

Ready to Learn

Submission date	Recruitment status	<input type="checkbox"/> Prospectively registered
29/09/2015	No longer recruiting	<input type="checkbox"/> Protocol
Registration date	Overall study status	<input type="checkbox"/> Statistical analysis plan
30/09/2015	Completed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Results
Last Edited	Condition category	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data
08/03/2018	Other	

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

Almost one in six children in Northern Ireland (NI) leaves primary school without achieving the expected level in English and Maths. In 2010-11, around 9,000 pupils in NI failed to achieve the required standard in literacy and numeracy by the time they left full-time education. Educational underachievement has far reaching consequences, both for individual children and society as a whole. Ready to Learn is a programme package (manualised intervention) with two core elements. The first is an after-school programme for children designed to improve their literacy and promote social, emotional and behavioural skills. The second is a parent-focused programme designed to help parents understand what and how their children are learning in school, and to help them reinforce their children's learning at home. The main aim of the study was to find out whether Ready to Learn improved the literacy of socially disadvantaged children, and whether it could increase the engagement of parents with their children's education. In addition, we wanted to know whether, and to what extent, Ready to Learn could improve children's social, emotional and behavioural skills, because these skills help children learn.

Who can participate?

Co-educational primary schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas in one of two NI Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland. Participants were children in all P1 classes i.e. children entering school for the first time.

What does the study involve?

Participating schools are randomly allocated into one of two groups. Schools in group 1 receive the Ready to Learn programme. Schools in group 2 (control group) are given £3,000 cash to use as they wish and otherwise provide education as usual. A variety of measures are used to assess the impact of the Ready to Learn programme on the children's literacy, social, emotional and behavioural skills over a three year period.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

Potential benefits include improved educational outcomes (on the grounds that those participating in a trial - in this case teachers and pupils - generally do better, including those in the control group). No risks have been identified.

Where is the study run from?

A total of sixteen co-educational primary schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas in one of two NI Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland.

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

April 2010 to August 2013

Who is funding the study?

Atlantic Philanthropies (USA)

Who is the main contact?

Professor Geraldine Macdonald

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Contact information

Type(s)

Scientific

Contact name

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number

N/A

Study information

Scientific Title

Ready to Learn: a cluster randomised trial of Barnardo's 'Ready to Learn' literacy programme for children starting school

Study objectives

The main aim of this study was to ascertain whether, and to what extent, the Ready to Learn programme improves the literacy of socially disadvantaged children entering primary schools compared with children in schools that do not have access to the programme. The funders wished to commission a cluster randomised trial, both to maximise the rigour of the study and to minimise the contamination effects that would arise with the randomisation of individual students within a school.

Primary objectives: The primary objectives of the evaluation were:

1. To assess the effectiveness of Ready to Learn in improving the literacy of social disadvantaged children
2. To increase and maintain the engagement of parents with their child's education. The study was designed to address this objective at the school level.

The secondary objectives were:

1. To assess the effectiveness of the Ready to Learn programme in improving children's social, emotional and behavioural regulation skills
2. To ascertain the relative contributions of the two components of the programme

The tertiary objectives were:

1. To examine the extent to which the manual specifications are applied in practice across the nine school sites, the extent and reasons for variation
2. To identify factors that support or hinder implementation and participant responsiveness
3. To explore the relationship between variation in programme implementation and outcomes
4. If effective, to explore the factors that might account for Ready to Learn's impact

Ethics approval required

Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)

School for Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work, Queen's University of Belfast, 02/11/2010

Study design

A single-centre, cluster randomised trial

Primary study design

Interventional

Study type(s)

Prevention

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Educational and economic underachievement of socially disadvantaged children starting primary school in Northern Ireland.

Interventions

In April 2010, the sixteen schools participating in this study were allocated at random into two groups. One group (nine schools) received the Ready to Learn programme. The other seven schools (control group) received £3,000 cash to use as they wished, and otherwise provided 'education as usual'.

The Ready to Learn programme is a school-based programme with two key components:

1. An after-school literacy programme combining an academic programme aimed at enhancing literacy achievement with a social programme incorporating social, emotional and behavioural regulation skills
2. A family literacy strand designed to help parents or carers whose children are in their first year of school parents to engage with, and support, their child's education

Intervention Type

Mixed

Primary outcome(s)

Improved Reading Achievement were assessed using the following measures (timing of data collection across the three years appears in ()s.

1. The York Assessment of Reading Comprehension [YARC] (Year 3)
2. Concepts about Print [CAP] (Years 1 and 3)
3. The Naming Speed and Non-Word Reading Tests from the Phonological Assessment Battery [PhAB] (Years 1, 2 and 3)
4. The Word Recognition and Phonic Skills [WRaPs3], a standardised measure of word recognition and phonic skills (Years 1, 2 and 3)
5. The British Picture Vocabulary Scale [BPVS] (Years 1 and 3)
6. The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey [The Garfield Test] (Years 1, 2 and 3)
7. Parental interviews (qualitative data)

Parental Engagement assessed using the following measures in years 1 and 2.

8. The Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME)
9. The Home Learning Environment (HLE)
10. Parental interview (qualitative data)

Key secondary outcome(s)

Social, Emotional and Behavioural Regulations Skills were assessed using the following measures in each of the three years:

1. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)
2. The Social Skills scale of the Teacher-Report of Child: Preschool and Kindergarten Behavior Scales (PKBS)
3. The Assessment of Children's Emotional Skills (ACES)
4. Teacher/principal interviews

Completion date

31/08/2013

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

Eligible schools were co-educational primary schools from areas of high social disadvantage in Northern Ireland, with pupil numbers of 100+, who also met the following criteria:

1. Provided evidence of educational underachievement
2. Were not already in receipt of Barnardo's services / programme
3. P1 intake not a composite class in September 2010
4. Were located in either the Belfast or North Eastern Education and Library Board
5. The school was sustainable for the duration of programme i.e. was not likely to close/be merged with another school
6. Were committed to participating in the trial whether in the treatment or control arm of the study

Participant type(s)

Other

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Child

Sex

All

Key exclusion criteria

No exclusion criteria were stipulated other than that schools had to meet all inclusion criteria.

Date of first enrolment

01/04/2010

Date of final enrolment

22/04/2010

Locations

Countries of recruitment

United Kingdom

Northern Ireland

Study participating centre

Barnardo's NI

542-544 Upper Newtownards Road

Belfast

United Kingdom

BT4 3HE

Sponsor information

Organisation

Queens University of Belfast

ROR

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

Funder(s)

Funder type

Not defined

Funder Name

Atlantic Philanthropies

Alternative Name(s)

The Atlantic Philanthropies, atlanticphil, Atlantic, The Atlantic Philanthropies (Bermuda) Limited, AP

Funding Body Type

Private sector organisation

Funding Body Subtype

International organizations

Location

Bermuda

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

IPD sharing plan summary

Available on request

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Results article	Results in funder's report:	01/10/2014		Yes	No
Participant information sheet	Participant information sheet	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes