

Early Talk Boost – research project

Information for settings



What is Early Talk Boost?

Being able to talk and understand words are key skills for young children, enabling them to access all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum (EYFS).

Early Talk Boost is designed to help support children who need a targeted approach to catch up with their peers, enabling them to access key areas of the EYFS curriculum including Communication and Language, Personal, Social and Emotional Development and Mathematics. The Early Talk Boost intervention has been designed by Speech and Language UK specialist teachers and speech and language therapists, with the help of early years practitioners and parents. It is informed by strong evidence and has demonstrated early promise in a study that showed impact on children's ability to talk and understand words.

This evaluation of Early Talk Boost is funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and is being carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).

The intervention is 9 weeks long and comprises of three 15–20-minute sessions per week. It is usually delivered to groups of 6–8 children in each setting. In this trial, we will ask settings to be willing to run the intervention from January–June 2026 with at least 2 groups of different children aged between 3 and 4. Larger settings may be asked to run up to 4 groups. The second group will consist of the youngest 3-year-old children and can be run in the 9 weeks immediately following the first group or both groups can overlap in time if that is easier to manage. Training and materials to run the groups are provided by Speech and Language UK.

What is the research project?

The study aims to evaluate the Early Talk Boost intervention in an independent and rigorous way to see what impact it has on children's oral language skills. The evaluation will use 2 assessments to find out what impact the programme has had on children's language outcomes: LanguageScreen and the Renfrew Action Picture Test (RAPT).

The research project will use a randomised controlled trial (RCT) design to assess the impact of Early Talk Boost. Participating settings will be randomly allocated one of the 2 groups:

- The intervention group, who will receive Early Talk Boost training in December 2025 – January 2026 and deliver the programme during the Spring and Summer terms of 2026.
- The control group, who will not receive Early Talk Boost and will continue with their usual practice. Settings in this group will receive funding which would allow them to buy in Early Talk Boost after the end of the trial.

An RCT is the best way to see if Early Talk Boost has an impact on children's outcomes. It allows us to compare the outcomes of children who received Early Talk Boost against those who didn't, to understand the true effect.

All settings will take part in the research activities from September 2025 – July 2026, whether they are part of the intervention or control group. In Autumn 2025, nursery staff will use LanguageScreen to assess participating children before settings are randomly assigned to either intervention or control. LanguageScreen is a tablet-based tool that measures children's language skills. It will help the research team to identify and select the children with the lowest scores, who will continue in the trial. Each intervention setting will be assigned at least 2 groups of children for the intervention. Larger settings may be assigned up to 4 groups. Selected children in the intervention settings will receive Early Talk Boost sessions, while children in the control settings will follow their usual practice. In Summer 2026, NFER Test Administrators will assess all selected children from intervention and control settings using LanguageScreen and RAPT. In addition, nursery staff in all settings will complete the FOCUS-34 measure for each selected child in the Summer term.



The findings will be used to help researchers understand more about how to support children's language development.

Who can take part?

Eligibility

All settings in England (except those in the Northeast, North Yorkshire and Cumbria) can take part in the study. Both Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) and maintained nurseries (either stand alone or as part of a Primary School) are eligible.

Settings need to be able to:

- Commit 2 practitioners to attend the Early Talk Boost training
- Deliver 3 intervention sessions per week for 9 weeks to 2 groups of children (up to 4 groups of children in larger settings)
- Expect to have at least 20 children, aged 3 to 4 years, who do not have SEND concerns and can attend the setting for at least 3 different days (or half-days) in a week during the 2025-26 academic year.¹
- Commit to supporting evaluation activities.
- Have a device to administer Language Screen assessments in Autumn 2025. (If not the loan of one can be arranged)

¹ Numbers for this academic year 2024-2025 are an indication of numbers for next year

Settings are **not** eligible to take part if they:

- Are running Early Talk Boost groups during the academic year 2024-25
- Are planning to deliver the Nuffield Early Language Intervention for Preschools (NELI Preschool) or Talking Time in the academic year 2025-26

What are the benefits to my setting?

