facilitator, which typically lasted one day. This training and subsequent briefings were accompanied by a Families Connect delivery manual, which contained session plans and resource examples.

Within schools, Families Connect is provided as a universal offer for parents and carers. Peer modelling and learning is an important part of the programme model and therefore it is encouraged that schools recruit a range of different families within a school. However, some instances of targeting participants of other school-based programmes or interventions was encountered.

Each Trainer led the delivery of each weekly session, preparing resources in advance and discussing with the co-facilitator which elements each would lead on. At the end of each session the Trainer and co-facilitator would reflect back on the session and discuss what went well, what did not, any areas for reflection and feedback as well as check safeguarding concerns and any practicalities for the following week. These discussions were recorded on a site weekly monitoring spreadsheet, along with attendance information. The Trainer would also record reflections and conversations that were held in the parent reflection

time. These were coded to individual families to match up to other quantitative data being gathered.

SCUK Trainers were supported by the Families Connect central team on a weekly basis through a weekly delivery catch up call. The calls allowed Trainers to learn from other delivery and facilitated peer to peer support between the Trainers. They also provided a chance to share learning and to feed back directly to the central team, to allow challenges and difficulties to be addressed and to inform the ongoing development of the programme. Support was also offered on an on demand basis by the Families Connect central team.

One site visit was carried out by the central team at each site between weeks two to four of delivery, providing on-site support and guidance to both the SCUK Trainer and school co-facilitator. The quality and fidelity of programme delivery was also observed with reflections and suggestions made to the site in response.

At the end of programme delivery an evaluation meeting was held between the SCUK Trainer, regional Programmes Manager, school lead and school co-facilitator to reflect back on the positives and negatives of programme delivery and formulate recommendations for improvement.

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## Rationale: Scope and purpose of the evaluation

### Rationale: Scope and purpose of the evaluation

The summer term test was designed to develop initial evidence on the potential impact of the programme and generate learning about programme content and delivery to inform future implementation.

The expected outcomes for Families Connect at a parental level are improvements in parental engagement in education and learning and improvements in the home learning environment of their children. This will be achieved through an increase in the frequency and quality of the support parents actively provide for their child's social and emotional learning, and learning around literacy and numeracy. This will be done through an increased sense of parental self-efficacy and knowledge and skills in how to support their children's learning. An additional expected outcome of the project will be the strengthening of relationships between parents and schools. Expected child outcomes are in children's social and emotional behaviour, communication and softer skills. Improvements in children's educational attainment and therefore life chances are the expected longer-term impacts of Families Connect.

Discussions with the programme designers highlighted the key outcomes of the different domains of the workshops. The activities of the workshops and the specifically sought parent and child outcomes from these were used to develop the log frame for the project.

For the current evaluation the outcomes of focus are:

#### 1. Improvements in the home learning environment

- Increase in parental engagement of activities that are likely to have a positive effect on child cognitive development.

#### 2. Development of appropriate parental skills Increases in parental confidence

- Increases in parental motivation
- Improvements in parent-child communication
- Increases in understanding and empathy for child learning

#### 3. Development of children's softer skills

- Increases in child academic self-esteem
- Increases in child motivation to learn

#### 4. Development of children's communication skills

- Increases in expressive and receptive vocabulary

#### 5. Improvements in children's social and emotional behaviour

- Improvements in children interest and understanding of literacy and numeracy

#### 6. Improved relationship between parent and school

- Increases in parental engagement
- Increase in parent and school communication

### Initial development phase, 2014-2015

The 2016 summer test followed two previous tests in 2014 and 2015. The initial pilot tested the feasibility of a smaller scale version of the project, based over four weeks; looking at whether Families Connect was something schools were interested in taking up and if parents were interested in attending and coming back to take part each week. This largely qualitative pilot was used to further develop and inform the modules and programme. Initial findings showed that parents, children and school staff appreciated the project and initiated positive changes within the school environment. A key recommendation identified from the first phase of tests was the need for more qualitative feedback from the children participating about their experiences to gauge the impact of the programme. This was addressed in subsequent test phases.

The second phase of testing was designed to find out whether the programme as ten weekly two-hour workshops was effective at improving the home learning environments of the families involved. The workshops were scheduled to follow the same format to ensure consistency in approach. As part of the evaluation process in 2015, a logical framework was drawn up that identified the overall goal of the project as improvements to the home learning environment to support future educational achievement with five core short-term outcomes:

1. Increased level of support parents actively provide for their child's social and emotional learning
2. Increased level of support parents actively provide for their child's learning around literacy
3. Increased level of support parents actively provide for their child's learning around numeracy
4. Increase in child's softer skills such as confidence, self-esteem, and motivation to learn
5. Strengthening of relationship between parents and schools such as confidence to raise concerns, involvement in the school community

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## Rationale: Scope and purpose of the evaluation

Quantitative and qualitative data was captured during the pilot. Pre- and post-questionnaires with parents and qualitative data demonstrated a positive impact on parents in terms of their confidence, skills and in the number of activities being carried out in the home. Pre- and post-teacher reports also captured the programme's perceived impact on children.

The strongest outcome of this evaluation was demonstrated through parental feedback that after taking part in the programme, parents increased their ability to support their children's learning in the home. The report found evidence for four of the outcomes identified (outcomes one to four above). Outcome five (strengthening of relationships between parents and schools), was not measured.



A family play a counting game together during a Families Connect session at a school in Scotland.

### Aim of the 2016 evaluation (summer term)

This stage of evaluation was designed to develop a more robust evidence base for Families Connect to support its wider roll out across the UK. The evaluation was designed to assess whether the current model of Families Connect (in house delivery model) was fit for purpose, and test proof of concept by measuring the impact of the programme on parents and children when delivered through in house trainers and co-facilitated by school staff.

The current evaluation methodology builds on the existing evidence through a longer-term more robust quantitative assessment complemented by in-depth qualitative interviews. It considers in more detail the intermediate and longer-term outcomes for the parent and child related to this and is enriched by the qualitative data that provides greater detail around the key themes of the programme. In addition it provides rich parental feedback regarding the programme content and delivery, as well as allowing a situational analysis of the families taking part in the programme.

The evaluation has been conducted internally and with the intention of commissioning an external evaluation at a later stage of delivery (2018).

These findings from summer term delivery evaluation will contribute to a full report including summer and autumn delivery and will be used to inform the long-term model of evaluation used to assess and demonstrate impact of the programme.

### Methodology: Quantitative

The primary objective of the quantitative element of the evaluation was to assess changes in child and parent outcomes of those attending the programme over time.

Three quantitative tools were used during this test:

1. Parent questionnaire
2. Teacher questionnaire
3. One-to-one teacher-child assessment (BPVS3)

Parents and teachers completed the questionnaire and teachers the assessment, at pre-, post-, and three-month follow-up of the programme. In addition, a secondary objective was to assess whether a similar group of children allocated to a control group within each of the schools had a similar trajectory of outcomes as measured by the teacher questionnaire and assessment across the three time periods (parent questionnaires were conducted with participants of the programme only).

### Participants

Participants of the programme included 82 children and their parent(s) from nine schools across the UK. The report also includes data from 51 children allocated as controls within six of the schools. Although all nine schools were asked to complete data for control children, no baseline data was submitted within three of the schools. The control children were chosen by teachers within schools based on similarity of family demographic and child learning characteristics to the participating children.

The children participating who were assessed at baseline had a mean age of 5.2 years ( $SD=0.74$ ) with an age range of four to six years of age. The gender of children attending was split 58% (46) male and 43% (34.6) female. In terms of ethnicity, 70% (57) were white British and only 7% did not speak English as their first language. Nearly a quarter of children were reported to have special educational needs, 23% (17) and 4% (3) reported to have a disability.

The mean age of adults participating as assessed at baseline was 34.6 years ( $SD=7.62$ ), with an age range of 23 to 58 years. The majority attending were female 94% (67) and biological parents 94.6% (70). Over half (62%) were married or co-habiting with a partner. The average family income was low, with 78% of parents reporting a total household income of less than £19,999. The majority of parents were not in full-time employment, 43% looking after the family home, 7% unemployed and seeking employment and 22% in

part-time employment. The level of education attainment for parents was low with 21% (10) reporting no qualifications, 26% (12) a single GSCE or NVQ Level 1 and 19% 5 GSCEs or NVQ Level 2. Parent partner qualifications were equally low. In terms of ethnicity, the majority of parents participating were white British 70% (49). Of the parents participating 16% (12) reported a disability.

Further demographic information on participating children and parents, and control children is available in Annex A.

### Measures

A demographic questionnaire was administered to parents pre-programme. This questionnaire included questions on age, gender, ethnicity, disability and special educational needs of the participating child, and age, gender, ethnicity, disability, educational qualifications and employment status of participating parent as well as questions on partner educational qualifications, family structure and family income.

The parent questionnaire was administered across three time points: pre-programme, post-programme delivery and at three-month follow-up. It included a series of different measures to assess parents' perceptions of child behaviour, parental attitudes to involvement in their child's education, the quality of the home learning environment and an assessment of their self-esteem. The questionnaire also included questions on enjoyment of the programme and perceived influence on family interaction. The questionnaire included the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ: Goodman, 1997) to assess changes in parents' perceptions of child behaviour. The measure includes subscales, which assess emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems and pro-social behaviour. The questionnaire assessed parental attitudes to involvement in their child's education through a measure of parental role construction and of parental self-efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997). Parent role construction assesses parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do in relation to their children's education and the types of behaviours that follow. It is shown to be an important influencer on parents' decisions about involvement. Positive parent self-efficacy or belief in one's abilities to act in ways that will produce desired outcomes is associated with parents making positive decisions about their engagement in their child's education. The questionnaire assessed the quality of the home learning environment of the child through the Home Learning Environment Index for KS1 used within the Effective Pre-School and Primary Education 7-11 Project (the EPPE study)



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## Methodology: Quantitative

(see Sylva et al, 2008). The questionnaire also included a measure of parents' individual self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965).

A demographic questionnaire was administered to teachers pre-programme. This questionnaire included questions on age, gender, ethnicity, disability and special educational needs of the participating child.

