Philosophy for Children

This page covers the first (efficacy) trial of Philosophy for Children, which tested whether it could work in schools under best possible conditions. To read about the second (effectiveness) trial - testing a scalable model under everyday conditions in a large number of schools - click here.

Philosophy for Children involves group discussions about ethical or philosophical topics, such as fairness and truth. The discussions are designed to encourage children to ask questions, construct arguments and engage in reasoned debate.

EEF Summary

Philosophy for Children has now been adopted by schools in over 60 countries as a way of developing children’s higher order thinking skills. The EEF funded this project to find out whether the approach could improve attainment for pupils in English primary schools.

Year 4 and 5 pupils doing Philosophy for Children made about two months’ additional progress in Key Stage 2 maths and reading compared with other pupils.

These results have moderate security, and further evaluation is needed before we can be confident that they could be replicated in other schools. The EEF is therefore funding further testing of the approach in other schools.
### Research Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome/Group</th>
<th>Impact - the size of the difference between Philosophy for Children pupils and other pupils</th>
<th>Security - how confident are we in this result?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>-2 Months' Progress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>-2 Months' Progress</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>0 Months' Progress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths (FSM)</td>
<td>-3 Months' Progress</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading (FSM)</td>
<td>-4 Months' Progress</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing (FSM)</td>
<td>-2 Months' Progress</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Were the schools in the trial similar to my school?

48 primary schools took part in the trial. 27 were rated good or outstanding by Ofsted.

47% of pupils were eligible for free school meals, and 18% had special educational needs.

### Could I implement this in my school?

Philosophy for Children training is available from SAPERE. The EEF is conducting a scale-up trial to see if the results from the initial study can be replicated across a larger number of schools.

Delivered by Teacher, Participant group Whole Class, Intervention length 1 Year

### How much will it cost?

The cost to deliver this project in one school for one academic year was £3,940, or roughly £16 per pupil per year for a school of 240 pupils. The main cost was teacher training. This involved two days of training before P4C was delivered, and ongoing support throughout the year.

Cost per pupil £16, Training time per staff member 2 Days
Evaluation Conclusions

1. There is evidence that P4C had a positive impact on Key Stage 2 attainment. Overall, pupils using the approach made approximately two additional months’ progress in reading and maths.

2. Results suggest that P4C had the biggest positive impact on Key Stage 2 results among disadvantaged pupils (those eligible for free school meals).

3. Analyses of the Cognitive Abilities Test (a different outcome measure not explicitly focused on attainment) found a smaller positive impact. Moreover, in terms of this outcome it appears that disadvantaged students reaped fewer benefits from P4C than other pupils. It is unclear from the evaluation why there are these differences between the two outcomes.

4. Teachers reported that the overall success of the intervention depended on incorporating P4C into the timetable on a regular basis. Otherwise there was a risk that the programme would be crowded out.

5. Teachers and pupils generally reported that P4C had a positive influence on the wider outcomes such as pupils’ confidence to speak, listening skills, and self-esteem. These and other broader outcomes are the focus of a separate evaluation by the University of Durham.