

# Good pre-school and home-learning boosts academic development

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Attending a high quality pre-school followed by an academically effective primary school gives a significant boost to children's development. These are the findings of a new study which shows that a stimulating early years home-learning environment also provides a sound foundation on which these experiences build.

The Effective Pre-school and Primary Education Project (EPPE 3-11) carried out the study. One of the principal investigators of the project is Pam Sammons, a Professor of Education at The University of Nottingham. She said: "The EPPE research confirms the importance of early experiences and the powerful combination of home, pre-school and primary school in improving children's learning."

EPPE 3-11, which is managed by the Institute of Education, University of London, tracked 3,000 children from the time they started pre-school until age 11. The findings include:

## 1. Pre-school helps to combat social disadvantage

-- Good pre-schools benefit all children but high quality is especially important for children who have special educational needs, mothers with low qualifications or come from unstimulating homes.

## 2. Primary schools affect development

-- The overall quality of teaching affects children's social behaviour and

intellectual development.

-- Much variation in the quality of teaching was found (measured in Year 5 [age 10] classrooms in 2003/4), and this has a more powerful impact on children's academic progress children's than their gender or whether or not they receive free school meals.

-- Overall quality of teaching tends to be higher in classrooms where teachers use plenary sessions consistently.

-- Children who attend a more academically effective primary school show better attainment and progress in Key Stage 2 (ages 7 to 11) than children with similar characteristics who attend a less effective school.

-- Attending a primary school high in academic effectiveness gives a particular boost to children who have many disadvantages.

### 3. Home matters too

-- Higher parents' qualification levels are strongly associated with children's attainment and social behaviour for children at age 11.

-- A stimulating home learning environment at age 3-4 years is linked to long-term gains in children's development. The influence of the home-learning environment on children's development is similar in strength to their mother's qualification level.

The Effective Pre-School and Primary Education project (EPPE 1997 - 2008) is a long term study funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. It has followed the progress and development of approximately 2,800 children since they began pre-school over 10 years ago.

Earlier reports have demonstrated the importance of good quality pre-school experiences in providing children with a good start to school. EPPE has provided research evidence which has been used to inform the Government's expansion of the early years sector. This final report of the primary school phase of the research focuses on the end of primary school (Years 5 and 6 when children were age 10/11 years old).

The research has provided a unique insight into the enduring impact of early experiences, especially the home learning environment (for children age 3 -4) and the quality of pre-school. It also shows the importance of the primary school attended, especially its academic effectiveness.

The results clearly demonstrate the importance of investment in early years, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and for those who go on to primary education of poorer quality. However, the findings also show that pre-school on its own is not a magic bullet. The project has also revealed that the relationship between disadvantage and educational experience is complex and that multiple disadvantages interact with education experiences and are key sources of inequality. Nonetheless, it is clear that disadvantaged children benefit particularly from 'quality' education. These findings have important implications for policies and practices intended to help narrow the achievement gap between more and less disadvantaged learners.

Source: University of Nottingham

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