The teacher questionnaire was administered across three time points, pre-programme, post-programme delivery and at three-month follow-up. It included a series of different measures to assess child behaviour, child's softer skills at school, and level of parental engagement in education. The questionnaire also included questions on teachers' perceived overall academic ability of the pupil, reading and math ability. The questionnaire included a bespoke developed scale of children's softer skills (see appendix F) and the teacher version of the *SDQ* (Goodman, 1997) to assess changes in perceptions of child behaviour at school. This measure also includes the subscales: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems and pro-social behaviour. The teacher assessment of parental involvement was taken from the Hoover-Dempsey studies of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992).

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 – at pre-, post- and three-month follow-up.

## Procedure

Families that took part in the programme were invited to participate if they had a child between four and six years of age and were interested in taking part in a programme to support their children's learning. No inclusion criteria was set for families taking part, however schools were invited to take part based on the high proportion (20% or more) of children eligible for free school meals (FSM).<sup>3</sup> Many of the parents attended a coffee morning session in advance of the programme. These recruitment events provided information for parents and an opportunity to collect pre data for those who agreed to participate (for those unable to attend coffee morning sessions, pre data was collected at the start of the first session). Teachers also completed a questionnaire and

BPVS3 assessment on children participating in advance of attending the programme or within the same week of the first session.

Post-programme parent questionnaires were conducted in week eight of the programme. Schools were instructed to complete post-programme teacher questionnaires and the BPVS3 assessment within a few weeks of programme completion. The three-month follow-up was completed through the co-facilitator contacting parents within schools and requesting questionnaire and BVS3 completion from teachers.

**Table 2: Measures for participants and controls**

	Participant group			Control groups		
	Pre	Post	3mnth	Pre	Post	3mnth
<b>Parent questionnaire</b>	x	x	x	-	-	-
Demographics	x	-	-	-	-	-
Enjoyment/influence /impact	-	x	x	-	-	-
SDQ parent report	x	x	x	-	-	-
Role construction	x	x	x	-	-	-
Self-efficacy	x	x	x	-	-	-
HLE index	x	x	x	-	-	-
Self-esteem	x	x	x	-	-	-
<b>Teacher questionnaire</b>	x	x	x	x	x	x
Demographics	x	-	-	x	-	-
Academic ability	x	x	x	x	x	x
Children's softer skills	x	x	x	x	x	x
SDQ teacher report	x	x	x	x	x	x
Parental involvement	x	x	x	x	x	x
<b>Teacher assessment</b>						
BPVS3	x	x	x	x	x	x

<sup>3</sup> In some cases schools under 20% FSM were invited to take part if regional programmes teams provided a strong rationale for working with the school and the benefits of their involvement.

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Methodology: Quantitative

Of the 76 participating families who completed parent questionnaires at baseline, 80% (61) completed post-programme parent questionnaires and 50% (38) completed parent questionnaires at three-month follow-up. Teachers completed pre-programme questionnaires for 78 children participating in the programme, 58 post-programme questionnaires for participating children (74% of those with pre-data) and 49 three-month follow-up questionnaires for participating children (63% of those with pre-data). Teachers from five schools completed pre-programme questionnaires for 51 control children, 39 post-programme questionnaires for control children (77% of those with pre-data) and 37 at three-month follow-up questionnaires for control children (73% of those with pre-data).

Six schools accurately completed and submitted the data from the teacher assessment for participating child at pre-programme. One school completed the pre-assessment midway through programme delivery and therefore have been excluded. The other two schools failed to complete the assessment accurately and therefore have been excluded. Of the 57 children participating in the programme accurately assessed at pre-programme, 53% (30) were male and 47% (27) were female. Teachers completed assessments for 45 participating children at post-programme (79% of those with pre-data) and 44 participating children at three-month follow-up (77% of those with pre-data).

Of the six schools that submitted accurate data on the BPVS3 pre-programme, only four completed assessments for control children (two schools submitted post-programme and three-month follow-up and two schools submitted either post-or three month follow-up assessments). Of these 32 children, 55% (17) were male and 44% (14) were female. Teachers completed assessments for 22 control children at post-programme (69% of those with pre-data) and 23 control children at three-month follow-up (72% of those with pre-data).

See Figure 1 for a flow chart showing progression of families through the study.

## Analysis

The primary objective of the quantitative element of the evaluation was to assess the child and parent outcomes of those attending the programme over time. Significant differences in mean values for each of the child and parent outcomes were analysed at pre- and post-programme and at pre- and three-month follow-up using paired *t*-tests.

The secondary objective was to assess and compare whether the children allocated to the control group had a

similar trajectory of outcomes as the participating children as measured by the teacher questionnaire and teacher assessment of receptive vocabulary over time. Significant differences in mean values for each of the child and parent outcomes were analysed at pre- and post-programme and pre- and three-month follow-up using paired *t*-tests.

Additionally, significant differences between the participant and control groups were analysed for at baseline (and at post- and three-month follow-up where appropriate) and have been included in the findings

The extent of missing data in the teacher and parent questionnaires and BPVS3 assessment has an impact on the quality of analysis possible and the ability to generalise the data.

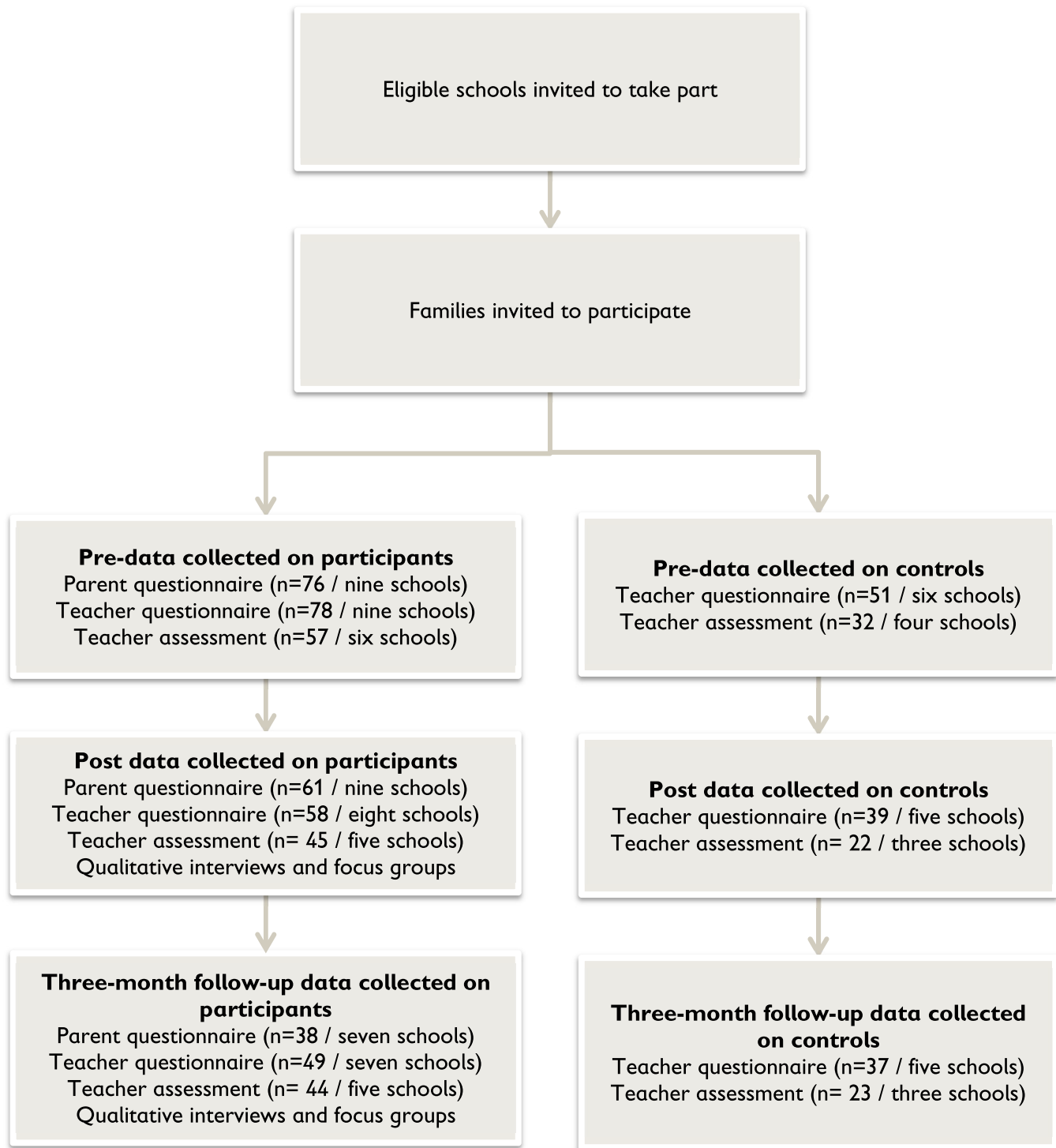
## Programme delivery

From those participants who attended the coffee morning and/or signed up to the programme, 65% attended a minimum of six sessions; whereas 69% who attended at least one session complete a minimum of six sessions. Attendance at any given session ranged from highest at 81% at week two to lowest at 62% at weeks six and seven. Unfortunately, one school's monitoring information was not submitted and therefore their data has been omitted from the overall retention rate (the above figures are based on eight out of nine schools that submitted full attendance records). However, the monitoring data that was provided from the ninth school was that all the participants attended a minimum of six sessions.

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Methodology: Quantitative

Figure 1: Flow chart showing progression of families through the study.



# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Methodology: Qualitative

### Methodology: Qualitative

#### Participants

Three types of qualitative methods were used during this test:

1. Focus groups
2. One-to-one interviews with parents
3. One-to-one interviews with school co-facilitator

Three parent interviews were held (two in Scotland and one in England), one facilitator interview (England), four focus groups, one post programme (Scotland) and three longitudinal follow-ups (one Scotland and two England). Qualitative data was also collected in the questionnaires provided to the nine schools and was included in the analysis. The majority of focus group and interview participants were female. There was however some representation from fathers who had participated in the programme and some who had not.

#### Procedure

Focus groups were organised by the school co-facilitator but held by a member of SCUUK, with the school co-facilitator or SCUUK Trainer not present. All parents who had been involved in the programme were invited to participate in both focus groups and the one-to-one interviews, with participation voluntary. Parents and schools were given information sheets explaining the purpose of the interviews and focus groups and what to expect on the day.

