

Every school with Reception class offered early language training

Every state school with a Reception class in England can now apply for training and resources through an early years catch-up programme funded by the Government, to support thousands more pupils with vital communication skills.

Delivered by the Nuffield Foundation and backed by an extra £8 million of investment, recruitment has launched for the second wave of the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI), a programme proven to be effective in raising outcomes in Reception-age children's early language, communication and speech skills – particularly those who need the most support to overcome the disruption of the pandemic.

Part of the Government's major investment to build back better from the pandemic, it builds on last summer's £9 million investment to launch the [first wave](#) of NELI, which means 62,000 four and five-year-olds are receiving extra support to get their education back on track after time spent away from the classroom.

Visiting All Saints C of E Primary School in Merton, one of more than [6,600 schools](#) already receiving the intervention through its first wave, Children and Families Minister Vicky Ford spoke to staff delivering the programme about the positive changes on Reception children's confidence with language and communication and how it has helped them re-engage with their classmates.

Children and Families Minister Vicky Ford said:

We know the first years of a child's life can be the most formative, which is why this Government is making it a priority to make sure all children have the best start in life.

Speaking and communicating with confidence sets a child up for success in life, so it's vital that we support children to grow in confidence with these skills – especially those for whom English is not their first language or who have been more isolated during the pandemic than their peers.

The early results from Nuffield are very encouraging and I encourage every school with a Reception class to sign up in this second phase.

The £8 million expansion was [announced](#) by the Prime Minister in February as part of the new £700 million package to tackle lost learning, following the original £9 million investment as part of the National Tutoring Programme in June 2020.

The expansion for the 2021-22 schools year will be managed and delivered by the Nuffield Foundation on the Government's behalf, supported again by the University of Oxford and Oxford University Press.

Developed by researchers at the Universities of Oxford, Sheffield and York, NELI helps young pupils identified as needing targeted language support, offering individual and small-group language teaching sessions to between three and six pupils, run by a trained teaching assistant or early years professional.

Nearly 20,000 staff members have already received online training and the intervention is run over 20 weeks. Sessions with the children feature 'Ted' the NELI puppet for games that help them concentrate on their speaking, listening and learning.

Angela Filsell, headteacher of All Saints' Church of England Primary School, said:

We are incredibly proud to welcome children from all communities to All Saints', many of whom join us with little or no knowledge of English. Over the years, we've observed that many children in the later years of primary school struggle to write full and coherent sentences that feature good vocabulary choices, so we have looked at how we can improve that support.

By electing to take part in the NELI programme we recognised the need to take a 'bottom up' approach in order improve speaking and listening skills, which in the long run increases children's progress and attainment across the curriculum. This programme compliments, and is layered on top of, our wide curriculum offer, which includes elements of Talk for Writing. We are very proud of our child-led curriculum here.

Eleven children were highlighted in the NELI screening process, which was easily accessed online. We run two groups three times each week, alongside additional one-to-one sessions. We've also invested time and made NELI a key priority. This commitment has yielded great results, even prior to the midway point being reached.

A further outcome has been improved behaviour, as the children become less frustrated socially and can communicate their wants and needs. The online training for staff was engaging and Ted [the puppet used in NELI training] is a favourite with the children.

Findings from the most recent trial of NELI funded by the Education Endowment Foundation found that children receiving the intervention made an extra three months additional progress in their oral language skills compared to children who did not.

Josh Hillman, Director of Education at Nuffield Foundation, said:

The disruption to early education caused by the pandemic is far from over, with opportunities for pre-school children to develop their language skills significantly reduced by restrictions on social interaction.

Rigorous evaluations have proven that NELI helps children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with English as an additional language, to accelerate their language development and early literacy skills. We would encourage all schools who have not yet done so to register to receive the free training and resources to deliver this successful programme.

Alongside the investment in NELI, the government also announced in February a £10 million investment for an early language programme to help nursery-age children affected by the pandemic. The Department for Education is separately investing £20 million in a professional development programme for staff working in pre-reception early years settings to boost standards in early language, literacy and maths among young children in disadvantaged areas.

Children in reception year will also benefit from the government's £650m catch up premium for schools, to ensure they have the support they need to make up for lost teaching time. Sir Kevan Collins has been appointed as Education Recovery Commissioner to help develop and implement long term solutions to help pupils most impacted by time out of the classroom.

Schools can find out more information and complete their registration to receive NELI [here](#). Places on the programme are limited and registration is offered on a first come first served basis.