

Improving Communication through Vision Screening in Early Years

Evidence

Starting point:

As a school, we have children entering nursery with low levels of communication and language and improving this area of learning is high on our school agenda. Last year a child in my class showed accelerated progress in his personal, social and emotional development and in his communication and language as a result of wearing glasses. This year our school collaborated with The Centre for Applied Research (CAER) research team on their project to see if early years teams could undertake simple checks on 3-4 year-olds to pick out those who were struggling with their vision. As a result, I decided to carry out further research to see if wearing glasses improved children's communication skills, in particular the area of speaking.

The evidence:

In the UK it is recommended that all children receive an eyesight test in their Reception year. Although communication is one of the prime areas of learning in the early years foundation stage there is no evidence on how vision screening and wearing glasses improves communication skills in young children. However, there is numerous evidence to show how wearing glasses improves literacy levels. I found the 'glasses for classes' research project funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and the CAER to be the most reliable and the most helpful in terms of how they carried out their research.

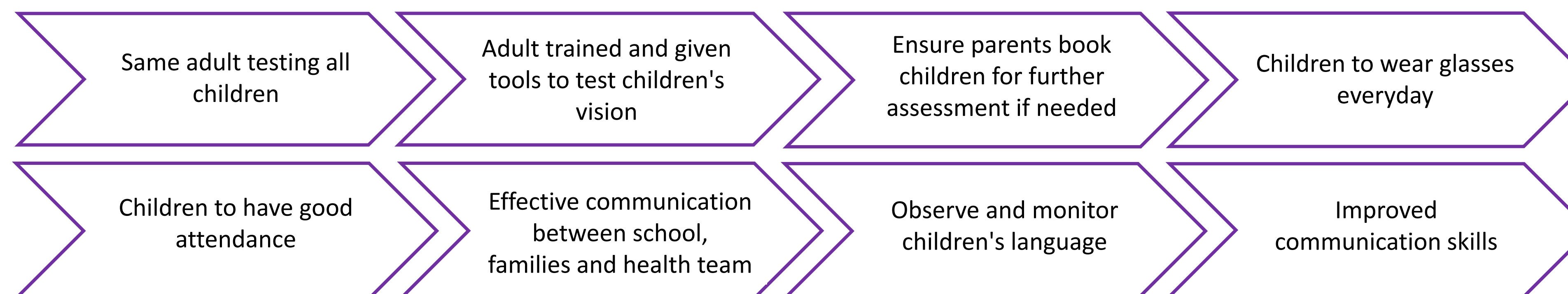
The CAER used the Born in Bradford data and found that poor eyesight could be contributing to the attainment gap in deprived areas.

[\(https://caer.org.uk/projects/glasses-in-classes/\)](https://caer.org.uk/projects/glasses-in-classes/)

Also funded by the EEF the project looked at the effect of glasses wearing on visual acuity and developing literacy. It is currently being evaluated and is due for publication in 2022.

Bruce A, Fairley L, Chambers B, et al. 2016 states that "It is important to understand both the level of vision in the population and the impact this is likely to have on future health and social outcomes."

Active ingredients and theory of change



Implementation

Before implementing any new strategy, I feel it is very important to have a clear plan where you can see how it will be introduced into your school, also allow time for effective implementation and execute it in stages.

- **Parental Consent**

First of all consent letters were sent out to all the parents explaining the vision screening programme. Once the forms were returned the children were assigned a code to be used when screening.

- **Staff training**

I met with the ophthalmologist who trained me how to test the children's vision. I was then observed to ensure I was testing them correctly.

- **Pre testing**

Using development matters I noted the children's communication and language levels, paying particular attention to the speaking strand.

- **Testing vision**

The children were given two simple tests to complete using the I-pad and the results were sent back to the research team for analysis.

- **Progress monitoring and post tests**

Over a 4 week period children were monitored then tracked to see if progress was being made. I also checked to see if there was a different element of development showing e.g. improvement in physical development. After another 4 week period post tests were carried out and analysis took place.

Discussion

Overall, the results of the new intervention were mixed. The vision screening picked up 2 out of 10 children. Although, progress was made for these children, I feel the intervention needed to run for a much longer period of time to show any significant progress. Another impact on the intervention was Covid-19 and the result of children and staff not attending. This also further impacted on the ophthalmologist and I having the time to work together. Despite making gains in communication and language it remains unclear whether wearing glasses has impacted other areas of learning and development.

Further steps

- Start intervention in the autumn term and run until summer term.
- Upscale by working with children from other settings who are the same age.
- Ensure more parents sign consent forms so more children can be tested.
- Use a specific language tool to track children e.g. Speech, Language and Communication Progression tool.

Reading List

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/implementation>

<https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/6/2/e010434.full.pdf>