During both the focus groups and interviews, a number of generic open-ended questions were asked to try and tease out certain themes, such as: why participants signed up to the programme; what they liked and did not like; what worked or did not work and whether there were any suggested improvements they would make for the programme (please see Annex B, C, D and E for examples of the focus group and interview question templates and information sheets shared with parents).





# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Findings: Quantitative findings

### Findings

The overall goal of the evaluation was to determine whether the programme has the potential to positively impact on children and parents attending and to generate learning from children, parents and staff participating that can be used to inform the programme development and delivery.

### Quantitative findings

#### Enjoyment, satisfaction and parent perceived influence of the programme on the family

At post-programme delivery, nearly all (95% (60)) of parents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that they really enjoyed the families connect programme.

Nearly all (95% (59)) of parents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that their child really enjoyed the families connect programme. Similarly, 90% (57) of parents perceived the influence of Families Connect on what they and child do together at home. Furthermore, 78% (49) of parents perceived an influence of the programme on other members of the family at home. Overwhelmingly, 90% (57) said that they would recommend families connect and 71% (36) said that they had already.

At three-month follow-up the majority of parents who completed the questionnaire (72% (28)) perceived an impact of families connect on what they do with their child in the home and 67% (26) perceived an influence of the programme on other members of the family at home.

#### Post 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
- 90% (57) said that they would recommend families connect
- 71% (36) said that they had recommended families connect already

#### At three-month follow-up:

- 72% (28) perceived an impact of Families Connect on what they do with their child in the home
- 67% (26) perceived an influence of the programme on other members of the family at home

#### Teacher perceived influence on child's academic ability

Teachers were asked to report on participating children's overall academic ability, reading ability and math ability at all three time points relative to other children (i.e. within the lowest 10%). From pre- to post-programme, 20% (9) of pupils were reported to have improved in overall academic ability whereas 5% (2) decreased. Teacher reports of participating children's progress in reading ability were more marked between pre- and post-programme; 45% (19) improved whereas 7% (3) decreased. Teacher reports of participating children's progress in math ability between pre- and post-programme were 23% (10) improved whereas 5% (2) decreased. At three-month follow-up the overall trend of improvement in child academic ability between pre- and post-programme reported by teachers was no longer evident.

#### Post Programme:

- 20% (9) of pupils were reported to have improved in overall academic ability
- 5% (2) of pupils were reported to have decreased in overall academic ability
- 45% (19) of pupils were reported to have improved in reading ability
- 7% (3) of pupils were reported to have decreased in reading ability
- 23% (10) of pupils were reported to have improved in maths ability
- 5% (2) of pupils were reported to have decreased in maths ability

No overall trend was evident at three-month follow-up.

#### Child outcomes

**Child receptive vocabulary** was measured at pre-, post- and three-month follow-up through an age-standardised teacher-based assessment (BPVS3). Significant improvements

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Findings: Quantitative findings

were assessed based on t-test comparison of means across pre- and post-programme and between pre-programme and three-month follow-up.

No significant difference was evident between pre-programme and post-programme receptive vocabulary mean standardized scores for the participating group; however a significant difference was evident between pre-programme and long follow-up. Pre-programme mean score =94.9 ( $SD=12.0$ ) and post programme mean score =97.6 ( $SD=10.7$ ) ( $t=-2.1$  (43)  $p<.05$ ). 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. Out of the 44 children who were assessed at pre-programme and at three-month follow-up, 61% of children's standardised scores improved, 5% remained the same and 34% decreased. For those participating children who improved, the average increase was 8 points. Approximately one fifth of children (18.2%) moved from below age-appropriate standardised scores to at or above.

No significant differences in mean scores were found over time for the control children.

**Child softer skills** were measured within the teacher questionnaire using a bespoke scale developed to be an age appropriate assessment of children's attitudes and behaviours towards school and learning such as general progress, motivation, concentration and enjoyment. The scale includes a range of statements such as 'Child wants to learn new things' and 'Child can concentrate and work independently', to which the teacher rates on a six point likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree (a full version of the scale is included in appendix F). Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was used to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the scale, which was considered excellent when applying standard criteria at pre-programme, post-programme and three-month follow-up;  $\alpha=0.95$  at each time point (Cronbach, 1951; George and Mallery, 2003).

Significant improvements were assessed based on paired t-test comparison of means across pre- and post-programme and between pre-programme and three-month follow-up. A significant difference was evident in child softer skills as reported by teachers between pre-programme assessment and post-programme assessment for the 52 children where measures were completed at pre- and post-programme time points. Pre-programme mean score =53.1 ( $SD=12.9$ ) and post-programme mean score =57.1 ( $SD=11.8$ ), ( $t=-5.3$  (51)  $p<.001$ ). The overall impact was sustained over time with a significant difference evident for the 49 children where measures were completed at pre-programme and three-month follow-up. Pre-

programme mean score =53.8 ( $SD=11.3$ ) and three-month follow-up mean score =57.9 ( $SD=11.2$ ), ( $t=-3.3$  (48)  $p<.01$ ).

Five schools completed measures of children's softer skills at the three time points for controls and participating children. A significant difference (assessed by independent sample t-tests) was 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. Mean =52.9 ( $SD=11.1$ ) for participating children and mean =58.0 ( $SD=10.7$ ) for control children ( $t=2.1$  (79)  $p<.05$ ) at pre-programme. The lack of equivalence between the two groups pre-programme limits further assessment but also provides evidence of the potential impact of the programme to sustainably improve the softer skills of participating children to those reported of their peers.

**Child behaviour** at home and at school was assessed using teacher and parent report versions of the *SDQ*. Significant improvements in behaviour were found between pre- and post-programme for the children participating on the teacher reported *SDQ*. Total difficulties score mean =9.2 ( $SD=7.9$ ) compared to mean =7.2 ( $SD=7.5$ ), ( $t=4.5$  (44)  $p<.001$ )) and subscales: conduct problems mean = 1.3 ( $SD=2.0$ ) compared to mean =1.0 ( $SD=1.9$ ), ( $t=2.5$  (46)  $p<.05$ )); hyperactivity/inattention mean = 4.6 ( $SD=3.6$ ) compared to mean =3.7 ( $SD=3.6$ ), ( $t=3.6$  (45)  $p<.001$ )); peer relationship problems mean = 1.8 ( $SD=2.3$ ) compared to mean =1.3 ( $SD=2.1$ ), ( $t=2.8$  (45)  $p<.01$ )) and pro-social behaviour mean =6.8 ( $SD=3.0$ ) compared to mean = 7.6 ( $SD=2.8$ ), ( $t=-3.6$  (44)  $p<.001$ ). No significant difference in child behaviour was found for the subscale of emotional symptoms or for any of the subscales at three-month follow-up, suggesting the impact on child behaviour as perceived by the teacher faded over time. No significant differences between pre-programme, post-programme and three-month follow-up were evident for the control children. There were also no significant differences evident between participants and control children in the five schools which returned teacher questionnaires for both groups as assessed by independent sample t-tests at the three time points.

At post-programme parental report of child behaviour, no significant differences were found in any of the subscales apart from emotional problem behaviour. Significant differences in parents' perception of emotional problems were evident between pre- and post-programme mean =2.6 ( $SD=2.1$ ) compared to mean =2.0 ( $SD=1.9$ ), ( $t=2.08$  (53)  $p<.05$ )). At three-month follow-up, significant differences were found for total difficulties mean =11.1 ( $SD=5.8$ ) compared to mean =8.8 ( $SD=5.2$ ), ( $t=2.3$  (25)  $p<.03$ )) and hyper

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Findings: Quantitative findings

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activity/inattention mean =4.2 ( $SD=2.5$ ) compared to mean = 3.5 ( $SD=2.3$ ), ( $t=2.2$  (34)  $p< .05$ )).

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## Findings: Quantitative findings

**Table 3: Child outcomes – Difference in mean scores between pre- and post-programme**

	Participant group			Control group		
	Pre-	Post-	P-value	Pre-	Post-	P-value
Receptive vocabulary (BPVS3)	95.0	96.3	ns	93.2	92.6	ns
Softer skills	53.1	57.1	$p < .001$	57.9	60.0	ns
<i>Behaviour</i>						
<i>Teacher report SDQ</i>						
Total difficulties <sup>a</sup>	9.2	7.2	$p < .001$	5.6	5.6	ns
Conduct problems <sup>a</sup>	1.3	1.0	$p < .05$	0.7	0.6	ns
Emotional	1.5	1.5	ns	1.3	1.2	ns
Hyperactivity/inattention	4.6	3.7	$p < .001$	2.8	2.7	ns
Peer relationship problems	1.8	1.3	$p < .01$	1.3	1.1	ns
Pro-social behaviour	6.8	7.6	$p < .001$	7.3	7.4	ns
<i>Parent report SDQ</i>						
Total difficulties	10.5	9.7	ns	-	-	-
Conduct problems	1.4	1.4	ns	-	-	-
Emotional	2.6	2.0	$p < .05$	-	-	-
Hyperactivity/inattention	4.3	4.3	ns	-	-	-
Peer relationship problems	2.2	2.0	ns	-	-	-
Pro-social behaviour	7.6	7.9	ns	-	-	-

<sup>a</sup> One item was accidentally excluded from the conduct problems subscale of the SDQ for both teacher and parent questionnaires at all three time points.

**Table 4: Child outcomes difference in mean scores between pre- and three-month follow-up**

	Participant group			Control group		
	Pre-	3mnth	P-value	Pre-	3mnth	P-value
Receptive vocabulary (BPVS3)	94.9	97.6	$p < .05$	98.8	98.2	ns
Softer skills	53.8	57.9	$p < .01$	57.7	58.5	ns
<i>Behaviour</i>						
<i>Teacher report SDQ</i>						
Total difficulties <sup>a</sup>	7.0	5.6	ns	5.8	6.2	ns
Conduct problems <sup>a</sup>	0.8	0.6	ns	0.7	0.6	ns
Emotional	1.9	1.4	ns	0.9	0.9	ns
Hyperactivity/inattention	3.9	3.4	ns	2.9	3.1	ns
Peer relationship problems	1.4	1.3	ns	1.1	1.4	ns
Pro-social behaviour	7.6	6.9	ns	7.5	7.5	ns
<i>Parent report SDQ</i>						
Total difficulties	11.1	8.8	$p < .05$	-	-	-
Conduct problems	1.5	1.2	ns	-	-	-
Emotional	2.9	2.3	ns	-	-	-
Hyperactivity/inattention	4.2	3.5	$p < .05$	-	-	-
Peer relationship problems	2.2	1.8	ns	-	-	-
Pro-social behaviour	7.6	8.2	ns	-	-	-

<sup>a</sup> One item was accidentally excluded from the conduct problems subscale of the SDQ for both teacher and parent questionnaires at all three time points.



# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Findings: Quantitative findings

### Parent outcomes

Parental involvement and engagement in education was measured through self-report scales of parent role construction and parent self-efficacy. No significant differences were found for parental role construction between pre-, post-programme and three-month follow-up. Significant improvements were evident in parent's perceptions of self-efficacy between pre- and post-programme mean score = 31.1 ( $SD=5.2$ ) compared to mean score = 32.8 ( $SD=4.6$ ), ( $t=-2.0$  (41)  $p < .05$ ) and between pre- and three-month follow-up, mean score = 30.6 ( $SD=5.5$ ) compared to mean score = 33.0 ( $SD=5.0$ ), ( $t=-2.8$  (29)  $p < .01$ )).

Teacher perception of parent engagement in education and efficacy was also measured. Significant improvements in teacher perception of parent engagement were evident between pre- and post-programme scores for participants mean score = 32.4 ( $SD=6.8$ ) compared to mean score = 34.1 ( $SD=6.1$ ), ( $t=-3.6$  (55)  $p < .001$ )). 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 teacher's perception of parental involvement can be attributed to the programme as similar significant improvements were found for the control children within the five schools between pre- and post-programme mean score = 31.1 ( $SD=8.6$ ) compared to mean score = 33.3 ( $SD=6.6$ ), ( $t=-3.6$  (55)  $p < .05$ )) but not between pre- and three-month follow-up. No significant differences in mean scores were found at either pre-, post-programme and three month follow-up between control and intervention groups in the five schools that submitted both participant and control data.

No significant differences were found for parental reports of self-esteem over the three time periods. No significant differences were found for parental reports on the home learning environment index total score or subscales of home computing, enrichment activities, interaction or expressive play over time.

**Table 5: Parent outcomes difference in mean scores between pre- and post-programme**

	Participant group			Control group		
	Pre-	Post-	P-value	Pre-	Post-	P-value
Parent role construction	52.8	53.0	ns	-	-	-
Parent self-efficacy						
Parent report	31.1	32.8	$p < .05$	-	-	-
Teacher report	32.4	34.1	$p < .001$	31.1	33.3	$p < .05$
Self-esteem	19.5	20.4	ns	-	-	-
Home learning environment	32.8	33.3	ns	-	-	-

**Table 6: Parent outcomes difference in mean scores between pre- and three-month follow-up**

	Participant group			Control group		
	Pre-	3 mnth	P-value	Pre-	3 mnth	P-value
Parent role construction	52.5	52.5	ns	-	-	-
Parent self-efficacy						
Parent report	30.6	33.0	$p < .01$	-	-	-
Teacher report	32.4	33.5	ns	31.3	32.8	ns
Self-esteem	19.9	20.6	ns	-	-	-
Home learning environment	32.4	32.1	ns	-	-	-

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Findings: Qualitative findings

### Qualitative findings

The purpose of the qualitative research was to identify core themes that capture some of the underlying dynamics and intricate patterns that emerge in complex social interventions such as Families Connect that may not be so easily identified in quantitative measures.

Focus group objectives included:

1. To get more detail around the key outcomes of the programme (Home Learning Environment, parent/ child interaction, relationship with school, empathy for child's learning, supporting child to learn).
2. To ascertain a situation analysis of where families are (the context of their lives since the project has started).
3. Parental feedback on programme content and delivery to inform future development and implementation.

For one-to-one interviews, there were two additional objectives:

1. To provide greater personal insight, including around potentially sensitive topics, than is possible in focus group discussions.
2. A more holistic approach to understanding parental perceptions of programme implementation (for example, potentially more negative feedback or greater contextualisation than is unlikely to come up in focus groups).

The following section will explore the parent motivation for signing up to Families Connect, and then discuss the identified themes concluding with participant suggested improvements for the programme.

### Parent motivation to take part in Families Connect

*"I want to be a better mother."*

The above statement is thought provoking, it doesn't in any way suggest the respondent is not a good mother, but rather, she wants to continue to develop new strategies to help her child/children succeed. 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.

In the summer term of 2016, 78 parents signed up to take part in the programme, with approximately 65% completing. Reasons that parents signed up to Families Connect varied across the parents we interviewed. Their rationale falls into three categories:

1. School engagement in Families Connect and/or exposure of an intervention based in the school setting
2. To understand and help child develop their social and emotional learning
3. To build parenting skills to help in the Home Learning Environment

#### **School engagement in Families Connect and/or previous exposure of an intervention based in the school setting**

School involvement in recruitment and teacher promotion of the programme was also stated as a rationale for signing up to Families Connect. This was not only reported to increase the parent interest in the programme but also sparked the children's interest within the programme.

*"It was brought to my attention by my child's teacher and thought it would be good to do."*

Previous exposure to Save the Children UK's Families and Schools Together (FAST) within the school setting is reported to have influenced some parents to consider another programme with the perception that Families Connect will provide new learnings for the parents and help the family unit.

*"I was here for fast club, and it was so interesting, so I would like to take part on Families Connect, to know what we can learn."*

#### **To understand and help child develop their social and emotional learning**

Parents reported that the social and emotional development modules in Families Connect were of particular interest to them and encouraged them to attend. Some of the parents just wanted a better general understanding of their child's social and emotional well-being, for example one parent stated she wanted:

*"...a better understanding about what he thinks and feels to help my son deal with his emotions."*

Other parents spoke directly about strategies to improve emotionally induced behaviour, for example:

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Findings: Qualitative findings

*"My son is beginning to develop behavioural problems and I'd like to fix it before it develops into something worse."*

A few parents had particular concerns about their child's emotional wellbeing. Following family breakdown one of the parents stated, she wanted to help with:

*"...his emotions and help him open up better with the way he was feeling."*

### **To build parenting skills to help in the Home Learning Environment (HLE)**

Most of the parents referred to learning new strategies for home learning as an incentive to sign up to Families Connect or simply just to be more involved in their children's learning:

*"I would like to find new ideas to help with learning at home."*

A few parents in one of the school focus groups noted that they took part because they believed the programme "was a curriculum based math programme" and were frustrated when this was not the case. A review of recruitment techniques and messages may be required to ensure that the parents and teachers understand the objectives of the programme.

### **General feedback on the overall experience**

Most of the parents who participated in the interviews and Focus groups discussed how Families Connect met expectations and was very helpful for the families overall.

*"I think its good program for every parent. I learn lots of things; they help me every day with my son."*

Parents also reported that the children loved the programme and were upset when the programme ended.

*"It's what they always look forward to, 'What game are we having next week?'"*

On the other hand, some parents expressed not understanding how the Families Connect programme will have helped their children. They said it did not change the way they spoke to their children, and that their children were all very open about their feelings before they attended. They also felt there should be more parent and child interaction and the children should be brought in earlier to

take part. Some of this group of parents discussed being "bored" with being sat down and spoken to and became uncomfortable when asked to try the activities with another adult, indicating "it felt like school" with "too many pen and paper activities". It should be noted that most of these parents attended the same school and Families Connect sessions.

Parents also suggested that the programme wasn't necessarily catered to fit all children, for example, one parent felt part of the program put an emphasis on negative feelings which is already an issue with her autistic son; she felt the programme "could've had more positive feelings in there." Further exploration is required to evaluate the effect of the programme for children diagnosed with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Excitingly the teacher questionnaires indicate early signs of the programme effectiveness. Some teachers commented on child progress at school, two quotes illustrate this below:

*"He is far more confident with his reading and writing independently."*

*"She has grown in confidence and she is speaking more in class."*

However it wasn't all positive with some teachers being unaware of any specific impact or they didn't believe that there was enough time for impact to be seen. For example, one teacher was "not aware of any specific impact".

## Thematic analysis

Responses to the other questions have been categorised by a number of identified themes:

1. Home Learning Environment (HLE)
2. Enriching activities;
3. One-to-one engagement
4. Communication
5. Parent self-efficacy
6. Understanding of child empathy and behaviour
7. Family relationships, school engagement and social capital.

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Findings: Qualitative findings

### Home Learning Environment

*"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 quote above expresses difficulties that many parents face when trying to engage children in learning at home. Nonetheless, most parents felt that Families Connect had a positive impact on how they interact with their children and how they interact with their learning and homework by giving those new ways to express themselves. Some parents felt the programme had provided new insights into ways of learning at home and had increased the amount of reading and incorporating numeracy and literacy at home.

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

Another parent stated that the programme had had a positive effect on the wider family unit, with the youngest son practising phonics on iPad and the eldest daughter now doing homework with the family whereas previously she would have done it in her room alone.

*"I loved that some of the activities led us to explore other things, e.g. magic envelope led onto 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 make my child feel happy that it was an activity that we could do together."*

*"Family night check in every night is six o' clock, I'm like right let's check in... everyday I'm maybe using three or four of these things [Families Connect activities]."*

### Enriching activities

*"I truly loved this programme as did my children, it made me more mindful and understanding as a parent, every week I learned something. It was exciting and definitely changed my way of looking at situations. I would recommended the programme to parents it was just what I needed in order to deal with situations and be aware of my actions."*

Almost all of the parents discussed trying all of the different activities from Families Connect at home and how different tasks provided new ways to engage children and help make learning at home fun and bring the family together.

*"All things that I've done and the tasks and the wee activities have really, it has really helped me, me and my wee girl, helped me understand where she is at."*

*"We did a lot of numbers [since Families Connect] we go past the metro station every morning, going home to come to and from school and they look at the clock there and the numbers, 'the metro is going to be here in this many minutes' and they are learning a lot from it. I sit down and play things with them out of bottle lids and stuff."*

Although there was an abundance of reports regarding the benefits of the activities, there was also some negative or indication that the programme had been ineffective for particular families.

*"Some didn't click with my son but it was still a good activity that may be more worth-while for another child."*

In one of the focus groups, parents agreed that it would be good to move some of the activities outdoors if weather permitted, for example, use a life-size version of the buses on the playground, as children like being hands on and practical. It was felt the kids would be more reactive if so.

### One-to-one engagement

*"I was looking at it to maybe bring us a wee bit closer and it really has brought us closer, so I'm pretty, I am pretty happy with that, so I am."*

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. The programme has been reported as beneficial in helping parents communicate



# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Findings: Qualitative findings

with their children. The parents felt that Families Connect had a positive impact on how they interact with their children and how they interact with their learning and homework by giving them new ways to express themselves.

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

### Communications

*"Talking about it used to make me feel more upset, but the programme made me understand that you need to talk."*

The programme was beneficial in helping parents communicate with their children and provided an opportunity for the one-to-one time with the individual child. Parents spoke about the programme reminding them to listen to their children and changed how the parent interacted with their children. One parent reported how she now praises children when they do something good, talks to them more and no longer shuts down on difficult situations.

*"It's kind of reminded me to listen better... It's reminded me that when my daughter is talking to me, to actually stop, physically turn around, look at her and listen to what she is trying to tell me, 'cause it frustrates her if she thinks she is not being heard."*

In one of the focus groups, parents spoke about changes in other children in the group and the way they communicate.

*"She speaks to people a hell of a lot nicer than she used to... Over the weeks we've all noticed a difference in her, she's not quite as cheeky."*

### Parent self-efficacy

*"I just feel as though it built my confidence a bit."*

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."*

A number of parents reported a change in their own attitude.

*"I feel myself getting less frustrated and less thinking that she's trying to act up, thinking well maybe she needs that wee minute."*

One parent reported that whilst she had always read to her children, she had dreaded homework, whereas now she felt it was something that they could make a fun game of and use to draw the family closer together. Another parent reported that the programme had greatly helped her communicate herself, and that without it she would not have been able to.

*"I'm dyslexic too, not in a bad way I just can read things and then I can't go back and read it ever so don't expect me to read this but with Tobias because he takes a wee bit longer to do his homework than the rest it's great because I learn with him to. So it was great to go back and do that all over again and stuff because it has all changed again. To learn something new all the time, it was great."*

One mum describes 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 so just to kind of build confidence and things."*

### Understanding child empathy and behaviour

A group of parents noted that they had not expected the programme to make a change, but that they now felt it really helped the way that they communicate with their children emotionally. They felt that the facilitators "never stop encouraging parents to see things from your child's point of view". Specifically, the Feelings Fan resource introduced in the first workshop had a positive impact in helping with communication and allowing children to express themselves more. Parents further noted that this effect was not only that their children were able to identify their own feelings but also identify emotions in others.

One parent discussed whilst she felt that her daughter was already ahead of her peers in terms of being more academically able, the programme had boosted her daughter's confidence, "made her speak more and feel special". Another reported that the Feelings Fan was effective for communication about her son's emotions, noting a marked change in behaviour which was previously hard to manage: "The Feelings Fan helped to identify situations before they deteriorated". She noted that a support worker had also

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Findings: Qualitative findings

reported seeing an improvement and had taken a step back after managing much better with her son.

*"I feel like I am at the end of the tunnel now because I had a wee boy that didn't want to open up and share his emotions and now he'll kinda tell you if he's sad, if he's angry, is like I can see the light now in him."*

In addition to the way they communicate with their children emotionally, parents reported having a better understanding of children's needs and emotional well-being and some parents noticed an improvement in their child's caring, their appreciation, expression of emotion and trust.

*"I love how it is putting tools on how to better understand and connect with my child and having reassurance that I'm actually doing a good job."*

### Family relationships

*"It has brought us more family time."*

Respondents reported a positive impact on the wider family, including more communication about their days, feeling more loved, feeling closer as a family, more one-to-one time with middle son, a happier home environment and more wider family time.

*"Just means if they're happy, I'm happy, it's like a more happier environment basically... because we are all communicating".*

### Social capital

*"It's not like you are just going for a course, it's like 'oh, I am going out with my friends today,' so we all have fun, we talk, we chat... we laugh a lot, we chat a lot, it's just fun!"*

Parents stated that they liked working in a group, they enjoyed meeting new people and the fact that this helped to build confidence and provided support. Families Connect offered a support network and an opportunity to have adult conversation with people who were going through similar experiences, reducing feelings of alienation.

*"There is other people on the planet that are going through the same thing as you're going through... They're coming in and sharing their feelings with us and saying this is what happened and this is what I did and you're like, oh right, well, I will try that next time around."*

Families Connect was reported to have an impact on the parents' wider networks, as parents in one group reported shared learnings with friends who do not have children attending the school and others reported feeling more confident to speak to parents outside of school.

*"I would walk to the school and I would only speak to the parents that I knew and this group has actually gave me the confidence to talk to other parents outside the school."*

### School engagement

*"It has been a good opportunity for parents to become involved in school life. Parents feel more comfortable in school environment and have gained confidence when supporting children."*  
(Teacher reported)

The parents reported having more confidence when discussing any issues with the school since completing Families Connect. One parent spoke of increased confidence when joining school events because she had developed relationships with the teachers and the parents.

*"I talk to the teachers more and I talk to more parents than I did before."*

Furthermore, the increase in parent engagement and confidence was suggested to have given the children more confidence in school.

*"Getting to know school, showing my son that I know the teachers and therefore giving him confidence was most important part of programme for me."*

Another example of positive child outcomes that teachers reported were in terms of children's softer skills:

*"Since participating in this programme, she is certainly more able to focus, complete a task and concentrate for longer periods of time."*

It should be noted that one teacher reported that "the programme had a positive impact on the children in terms of bringing the parents into the school and allowing the children to work with them. However, there was a negative impact if the parents did not continue to attend." This was in relation to the parents not turning up to the school and correlates with the pride children displayed when their parents attended the school. There were also fears expressed in one focus group

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Findings: Qualitative findings

that the programme made their children miss out on the education being offered in the classroom. These parents felt that the programme was “playing” and would like to see Families Connect be more closely aligned with the current curriculum and the specific school’s maths routine. These parents are the same as those who had said that they thought they were signing up to a maths programme.

When discussing communication and support provided from the school within other focus groups, some parents felt:

*“There is no parent council, but since this has started up, there will be a parent council in this school because a lot of us are actually stepping up and saying 'right this is the new parent council but before this group took part, I would never go, 'oh I'll be on the parent council' because it just wasn't something you would do... Nothing stops me from getting involved in this now, and I most certainly will be on the parent council.”*

However, others felt that their school already had good processes in place and didn't feel the programme had any specific effect on the support or communication they received from the school.

### **Additional suggestions or reflections made about Families Connect**

Families also felt they would have liked to have kept meeting after the end of the programme and more could have been done to support this.

*“It's the best thing I have done here, I think it should continue, or some sort of version or just time that I could have with her, maybe in the school, maybe just a wee meeting once a month or something would be fantastic.”*

Some parents also commented how it would be good to encourage more dads to participate on the programme. Some suggested that a male facilitator may help in making it “dad friendly.”

Some teachers suggested that additional information about the programme, to help understand it more from the beginning and to help explain the programme more widely within the school and to parents, would be beneficial.



Parents discuss the week's topics with a Save the Children facilitator and school staff.



A father and daughter enjoy playing a counting game together.



### Discussion

The results of the quantitative and qualitative 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 on the programme. The test has also generated significant learning that will continue to inform the programme development for ongoing implementation.

The results of the quantitative element of the evaluation provide preliminary support for the potential impact of Families Connect on young children's language development as measured by children's understanding of receptive vocabulary. The findings of significantly higher standardised scores at three-month follow-up for the participating children but not at post-programme, is likely a result of changes in children's receptive vocabulary being more longer-term. Therefore, changes in this outcome would not necessarily be expected immediately after post-programme. The findings related to teacher-reported gains in participating children's softer skills demonstrate the potential impact of the programme on children's attitudes and behaviour towards school and learning, which were sustained over time. The evaluation also provides evidence on the immediate impact of the programme on child behaviour at school, although these effects were not sustained over time. Teacher-reported changes in children's academic abilities, particularly in reading, were also evident post-programme but these impacts were not shown to be sustained over time. Parents' perceptions of improvements in child behaviour were also evident immediately post-programme and at three-month follow-up.

Positive impact of the programme on parents was less evident within the quantitative analysis. Sustained impact was demonstrated through teacher reports of parent self-efficacy and also parent perceptions of the influence of the programme on their interaction with their child and also the influence of the programme on family members.

Overwhelmingly, parental satisfaction with the programme was very high with nearly all (95%) of parents who completed post-questionnaires reporting that both they and their child had really enjoyed taking part. Rates of retention and attendance of the programme were high, with 65% of those participants who attended the coffee morning and/or signed up to the programme attending a minimum of six sessions. Attendance within individual sessions was also high, ranging from between 62% to 81%.

However, limitations of the current evaluation include the extent of missing quantitative data, which limited the generalisability of the study and the quality of the statistical analysis – particularly the extent to which the control group could be used to provide initial evidence of attribution to the programme. The lack of findings related to the home learning environment in the quantitative analysis may be a result of the limitations of the HLE index scale to measure more subtle changes, such as quality rather than quantity of interactions between parent and child.

The findings from the qualitative element of the evaluation provide detailed contextual evidence to support understanding of the ways in which the programme has influenced the families taking part. It has also generated learning that will influence the development and delivery of the programme in future.

The main reasons given by parents as to why they signed up to the programme also support the quantitative evidence on parent role construction and self-efficacy, as most parents said they were interested in further supporting their children's learning and development, and had signed up to the programme to be able to do this more effectively. Overwhelmingly the parents taking part had enjoyed the programme and said that it met their expectations. However, parents also provided information on elements of the programme that some struggled with or found less interesting or relevant. Some parents reported not being clear on the programme objectives before they had signed up or having different expectations of the programme – it was most often these families that took the least from the programme and did not necessarily see the benefit for their children.

