

# An evaluation of National Strategy intervention programmes

---

This small-scale survey evaluated the impact of National Strategy approaches to intervention on pupils working just below national expectations in a small sample of 12 primary and nine secondary schools. Intervention was more effective in the primary schools than in the secondary schools visited and stemmed from careful analysis of pupils' weaknesses, flexible planning of programmes, thorough training of key staff and effective monitoring and evaluation. Good leadership and management contributed to the successful impact.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects registered childcare and children's social care, including adoption and fostering agencies, residential schools, family centres and homes for children. We also inspect all state-maintained schools, non-association independent schools, pupil referral units, further education, initial teacher education, and publicly funded adult skills and employment-based training, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), and the overall level of services for children in local authority areas.

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE  
Phone: 08456 404040

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Reference: 070256

© Crown Copyright 2009



# Contents

---

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Key findings</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Characteristics of National Strategy interventions</b>	<b>7</b>
What is intervention in the context of the National Strategies?	7
The impact of National Strategy interventions	9
Teaching and learning in intervention programmes	14
The impact of intervention programmes on the curriculum	18
The leadership and management of intervention	20
<b>Notes</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Further information</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Annex. Schools visited in the survey</b>	<b>23</b>
Primary	23
Secondary	23

## Executive summary

Inspectors visited 12 primary and nine secondary schools in the spring term 2008 to evaluate the impact of National Strategy interventions on pupils' achievement, teaching, learning and the curriculum. They also evaluated the quality of the leadership and management of intervention at school level. Five of the secondary schools had national test results in 2007 that were below average in relation to all schools. Three of the schools had results that were above average and the remaining school was broadly in line with the average. Of the 12 primary schools visited, four had results above the national average, four were broadly average and four were below average. Eleven inspectors' visits focused on mathematics and 10 on English.

The National Strategies promote a variety of intervention programmes and approaches.<sup>1</sup> Some of these are well established, such as the early, additional and further literacy support programmes in primary schools and the Year 9 booster and revision materials<sup>2</sup> in secondary schools, and others are relatively new.

Intervention strategies have been a key feature of the Primary and Secondary National Strategies since their inception. The National Strategies define the target group for intervention as: those pupils who are working below national expectations, but who have the potential to reach the levels expected of their age group if they are given timely support and motivation.

Intervention had more impact in the primary schools visited than in the secondary schools. The impact was good or outstanding in eight of the 12 primary schools, but in only two of the nine secondary schools. It was satisfactory in four primary schools and five secondary schools. In two secondary schools the impact of intervention was inadequate.

The primary schools applied or adapted the National Strategy intervention programmes and regularly mixed them with other pertinent materials and approaches to cater for pupils' needs. The nine secondary schools were most likely to adopt the Year 9 booster and revision materials. They did not regularly use other National Strategy resources and approaches: they reported that they had tried them and found they were ineffective.

No single programme or approach was successful in all the schools. However, the quality of the leadership and management of intervention was a key factor in determining impact. This required careful analysis of pupils' progress; prompt identification of those pupils who might benefit from intervention; flexible

---

<sup>1</sup> Details of the National Strategies can be found at [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primary/](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primary/) and [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/secondary/keystage3/](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/secondary/keystage3/).

<sup>2</sup> Year 9 booster materials are designed to support underachieving pupils or those close to achieving Level 5 in preparation for National Curriculum tests, including revision strategies ([www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/new/published/year9b/](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/new/published/year9b/)).

organisation of programmes to respond accurately to pupils' needs; good quality training for staff; and regular monitoring of provision and pupils' achievement. Senior leaders, particularly in the primary schools, set clear direction for intervention strategies and ensured that staff worked together to enable pupils to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills. In the secondary schools, responsibility for intervention programmes was often shared between subject leaders and other staff; this led to gaps in provision and programmes that were not targeted sufficiently to help pupils improve.

Two of the more successful examples of intervention – one in an infant school and the other in a secondary school – involved detailed analysis of the pupils' needs and accurate evaluation of the effectiveness of previous interventions. As a result, staff established specific intervention classes and these received focused, high-quality teaching.

