Peep Learning Together Programme

This programme aims to improve parenting skills and the quality of the home learning environment in the early years. The intervention consists of an initial home visit, and 24 one-hour sessions delivered over two terms, with groups of parents and children attending the sessions together in nursery settings. There are two days of training for nursery practitioners to help them work with parents, and resources cover five topics: 1) social and emotional development; 2) communication and language; 3) early literacy; 4) early maths; and 5) health and physical development. Each session focuses on a particular topic related to children’s development and includes discussion, songs and stories, as well as advice and approaches for parents to adopt at home. For this evaluation, the delivery will focus on social and emotional development, language and communication, and early literacy development, and additional mentoring support will be given to the practitioners to maintain quality.

Why are we funding it?

The Peep parenting approach has been shown to impact on children’s educational attainment in two quasi-experimental design evaluations. The first of these found that children made progress in verbal comprehension, vocabulary, numeracy development and self-esteem. The second of these followed 600 families over six years and found similar positive effects on children’s vocabulary, phonological awareness and comprehension. These results suggest that the approach is promising, however they do not have the security of a randomised controlled trial (RCT) so this is the next logical step in building the programme’s evidence.

The broader evidence for this approach is also promising. Evidence from the Effective Provision of Pre-School Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE) study suggests that the home learning environment is a strong predictor of cognitive and social development. An RCT will provide an opportunity to test whether this programme can improve the home learning environment, and whether this in turn impacts on literacy and language development.

How are we evaluating it?

A team from Queens University Belfast has been appointed to conduct the evaluation. The trial will consist of a two-arm RCT, with 150 schools randomised to treatment or a business-as-usual control. The intervention will focus on children in nursery classes. Prior to randomisation, children will be pre-tested on language and early literacy, and parents will be invited to express interest in the programme. The comparison will be between the outcomes for children across treatment and control whose parents say that they would attend the programme if they were given the opportunity. The primary outcome will be language and early literacy. The secondary outcomes will include measures of parental skills and confidence, the home learning environment, and social and emotional development. The evaluation protocol provides more detailed information on the evaluation design.

When will the evaluation report be due?

The evaluation report will be published in summer 2019.