The importance of the qualitative evidence in demonstrating programme impact is clear in the reports by parents of the change in the quality of their interactions with their children. Parents also reported an enrichment of the home learning environment, which was not evident in the quantitative analysis. The qualitative findings provided evidence of changes in child behaviour – supported within the quantitative analysis.

The findings also provided evidence of the ways in which the programme had influenced changes in family communication and interaction; by providing the time and the space for the one-on-one interactions between the parent and child that many families do not necessarily experience within the home. Providing parents with a better understanding of child behaviour and empathy in learning also influenced changes in family communication. This in turn provided parents with new ways to express themselves.



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## Discussion

The qualitative findings provide evidence of improvement and increases in level of parent/school engagement, reported by both parents and teachers. It also provided details on the ways in which teachers and parents had felt the programme had benefitted children's learning. The feedback within the focus groups and interviews reinforced the importance of continual parental engagement within the school and of sustaining the networks and relationships developed during the programme.

There were other programmatic content and delivery considerations raised during the delivery of this test which led to immediate further refinement to the programme elements. These changes were informed by the ongoing feedback and monitoring captured during the implementation of the programme. These include the following:

1. Some of the sessions were too full and caused sessions to be rushed due to there being too much material to get through. Sessions have since been reviewed and scaled back in content in discussion with the individual programme experts.
2. Some of the sessions had too many learning points which diluted key messages meant for parents. The key messages have been refined and re-design work to the session plans and parent handouts now reflect these simplified messages.
3. The printed resources were designed and presented in an inconsistent manner, with some artwork being unfriendly and of varying quality. These have all now been re-designed with consistent artwork and branding. Focus has been placed on making it family friendly in its design.
4. There was no set briefing for trainers to follow to brief their school co-facilitators, causing an inconsistency in terms of delivery information cascade. A detailed guidance document has now been written and is included in the delivery manual, outlining a suggestion briefing schedule and areas and exercises to complete when carrying out the briefing.
5. It became immediately clear that a dedicated staff member was required to manage processes and chase completion and submission of the monitoring and evaluation data sets for the tests. This was put in place for autumn testing.
6. More detailed guidance around data collection was given to regional teams and to schools to support data collection and reduce the number of incomplete or incorrectly completed data sets in future tests.



A parent and child enjoy spending quality time exploring a book together in Families Connect.

## Recommendations

Below includes the key recommendations for further research and delivery of Families Connect.

### Programme content

#### 1. Programme continuation and sustainability

The qualitative evidence suggests there is more to be done to encourage further engagement with families after the eight weeks of Families Connect. The manual now has a 'Keeping it Going' guidance document for sustaining contact and learning with families after the programme has finished, which was not written during the time of this test. It will be interesting to monitor whether this comes through more strongly in the next round of delivery and if this guidance has been impactful in any way.

#### 2. School information sheets

The school information sheets used during site set up for Families Connect should be reviewed. Further development should be considered to ensure schools are fully aware of the programme detail and are able to cascade this information with their school colleagues to ensure all are aware of the programme and expected outcomes before the programme begins.

### Programme delivery

#### 3. Parent role construction

The absence of a significant impact on parent role construction suggests that parents participating in Families Connect joined the programme with an existing level of recognition that participating in their children's learning was important, and was possibly the motivating factor for their participation in Families Connect. It also suggests that we did not reach a lot of parents who do not see supporting their children's learning as their role as this would have been reflected in the baseline scores. It is therefore recommended that we review the recruitment guidance document for the programme to support schools to reach a mix of parents; those who do not see the value in supporting their children's learning and those that do.

#### 4. Participation of fathers

As was detailed in the demographic findings, significantly fewer fathers attend Families Connect than mothers or female family members. It is recommended that we consider how we could make Families Connect appeal more to fathers or male family members and if there is anything that could be done to support their participation more widely.

#### 5. End of programme drop-out

Although the test sustained a strong retention rate of 65%, it is worth considering if the lower rates of attendance in sessions six and seven was due or linked to fear or anxiety of the numeracy module. If this is shown to be the case, steps should be taken to address anxieties in advance.

### Evaluation

#### 6. British Picture Vocabulary Scale (BPVS)

As the BPVS assessment showed significant increased change at the three month follow-up rather than at post-programme (after eight weeks of the programme) stage, we recommend that the sites using BPVS in spring term 2017 do not complete BPVS at a post stage but only at a three month follow-up. This will give a chance for the increases in receptive vocabulary to be recorded. Changing the point in time this is recorded rather than adding in an additional data collection set will hopefully be palatable for the schools involved in spring testing. However, we will need to make sure we have the checks in place to support data completion and communicate this change effectively to the schools.

#### 7. Use of the Home Learning Environment (HLE) scale

Use of the HLE scale will be reviewed for future delivery. The use of the scale to measure change in the HLE over time is potentially limiting in respect that it captures the changes in the quantity of interactions and activities that take place in the home but does not capture improvements in the quality and variety of activities in the home. There were no reported significant increased changes to the HLE of the families who took part in the programme within the quantitative analysis. However, changes were reported by participants within the qualitative data gathered during focus groups and interviews and also during the weekly reflection sessions, with parents reflecting back on how they were doing more 'learning activities' in the home.

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Recommendations

### 8. Home observations

To understand further the change in activities in the home following participation in the Families Connect programme to include frequency, type and quality of learning activity, home observations could be conducted. It is recommended that a discussion be held about the feasibility of home observations for a deeper understanding regarding this and when this would be most appropriate.

### 9. Monitoring and evaluation tools

Following feedback from parents and teachers regarding the time it takes to complete the monitoring and evaluation requirements, the ways in which monitoring and evaluation data is gathered for the programme should be considered. For example, more user-friendly methods than the paper-based questionnaire format should be explored and a review of the measures needed for inclusion in future testing should be undertaken to reduce the time requirements for parent and teacher completion.

### 10. Monitoring and evaluation management

Due to the number of incomplete sets of data, it is recommended to allocate a dedicated staff member whose role it is to process incoming data sets from schools and check for completion errors in a timely manner.

### 11. Child evaluation tools

The use of more child evaluation should be considered to enable children to have their say and provide their thoughts on the previous week's activity.



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# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Annex A: Demographic tables

### Annex A: Demographic tables

**Table 1: Demographic information on child from baseline collected through parent and teacher pre-questionnaires**

		Intervention		Control	
		n	%	n	%
<b>School</b>	Blacklands	10	12.2	0	0
	Blaen y Maes	9	11.0	10	19.6
	Broad oak	9	11.0	0	15.7
	Miskin	14	17.1	11	21.6
	Nettlefield	8	9.8	0	0
	Newark	7	8	8	15.7
	South Rise	5	6.1	4	7.8
	St Eithne's	10	12.2	10	19.6
	St Malachy's	10	12.2	10	0
<b>Country</b>	England	24	29.3	12	23.5
	Scotland	17	20.7	8	15.7
	Wales	23	28.0	21	41.2
	Northern Ireland	18	22.0	10	19.6
<b>Child age</b>	4 years	15	18.5	11	22.4
	5 years	34	42.0	19	38.8
	6 years	32	39.5	19	38.8
	Missing	1		2	
<b>School year</b>	Nursery	11	13.4	5	9.8
	Reception	29	35.4	19	37.3
	Year 1 / P1	24	29.3	22	43.1
	Year 2 / P2	18	22.0	5	9.8
<b>Gender</b>	Male	46	57.5	21	42.0
	Female	34	42.5	29	58.0
	Missing	2		1	
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White British	57	69.5	37	78.7
	Other	25	30.5	10	21.3
	Missing	0		4	
<b>Child disability*</b>		3	4.1	1	2.0
Missing		9			
<b>Special educational needs*</b>		5	6.5	1	2.0
Missing		8		3	
<b>English additional language</b>		5	6.5	1	2.0
Missing		5			
Total		82		51	

\* As recorded by pre programme Teacher's questionnaire.

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Annex A: Demographic tables

**Table 2: Demographic information on parent from baseline collected through parent pre-questionnaires**

		Intervention				Intervention	
		n	%			n	%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	4	6	<b>Partner qualifications</b>	No qualifications	10	21.3
	Female	67	94		1 GCSE or NVQ level 1	12	25.5
	Missing	5			5 GCSE or NVQ level 2	9	19.1
<b>Relationship to child</b>	Biological parent	70	94.6		1 A-level or NVQ level 3	2	4.3
	Adoptive parent	1	1.4		1st degree or NVQ Level 4-5	7	14.9
	Grandparent	3	4.1		Higher degree	1	2.1
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	27	37		Other	6	12.8
	Co-habiting partner	18	24.7		Missing	29	
	Divorced	2	2.7	<b>Total</b>		76	
	Single	22	30.1				
	Re-married	2	2.7				
	Separated	2	2.7				
	Missing	3					
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White British	49	70				
	Other ethnicity	20	30				
	Missing	6					
<b>Parent disability</b>		12	16.4				
	Missing	3					
<b>English additional language</b>		13	17.6				
	Missing	2					
<b>Employment</b>	Full-time	9	12.3				
	Part-time	16	21.9				
	Looking after home	31	42.5				
	Unemployed (seeking)	5	6.8				
	Permanently ill/disabled	4	5.5				
	Retired	2	2.7				
	Other	6	8.2				
	Missing	3					
<b>Total income</b>	<£5,000	13	21.7				
	£5,000-£9,999	10	16.7				
	£10,000-£19,999	24	40.0				
	£20,000-£29,999	6	10.0				
	£30,000-£39,999	5	8.3				
	£40,000-£49,999	2	3.3				
	Missing	16					
<b>Parent qualifications</b>	No qualifications	15	21.1				
	1 GCSE/NVQ level 1	17	23.9				
	5 GCSEs/NVQ level 2	14	19.7				
	1 A-level /NVQ level 3	8	11.3				
	1stdegree/ NVQ Level 4-5	7	9.9				
	Higher degree	3	4.2				
	Other	7	9.9				
	Missing	5					

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Annex B: Focus group information sheet for parents

### Annex B: Focus group information sheet for parents

Thank you for considering taking part in the Families Connect Focus group

#### **What is Families Connect?**

Families Connect is a programme that aims to support parents to enhance their children's learning through exploring games and fun activities. It runs for eight weeks and involves both the parents and the children who take the learning they have explored in the session to try out at home. Families Connect currently explores social and emotional learning, literacy and numeracy through the medium of play.