Small-group intervention was effective when teaching assistants were thoroughly trained, worked closely with class teachers, had good subject knowledge and knew the programmes well. Where provision was good, teaching assistants and/or teachers had sufficient subject knowledge to adapt the materials and their approach to meet the pupils' needs. Withdrawing groups for support was less effective when assessment information was not used effectively to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills and the programmes selected did not match what pupils needed. Often, this intervention came too late, just before national tests, and was not related in any way to the teaching programme in pupils' main English or mathematics lessons.

In the best examples of intervention, the quality of provision and teaching was carefully monitored by senior staff. However, the work of many teaching assistants was rarely observed and the progress of pupils on intervention programmes was not tracked sufficiently.

## Key findings

- Intervention was more effective in the primary schools, where the impact was good or outstanding in eight of the 12 schools, than in the secondary schools, where it was good or outstanding in only two of the nine.
- The primary schools were more likely to use or adapt National Strategy programmes, although most used a mixture of Strategy and non-Strategy materials according to pupils' needs. The secondary schools used Year 9 booster and revision materials more than other National Strategy intervention programmes, which had often been tried and abandoned.
- Effective mapping of provision, clear aims and close monitoring of pupils' progress were key features in the better practice.
- Two of the more effective examples of intervention – one primary and one secondary – involved carefully planned grouping of pupils into intervention classes that removed the need for specialist withdrawal work. In both these

schools standards were below the national average, but effective class teaching had a distinct impact on pupils' progress.

- Intervention for small groups was most successful when teaching assistants were thoroughly trained, worked closely with class teachers, had good subject knowledge and knew the programmes and their pupils well. As a result, they were able to adapt the materials and their approach effectively to meet the pupils' needs. However, intervention was unsuccessful where assistants were not trained and worked through programmes that did not tackle pupils' weaknesses. This was particularly the case in secondary schools.
- Planning, in the case of the less effective intervention, did not include sufficient understanding of pupils' needs and often concentrated on booster or revision sessions in Years 6, 9 and 11. Although these were successful to a degree, they could not make up for the deficit in learning that accrued because intervention had not occurred earlier or because past teaching had failed to identify and address initial weaknesses.
- Generally, the schools analysed assessment information well to identify pupils who might benefit from intervention and to track their progress overall. However, in most of the schools the monitoring of the teaching in withdrawal groups and evaluation of its impact were weak.

## Recommendations

In order to improve the effectiveness of intervention programmes in schools, those responsible for leading and managing the National Strategies, nationally and locally, should:

- ensure that schools understand the importance of thorough identification of pupils' needs and careful planning of programmes to meet those needs
- promote regular and continuing training for staff, including teaching assistants, who deliver specific intervention programmes
- support schools in monitoring intervention programmes and evaluating their impact.

In order to raise standards by improving the achievement of pupils targeted for intervention, senior leaders and teachers in schools should:

- analyse closely the weaknesses in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills against the available intervention programmes and approaches, to ensure that the correct strategies are used at an early stage
- ensure that all those involved in providing the intervention programmes, particularly teaching assistants, are trained regularly and thoroughly

- evaluate the effectiveness of intervention programmes, adapting them and combining them with other approaches such as good quality teaching to ensure that their impact is successful.

## Characteristics of National Strategy interventions

### What is intervention in the context of the National Strategies?

1. The National Strategies target intervention at pupils who are working below national expectations, but who have the potential to reach the levels expected for pupils of their age if they are given timely support and motivation. Intervention programmes are not focused specifically on pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or on those who may be underachieving, whatever their prior attainment. Nevertheless, according to the National Strategies, individual pupils from these groups may make up some of the target group for intervention.
2. The National Strategies promote a variety of intervention programmes and approaches. Some of these are well established, such as the early, additional and further literacy support programmes in primary schools and the Year 9 booster materials in secondary schools.<sup>3</sup> Other programmes are relatively new.
3. The National Strategies encourage schools to identify, as soon as possible, the pupils who would benefit from intervention in order to tackle difficulties and barriers to learning early on, rather than trying to help pupils to catch up later. The intervention programmes, materials and approaches are intended to help teachers to support these targeted pupils.
4. The National Strategy describes three 'Waves' of teaching and support.<sup>4</sup> These terms are more commonly used in primary than in secondary schools.
  - Wave 1: high-quality, inclusive teaching supported by whole-school policies and frameworks that are clearly targeted at all pupils' needs and prior learning.
  - Wave 2: additional, time-limited intervention programmes designed to accelerate learning for particular groups that are expected to catch up or exceed the performance of their peers as a result.
  - Wave 3: targeted, time-limited, evidence based and increasingly individualised programmes of intervention.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> The National Strategy introduced these programmes in 2001/02 to offer structured, additional support in literacy to pupils who were not making expected progress; early literacy support (ELS) for Year 1; additional literacy support (ALS) for Year 3 and further literacy support (FLS) for Year 5.

