

Evaluation of the Save the Children "Families and Schools Together" (FAST) programme.

Submission date 20/10/2015	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	<input type="checkbox"/> Prospectively registered <input type="checkbox"/> Protocol
Registration date 23/10/2015	Overall study status Completed	<input type="checkbox"/> Statistical analysis plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Results
Last Edited 21/11/2018	Condition category Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

The Families and Schools Together programme (FAST) is a parental engagement programme that has been run in a number of countries over the last 25 years. It aims to improve parenting skills and confidence, parents' engagement in their child's learning, children's behaviour, and enhance links between families, school and the community. Parents and their children attend eight weekly 2.5-hour group sessions, delivered by local 'partners' who are trained by accredited FAST trainers. FAST seems to lead to improvements in children's social skills and behaviour, and reductions in parents' social isolation. However, we do not know if it might improve children's learning in school. This study aims to evaluate the impact of FAST on children's learning and behavioural outcomes, by comparing a group of schools that receive the FAST programme with another group that do not.

The main research questions are:

1. What is the impact of FAST on Year 1 children's attainment – as measured by end of Key Stage 1 tests?
2. What is the impact of FAST on Year 1 children's behaviour, social and emotional outcomes – as measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)?

As FAST is delivered to a sub-group of families with Year 1 children in intervention schools, the impact of FAST on Year 1 sub-group attainment as compared with a sub-group of matched pupils from the control group schools will also be investigated.

Who can participate?

To be included in the study, schools must be primary schools in England, with Key Stage 1 pupils and not taken part in in FAST in the past. Access to the programme is universal. Children considered eligible for the study are Year 1 children. Save the Children UK (SCUK) will recruit schools to the study with greater than 20% of pupils eligible and in receipt of free school meals.

What does the study involve?

All schools that have chosen to take part in the trial provide data before the study begins (i.e. baseline data) including: information about each child in Year 1, a teacher completed anonymised SDQ for each child in Year 1, and a brief form detailing any family support interventions (e.g. programmes) the school has recently taken part in or is currently running. Schools are then be randomly allocated to either the control group or the intervention group.

Schools in the intervention group take part in the FAST programme in their schools. Key staff attend FAST training on how to deliver the programme. They then invite families with year 1 children to take part in the FAST programme – which may include inviting all year 1 families, and /or targeted invitations based on the local teams' knowledge of who may benefit. The local FAST team runs the programme on a weekly basis as a twilight session (3.30-6pm) one night a week for eight weeks. Families then continue to meet for a further 22 months in whatever way they wish (duration and nature of session up to them) - this period is known as FASTworks. Schools in the control group don't receive the FAST programme and are asked to continue as usual delivering any other programmes they normally run. Intervention schools need to complete a school log of attendance at the 8-week FAST sessions. Some intervention schools are chosen at random to take part in a visit or a phone interview. This might be a simple observation visit where NFER or CCFR come to observe a FAST session, or a case study visit or telephone interview where NFER/CCFR interview staff and parents to find out their views. A local lead or parent from each intervention school also complete an activity log during FASTworks (i.e. the following 22 month period). Once the eight-week programme is complete, all schools (intervention and control) will fill out an anonymised SDQ for each child in Year 1 (i.e. the mid-point SDQ). At the end of the study for both groups NFER collects each child's KS1 assessment, taken in Summer 2017, to be independently marked, to measure academic attainment. All schools also complete an end-point anonymised SDQ for each child on roll, by now in Year 2.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

Families in schools in the intervention arm have the opportunity to attend FAST. There are no perceived risks of taking part. The families and Year 1 children that take part in the 8-week FAST programme will be known as the FAST sub-group. Their outcome data will form part of an analysis with a matched sample from the control school.

Where is the study run from?

The study will be run in primary schools across England. The main trial centre will be the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) (head office in Slough, trial lead based in York), working in conjunction with the Centre for Child and Family Research at Loughborough University (CCFR). Save the Children UK (SCUK) will lead the recruitment for the study, and oversee the interventions in schools.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?

April 2015 to September 2017

Who is the main contact?

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Contact information

Type(s)

Public

Contact name

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number

N/A

Study information

Scientific Title

A school randomised controlled trial to evaluate the impact of the "Families and Schools Together" (FAST) programme.

Acronym

FAST

Study objectives

Running the FAST programme will positively impact the academic attainment of children in Year 1.

Ethics approval required

Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)

NFER's Code of Practice Group, 20/08/2015

Study design

Whole-school randomised effectiveness trial, with two main arms (intervention and control). It will also contain a quasi-experimental pupil-level analysis of the FAST intervention target sub-group.

Primary study design

Interventional

Study type(s)

Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

This study is exploring the educational and behavioural benefits of the FAST programme on year 1 primary school children.

Interventions

Through an RCT design, schools will be randomised to the intervention or the control group. The FAST intervention is then delivered to a sub-group of children and their families within the intervention schools. Save the Children UK (SCUK) deliver the FAST programme in schools in England, via a license agreement held by Middlesex University and the FAST programme team in

the USA..

1. Intervention arm: schools run the FAST programme. This is an 8-week after school parental engagement programme for whole families which takes a structured approach to improving family relationships, family time, communication, behaviour, and wider community spirit. Families then continue to meet in any way they wish for a further 22 months, in a period known as FASTworks.
2. Control arm: schools do not take part in FAST but continue with and record their usual behaviour. Control arm schools receive a payment from SCUK upon data completion for the trial.

Intervention Type

Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)

Primary outcome (KS1 attainment) – assessments sat in May/June 2017, marked independently, raw scores from NPD will also be accessed Sept 2017

Key secondary outcome(s)

Secondary outcome (SDQ) – mid-point, after each block of 8-week delivery (i.e. Dec 2015, April 2016, and July 2016). A further SDQ at end-point July 2017.

Completion date

30/09/2017

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

Schools were recruited to the trial if they met the following criteria:

1. Primary school in England with Key stage 1 pupils.
2. Schools must have > 20% of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)
3. Schools must be maintained, free, or academy.

Sub-group inclusion criteria - any family with Year 1 children felt by the FAST local partners including school partners to benefit from the programme. This could include an invitation to all families with year 1 children; and/or it could include some targeted invitations to participate in the 8-week programme.

Participant type(s)

Other

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Child

Sex

All

Key exclusion criteria

1. Must not have taken part in the FAST programme before
2. Not private schools

Date of first enrolment

01/04/2015

Date of final enrolment

01/02/2016

Locations

Countries of recruitment

United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre**National Foundation for Educational Research**

The Mere, Upton Park

Slough

United Kingdom

SL1 2DQ

Study participating centre**Centre for Child and Family Research, Loughborough University**

United Kingdom

LE11 3TU

Sponsor information

Organisation

Education Endowment Foundation

ROR

<https://ror.org/03bhd6288>

Funder(s)

Funder type

Government

Funder Name
Education Endowment Foundation

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

IPD sharing plan summary
Stored in repository

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Funder report results	results			No	No
Participant information sheet	Participant information sheet	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes
Study website	Study website	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes