

Starting young in early years education boosts Foundation Stage Profile scores ^[1]

Author: Gaunt, Catherine

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EXCERPTS

Children who attend early years settings before the age of three have higher Foundation Stage Profile assessment scores than children who start at three or four, according to an analysis of data carried out for the Office for National Statistics.

An analysis of FSP scores found that the average score was higher for children who had been in early years education before they started school and was 'statistically significant'.

The findings by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research are based on a sample of 7,939 children from the Millennium Cohort Study, with 'sweeps' of the data at three different stages, with the last one taking place when the children were five-years-old.

They chime with those of an earlier study, also based on findings from the MCS, which found that children who are exposed to any kind of formal childcare are at an advantage in all aspects of development before they start school (News, 25 February).

The latest research attempted to find a correlation between quality in early years settings and outcomes but found there was no significant relationship between any of the four key measures used and FSP results. None of the quality measures the report looked at were statistically significant related to FSP score.

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Co-author of the report David Wilkinson said, "In terms of FSP on our outcomes we don't find variation by sector in terms of providers." However he said that in naming vocabulary tests, "when you look at those outcomes it looks like children in maintained settings [nursery schools and classes] do better."

But the study also found that children in maintained settings had 'significant worse scores on the pro-social behaviour scale than those in private settings.'

Researchers were also able to identify the age at which children started attending formal childcare, which was categorized by nursery school or class, playgroup, pre-school, childminder or day nursery. The majority of children surveyed started early years provision between the ages of two and four: 31 per cent started at two and 27 per cent when they were three. Thirty per cent of children were attending early years settings before their second birthday and just three per cent started after they turned four.

The research also examined whether Ofsted inspection judgments for early years settings were a good predictor of how well children were doing at the end of the Reception year by analyzing 2005/06 Foundation Stage Profile assessment scores and 2005-08 Ofsted inspection results, with surprising results.

It concluded that there was only 'a weak' relationship between Ofsted's judgment on the quality of a setting and children's Foundation Stage Profile results.

Children who attended settings graded outstanding by Ofsted had lower scores in their FSP assessments than children who attended settings that had been judged good or satisfactory, it found. Mr Wilkinson said the finding was surprising but added, "There is more of an outcomes focus under the new inspection framework."

The study acknowledged that the research was carried out before the EYFS was introduced in September 2008 and before the new Ofsted early years inspections framework was brought in with a greater focus on children's learning and development.

Purnima Tanuku, chief executive of National Day Nurseries Association, said, 'NDNA and the nursery sector have long understood the benefits of high-quality care and early learning, and we are pleased that new research demonstrating this has been released.

"It is very positive to have confirmed evidence that settings of all types - maintained, private and voluntary, had a similar positive impact on children's outcomes, reflecting the importance of a thriving mixed economy in early years to benefit children and families.

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