<sup>4</sup> Further information on interventions in secondary schools is available at:  
[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/intervention/home.html](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/intervention/home.html).

All schools should have teaching which meets the description of Wave 1. A school may have provision at Waves 2 and 3, as well as Wave 1, to meet pupils' differing needs.

5. The National Strategies expect schools to develop intervention plans based on a thorough audit of pupils' needs; schools should review their provision for pupils working below age-related expectations in order to identify the specific support they need in order to improve.<sup>6</sup> Secondary schools in particular have been encouraged to designate an intervention leader and to have a trained intervention team.<sup>7</sup> The aim of this team is to raise the attainment of underachieving pupils. Its role is to work with other staff across the curriculum to:
  - identify pupils in need of intervention support
  - ensure that the pupils have curricular targets that are explicit, understood and tackled
  - help to plan, and provide the resources for, appropriate intervention programmes
  - monitor the progress of pupils involved in the programmes
  - advise other staff on ways to help the pupils to make the next steps in their learning.
6. The National Strategies encourage schools to use 'progression maps' to identify and track pupils' progress. These are designed to support teachers in planning the curriculum so that it improves the progress of underachieving pupils in Years 7 to 11. The maps describe progression in reading, writing and mathematics; identify the critical next steps in learning for pupils; and offer advice on and examples for teaching. They also contain advice for parents, carers and mentors who are supporting pupils.

---

<sup>5</sup> Provision at Wave 3 is likely to draw on specialist advice. Pupils receiving support at Wave 3 will always be placed on School Action and on School Action Plus if an external agency is involved in assessment, planning and review. It may involve adjusting learning objectives and teaching styles, or individual support, or both of these.

<sup>6</sup> Intervention audits were required of secondary schools from 2004.

<sup>7</sup> The National Strategies expect teachers and teaching assistants to be well briefed and trained to teach the intervention programmes. The National Strategies provide online training materials in the different areas: [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/intervention/56.html](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/intervention/56.html).

## The impact of National Strategy interventions

7. Almost all of the 21 schools in the survey blended the National Strategies' programmes with other programmes devised by the school or external sources. The schools often adapted National Strategy programmes; they selected just some of the materials or using them in circumstances beyond those for which they were originally intended. This involved using materials proposed for small groups with whole classes, or using them to meet the needs of pupils in older or younger age ranges than intended. In addition, the schools often combined these with computer programs and materials designed for pupils with special educational needs. As a result, although inspectors focused wherever possible on National Strategy interventions, both they and the schools had difficulty in disaggregating the impact of National Strategy intervention from other interventions.
8. The overall effectiveness of intervention programmes, including those promoted by the National Strategies, was good or outstanding in 10 of the 21 schools visited. Their impact in primary schools was more marked, being good or outstanding in eight of the 12 schools. In the nine secondary schools visited, it was good in two, satisfactory in five and inadequate in two. The quality of leadership and management and the impact of intervention on other aspects of provision are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. The relationship between interventions on key aspects in the 21 schools visited**

		Number of schools				
		Total	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
<b>Overall effectiveness of interventions</b>						
	Primary	12	1	7	4	0
	Secondary	9	0	2	5	2
<b>Impact of interventions on achievement</b>						
	Primary	12	1	6	5	0
	Secondary	9	0	2	5	2
<b>Impact of interventions on teaching and learning</b>						
	Primary	12	1	7	4	0
	Secondary	9	0	2	6	1
<b>Impact of interventions on the curriculum</b>						
	Primary	12	1	6	5	0
	Secondary	9	0	4	4	1
<b>The leadership and management of interventions</b>						
	Primary	12	1	7	4	0
	Secondary	9	0	2	5	2

