

# A cluster randomised controlled trial and evaluation and cost-effectiveness analysis of the Roots of Empathy schools-based programme for improving social and emotional well-being outcomes among 8- to 9-year-olds in Northern Ireland

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## Plain English summary

### The Roots of Empathy schools-based programme

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## Plain English summary

Children's early social and emotional development remains a significant predictor of their future social, education and health outcomes. Roots of Empathy (ROE) is a school-based programme that is delivered on a whole-class basis for one academic year. It seeks to increase children's empathy, leading to positive behaviour change and preparing them better for later life. It consists of 27 lessons based around the monthly visit from an infant and parent, who are usually recruited from the local community. This study provides a robust evaluation of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness (value for money) of ROE. ROE involved 74 primary schools in Northern Ireland randomly divided into two equal groups that either delivered ROE during 2011–12 or acted as a control group. The effectiveness of ROE was measured immediately at the end of the year and for the following 3 years (up to 2015). The study found that ROE was effective in increasing the children's prosocial behaviour and reducing their difficult behaviour immediately at the end of the programme. Although the effects on prosocial behaviour fell away after the first year, there was some possible evidence that the effects on reducing difficult behaviour may have been sustained for the following 3 years. Although originally developed in Canada, ROE was very well received by teachers, parents and children, and it was effectively delivered in schools in the context of Northern Ireland. The study also found that ROE was likely to be a cost-effective use of society's resources as a means of improving children's quality of life.

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