By taking part in this evaluation study, your setting is adding to the evidence base and knowledge on what works in early years education in England.

Participating settings will also receive,

Intervention group:

- Early Talk Boost intervention pack which normally costs £575 and training and support, all of which is fully funded.
- Funding by the EEF as a contribution towards their staff's time/cover cost to attend training: settings will receive £60 per staff member who completes the professional development activities, for up to 2 staff members.
- Contribution towards staff time to complete LanguageScreen in Autumn 2025
- £250 in recognition of their contribution to this research. The payment will be provided in 2 stages, 1) £100 in Spring 2026, and 2) £150 in Autumn 2026 (see timeline for further details).
- Contribution towards staff time to complete Focus-34 in Summer 2026.
- £150 to complete Early Talk Boost session delivery logs.
- £150 if they are asked and agree to participate in additional case study data collection activities.

Control group:

- Contribution towards staff time to complete LanguageScreen in Autumn 2025
- £250 in recognition of their contribution to this research. The payment will be provided in 2 stages, 1) £100 in Spring 2026, and 2) £150 in Autumn 2026 (see timeline for further details).
- Contribution towards staff time to complete Focus-34 in Summer 2026.
- An additional £1000 which can be used to purchase Early Talk Boost programme for settings to deliver it after the trial.

What does training and support look like?

- Speech and Language UK will train 2 practitioners from each setting that is randomised to the intervention group. They will receive 5 hours of online training (typically delivered in 2 sessions).
- Additional support will be provided by a Speech and Language UK Advisor comprising 2 online support sessions and one on-site visit.
- Speech and Language UK will set up additional support and link settings together through a dedicated social media channel.
- Settings will receive £60 per staff member trained as outlined above.

How will the intervention be evaluated?

NFER will use a mix of assessments for the children and online surveys of practitioners, and in-person feedback from practitioners to evaluate the programme.

- After your setting signs up for the evaluation, NFER will ask you to share data for the 3–4-year-old children enrolled in the 2025-2026 school year. You'll also be asked to complete online surveys and carry out LanguageScreen assessments with all eligible 3–4-year-olds (about 10 minutes per child) as part of the baseline activities.
- After the baseline activities are complete your setting will be randomly allocated to either the intervention or control group.
 - Nominated practitioners from the intervention settings will complete online training and deliver the Early Talk Boost programme to selected 3–4-year-old children between January and June 2026. They will also need to complete weekly attendance registers for the Early Talk Boost sessions. A few intervention settings will be invited to participate as anonymous case studies for the evaluation, but this is completely voluntary.
 - Control settings will continue with their usual practice during this time. (Please note, control settings will be asked **not** to deliver Early Talk Boost, NELI Preschool or Talking Time in the academic year 2025-26)
- At the end of the trial, in June-July 2026, nominated staff from all settings will complete online surveys and accommodate visits from NFER Test Administrators, who will carry out LanguageScreen and RAPT assessments with selected children.



Researchers are evaluating Early Talk Boost. They are **not** evaluating your setting, teaching staff, or the individual children in the class. No individual children, teachers or settings will be named in the report arising from the study.

What data will be collected?

All data gathered during the evaluation will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and will be treated in the strictest confidence by NFER. Your setting's key contact and children's details for the evaluation will be shared securely between NFER and Speech and Language UK – so that both the organisations can get in touch with settings to provide training access, collect children's data, provide guidance and programme materials, share surveys and arrange any observations or interviews.

No setting, practitioner or child will be named in any report arising from this work, nor will we include any information that might mean that someone else could identify them. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has funded this evaluation. For this evaluation, NFER is the data controller for the trial and Speech and Language UK is the data processor. This means that NFER will make decisions about how and what personal data is used in accordance with the objectives of the evaluation set by the EEF. Speech and Language UK will process this data on behalf of NFER.