9. The most effective intervention was characterised, on the part of senior leaders and those who coordinated intervention programmes, by ongoing and accurate assessments of pupils' progress; regular analyses of such information; high and challenging expectations about where pupils should be at particular stages of learning; and secure knowledge about what could be done to bridge the gaps in learning. Senior leaders and teachers knew the various National Strategy intervention programmes thoroughly and selected those that were most appropriate to meet pupils' specific needs.
10. Such an overview was more common in the primary schools visited and, as a result, their approaches were usually more coherent across the core subjects. The provision catered for a full range of pupils, including the gifted or talented, those who spoke English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, as well as those who matched the definition of the target group for intervention used by the National Strategies. In the secondary schools, responsibility was often spread among subject leaders, special educational needs coordinators and other key staff. The resulting provision lacked consistency between subjects and in the approaches taken by individual teachers. Accountability was not sufficiently transparent for the varied quality of provision and outcomes.
11. Pupils made good progress as a result of intervention programmes in different types of schools and through a variety of different approaches. One primary school had a highly effective programme to improve writing that was based on small-group work in addition to pupils' literacy lessons. Another school enabled around half of the target group of pupils to reach at least the age-related expectation in reading through small group intervention alongside the guided reading sessions in their normal class.<sup>8</sup>
12. Generally, the primary schools in the sample were more inclusive of the full range of needs than the secondary schools. However, the secondary schools often had areas of strength, for instance in managing pupils who were in danger of becoming disaffected, although, again, provision specifically for those defined as the target group for intervention was not necessarily as effective.<sup>9</sup> One secondary school had a broad and effective programme of booster and revision interventions for specific groups of pupils that was matched to their needs. However, no one approach to intervention was effective in all the schools visited and the success of specific programmes also varied.

---

<sup>8</sup> Guided reading, part of a wider reading curriculum, is a carefully structured approach to teaching reading with a small group of children who are at approximately the same reading level. It extends opportunities provided by shared reading and focuses sharply on the specific strategies to which pupils need to be introduced and then develop or practise when they read independently.

<sup>9</sup> See also *Good practice in re-engaging disaffected and reluctant students in secondary schools* (070255), Ofsted, 2008; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070255](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070255).

13. The key determinant for success was clear direction by senior leaders and the detailed preparation, training and knowledge of those responsible for putting the intervention into practice. Inspectors saw effective work in both Wave 2 and Wave 3 intervention, as well as in Wave 1 teaching, but also saw work where the impact on pupils' progress was no better than satisfactory. The importance of tailoring an approach to the school's and the pupils' particular priorities is evident in the infant school described here.

The school devised its own solution to the problem of around half of the pupils in Year 1 requiring additional, high-level support for a wide range of needs. It formed a group of these underachieving pupils whose needs had been identified through observation initially during their time in the Foundation Stage. These assessments identified precisely each pupil's combination of social, emotional and physical needs, as well as his or her learning needs.

The school chose not to provide a small intervention group for each different category of need. This would have resulted in an unmanageable number of separate groups, creating problems for timetabling, for providing appropriate support and for maintaining coherence with the mainstream curriculum. Instead it formed the single 'high-support' group led by a teacher who was very skilful in removing barriers to learning. The teacher taught this group for the whole of every morning, teaching the pupils for all of their English and mathematics work. An experienced teaching assistant worked with her.

14. For each example of successful intervention, other schools reported – or inspectors observed – programmes that were similarly organised but which led to only limited progress for pupils. One primary school had abandoned Year 6 booster programme after its evaluation indicated that they had had little impact on pupils' performance. The secondary schools had tried to develop the programme of literacy progress units, with some success in improving pupils' immediate literacy skills, but most had not found them to be successful enough in sustaining progress and enabling pupils to reach National Curriculum Level 5 by the end of Year 9.<sup>10</sup> As a result, they were rarely used.
15. Generally, withdrawing pupils from English classes, as the literacy progress units originally required, caused other difficulties and removing them from other lessons was unpopular with teachers because of the disruption to learning in the subject. Frequently, the gains that pupils made in withdrawal groups were counterbalanced by difficulties in missing work from their main English or

---

<sup>10</sup> Literacy progress units were designed to assist pupils who entered Year 7 with Level 3 in National Curriculum tests to reach Level 4 by the end of Year 7 and Level 5 by the end of Year 9. They were produced originally to be used in short withdrawal sessions out of lesson time, but later revised so that they could be used, if required, as part of the regular, timetabled English lessons.

mathematics lessons. Furthermore, pupils became too dependent on adults for extra help. The lack of communication between the subject teacher and the adult leading the withdrawal group exacerbated the discontinuity between everyday classes and additional support. Consequently, few examples were seen of withdrawal work in secondary schools targeted at students who met the criteria for intervention, though there was often provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In two of the secondary schools, the units survived as part of English schemes of work and, in other secondary schools, parts of the units were used in small-group intervention programmes.

