

Project Overview

Background

Good communication skills are linked to achievement and life chances, yet 10% of all children have long-term persistent oral language difficulties that are likely to need support throughout schooling. In addition, upwards of 50% of children in areas of social disadvantage start school with below average language skills. Unsupported language difficulties affect attainment, learning, literacy, social relationships, behaviour, mental health, and ultimately employment and social mobility.

This study aims to find out whether a tiered approach to language intervention, with an in-built screening assessment will improve oral language skills for children in Year 1.

Schools will be randomly allocated to either the intervention group or the control group. The control schools will carry on supporting their Year 1 pupils with SLCN as they usually would. The intervention schools will use Infant Language Link to support all their Year 1 pupils in a selected class.

Which pupils is this for?

The Infant Language Link package is designed to meet the needs of children with speech, language and communication difficulties. Children for whom English is an additional language can be included. The evaluation will *not* include children with diagnosed autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) or global learning difficulties. These children can still take part in Infant Language Link but will not be included in the evaluation of the project.

What do schools have to do?

The study will start in June 2023, when the evaluation team at Sheffield Hallam University will be in contact with schools. They will arrange to visit the schools and conduct baseline assessments with all the children in the selected Year 1 class in September 2023. The schools will then be randomly assigned to either the control group or the intervention group in October 2023.

The intervention schools will be given training on how to use Infant Language Link and will use the package between November 2023 and May 2024. They will screen all their Year 1 students in the selected class using the standardised assessment. The class teacher will use whole class strategies within all class teaching and a TA will run small language intervention groups: 2 half hour sessions per week for 12 weeks.

In June 2024, the evaluation team will visit all schools again (both intervention and control) to do another round of pupil assessments to help measure progress over the study period.

Can any school take part?

The funding for this project is from the EEF and as such only mainstream state funded schools in England are eligible to take part. We are looking to recruit around 150 schools. In order to understand the impact of EEF trials on pupils from a diverse range of backgrounds, we will be prioritising schools from particular areas.

Schools must:

- Want to implement an award-winning language intervention across Year 1
- Have 20+ Year 1 pupils in one class in September 2023
- Not have used Speech Link or Infant Language Link previously
- Not be undertaking another research project in Year 1 during 2023/2024
- Be able to deliver both class based and small group interventions for the duration of the study. This includes providing release time for support staff to prepare and run the small group interventions.

What's in it for the school?

All schools will be randomly assigned to either the control or intervention group.

All intervention schools will receive the following benefits:

- Will be able to use Infant Language Link **FREE** for the duration of the project.
- Will receive training for 3 to 4 members of staff on how to implement strategies and deliver speech and language interventions.
- Will be able to use Infant Language Link across Year R and Year 2, as well as Year 1, for the duration of the project.
- Will be able to identify all children that have SLCN in Year 1, enabling schools to identify if a literacy or behaviour difficulty is due to language.
- Will have access to our helpdesk and speech and language therapy advice for the duration of the project.
- Will have an opportunity to use a promising approach to raising attainment for pupils with SLCN.

All control schools will receive £500 as a thank you for taking part and hosting the two visits from the evaluation team.

What is the next step?

Complete the online form to register your school's interest. You will be asked some questions to establish your school's eligibility. If your school is eligible and within a target area we will send you some more detailed information about the schedule and requirements for the project and ask you to sign a Memorandum of Understanding which forms an agreed contract between the school and the research team.

We are expecting interest to be high in this project and eligible schools will be offered spaces on a first come, first served basis.