#### **Why have I been asked to take part?**

Families Connect is a new programme we are currently trying out in schools across the UK. We are trying to find out how the programme works and what difference it makes to the families and children taking part. Consequently we would like to talk to you about why you decided to take part in Families Connect, what you got out of it and your thoughts on how you support your child to learn. We would also like to hear from you about your involvement in your child's school.

#### **What will happen at the focus group?**

We would like to keep the focus group informal and relaxed. We will ask you questions relating to the Families Connect Programme, specifically in relation to why you signed up to take part, and how you already support your children at home to learn. All thoughts and ideas you have and share with us is helpful to us. We will record the discussion as it is hard to remember everything you say, we may also take notes at times too.

#### **How long will it take?**

The session should take about 1 hour; this is often dependent on the size of the group and how much you have to say.

#### **Why do you want to record the group?**

We would like the session to be recorded and transcribed to ensure we capture all of your views and opinions. The recording will only be accessible to 'Save the Children' employees and any further information sharing will be transcribed and anonymised. Therefore, you will not be identifiable to anyone. For example, we would say "One person said this..." or "A number of people mentioned..." or "A parent from Scotland said..."

#### **Is the focus group confidential?**

We advocate that the focus groups discussion are kept confidential but that if a matter is shared during the session which suggests a child or person may be at harm or at risk of being hurt then we will follow our safeguarding procedures.

#### **How will my information be used?**

Your views will enable us to develop a new programme and assist us in making informed developments to our programmes. This means your views and opinions will be included in internal reports (Save the Children) and possibly also external reports (possible funders, schools and parents and other charities too) to explain how and why we have made changes and amendments to our programme.

#### **What if I change my mind and don't want to take part?**

Your participation is voluntary and you are free to change your mind at any time and leave the focus group. We will then not include anything mentioned in the focus group up to that point in the transcription and write up of the focus group.

#### **I would like to contribute, but I am not comfortable with taking part in a focus group.**

We value your opinions and would be very happy to do an informal one on one interview with you, if we have the staff capacity to do that, if you would prefer. Just let us know.

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Annex B: Focus group information sheet for parents

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### **How can I find out more information about Save the Children or contact you again in the future?**

If you have any questions or concerns please contact:

\*\*\* Insert local Contact details \*\*\*

You can find out more about Save the Children and the work of the organisation at any time by visiting the website  
[www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk)

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet



# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Annex C: Question sheet for post-focus groups

### Annex C: Question sheet for post-focus groups

#### Purpose of the focus group and evaluation questions overview:

1. To get more detail around the key themes of the project (Home Learning Environment, parent/ child interaction, relationship with school, empathy for child's learning, supporting child to learn)
2. To ascertain a situation analysis of where families are (the context of their lives after the project).

Key evaluation questions to cover include: What motivated parents to sign up to Families Connect? How do they support their children to learn? What challenges do they face when supporting their children to learn? How does the school involve them in their child's learning? What do the parents do differently as a result of taking part in Families Connect?

---

#### Introduction

Give an explanation.

*Good afternoon. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and this is \_\_\_\_\_.*

*Thank you for coming today.*

#### Present the purpose

*We are here today to talk about Families Connect, the programme you have been involved in over the past eight weeks. As you may know some of the activities and games were new and we were trying them out for the first time as it is still in the 'design' phase. We are also trying to find out how the programme works and what difference it makes to the families and children taking part.*

*We are keen to find out why you decided to take part in Families Connect, what you got out of it and your thoughts on how you support your child to learn. We would also like to hear from you about your involvement in your child's school.*

*Just so that you know I am not going to be giving my opinions. It is your ideas that matter. There are no right or wrong answers, you can disagree with each other (but kindly!), and you can change your mind. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel.*

#### Discuss procedure

*I or (present colleague) will be recording the session and possibly taking notes at various points through the discussions as its hard remembering everything after an hour's discussion. It would be nice if we could basically just have a chat about a few things, so feel free to answer whenever you like. It would really help however, if we just had one person speaking at one time. There are a few things to cover so I may move us on at some points if needed. A focus group is a relaxed discussion although we would like to record the discussion to help us type it up afterwards, as it can be hard remembering what everyone said. Is that ok with everyone.*

#### Housekeeping

*If you haven't already, please ensure all parents present have completed a consent form and have been given an information sheet, with a complaints and feedback leaflet attached. Please also ensure everyone knows where the toilet is and any info regarding fire procedures. Teas, coffees and biscuits should ideally be available throughout the session.*

#### Participant introduction

*Let's start by everyone sharing their name, and the names and ages of their children perhaps.*

#### NB for facilitator only: a guide to the approach

Qualitative focus groups should in their nature be quite unstructured. The questions should be a guide and provide prompts. Parents should steer the direction of conversations and the facilitator should be there to draw them back in if they go off topic or things get too negative / competitive or there are other bad dynamics (e.g. one person dominating). Ideally the facilitator would be reactive and inquisitive in context to move the conversation naturally to cover all of the areas listed below.

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Annex C: Question sheet for post-focus groups

### Interview

(THEME: motivation for participation in FC and whether expectations were met)

Q.1) First of all we are really keen to find out why you signed up to Families Connect. What appealed to you?

Probe: What about: (if not mentioned)

- learn something
- interested in the topics
- to feel part of the school community
- gets you out of the house
- friend going
- spend quality time with my child
- get time with the teachers
- meet new people

Q.2) Did Families Connect meet your expectations?

Probe:

- Did FC exceed expectations?
- Did it not meet expectations
- If so, in what way? Or not?

(THEME: General satisfaction with content/ staff/ facilities/ quality of delivery)

Q.3) Did you enjoy the programme?

Probe:

- How satisfied were you with the messages and games and ideas shared with you?
- What about the staff involved?
- The space made available to you?

(THEME: Situational detail on enriching side of the home learning environment.)

Q.4) What effect do you feel the programme has had on you?

Probe:

- Do you feel more confident in supporting your child's learning?
- Are you more motivated to support your child's learning since taking part in the programme?

Q.5) Since taking part in the programme do you feel that you talk more with you child / your child talks more with you?

Probe:

- What do you talk about?
- How do you think this has impacted on your relationship with you child?
- Do you feel you understand your child more?

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Annex C: Question sheet for post-focus groups

Q.6) Since taking part in the programme is there anything you now do differently at home with your child?

Probe: What about (if not mentioned)

- Watching TV together
- Making up stories together
- Listening to your child
- Making up games
- Playing on the computer/ iPad/ tablet/ phone
- Playing with friends/ siblings
- Reading stories
- Reading to your child
- Playing outside
- Dancing to music
- Playing with toys

Q.7) Do you engage in the activities and tools outlined in the programme?

Probe:

- In what way have you developed/ adapted them to suit your family?
- Which ones does your child enjoy the most?
- How do you feel these support your child's learning

(THEME: Situational detail on enriching side of the home learning environment; HLE 'outside' and also linked to social capital.)

Q.8) Since taking part in the programme is there anything you now do differently when out with your child?

Probe:

- Where do you go?
- Who with?
- What activities do you do there?
- Do you do different things since taking part in the programme? (e.g. weave in 'learning')

(THEME: Situational detail on what parents see as their expectations in engaging in child's learning at home. What do they identify as their role? How much influence do you feel you have over child's motivation to learn? )

Q.9) Since taking part in the programme what would you describe as your role in supporting your children's learning?

Probe:

- Has this changed to what it was before the programme began?
- Do you feel more supported to perform this role?
- What other support do you think would help?

Q.10) Do you feel you making a difference to your child's learning? Any barriers?

Probe: What barriers may there be to you having an influence?

- Don't know what to do
- Things are different to when I was in school
- He/ she doesn't listen to me
- Not a trained teacher
- My child and I always end up fighting
- I get frustrated easily

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Annex C: Question sheet for post-focus groups

(Theme: Situational detail on parent relationship with school. How does the school communicate with parents – methods and what on? Do you find this helpful? Do you want more information? )

Q.11) Since completing Families Connect are you talking more with the school regarding your child's learning?

Probe:

- Who are you talking to?
- Is there anything that you feel has changed in the way you communicate with the school since taking part in the programme?

Probe (if not already covered):

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| - Progress during parents' evening  | - Messages about events and clubs                                      |
| - What we can be doing at home  | - Homework clubs   |
| - Reading clubs   | - Homework we have to help them with                                   |
| - How to read with my child   | - Things we can do at home to support my child                         |
| - Areas my child is struggling with and what we can do at home to help them | - A summary each term about what they are doing in the class that term |

Probe: Have you found this helpful?

- |       |      |             |           |
|-------|------|-------------|-----------|
| - Yes | - No | - Sometimes | - Kind of |
|-------|------|-------------|-----------|

Q.12) Is there anything you feel you would like the school to share more information on?

Probe (if not already covered):

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| Progress during parents' evening  | Things we can do at home to support my child                         |
| What we can be doing at home  | Messages about events and clubs                                      |
| Reading clubs   | Homework clubs   |
| How to read with my child   | Homework we have to help them with                                   |
| Areas my child is struggling with and what we can do at home to help them | A summary each term about what they are doing in the class that term |

(Theme: Situational analysis on social capital and group working/ learning)

Q. 13) What has been good about working in a group?

Probe:

- Learn from each other (what was that?)
- Reassurance that it's not 'just me'
- Share my own ideas and hear others listen
- See other parents regularly
- Get to know other parents

### Closure

Is there anything else you think would be useful for us to know? Thank you very much for coming this morning/ afternoon. Your time is very much appreciated and your comments have been very helpful.



### Annex D: Parent interviews information sheet for schools

#### **Why run interviews with parents?**

One-to-one interviews with parents provide an opportunity for those involved in Families Connect to explain how they are currently experiencing the programme and any changes they may have perceived, in a way that is potentially more open than in a focus group with other parents. It avoids any risk of competition between participants, reduces positive response bias (the unwillingness of families to seem negative in a focus group) and allows the interviewer to build a more informed and holistic understanding of the impact within a family. We would really like to conduct interviews with some of the parents taking part in the test this term (Summer 2016).