16. The schools in the sample recognised that intervention could not be a remedy for ineffective class teaching; they increasingly focused on improving the quality of teachers' planning for the particular needs of pupils who fell into the target group for intervention. As with the example in the infants school described above, a secondary school, having tried various forms of small-group, withdrawal-based intervention with limited success, moved to form specific intervention classes using additional staff.

Senior leaders allocated funding to provide an additional English class in each half-year cohort focusing specifically on those pupils working just below national expectations.

The programme began in September 2007 at a cost of around £50,000 from the intervention budget. Initial analysis from early entry to GCSE in November 2007 indicated an improvement on earlier years with 50% of pupils already achieving grades A\*–C, where performance in the previous few years had been around 40%. Year 9 trial tests, which were analysed by the local authority's consultants, showed 60% of pupils achieving Level 5+ which was 10 percentage points higher than usual for the school at that stage. Senior leaders and the subject leader were convinced that the increased focus in the intervention classes on what these targeted pupils needed in order to take the next step, had had an impact and that the data demonstrated this.

17. Adopting a National Strategy programme did not in itself improve the progress made by pupils. Eleven of the 21 schools visited consistently failed to identify all those pupils who would benefit from intervention. In those primary and secondary schools where the intervention programmes had the least impact, pupils had been allocated to groups without a sufficiently detailed analysis of their very specific needs. As a consequence, the teaching of programmes focused on the delivery of materials rather than directly tackling pupils' specific difficulties and misunderstandings. Often, teaching assistants lacked the subject knowledge they needed to be able to adapt the materials or adjust their planning. As a result, pupils did not necessarily make sufficient progress to bring them up to the national expectation.

## Teaching and learning in intervention programmes

18. The quality of teaching and learning in the intervention programmes was good or outstanding in 10 of the 21 schools. However, in the other 11 schools there was a great deal of variety between key stages, between different intervention programmes, and also between teaching in the main class and in the intervention programme.
19. In one of the secondary schools the teaching and resulting progress of the Year 7 pupils in an intervention programme in mathematics was at least satisfactory, but the teaching in the main classes, especially for those pupils needing to improve to reach national expectations, was inadequate. In another secondary school, the intervention teaching was satisfactory at Key Stage 3 but not at Key Stage 4. In one of the primary schools, the teaching by teaching assistants of the Springboard materials and other small-group work was effective but the teaching of the Year 6 booster materials less so.<sup>11</sup>
20. The best teaching of intervention materials was informed by very detailed planning by the teacher and the skilled tailoring of materials and approaches to meet the needs of individual pupils.

In the Year 1 high-support group, pupils made very good progress because the classroom was very well resourced and stimulating, with attractive displays that supported the learning of basic skills in literacy and numeracy. The teacher used the displays very effectively for quick reinforcement of basic facts so that pupils could quickly move on to problem-solving tasks and practical activities. The planning for the lessons showed very good use of assessment information. The teacher had a very detailed understanding of each pupil's abilities and she matched work accurately to these. Lessons had clear objectives referenced to the objectives in the framework for mathematics. These objectives enabled the teacher to secure the progress of individuals.

The teaching was adapted to meet individual needs. During introductions to the whole class, questions and resources were personalised for individuals. Each pupil had his or her own targets and the teacher's marking in the books related directly to these. Assessment often used evidence from photographs and models because the emphasis was on practical work. The teaching was lively, stimulating and fun, maintaining the pupils' attention throughout. There was much reinforcement for each

---

<sup>11</sup> Springboard materials are used mostly in primary schools ([www.springboard.org.uk](http://www.springboard.org.uk)). They are designed to deal with critical knowledge and skills in mathematics so that pupils can reach age-related expectations. The sessions should be linked carefully to the topics completed in the pupils' daily mathematics lessons.

small step of learning and pupils were given responsibilities which boosted their self-esteem.

