

Ready 4 School



Summary of findings

The Project

The Ready for School project piloted a music programme aimed at supporting the development of speech, language and communication in rising 5s. Children from 6 pre-schools were selected to take part in the programme, many of whom were identified as requiring support to develop their communication skills.

The children participated in 15 workshops from February to July 2017, consisting of music activities with content designed specifically to promote speech and language development, some free play time and story time. During the course of the programme, pre-school and reception class staff took the opportunity to meet with parents to discuss transition to primary school. Phase 2, from September 2017 to February 2018, followed the children into their reception classes where they took part in another 15 sessions, this time with their whole class.

The speech and language development of the children in the initial cohort was tracked using a developmental checklist. In addition, 5 from each school were selected to be assessed by a speech and language therapist at the beginning and end of the programme. Musical development was assessed using the Sounds of Intent in the Early Years Progression Framework (Sol-EY.) Parents, practitioners and teachers were also surveyed throughout the programme.

Results:

1: Musical development

There are 6 levels of progress in the Sol –EY, with levels 2 to 5 occurring in the early years. All but one child made at least 1 level of progress. 56% of the cohort made 2 or more levels of progress with the average being 1.8 and the average level achieved by the end was 4.5.

Children improved in their ability to listen and concentrate during the music activities and to sing in tune. With only a couple of exceptions, children were happy to sing solo and video evidence demonstrates that a significant proportion of the children were able to cope with complex melodic lines and demonstrate understanding of underlying harmonic structures beyond the normal age-related ability.

2: Speech and language development

Standardised speech and language tests were carried out on 5 children in each setting. The sample included many with specific speech and language issues and some with other challenges. Each child was tested using the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF) which tests three areas which then combine to create a core language score. They were also tested using the British Picture Vocabulary Scale (BPVS).

Many children made greater progress than had been expected over the course of the year. The average combined test result for our sample of children was 40.9% at the start of the programme i.e. below average against a national expected standard at that age. When retested at the end of the programme, the average score for the group was 62.5%, higher than average for that age group.

The results of the speech and language developmental checklist mirrored the results of the standardised tests, showing a greater proportion of children demonstrating expected levels of speech and language ability for their chronological age at the end of the programme than at the beginning.

3: Continuing professional development

The music practitioners and some of the pre-school and school staff from the pilot schools attended a 2 day training course before the programme started which focussed on speech and language development and musical development of 3 to 5 year olds. School staff and parents had the opportunity to observe and participate in the workshops and parents also received some resources to use at home.

75% of the music practitioners and 91% of the pre-school and school teachers reported that they have developed in their confidence to lead music activities.

67% of parents reported increased confidence to participate in music with their children. They appreciated the book and CD provided with many telling us how the children liked singing along in the car. 67% of parents also stated that they would be more likely to allow their child to take up a musical activity in the future.

4: Other benefits

Many teachers noted the children's increased listening and concentration skills, which they felt had a positive impact on the children's ability to engage effectively with the whole curriculum.

Anecdotally, many teachers and parents reported that they thought the programme had had a positive impact the children's transition from pre-school to primary school. At the mid-point of the programme, 94% parents reported increased confidence that their children would transition smoothly and at the end of the programme 100% reported that their children had transitioned well, citing the music programme as a factor in this.