Speech and Language UK will also process data to deliver Early Talk Boost programme. For this process, they are the data controllers and are responsible for making decisions about how data is processed.

At the end of the research project, the evaluation data will be submitted to the ONS SRS in the EEF data archive which is managed by FFT. At this point, the EEF will become the data controller. The evaluation data will include data only identifiable to the Department for Education and no information will be archived that could be used to directly identify individual children (for further information, see EEF's archive privacy notice). Further matching to National Pupil Database (NPD) and other administrative data may take place during later research.

Data privacy information

You can see further details of the evaluation and links to NFER's privacy notices for the evaluation [here](#).

Speech and Language Privacy Notice can be found here:

<https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/privacy-policy/>

For more information on how the EEF processes and uses data stored in the EEF data archive, please see the [privacy notice](#) for the EEF data archive.

We're interested – what do we do now?

We have limited spaces available - if you are interested in finding out more, please complete this form using the following web link or QR code: [Early Talk Boost research project - Speech and Language UK: Changing young lives](#)

Expression of Interest Form



Or contact ETBtrial@speechandlanguage.org.uk for further information.

Project Team

This is a major study, and several different organisations are collaborating on it. They are:

Speech and Language UK: - *The intervention developer and delivery team* - Speech and Language UK are experts in helping children with their talking and understanding of words. They create tools for schools and nurseries, give advice and guidance to families, run 2 schools for children with complex speech and language challenges and put pressure on politicians to make them aware of children's speech and language needs.

National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER): - *The project's independent evaluator* - NFER's widely respected evaluations have informed education policy and practice for over 70 years, providing sound evidence in education debates and national reviews. This includes delivering many high-profile evaluations of government initiatives and practice Interventions for the Department for Education (DfE) and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). Our researchers, economists, statisticians, assessment specialists, psychometricians and operations specialists have extensive knowledge of the education system.

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) - *Funding the study* - The EEF is an independent charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement. They run projects which test the efficacy of education interventions to generate new evidence of what works.

Timeline:

Month	Activity
March 2025 – July 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settings sign up to the project via an expression of interest form (first come, first served!). • Settings then attend an online information session to find out more before committing to the project. • Settings who wish to take part complete the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).
July 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NFER contacts settings who have signed up to the trial, providing details of evaluation activities that will take place from September 2025 onwards • NFER provides settings with a parent information sheet
Sept 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settings send the information sheet to parents (with a 2-week period for responses if a parent wishes to opt-out of the evaluation) and share data about eligible 3-4-year-old children with NFER • Settings complete 2 online staff surveys
Oct 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NFER provides settings with guidance on how to complete the LanguageScreen assessment
Nov 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settings administer the LanguageScreen assessment to all eligible children
Dec 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settings are notified whether they are in intervention or control group • Nominated practitioners from intervention settings attend training • NFER notifies intervention settings which children have been selected to participate in the programme sessions.
Jan 2026	<p>In all intervention settings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nominated staff complete Early Talk Boost training • Early Talk Boost tracker is implemented with the participating children • Nominated staff start delivering the Early Talk Boost programme to the participating children
Feb – June 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settings receive first payments • Intervention settings continue delivering the Early Talk Boost programme • NFER undertakes case study visits with a small number of volunteer intervention settings (observations of Early Talk Boost sessions and interviews with nominated practitioners)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intervention settings complete weekly attendance registers for Early Talk Boost sessions • Settings allocated to the control group continue with usual practice
June – July 2026	<p>All settings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete 2 online staff surveys, and • Facilitate visits from an NFER test administrator to administer LanguageScreen and RAPT with selected trial children • Complete the FOCUS-34 measure with selected trial children
Sep – Oct 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All settings receive assessment feedback reports • All settings receive payment for completing relevant trial activities
Aug 2026 – April 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research activities – analysis and reporting
May 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final research findings published on EEF website