#### **When will the interviews happen?**

We are completing interviews at two points in the programme – approximately mid-way through and one month after completion at different schools. The midway interview will hopefully enable us to gain an understanding of family perceptions of the implementation and impact of the programme so far. Not every school will arrange interviews.

If you work with parents who would be happy to be interviewed half way through the programme, you do not need to arrange another at the end as well. However, if you feel the parents would welcome the opportunity to share their experiences of the programme at the end of the programme, then another interview can be arranged, staff capacity allowing.

#### **How will the interviews be run?**

The interviews will be conducted by one or two Save the Children members of staff. Parents can choose if they would like the interview to take place in their home or at the school. We ask that the school support with arranging for this to be set up.

The Trainer delivering the Families Connect programme in your school will not be running the interviews for research and ethical reasons.

Interviews will be recorded to support collection of information although this data will be kept and reported on anonymously. However, any child protection or safeguarding concerns that arise from the interviews will be reported immediately.

#### **Can a member of the school team join the interview?**

In order for the interviews to be as open as possible, we ask that members of school staff do not attend, unless requested by the parent.

#### **What will you do with the information you gather?**

The views gathered during the interviews will enable us to understand what parents think of the programme and the difference they feel the programme is making within their family. The views gathered will be included in internal reports (Save the Children) and possibly also external reports (possible funders, schools and parents and other charities too) to explain the difference the programme is making and how and why we have made changes and amendments to our programme.

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Annex E: Question sheet for follow-up interviews

### Annex E: Question sheet for follow-up interviews

#### Purpose of the interviews and evaluation questions overview:

1. To get more detail around the key themes of the project (Home Learning Environment, parent/ child interaction, relationship with school, empathy for child's learning, supporting child to learn).
2. To ascertain a situation analysis of where families are (the context of their lives since the project has started).
3. To provide greater personal insight, including around potentially sensitive topics, than is possible in focus group discussions.

A more holistic approach to understanding parental perceptions of programme implementation (for example, potentially more negative feedback or greater contextualisation than is unlikely to come up in focus groups).

Key evaluation questions to cover include: Did Families Connect live up to their expectations? How easy did they find it to attend? How has Families Connect had an impact on what they and other family members do together at home, and how they feel they can support their child's learning? Did Families Connect have any impact on how they communicate with the school and with other parents?

---

#### Introduction

Give an explanation

*Good afternoon. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and this is \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you for coming today.*

#### Present the purpose

*We are here today to talk about Families Connect. We are trying to find out whether you feel the programme worked and what difference it made for you.*

*We are keen to find out why you decided to take part in Families Connect, what you hoped to get out of it and your thoughts on whether you feel the programme has helped you to support your child's learning. We would also like to hear from you about your involvement in your child's school.*

*There are no right and wrong answers, what we are interested in are your opinion and ideas. We are interested in positive and negative feedback as this will help us improve the quality of the programme. If there is anything you don't want to discuss feel free to say so at any point.*

#### Discuss procedure

*The interview will take around 30 minutes to an hour. I or (present colleague) will be recording the session and possibly taking notes at various points through the discussions as it's hard remembering everything. The recording will only be accessible to 'Save the Children' employees and any further information sharing will be transcribed and anonymised, so you will not be identifiable to anyone. For example, we would say "One person said this..." or "A number of people mentioned..." or "A parent from Manchester said..." However, I am obligated to let you know that if you tell me something that concerns the safety of your child or someone else, then I must report it.*

*We will use all the information you give us to develop the programme and build wider evidence on how programmes can support families. We mainly want to hear from you although I will start with some questions to get us going.*

#### Housekeeping

*If you haven't already, please ensure the parent has completed an interview consent form and has been given an information sheet, with a complaints and feedback leaflet attached. Please also ensure everyone knows where the toilet is and any info regarding fire procedures. Teas, coffees and biscuits should ideally be available throughout the session.*

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Annex E: Question sheet for follow-up interviews

### **NB for facilitator only: a guide to the approach**

The interviews should in their nature be quite unstructured. The questions should be a guide and provide prompts. Parents should steer the direction of conversations and the facilitator should be there to draw them back in if they go off topic or things get too negative. Ideally the facilitator would be reactive and inquisitive in context to move the conversation naturally to cover all of the areas listed below.

### **Interview**

#### **(THEME: motivation for participation in FC)**

Q.2) First of all we are really keen to find out why you signed up to Families Connect. What appealed to you?

Prompt:

- learn something
- interested in the topics
- to feel part of the school community
- gets you out of the house
- friend going
- spend quality time with my child
- get time with the teachers
- meet new people

Expand: Is it fulfilling those expectations? In what way?

If no: What would you like to see/do instead?

#### **(THEME: Practicalities of attendance)**

Q.3) Was there anything about Families Connect that made it difficult for you to attend?

Prompt:

- |                                   |                         |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Timing                            | Anxious about childcare |
| Getting to the school             | Being away from home    |
| Less comfortable being in a group | The other parents       |
| The friendliness of the staff     |                         |

If no: What was it about the sessions that mean they are easy to attend?

#### **(THEME: Situational detail on enriching the home learning environment.)**

We would like to understand what you as a family do together at home.

Q.4) Have you or anyone at home used or continue to use the games or tools from the sessions at home?

Expand: Did you enjoy doing them?

If yes: Has this had an influence on what you do at home?

Prompt:

- |  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| - The amount or sort of time you set aside | - How you listen              |
| - The routines you have                    | - How you give praise         |
| - The amount of patience you have          | - Talking more or differently |

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Annex E: Question sheet for follow-up interviews

If yes: Has this influenced

- your child's learning
- Your relationship with your child
- Your child's behaviour
- The things you do

If no longer: Why did you stop using them?

If no: Why?

Prompt:

- Don't have the time
- Don't see the point
- We haven't enjoyed them
- 

Q.5) Have you been discussed anything you learnt or did in the programme with anyone else in the family? Or outside the family?

If yes: Have you seen any difference in what that family member does with your child?

Prompt:

- Dad more involved in reading
- Mum using the listening tools

If no (unless single-parent family, no extended family etc.): Why do you think that is?

Prompt:

They don't have the time

It's not their job

I like to do it myself

Q.6) Have you used any of the tools or games with any other of your children? (if applicable)

(THEME: Situational detail on what parents see as their expectations in engaging in child's learning at home.)

Q.7) Do you think the way in which you see your role in supporting your child's learning has changed? Is there anything you now do differently?

Prompt:

Create positive association with school

Read books with them

Listen to them read

Sit with them to do homework

Have words or numbers around the house

Play puzzles and other games with child

Talk to them

If yes: Why do you think this has changed?



# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Annex E: Question sheet for follow-up interviews

Q.8) Before you started Families Connect did you see any barriers to supporting your child's learning? What were these?

If yes: Do you think that these still exist?

If yes: What do you think would help with that?

If no: what helped them go away?

Prompt:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| - Don't know what to do                        | - Not a trained teacher                 |
| - Things are different to when I was in school | - My child and I always end up fighting |
| - He/ she doesn't listen to me                 | - I get frustrated easily               |
| - Having the time - housework/chores           | - Time - work demands                   |
| - Competing demands from other children        | -                                       |

(Theme: Situational detail on parent relationship with school)

Q.9) Do you think there has been any change in how involved you feel in the school, since you started Families Connect, or in how they communicate with you?

Prompt:

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| - Greater opportunity to speak    | - Feel more comfortable asking questions |
| - Feel like I am listened to more | - Understand how the school works        |

If no: Is there anything you would like the school to share more information on?

Prompt:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| - Progress during parents' evening  | - Messages about events and clubs                                      |
| - What we can be doing at home  | - Homework clubs   |
| - Reading clubs   | - Homework we have to help them with                                   |
| - Areas my child is struggling with and what we can do at home to help them | - A summary each term about what they are doing in the class that term |
| - How to read with my child   | - Things we can do at home to support my child                         |

(Theme: Situational detail on social capital and peer influence and support)

Q.10) Do you think you interact any differently with other parents from the school, since starting Families Connect?

If yes: How?

Prompt:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| - At the school gates                      | - PTA meetings                                    |
| - Friendly with parents of child's friends | - Other parents who speak the same language as me |
| - Other groups organised by the school     | - Don't have the time                             |
| - Don't speak the same language            | - Don't feel I have anything in common            |

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Annex E: Question sheet for follow-up interviews

If yes: Why do you think this is?

Prompt:

Greater opportunity to speak

Got to know more people

More comfortable talking with others

Meet up more with other parents

Q.11) Do you talk with other parents about what they do at home? Do you feel it has been helpful?

If yes: In what way?

Prompt:

- |  |                                  |
|--|----------------------------------|
| - I can learn from them                    | - They are like me               |
| - Good to know we have similar experiences | - It's real advice for real life |
| - I know they understand me                | -                                |

If not: Why not?

Prompt:

I think I know more than them

They're not qualified

We have different experiences

I can't relate to them

Here's one final question, to summarise your experience so far:

Q.12) Does the programme still have an impact?

If yes: What has been most important / most helpful so far? Or what is the biggest impact on your family you have seen?

Expand: Why do you think this is?

Expand: Did you expect to see this?

Expand: What does this mean for you at home?

Prompt:

The amount or sort of time you set aside

How you listen

The routines you have

How you give praise

The amount of patience you have

Talking more or differently

### Closure

Is there anything else you think would be useful for us to know? Thank you very much for coming this morning/ afternoon. Your time is very much appreciated and your comments have been very helpful. I hope you enjoy Families Connect!

# FAMILIES CONNECT

## Annex F: Children's softer skills, bespoke scale

### Annex F: Children's softer skills, bespoke scale

In this section, please indicate how much you AGREE or DISAGREE with each of the statements.

	1 Disagree very strongly	2 Disagree	3 Disagree just a little	4 Agree just a little	5 Agree	6 Agree very strongly
The child is interested in solving problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The child wants to learn new things.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The child can concentrate and work independently.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The child seeks help when they don't understand.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The child deals well with mistakes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The child accepts criticism or corrections.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The child behaves well in class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The child gets on well with their peers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The child is proud of their work and achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The child is generally positive about learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The child is adaptive to new tasks and challenges.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The child makes progress in learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>