

Early Talk Boost – research project

Information for settings



What is Early Talk Boost?

Being able to talk and understand words are key skills for young children, enabling them to access all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum (EYFS).

Early Talk Boost is designed to help support children who need a targeted approach to catch up with their peers, enabling them to access key areas of the EYFS curriculum including Communication and Language, Personal, Social and Emotional Development and Mathematics. The Early Talk Boost intervention has been designed by Speech and Language UK specialist teachers and speech and language therapists, with the help of early years practitioners and parents. It is informed by strong evidence and has demonstrated early promise in a study that showed impact on children's ability to talk and understand words.

The evaluation of Early Talk Boost is funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and is being carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES). Delivery of the intervention is funded by the East of England Early Years Stronger Practice Hub and the South West Early Years Stronger Practice Hub.

The intervention is 9 weeks long and comprises of three 15–20 minute sessions a week. It is usually delivered to around 6-8 pupils in each setting. Training and materials to run the groups is provided by Speech and Language UK.

What is the research project?

The study aims to evaluate the Early Talk Boost intervention in an independent and rigorous way to see what impact it has on children's talking and understanding of words.

The research project will use a randomised waitlist-controlled trial design to explore the impacts of Early Talk Boost. This means that those who sign up to take part will be randomly allocated to receive Early Talk Boost from Spring 2024 (and form the first training cohort; also called intervention group) or receive the intervention from September 2024 (and form the second training cohort; also called a control group).

The introduction of a randomly assigned control group is the best way of evaluating if an intervention has an impact on children's outcomes. It allows us to compare the efficacy of Early Talk Boost against what would have happened if we had changed nothing. In addition, random allocation is like throwing dice that ensures there is a fair process to decide which settings receive the intervention first.

The aims of the project are both to support education recovery following the pandemic, whilst also developing our understanding of effective professional development in the early years.

All settings will take part in the research activities from September 2023 – July 2024, whether they are part of the first or second cohort to receive the intervention.



The results will be used to think about ways to improve Early Talk Boost so that Speech and Language UK can help more families of young children. The findings will also be used to help researchers understand more about how to support children's language development.

Who can take part?

Eligibility

Settings in the following Local Authorities (LAs) can take part in the study: Norfolk, Suffolk, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Southend-on-Sea, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Plymouth, and Torbay. Both Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) and maintained nurseries (either stand alone or as part of a Primary School) are eligible. Settings can only sign up to receive one funded Stronger Practice Hub programme between 2022-2025.

Inclusion criteria:

Settings need to be able to:

- Commit 2 practitioners to attend the training
- Deliver the intervention over 3 sessions per week for 9 weeks
- Have at least 8 children who are between 3 and 4 years old (date of birth must fall between 1 December 2019 and 1 October 2020)
- Commit to supporting evaluation activities.

Exclusion criteria:

Settings can't take part if they:

- Are already running Early Talk Boost groups
- Are taking part in any other trial funded by the EEF or similar funder, or are taking part in another SPH-funded programme.

Children are not eligible if they:

- Have significant SEND which would prevent them from accessing the assessment and/or would be distressed through completing the assessment and taking part in the intervention.

What are the benefits to my setting?

By taking part in this evaluation study, your setting is adding to the evidence base and knowledge on what works in early years education in England.

Training and support:

- Speech and Language UK will train 2 practitioners from each setting who will receive 5 hours of online training (typically delivered in 2 sessions).

- Additional support will be provided by a Speech and Language UK Advisor comprising 2 online support sessions and one on-site visit.
- Settings on the waiting list for the intervention will be involved in regular updates and a keeping in touch programme.
- Speech and Language UK will set up additional support and link settings together through a dedicated social media channel.

Resources provided:

- Settings taking part in the programme will receive an Early Talk Boost intervention pack which normally costs £500 and training and support, all of which is fully funded.
- Additional funding has been made available by the EEF to reimburse settings for approximately 50% of their staff's time/cover cost to attend training: settings will receive £60 per staff member who completes the professional development activities, for up to two staff members.
- To support engagement with research activities (including organising days researchers can visit to complete child assessments, staff completing surveys or interviews) you will receive a payment of £400 to thank you for completing them. The payment will be provided in two stages, 1) £150 in Spring 2024 after completion of the initial set of child assessments and surveys, and 2) £250 in August/September 2024 after completion of the final set of child assessments and surveys.
- Some settings will be asked to participate in case studies, individual staff who support this by taking part in additional interviews will receive a £15 voucher.

