

## Evaluating the impact of Every Child Counts

Posted on Monday 4th April 2011

A major evaluation of Every Child Counts (ECC), a numeracy programme introduced into English primary schools in 2008, has shown a positive short term effect on children's numeracy skills. The evaluation, conducted by researchers from the Universities of Birmingham, Durham and York for the Department of Education, equated the improvement to seven additional weeks' progress in numeracy skills for each child.

The independent evaluation was not able to derive strong conclusions about the medium-term impact of Every Child Counts on children and schools. Although the programme was considered to be well designed and received strong support from the participating schools it was also relatively expensive to deliver.

Every Child Counts (through the Numbers Count intervention) provides intensive support to the lowest-achieving Year 2 children. Children are taught on a one-to-one basis by a specialist teacher for half an hour a day over the course of a term. The programme is currently being provided to over 20,000 children in about 1700 schools.

The research, led by Carole Torgerson (University of Birmingham), Andy Wiggins (Durham University) and David Torgerson (University of York), brings together the results of two randomised trials and secondary data analyses to assess effectiveness. The team also conducted an economic evaluation of the programme, and evaluated its implementation in schools.

A randomised controlled trial (RCT) involving 409 children in 44 schools across England assessed the effect of receiving Numbers Count (NC) teaching compared with not receiving the programme. Children receiving Numbers Count showed a greater level of improvement - when measured using the GL Progress in Maths (6) test - compared with control children. This improvement was consistent across all groups irrespective of gender, free school meal status, age, and prior achievement.

A second trial involving 129 children in 15 schools assessed the effectiveness of delivering the programme in groups of two rather than on a one-to-one basis. Children receiving NC, whether in pairs or one-to-one, showed similar levels of improvement.

Medium term impact (2 years) of ECC was assessed using quasi-experimental methods with data from the National Pupil Database. However, no significant impact either at the pupil or the school level was found.

The economic evaluation found that the positive effect equates to about £193 per extra week of progress. However, only about 9% of children achieved their expected age related level due to the programme, which given that the programme costs £1353 per child, equates to about £15,000 for each additional child to reach their expected level.

Professor Carole Torgerson comments: *"We conducted a rigorous evaluation of NC to give a robust assessment of the effect it has on children. Our trial showed that the programme made a moderate improvement in children's numeracy. However, this improvement needs to be assessed in the context of the programme's cost, which was high, and the fact that we don't know if the effect is maintained beyond a single term."*

*The DfE is to be congratulated for funding a large-scale independent evaluation of ECC using a randomised controlled trial design. Large scale randomised evaluations of educational initiatives have an important role to play in supporting policy in education."*

The process evaluation found that schools and children were very positive about the programme. Local authorities and schools highlighted a number of wider benefits from adopting ECC including helping to improve mathematics in the schools more generally.

Dr Wiggins adds: *"Whilst we were impressed with the implementation of Every Child Counts in the schools and the quality of the training and support to teachers. However, there are questions about its suitability in its current form to provide a universal solution to meet the needs of the 30,000 or so 6-7 year old children who are under-performing in maths."*

*It follows that there is a need to develop and properly evaluate other mathematics interventions so as to provide schools and policy makers with a range of evidence based options which they can use to address the mathematical needs of their disadvantaged and under-achieving children."*

Professor David Torgerson from the University of York adds: *"The York Trials Unit was delighted to support this important educational evaluation"*.

ENDS

\*For media interviews with Professor Carole Torgerson contact Ben Hill, PR Manager, University of Birmingham, Tel 0121 4145134, Mob 07789 921163

For media interviews with **Dr Andy Wiggins**, Associate Director of Research and Evaluation, CEM Centre, Durham University, please contact Durham University Media Relations: Telephone: +44 (0)191 334 6075 or +44 (0)191 334 6077 Email: [media.relations@durham.ac.uk](mailto:media.relations@durham.ac.uk) (<mailto:media.relations@durham.ac.uk>)

### Note for broadcasters

Durham University has an ISDN line on site. Please contact the Media Office on +44 (0)191 334 6077 to arrange interviews. The ISDN number is +44 (0)191 386 2749. Durham University is 30 minutes from BBC/independent TV and radio studios, and Sky News have a studio based in Durham.

### NOTES TO EDITORS

The full title of the paper is:

**Every Child Counts: The Independent Evaluation**

Read the report here:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/AllPublications/Page1> (<http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/AllPublications/Page1>)

Torgerson, C.J., Wiggins, A., Torgerson, D.J., Ainsworth, H., Barnby, P., Hewitt, C., Jones, K., Hendry, V., Askew, M., Bland, M., Coe, R., Higgins, S., Hodgen, J., Hulme, C., Tymms, P. Every Child Counts: The independent evaluation, Executive Summary, report to DfE, March, 2011

1: Every Child Counts aims to tackle underachievement in maths, specifically targeting the bottom 5% of pupils aged 6-7. It seeks to bring up the performance of the

children in maths to their expect age related level. The ECC intervention, Numbers Count, was developed by Edge Hill University and the Every Child a Chance Trust, in partnership with Lancashire Local Authority. Its development was informed by the findings from the Williams review of Mathematics teaching in early years settings (June 2008)..

2: Figures provided by the Department for Education (DfE) showed that it cost on average £1353 for each child to receive the programme on a one to one basis (£900 in pairs).

3: Assessment for the trials was carried out using the GL Assessments Progress in Maths (6). This assessment was independent of any of the diagnostic or teaching elements of the programme, and was administered and marked by independent testers.

4.The cost of the Every Child Counts programme is £47 over the 3 years with additional funding coming through the Every Child a Chance Trust

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