



## Research & Development Impact Report No. 5

### How do we get families and schools working together?

#### Evaluating the impact of Families and Schools Together (FAST) in an inner city London Primary School

*"We know them [school staff] better now, and feel comfortable to talk to them", "We [parents and school staff] have built a great bond".*

Parent, Harrington Hill Primary

*"We have made great friendships with the parents who attended FAST. We stop and have a chat if we see each other.*

School Partner, Harrington Hill Primary

#### Who might find this research useful?

- Primary schools with relatively little parental involvement, looking to establish a sense of community in the area. Schools trying to encourage greater parental involvement in their child's education.



#### For further information please contact:

Pete Brodie (Pastoral Lead)

Harrington Hill Primary School, Mount Pleasant Lane, Hackney  
E5 9EY

Save the Children

<http://www.familiesandschoolstogether.com>

# Research & Development Impact Report

## How do we get families and schools working together? Evaluating the impact of Families and Schools Together (FAST) in an inner-city London Primary School

Project Participants	22 Reception and Year 1 families (of which 18 went on to complete the programme). The FAST team (4 School Partners, 4 Parent Partners and 2 Community Partners)	Phase(s): Early Years and Primary
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### School context relevant to this research:

- Harrington Hill Primary School is located within Inner London in a neighbourhood considered to have high total deprivation levels.
- There are 339 students enrolled at the school and over two fifths of the pupils receive free school meals.
- Historically, there has been relatively little parental involvement at Harrington Hill Primary.
- Families and Schools Together (FAST) is funded by Save The Children.
- FAST therefore presented a great opportunity for the school to work closely with both parent volunteers and families.

### Starting point(s)/ Baseline evidence:

- Before the 8 week programme began, parents and teachers of 'target' children within the participating families were asked to complete a pre-questionnaire designed specifically to measure FAST programme goals. Parents answered questions about social relationships, social support, involvement in their child's education, self-efficacy, family involvement, and the child's behaviour. Teachers answered questions on the child's behaviour and academic performance, and about the parent's involvement in the child's education.

### Is this developing the findings of existing research evidence?

- FAST has gained status as an evidence-based programme by the United Nations (UN) in the UK and the US as a result of rigorous research on the effectiveness of the programme. To date, four large randomised controlled trials with one- or two-year follow-ups have been carried out to demonstrate that FAST helps children and their families. Further information can be found at [www.familiesandschoolstogether.uk](http://www.familiesandschoolstogether.uk)

### Intended successful outcomes

- The programme aims to strengthen the bonds within and between families, between families and the school, and to connect people within the community. The programme has the following goals:
  - To enhance family functioning
  - To prevent the target child from experiencing school failure
  - To reduce the stress that the families experience from daily life.

### Impact measures

- The main impact measures used in FAST UK evaluation are paper and pencil instruments with acceptable levels of psychometric properties.
- Demographic data and feedback on programme satisfaction are also collected from the parents at the end of the eighth week.
- Parents complete post questionnaires answering questions about social relationships, social support, involvement in their child's education, self-efficacy, family environment, and the child's behaviour.
- Teachers complete a post-questionnaire about the child's behaviour and academic performance, and about the parent's involvement in the child's education.

### Summary plan of action

**Before:** The FAST team were recruited and the team were trained, over two days, to deliver the programme. Reception and Year 1 families were invited to join through flyering, school newsletter items and a series of information sharing events. Once families were recruited and target children were identified, Parent and Teacher pre-questionnaires were completed.

**During:** Eight week programme delivered. Families were split into two 'hubs' to participate in six key elements:

- (1) A meal shared as a family unit
- (2) Family communication games played at a family table
- (3) Peer time for couples or buddies
- (4) A self-help parent group
- (5) One-to-one parent-child time
- (6) A fixed door prize that allows every family to win once

Team review sessions were held at the end of week 1, 5 and 8.

**After:** Parent and Teacher post-questionnaires were completed. The data was analysed and an evaluation report was published by Middlesex University. A FASTWORKS group was set up by graduating parents, with team support, to maintain FAST family networks and identify community development goals.

**Initial resource allocation (human, material and financial)**

- Timescale: 8 weekly sessions. 2.5 hours per week
- 10 team members (4 school partners, 4 parent partners, 2 community partners) + volunteers.
- 2 classrooms ('hubs') and hall/playground. Kitchen facilities.
- Arts/Craft materials, 'Special Play' packs, refreshments, weekly prizes
- Budget of £2800 provided by Save the Children.

**Other points to note**

Recruitment: FAST is aimed at children aged 3-5 in the first few years of primary. It was decided to open the invitation to all parents/carers with a child in Reception or Year 1. Families volunteered for the programme however the school encouraged specific families to take part if it was felt they would particularly benefit from the sessions. Although the 'target' child is to be aged 3-5 years old, the whole family are encouraged to attend the weekly meetings.

### Progress and Impact Review July 2017

**Review of Impact**

The data from the pre and post questionnaires were independently analysed by Middlesex University and published in a detailed 'FAST School Evaluation Report'. Stars were awarded and used to visually quantify how satisfactory the results of the programme were. The findings of the School Evaluation Report were based on data from 13 complete sets of pre and post questionnaires.

**Outcomes to date (refer to data, intended outcomes and success criteria)**

Specific to goals

- 1) To enhance family functioning
  - Family Environment ★★
  - Parent-Child relationship★★
  - Parenting Self-Efficacy★
  - Child Behaviour at home★
- 2) To prevent the target child from experiencing school failure
  - Child Academic Competence: ★
  - Parental Involvement in Education★
  - Child Behaviour at School ★
- 3) To reduce the stress that the families experience from daily life
  - Community Social Relationships ★
  - Social Support ★★
  - Reciprocal Parent Support ★★★★★
  - Self-Efficacy ★

General

Overall Parent Satisfaction ★★★★★ (satisfaction rating of 9.4 (out of 10) for the programme)  
Parent Empowerment in Child's Education ★★

## Analysis

- Over one quarter of FAST families reported improvement in family environment in terms of family cohesion and significant reductions in family conflict whilst a third of the families reported improved parent-child relationships.
- An improvement in self-efficacy was observed in a small proportion of families and a reduction in behavioural difficulties at home was observed in one of the participating families.
- A small proportion of pupils improved in academic competence, however, it was agreed that progress would be better measured over a longer timescale.
- A significant improvement in parental involvement in education was observed in 1 of the 13 families.
- 2 of the 13 evaluated pupils showed significant improvement in prosocial behaviours at school.
- Significant improvement in community relationships occurred in 3 out of 13 FAST families. Two-fifths of parents reported an increase in emotional support, affectionate support or tangible support whilst 6 out of 12 families reported a significant improvement in reciprocal parent support.
- A small proportion (3 out of 13) of parents reported a significant improvement in either social or general self-efficacy.

## Evaluation

Based on the results of the Middlesex University School Evaluation Report, FAST appears to be an effective programme for bringing families and schools together. Over the 8 week period, the data compiled and analysed by Middlesex University showed strengthened bonds within and between families, between families and the school and within the community. Parent satisfaction was a particular area of success for the cycle, with numerous parents highlighting improvements with school staff, community agencies, other parents, and their children. Parent empowerment in their children's education was also an area of success.

## Other outcomes and impact

FAST team cohesion: Team member satisfaction was awarded three stars and deemed 'very good'.

*"When we started the programme, we didn't know each other. We were able to build special relationships..."*

*FAST parent partner*

FASTWORKS: As encouraged by the FAST programme, a number of families who participated in the sessions went on to form Harrington Hill Friends Together (HHFT). The group meets monthly in a local church hall to continue strengthening bonds both within and between families. Parents from the programme have also gone onto set up a weekly walking group as well as regularly attend school coffee mornings.

Parent Governor: One of the parents who participated in the 8 week FAST cycle went on to become a parent governor on the school board of governors.

## What next? / Wider learning

- Track target children's attainment over a longer timescale to better indicate the impact of FAST on academic progress.
- Explore the possibility of further funding from Save the Children to fund future FAST cycles.

## Review of resource allocation (human, material and financial)

- Qualitative feedback from team members was encouraging for this cycle. It was reported that everyone displayed great teamwork and cooperation, and the school was commended for their high level of support. Every team member agreed that the FAST programme gave them a strong sense of accomplishment, and that the individual members had grown professionally and personally.
- Despite initially using two 'occupied' classrooms, it was realised after the first week that for the sessions to run effectively, hubs would need to be set up in two unused classrooms, allowing ample time for set up.
- More extensive kitchen equipment would need to be purchased for future cycles in order to support parents requiring school facilities to cook their allocated meal.
- £1900 was spent overall.

## References

FAST School Evaluation Report (see report for further references)



Appendix one: Photos from the sessions

Family Communication Games





One-to-One Parent Child Time



Special Door Prize



Graduation



**Appendix two:** extracts from <http://www.familiesandschoolstogether.com/content/about-fast>

## About FAST

**Families and Schools Together is an award-winning early-intervention programme which brings parents, children, teachers and the wider community together, to make sure children get the support they need to fulfil their potential at school – and in life.**

That's why Save the Children is working in partnership with Middlesex University to deliver FAST in areas of deprivation and where high numbers of children receive free school meals. Together, we're committed to creating a lasting legacy for early-intervention and parental support.

## HOW DOES FAST WORK?

- **Step 1:** Parents of children in a primary school class or year group are invited to attend FAST with their family.
- **Step 2:** Up to 40 families attend eight weekly sessions where children and parents take part in structured activities together.
- **Step 3:** Weekly sessions are followed by monthly meetings run by graduated FAST families.

## WHY DOES FAST WORK?

By building supportive relationships within families and across communities, FAST helps improve children's engagement in learning and can have a huge impact on their life chances and wellbeing.

FAST supports families by:

- **helping children improve their skills in reading, writing and maths** – as well as encouraging good behaviour and a positive attitude to school and learning
- **helping parents get more involved in their child's education**, so they can support learning and development at home
- **encouraging stronger bonds between parents and their child**, their child's school, other parents and the wider community.

## THE HISTORY OF FAST

FAST was developed in 1988 by Dr. Lynn McDonald, Professor of Social Work Research at Middlesex University (McDonald *et al.*, 1997) and has received numerous awards and honours, including from the United Nations (UNODC, 2010) as a family skills programme, and, in the UK, as an evidence-based parenting programme (C4EO, 2010; NAPP, 2008).

In the US, FAST is recognised by the National Registry of Effective Programmes and Practice (NREPP, 2009), has been cited as an exemplary delinquency prevention programme by OJJDP (2006), and as an effective substance abuse and mental health prevention programme (SAMHSA, 2002 and 2009).

Although FAST was founded in the USA, it brings together local support resources to build protective factors around children which has allowed for the FAST program to run successfully in 18 countries.