

Evaluation of Zippy's Friends: a school-based coping and social skills programme for young children

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| Last Edited 21/05/2021 | Condition category Other | <input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data <input type="checkbox"/> Record updated in last year |

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

Zippy's Friends is a universal programme that targets the development of coping and social skills among Key Stage 1 pupils. The programme is delivered by the class teacher over the course of the school year, through 24 weekly sessions which last around 45 minutes. The 24 sessions are divided into six modules, which focus on particular themes (including: feelings, communication, making and breaking relationships, conflict resolution, dealing with change and loss, and general coping skills). The programme aims to develop children's coping skills and their ability to adapt those coping skills to various situations. Further, it integrates problem solving skills, social skills and emotional literacy as skills that may facilitate adaptive coping behaviour. This study aims to find out whether Zippy's Friends has an impact on children's learning, as well as their social and emotional development. It will also examine factors associated with the delivery of the programme by speaking to teachers, pupils and parents about their experiences.

Who can participate:

Pupils entering Year 2 (aged 6-7 years) in the 2016/17 school year, from about 70 state-funded primary schools within five Local Authorities in England.

What does the study involve?

Participating schools are randomly allocated to either the intervention group or the control group. Schools allocated to the intervention group begin delivering the Zippy's Friends programme with Year 2 pupils in October 2016, following teacher training. Schools allocated to the control group do not receive the Zippy's Friends programme during the study and continue with their normal curriculum. Teachers are asked to complete a short reading test with participating pupils at the end of Year 1 (between April and June 2016), and also to complete a short questionnaire on each pupil's social and emotional development. At the end of Year 2, participating classes complete a literacy test and a short questionnaire on their social and emotional skills, e.g. about friendships and problem solving skills. We also carry out interviews with teaching staff, telephone interviews with parents, focus groups with pupils, and observations of programme delivery in a sample of the schools.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

Benefits to participating schools include the provision of training, materials and ongoing support for the delivery of Zippy's Friends during the 2016/17 school year. There are no risks associated with participating.

Where is the study run from?

The evaluation is run by an independent evaluation team based at Queen's University Belfast. The programme delivery is managed and supported by the charity Partnership for Children (Kingston-upon-Thames, England).

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

January 2016 to November 2017

Who is funding the study?

Education Endowment Foundation (UK)

Who is the main contact?

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Contact information

Type(s)

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Study information

Scientific Title

A cluster randomised controlled trial evaluation of Zippy's Friends: a school-based coping and social skills programme for young children

Study objectives

The current evaluation will address the following research questions:

1. What is the overall effectiveness of the programme on:
 - 1.1. Pupil reading attainment and emotional self-regulation (primary outcomes)
 - 1.2. Self-regulated learning and social skills (secondary outcomes)
2. Is there a differential impact of the programme for pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), boys or girls, and pupils with English as an additional language (EAL)?
3. How is the programme perceived by schools (in terms of engagement of pupils, teachers and local coordinators), and what are the barriers and facilitators to implementation?
4. Is any variability in implementation associated with variability in outcomes?
5. Do the proposed mechanisms (as depicted by the logic model) explain any link between the programme and academic attainment?

Ethics approval required

Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)

Research Ethics Committee at the School of Education, Queen's University, Belfast, 22/01/2016

Study design

Cluster randomised controlled trial

Primary study design

Interventional

Study type(s)

Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Attainment in reading and emotional self-regulation

Interventions

The evaluation will consist of a cluster randomised controlled trial. The independent evaluation team (at Queen's University Belfast) will randomly allocate schools to either the intervention or control group in July 2016.

Schools allocated to the intervention arm will begin delivering the programme in October 2016, following teacher training. Zippy's Friends is a universal programme that targets the development of coping skills among Key Stage 1 pupils. It is delivered by the class teacher over the course of an academic year, through 24 weekly sessions which last around 45 minutes. The 24 sessions are divided into six modules, each of which is centred around a set of illustrated stories about a group of children, their families, friends and Zippy, a pet stick insect. The modules focus on particular themes: feelings, communication, making and breaking relationships, conflict resolution, dealing with change and loss and general coping skills. Teachers are provided with a set of core materials and undergo one day training, which is delivered by Partnership for Children (PFC).

Schools allocated to the control group will not receive the programme during the evaluation period but will proceed with 'business as usual'. Parents receive an information sheet and opt-out consent form, to return to their child's teacher if they do not want their child to participate in the data collection associated with the trial.

Teachers will be asked to complete a short reading test with participating pupils at the end of Year 1 (between April and June 2016), and also to complete a short questionnaire on each pupil's social and emotional development. At the end of Year 2, participating classes will complete a literacy test and a short questionnaire on their social and emotional skills e.g. about friendships and problem solving skills.

A process evaluation will be undertaken by the evaluation team, and will run alongside the trial. This will aim to explore experiences of delivering the programme, and involve interviews with teaching staff, telephone interviews with parents, focus groups with pupils, and observations of programme delivery in a subsample of schools.

Intervention Type

Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)

1. Reading attainment - measured using the Hodder Group Reading Test at the end of Year 2
2. Emotional self-regulation - measured using the Child Anger Management Scale (pupil self-report) at the end of Year 2

Key secondary outcome(s)

1. Self-regulated learning - measured using the Learning Behaviour Scale (teacher-report) at the end of Year 2
2. Social skills - measured using the Social Skills Rating Scale (pupil self-report) at the end of Year 2

Completion date

30/11/2017

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

Year 2 pupils (aged 6-7 years) attending state-funded primary schools within five Local Authorities in England.

All state Infant and Primary schools in England are eligible to be put forward for randomisation

if they:

1. Have not delivered Zippy's Friends before
2. Are prepared to allow 1 hour per week in the Year 2 timetable for Zippy's Friends
3. Are prepared to release Year 2 teachers for training and support sessions
4. Have completed pre-test measures and provided pupil background data to the evaluators

Participant type(s)

Other

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Child

Lower age limit

6 years

Upper age limit

7 years

Sex

All

Key exclusion criteria

1. Not a pupil in a school that has signed up to participate in the trial
2. Parent has returned opt out consent form to the school

Date of first enrolment

01/01/2016

Date of final enrolment

30/05/2016

Locations

Countries of recruitment

United Kingdom

Northern Ireland

Study participating centre

Queen's University Belfast

Centre for Effective Education, School of Education

Centre for Evidence and Social Innovation

69-71 University Street

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Sponsor information

Organisation

Queen's University Belfast (UK)

ROR

<https://ror.org/00hswnk62>

Funder(s)

Funder type

Charity

Funder Name

Education Endowment Foundation (UK)

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? |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Protocol article | | 01/01/2017 | 21/05/2021 | Yes | 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 |