

Early learning for two year olds – the evidence

Experiences in the early years strongly influence children's outcomes in later life, across a range of areas, from health and social behaviour to employment and educational attainment. Research has shown a strong relationship between a child's life chances and their early years development.

One of the barriers to engaging parents with the early learning entitlement is a preference for parental childcare, with many families wanting to provide all the care. As a result, local authorities should stress the benefits to children of free good quality early learning when communicating with families. An information campaign raising awareness of the educational and social benefits of early learning can be used to tackle parents' concerns about the value of the two year old entitlement. We have collected a number of research findings that can be used in your campaign material to help overcome parents' concerns.

Research has shown that high quality education for toddlers can have an impact on cognitive achievement, social and behavioural development, language and literacy development, and even parent-child relationships.

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile

One measure of children's development is the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFS). This records each child's achievements at the end of the EYFS when they turn five. It looks at six areas of learning and development:

- ▶ personal, social and emotional development
- ▶ communication, language and literacy
- ▶ problem solving, reasoning and numeracy
- ▶ knowledge and understanding of the world
- ▶ physical development
- ▶ creative development

A high EYFS score is linked to better results in Key Stage 1 assessments. This means that children who achieve a good level of development at age five go on to achieve the expected levels for reading at Key Stage 1, and they are five times more likely to achieve the highest level. Pupils in the bottom 20% at age five are six times more likely than peers to be in the bottom 20% at Key Stage 1.

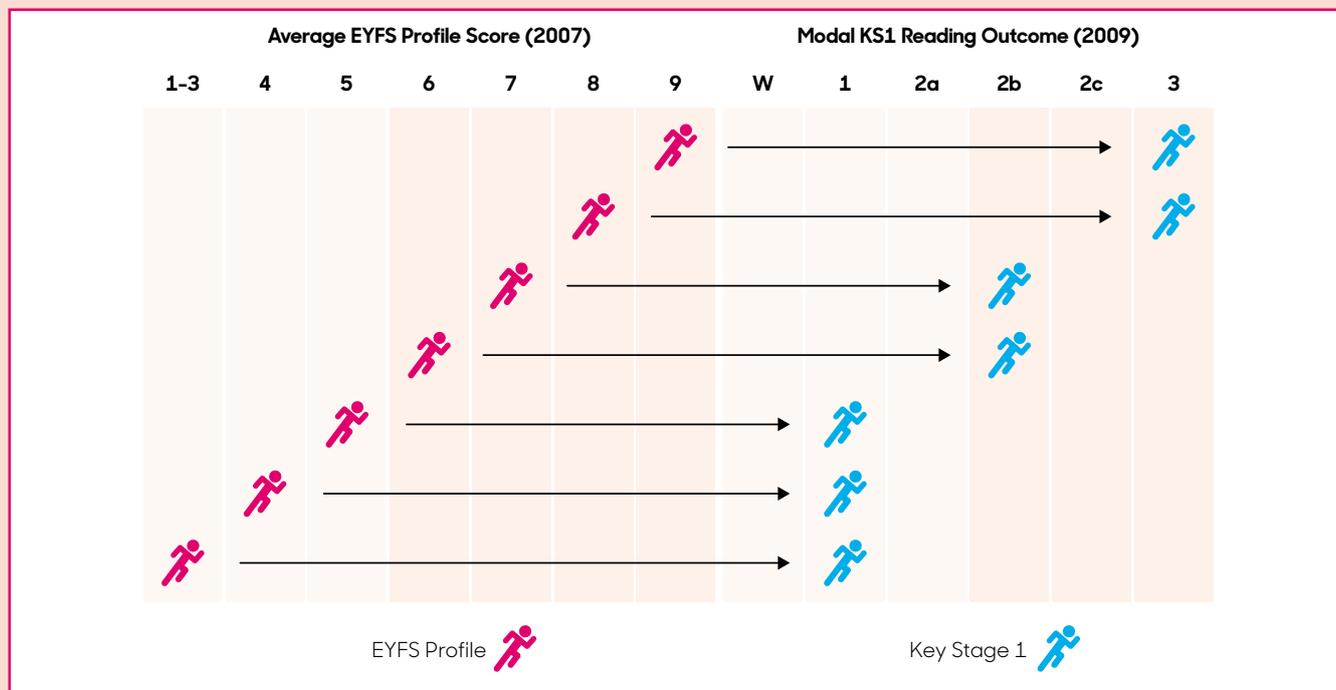


Figure1: DfE Early Years Evidence Pack 2013

Figure one maps average EYFS scores against corresponding reading outcomes. A child with an EYFS score between 1–3 goes on to achieve an average of level 1 in their Key Stage 1 reading assessment. However, a child who achieves an EYFS score of 9 is more likely to achieve a level 3 in their Key Stage 1 reading assessment. This data highlights that good quality early learning is an important part of providing children with the best start in life.