What does it involve for early years practitioners? They will:

- Provide information on your setting and children eligible to take part in the study.
- Send out information about the evaluation to parents of children selected to take part.
- Support independent assessors to screen all eligible children in your setting. This will include providing a room for assessors to use.
- Support independent assessors to do pre and post project tasks with the children. This will include providing a room for assessors to use.
- Have two staff members attend 2 training sessions - 5 hours of online training (typically delivered in 2 sessions).
- Deliver the intervention to the children 3 times a week for 9 weeks.
- Complete a tracker linked to the intervention to record child progress.
- Complete a brief survey before and after the project.

Settings randomised into the first cohort will complete the following in addition:

- You might be selected to take part in qualitative interviews
- We might ask to come and observe some of your delivery sessions.
- If selected as a case study nursery, we will invite some parents to attend interviews. You will need to provide us with parent contact details.

What does it involve for settings? They will:

- Agree and sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)
- Send out parent information letters - written and video information will be provided to share with parents explaining the intervention and the study.

- Share setting and child information with the evaluation team.
- If selected as a case study nursery, share parent information with the team.
- Senior leader/settings manager might be invited to take part in an interview.

How will the intervention be evaluated?

We will use a mix of short assessment tasks for the children, surveys of practitioners, and feedback from practitioners and parents to evaluate the programme. In Autumn 2023 all children who are eligible will be screened by external assessors. Up to 8 of these children will then do a standard language assessment which will take no longer than 40 minutes per child. External researchers will come into your setting to deliver these assessments. Researchers from the evaluation team will also visit some settings to observe programme delivery on select occasions and to interview practitioners. In Spring of 2024 external researchers will repeat the standard language assessment. There will be no further measures after this time.



Researchers are evaluating Early Talk Boost. They are not evaluating your setting, teaching staff, or the individual children in the class. No individual children, teachers or settings will be named in the report arising from the study.

How will data sharing work?

Participating settings will be required to provide pupil data (including pupil name, date of birth) to facilitate the evaluation. Settings in the first cohort who are selected to take part in a more detailed case study will be asked to share parent data (including name and email address), for us to invite some parents to participate in an interview.

All personal data collected as part of the study will be treated with the strictest confidence by the project team and processed only in accordance with the requirements of the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Further details about the processing of personal data will be included in a Memorandum of Understanding, Privacy Notice and information sheet for parents which we will be sent to settings that register their interest in the project.

E-consent/registration

We are so excited to deliver this project to your setting. We have limited spaces available - if you are interested in finding out more, please complete this form using the following web link or QR code: <https://forms.office.com/e/tHhixvYwq9>



Project Team

This is a major study, and several different organisations are collaborating on it. They are:

Speech and Language UK: - *The intervention developer and delivery team* - Speech and Language UK are experts in helping children with their talking and understanding of words. They create tools for schools and nurseries, give advice and guidance to families and put pressure on politicians.

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES): - The *project's independent evaluator* - IES is an independent, international centre of research and consultancy in education, public employment policy and organizational human resource management.

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) - *Funding the study* - The EEF is an independent charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement. They run projects which test the efficacy of education interventions to generate new evidence of what works.

East of England Early Years Stronger Practice Hub and EY South West Early Years Stronger Practice Hub – *Funding programme delivery* - Early years stronger practice hubs are working as part of the Department for Education's early years education recovery support to provide advice, share good practice, and offer evidence-based professional development for early years practitioners.

Timeline:

Month	Activity
April 2023 – Sept 2023	Settings sign up to the project (first come, first served!).
Sept 2023	Settings send the information sheet to parents and submit pupil and parent data.
Oct 2023 – Dec 2023	In setting pre-testing of children, pre project surveys with practitioners.
Dec 2023	Settings randomly allocated to cohort 1 or cohort 2.
Jan 2024	Practitioners from the first cohort attend training.
Jan – March 2024	Delivery of intervention for the first cohort.
Feb – Apr 2024	Case study visits to selected settings from cohort 1, observation of delivery interviews with practitioners and parents.
Apr – May 2024	In setting post-testing of children, post project surveys (both cohorts).
Sept 2024	Delivery of intervention for cohort 2.
June – Dec 2024	Research activities – analysis and reporting
Jan 2025	Final research findings report

Contact project@speechandlanguage.org.uk for further information.