



Language Intervention in the Early Years

Information for Head Teachers

Interventions for children's language development

Promoting language development in the early years is essential for equipping children with the skills they will need in later life. On average two children in every classroom will have significant language difficulties which will affect their learning and social communication. These levels are much higher in areas of social disadvantage. Finding effective early interventions for language difficulties is, therefore, a priority for schools and other services, but few interventions have been thoroughly evaluated.

We are offering your school the opportunity to participate in a research study which will compare the effectiveness of language interventions for pre-school children with language difficulties.

We aim to recruit 24 schools and work with approximately 288 children in Nursery and Reception classes who are not reaching expectations in their language development.

If you want your school to participate in the study please return the attached consent form to Dr Christine Jack: Telephone: 0191 208 3503, christine.jack@newcastle.ac.uk

What is this study about?

We are trying to find out if one of these interventions works better than the others:

- Building Early Sentences Therapy (BEST) was developed by Newcastle University in partnership with speech and language therapists and has promising early signs of effectiveness.
- The Derbyshire Language Scheme (DLS) has been used widely for many years but has had limited formal evaluation. The study will use an adapted version of this scheme.
- 'Continued Classroom Support' (CCS) where children will continue to access the usual language support provided by schools. Schools in this group will be offered one of the above interventions after the project's data collection is complete.

We do not know if one of the interventions is better than the others or if they are all equally good. To help us find out we will randomly allocate schools to one of these groups.



Why should you participate in the study?

- Identified children will be assessed by a speech and language therapist who will discuss the assessments with the children's class teacher. Parents will be able to request a meeting with the therapist to discuss their child's assessment.
- All participating schools will benefit from receiving a language intervention. If one of the interventions produces better results than 'Continued Classroom Support', schools in this group will be offered that intervention at the end of the study.
- Over the course of the study all schools will have access to a series of CPD sessions about supporting children with language difficulties.
- All schools will receive a certificate, in recognition of their work as a research participant and their engagement with the speech and language CPD.

The study

The study will run from January 2020 to September 2021 and there will be 3 waves of data collection: February 2020 - September 2020, September 2020 - May 2021, and March 2021 - September 2021.

We will work with you to contact parents of children who are likely to be eligible, to provide them with information about the study and get written consent for their child to participate.

If your school is allocated to the 'Continued Classroom Support' group you will have the opportunity to participate in a fourth wave which will allow some of your children to benefit from one of the interventions.

What will happen if you agree to take part?

Step 1: Assigning schools to an intervention

Your setting will be randomly allocated to one of the groups: BEST, DLS or 'Continued Classroom Support'. All the eligible children in your school will receive the same type of support. Allocation is blind and when you volunteer you will not know which group your school is in. You will be told before you start to recruit children.

Step 2: Identifying children and gaining consent from parents

After the school has been allocated to a group, we will ask class teachers to identify children in nursery or reception classes who are aged between 3;05 and 4;05 years old and who are failing to meet expected language targets and may benefit from a language intervention. It is expected that between two and six children will be eligible in each class. This number is likely to be higher in areas of disadvantage. We will provide information sheets and consent forms for teachers to send home. Contact details for the research team will be provided and, if necessary, researchers will attend a meeting at your school to talk to parents.

Step 3: Assessing children

Once consent has been obtained we will assess children for eligibility. The researchers will conduct standardised baseline testing with the children and we will ask teachers and parents to complete a short questionnaire about the children's communication. These assessments will allow us to identify

the children who are most likely to benefit from participating in the study. Some children may not be eligible.

We will ask you about the approaches your school already provides to support children's language development.

Step 4: Working with schools to deliver the intervention

If your school is assigned to receive BEST or DLS, all of the participating children will receive the intervention at the same time. The intervention will be delivered by a speech and language therapist in partnership with a teaching assistant from your school.

The therapy will be delivered in a quiet room/space in your school, twice a week for eight weeks; each of the sixteen sessions will last approximately 30 minutes, totalling approximately 8 hours over eight weeks.

Step 5: Follow up assessments

After the 8 weeks when interventions are delivered to children in BEST or DLS schools, the researchers will assess children from schools in all three groups again. A third assessment will be conducted about 2-3 months later.

Recording the sessions

In order to ensure the interventions are delivered consistently, we will video record at least one session in each school, other sessions may be audio recorded. We will ask parents/carers for permission to do this. Audio and video recordings will be stored on an encrypted server managed by Newcastle University. These recordings will only be accessed by the research team and will be deleted at the end of the study.

What to expect from the study

If you agree to take part you will need to:

- Sign a consent form saying you are willing for your school to take part in the study.
- Identify children who are falling behind age related expectations in their language development and likely to be eligible for the intervention.
- Provide these children's parents and carers with information about the study and collect consent forms from those who want to participate.
- Provide the researchers with information about your usual provision to support children's language development.
- Ensure class teachers / teaching assistants complete a short questionnaire about each identified child.
- Provide a quiet space for the intervention to be delivered and assessments to be completed.
- Release a teaching assistant to support the researcher during the first two sessions and to video the group at least once during the 8 weeks, to help the researchers ensure consistency.

Any school can withdraw consent at any time, without giving a reason. If this happens we will inform

the parents that their children can no longer take part.

More information

If you need any more information please visit the study website at <https://research.ncl.ac.uk/lively> or contact the study coordinator: Dr Christine Jack, Telephone: 0191 208 3503, christine.jack@newcastle.ac.uk

Your Rights

Ethical Approval

This study has been approved by the Newcastle University Research Ethics Committee.

Confidentiality

Throughout the study strict confidentiality will be maintained. When we write up the study, or present our findings at conferences, no children, teachers, teaching assistants or schools will be identified.

Safeguarding

All researchers have undergone a DBS check and will follow your school's safeguarding guidelines for volunteers working in school.

Managing data

We are asking for your consent to process the assessment data so that we can conduct the research described in this information sheet. All data gathered during the study will be kept securely within Newcastle University and only be accessible by the research team. Only the consent forms will have names on (school and teachers' names). These will be stored separately from other data and destroyed at the end of the study.

Newcastle University will act as the data controller for this study. You can find out more about how Newcastle University uses your information at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/data.protection> and/or by contacting Newcastle University's Data Protection Officer (Maureen Wilkinson, rec-man@ncl.ac.uk).

If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer who will investigate the matter. If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are processing your personal data in a way that is not lawful, you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

Open data

At the end of the study the data collected will be de-identified and made available as "open data" through a research data repository [<https://research.ncl.ac.uk/rdm/sharing/>]. This means the de-identified study data will be publicly available and may be used by other researchers for purposes not related to this study. It will not be possible to identify the children or schools from the "open data".

Dissemination of findings

We aim to present the findings from the study at conferences and have them published in peer reviewed journals. No schools or children will be named in these publications.

We will provide summaries of the findings to schools and parent(s)/carer(s).