Quality of provision

Pre-school education can significantly improve children’s cognitive outcomes regardless of the level or how long they attend for. But the quality and effectiveness of pre-school provision make a difference. High quality provision has a longer lasting impact on academic, social and behavioural outcomes, as seen in figure 2 and 3.

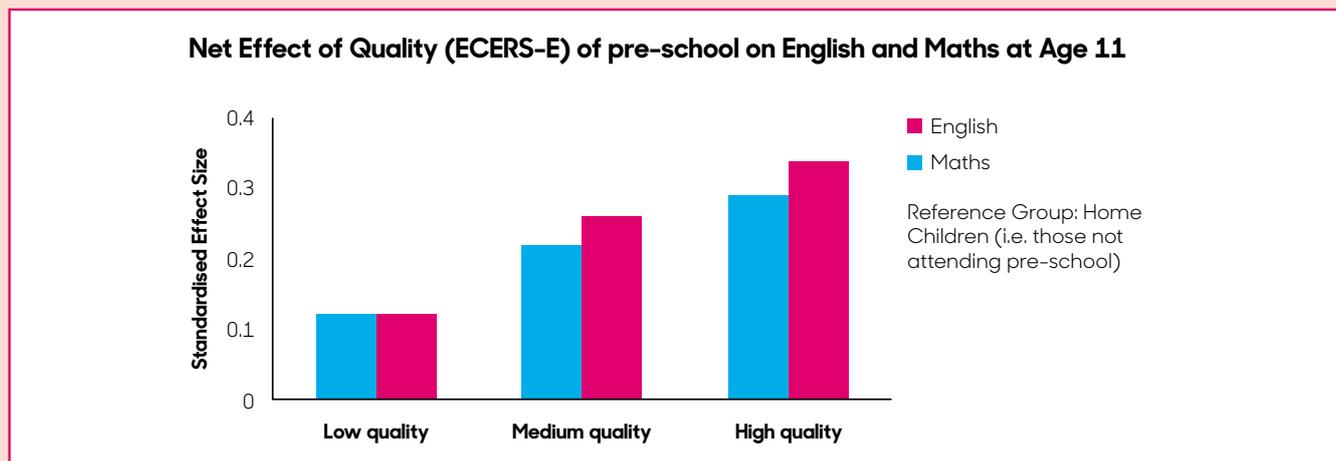


Figure2: Sylva et al 2004, The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project final report

The impact of pre-school educational effectiveness on social and behavioural outcomes in year 6

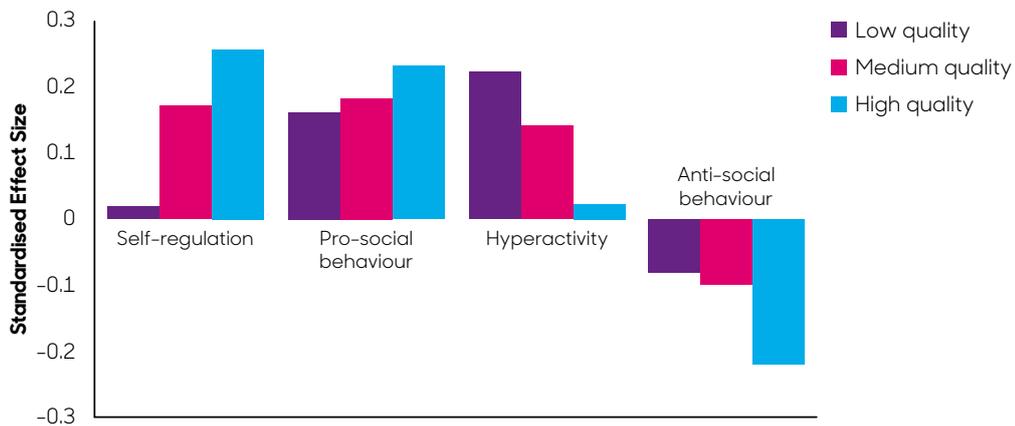


Figure3: Sylva et al 2004 The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project final report

The following factors have the greatest impact on the quality of childcare provision:

- ▶ Average qualification levels of teachers
- ▶ Having a qualified teacher/manager
- ▶ High levels of parental involvement
- ▶ Seeing cognitive and social development as complementary and equal in importance

Impact on parents

The availability of childcare can also have a positive impact on parents. A pilot study in to early learning showed that parents felt the offer had positively affected their ability to parent and their physical health and well-being and it provided them with opportunities for self-improvement.¹

Summary

Children benefit from early learning. Research has shown that good quality early learning:

- ▶ Gives children an opportunity to socialise with other children their age
- ▶ Has a long-term impact on children's development, for example their reading and number skills
- ▶ Helps them prepare to go to school
- ▶ Allows children to take part in exciting activities, games and messy play
- ▶ Any pre-school experience, enhances all-round development in children

1. DFE Early Education Pilot for Two Year Old Children Evaluation, 2009