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Can a school-based Roots of Empathy programme help Y5 pupils improve their mental health, increase their empathy and their prosocial behaviour, before they move to secondary school?

Submission date
03/10/2022

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
14/10/2022

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
13/10/2022

Condition category
Other

[ ] Prospectively registered
[ ] Protocol
[ ] Statistical analysis plan
[ ] Results
[ ] Individual participant data
[ ] Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
Roots of Empathy have designed the Nurturing Empathy before Transition (NEBT) project which aims to increase empathy and prosocial behaviour, as well as having a positive impact on the mental health of school children in year 5. It is described by the delivery partners as "an evidence-based, preventative intervention for primary school children, that aims to reduce aggression, including bullying, and increases children's social and emotional competence."

Sheffield Hallam University have been appointed as the independent evaluator and are using a Randomised Control Trial (RCT) to evaluate if, how and why the programme works. As part of this RCT, 140 schools will be recruited (60 schools in 2022/3 and 80 schools in 2023/4). Seventy will be randomly assigned to the intervention (30 schools in 2022/3 and 40 schools in 2023/4). Over the two years, 70 schools will be assigned to the control group. As such they will receive £400 as an incentive for their data collection but will not receive the intervention. The project will be delivered by a member of school staff that will have undergone training to become a Roots of Empathy Instructor, in partnership with a volunteer family (parent and baby) and a classroom teacher. The Instructor is recruited from the school but cannot be the year 5 classroom teacher. In the past Teaching Assistants and or Parent Liaison workers have taken on the role of Instructor. The Instructor receives training, is assigned an ROE mentor and given ongoing professional development. For more information visit the Roots of Empathy website.

The aim of this study is to evaluate the impact of delivering the Roots of Empathy programme, in a school setting to year 5 primary school pupils This randomised controlled trial (RCT) has been funded by the YEF and will focus on the development of mental health, empathy and prosocial behaviour. The evaluation is not an assessment of individual pupils or schools but is about understanding how effective the RoE programme is overall.

Who can participate?
This research is for primary schools in England with a minimum of 21% of pupils eligible for pupil premium. In addition, schools need to be in one of the following broad geographical areas; London, Midlands, Yorkshire and Merseyside. One class in each school will be identified to take part in the programme.

What does the study involve?
Schools are randomised to one of two groups, either the intervention group or the control group.
The intervention group will receive the RoE programme in their school for one year 5 class. The RoE programme consists of 27-sessions, covering nine themes. This equates to approximately three sessions a month, they are: a Pre-family visit session, a Family visit (with the volunteer parent and baby), and a Post-family visit session.

Control group, no activities planned. ALL pupils will also be expected to fill in a survey at two-time points, to assess their mental health, empathy and prosocial behaviour. Teachers and leads from participating schools will also be asked to fill in questionnaires that will give detail on the context of their school and their perceptions of student's behaviour.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
All participating schools have the opportunity to be part of a high-quality research trial, working with experienced researchers from Sheffield Hallam University's Institute of Education (SIOE) that will provide insight into if, how and why the Roots of empathy programme leads to increases in mental health, empathy and prosocial behaviour. Control schools will receive a financial payment on completion of different elements of the study. The expectation is that this money compensates control schools for taking part in this research. Therefore, pupils will get to take part in the Roots of Empathy or (if in the control group) benefit from enriched educational experiences. One risk is that pupils will be asked to participate in additional tasks as part of this evaluation-in addition to their normal school timetable. The risks have been minimised by making sure any evaluative tasks, such as questionnaires are as short as possible and only used if essential to the study.

Where is the study run from?
The study is taking place schools in the UK. The Randomised Control Trial evaluation is being conducted by Sheffield Institute of Education at Sheffield Hallam University (UK)

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

Who is funding the study?
This study is funded by the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) (UK)

Who is the main contact?
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Contact information

Type(s)
Principal investigator

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number
M261 YEF Nurturing Empathy

Study information

Scientific Title
Nurturing Empathy before Transition in Y5 pupils. A randomised controlled trial to explore whether the Roots of Empathy programme for Y5 pupils improves their mental health, increases their empathy and increases their prosocial behaviour, in comparison to control schools

Acronym
ROE NEBT RCT

Study objectives
The aim of the evaluation is to understand if and how the Roots of Empathy programme, delivered as part of the Nurturing Empathy before Transition project improves pupil mental health, increases their empathy and prosocial behaviour.

Ethics approval required
Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 03/05/2022, Sheffield Hallam Universities Ethics Review System (City Campus, Howard Street, Sheffield, S1 1WB, UK; +44 114 225 5678; converis@shu.ac.uk), ref: ER19810112

Primary study design
Interventional

Study design
Randomized controlled trial

Study type(s)
Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Mental health, empathy and prosocial behaviour in Y5 pupils

Interventions
Roots of Empathy will be training a member of school staff to deliver their programme for the NEBT project. The Roots of Empathy (RoE) programme consists of 27 sessions, consisting of 3 per month with the parent and baby attending one session per month, and a preparation and debrief session either side. Sessions last for approximately 40-45 minutes. However, as the welfare of the mother and baby are of paramount importance it is feasible that the mother and baby session may be cut-short if needed.

The intervention group will receive the RoE programme in their school for one year 5 class. The RoE programme consists of 27-sessions, covering nine themes. This equates to approximately three sessions a month, they are: a Pre-family visit session, a Family visit (with the volunteer parent and baby), and a Post-family visit session.

Control group, no activities planned. ALL pupils will also be expected to fill in a survey at two-time points, to assess their mental health, empathy and prosocial behaviour. Teachers and leads from participating schools will also be asked to fill in questionnaires that will give detail on the context of their school and their perceptions of student's behaviour.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
1. Mental health measured using the Me and My Feelings questionnaire (Deighton et al., 2012) at baseline and endline (10-11 months)

Key secondary outcome(s)
1. Mental health measured using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 2001) at baseline and endline (10-11 months)
2. Empathy measured using the Basic Empathy Scale (BES) (Joliffe et al., 2006) at baseline and endline (10-11 months)

Completion date
01/08/2024

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
School level:
1. Primary school
2. In Yorkshire, Merseyside, the Midlands (East and West) and Greater London
3. 21% or more FSM/PP

Participant type(s)
Other

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Child

Sex
All

Key exclusion criteria
School level:
1. Prior experience of the RoE programme
2. Private schools, special schools or PRU

Date of first enrolment
01/04/2022

Date of final enrolment
07/10/2022

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre
Sheffield Hallam University
Arundel Building
Sheffield Hallam University
City Campus
Howard Street
Sheffield
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S1 1WB

Sponsor information

Organisation
Sheffield Hallam University

ROR
https://ror.org/019wt1929

Funder(s)

Funder type
Charity

Funder Name
Youth Endowment Fund

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
For the purpose of research, at the end of the study pupil data supplied to the SHU evaluation team by schools/ROE will be shared with the Department of Education (DfE). The DfE will pseudonymise the data, so it is no longer possible to identify any individual young person from the study data. The DfE will then transfer the data to the YEF Data Archive, which is stored in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Secure Research
Service. The YEF is the 'controller' of the information in the Archive. It will be possible for information in the Archive to be linked with information about the pupils from the National Pupil Database (NPD) and the Police National Computer (PNC). This will help approved researchers find out the long-term impact of the projects funded by YEF. It is YEF's intention to retain data in the YEF archive indefinitely. This is consistent with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)'s view that data can be held indefinitely for research and archiving purposes. However, YEF will commit to reviewing every 5 years, following submission to the YEF archive, to see whether there is a continued benefit to storing the data and its potential use in future research.

IPD sharing plan summary
Stored in non-publicly available repository