21. When the schools used assessment information effectively to identify the pupils who would benefit from intervention and chose the most appropriate programme, this had a clear impact on the quality of teaching and learning. This was the case in three of the primary schools. As a result of careful analysis of pupils' work and progress, each of the schools used a variety of intervention programmes, including several that were not part of the National Strategy. However, teachers and teaching assistants knew what pupils needed to improve and ensured that their planning of lessons focused on these areas, using relevant materials and approaches to tackle misunderstandings and to reinforce key skills.
22. In seven of the nine secondary schools, there was little evidence of any specific planning in mainstream classes for pupils who were working below national expectations. There were rarely any differentiated criteria or learning steps that might focus these pupils on specific aspects of their learning; the learning objective was usually common to the whole class. However, one of the schools, by forming intervention classes, overcame these weaknesses because the objectives and the materials were geared more closely to filling in the gaps in pupils' learning and understanding. Another school ran very effective booster and revision sessions for targeted pupils after school, at weekends and in holidays. In one such mathematics lesson for GCSE pupils at the grade C borderline, the teacher successfully managed pupils' confidence about and understanding of correct approaches to examination questions.

The advanced skills teacher in mathematics ran after-school revision sessions for GCSE: one aimed at pupils at the C/D borderline and another group for those aiming for grades A and A\*. The C/D borderline group, an invited group, contained some potentially disaffected pupils. The teacher took pupils carefully through questions to ensure that they were confident to apply what they knew to the forms that questions might take in the examination. He realised that many pupils panicked and did not achieve marks where they easily could.

In the lesson seen during the survey inspection, the advanced skills teacher took the class through the stages of a complex question which required the use of Pythagoras' theorem. He ensured that they worked in several steps, writing out the method and noting each part of their working. His approach was to give a pupil the responsibility for going through each stage of the question in turn. He recorded each stage as they reported it on the interactive whiteboard and made sure others checked and commented. Pupils understood what was expected because the working model was very clear. They enjoyed the challenge of having to complete a whole section of the question and responded well to the teacher's prompting if they hesitated. At no stage did he do any of the

work for them. If a pupil was stuck, others were asked to help but only with the next step. Within the small group of seven pupils, all contributed in detail over a period of 15 minutes. After tackling a sequence of varied questions, they showed their clear understanding of how to apply Pythagoras' theorem.

23. Small-group interventions were most successful when the teaching assistants responsible for teaching the programmes were thoroughly trained and knew the programmes well. In the primary schools visited they worked closely with the teachers to plan what should be taught and how, and were prepared to adapt the materials and approaches to meet the pupils' needs. Such approaches included concentrating on building pupils' confidence, tackling common misunderstandings and providing opportunities for pupils to apply what they had learnt. This is illustrated in this example from a primary school.

The teaching in intervention groups by teaching assistants was good. They knew the intervention programmes well and how to promote pupils' learning. The emphasis was very much on learning rather than just on delivering a programme. The teaching assistants led well planned, structured, sequenced group sessions. These had a good balance of direct teaching and independent activity. Good questioning targeted pupils' individual needs. The teaching assistants knew the pupils well: they had spent most of their time with the main class and so they were able to tailor the teaching to individuals. They linked their teaching to work from the main class, either helping pupils with particular difficulties or preparing them for forthcoming work. Preparation and the use of resources to promote pupils' independent learning skills were good and there was no spoon-feeding of responses for pupils.

24. However, not all the small-group interventions were as successful. The common weaknesses were:
- insufficient timely and accurate identification of intervention for pupils
  - insufficiently specific planning to meet pupils' particular needs
  - teaching assistants' lack of subject knowledge and confidence to adapt sessions according to pupils' understanding, resulting in an unhelpful reliance on the detail of a particular programme and too little flexibility.

In the worst cases, the planning was not connected to whatever the pupils were doing in their main English or mathematics classes, although this was more often the case in the secondary rather than the primary schools.

25. A headteacher in one of the primary schools had identified these problems through careful evaluation of the intervention programmes and resolved them by re-launching the activity completely.

The new headteacher established quickly that the quality of the work undertaken by teaching assistants was central to the success of intervention. Senior staff evaluated teaching assistants' work and found they were delivering the programmes only as dictated in the materials and had few independent strategies for tailoring learning to individual pupils. The review also identified that they did not know pupils well enough. To resolve this, teaching assistants were removed from intervention work for a period of time. They worked with the class teacher to improve their teaching skills and to get to know the pupils. They also received good training and guidance from members of the leadership team. As a result, they now know the programmes well and understand the levels pupils are working at or towards. They consider National Strategy programmes as too rigid in approach and have adapted them to suit their pupils. Because of their close relationship with one class, they can link the work in small groups to the mainstream class lessons. They keep detailed plans for and records of pupils' progress and are beginning to use their growing knowledge to contribute more to the planning for and assessment of intervention groups.

26. The better intervention in classrooms and small groups showed that teachers and teaching assistants used assessment effectively to help pupils consolidate their learning: for example, pupils in small groups received immediate feedback. In two of the primary schools and one of the secondary schools, this involved pupils assessing themselves using criteria against which they could measure their progress.
27. Weak assessment was a key feature in the less effective teaching of intervention programmes. In both the primary and secondary schools visited, there were no targets for pupils. Limited or overly general marking did not identify and explore pupils' misunderstandings or advise them how to improve. Most importantly, teachers and teaching assistants did not use assessment information in planning the next step in that session or the next lesson. For example, pupils in one of the secondary schools were required to rate their understanding as 'red', 'amber' or 'green' at the end of mathematics lessons. They were generally accurate in their assessment and confident to say 'red' if they did not understand. However, only a few teachers used this traffic light system effectively to direct the next lesson's teaching.

## The impact of intervention programmes on the curriculum

28. Intervention strategies had a greater impact on the curriculum in the primary schools visited than in the secondary schools. In the better provision in the primary schools, National Strategy interventions were used to tackle specific weaknesses or gaps in knowledge. For example, one school visited taught selectively from the *Letters and sounds* phonics programme and used it effectively with pupils in Years 3 and 4.<sup>12</sup> Another school included appropriate sections of National Strategy programmes in its planning for certain groups within whole-class teaching. In a third school, National Strategy programmes ran alongside other group activities in class, such as guided reading and writing. Another school ensured that intervention groups ran before school, over lunchtime and on some Saturday mornings so that pupils did not miss out on class teaching. All these examples confirm that intervention is most successful when confident leaders and well organised teachers select from the National Strategy programmes and develop a curriculum that meets the needs of pupils and the circumstances of the school.
29. The primary schools with good provision rarely used National Strategy programmes alone for intervention. They reported that they found the materials too detailed, challenging or limited in their approach. The balance between Strategy and non-Strategy programmes varied considerably. One of the schools used National Strategy materials almost exclusively; another used virtually none but, in both the schools, the impact of the intervention programmes on pupils' achievement was good. Other schools had combinations of materials between these two extremes. However, it was clear that very few of the schools surveyed used whole suites of National Strategy programmes without selection and adaptation.
30. Insufficiently careful planning to meet pupils' needs was the main reason why, in some of the primary schools, the impact of interventions on the curriculum was only satisfactory. This often coincided with the withdrawal of small groups of pupils for work led by teaching assistants: the assistants were not fully trained and had limited subject knowledge. Most importantly, the programmes were not linked to work in the pupils' English or mathematics lessons. In the least effective example seen, the teaching assistant worked with pupils who had been selected for the intervention on the grounds of their behaviour rather than because of the level at which they were working. This removed the pupils and their difficulties with concentration from the main class, but transferred them to the small group. Problems arose in other primary schools when pupils

---

<sup>12</sup> *Letters and sounds* (00281-2007FLR-EN), DfES, 2007; [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primary/publications/literacy/letters\\_sounds/](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primary/publications/literacy/letters_sounds/). The programme replaces *Playing with sounds* and *Progression in phonics* as a response to the Rose Review of the teaching of early reading. It is promoted as a high quality programme for teaching phonics that meets the core criteria for phonics programmes which were determined as a result of the Rose Review.

missed important elements of work in their main English or mathematics lessons because they joined the intervention programme, thus slowing their progress even further.

31. In the nine secondary schools visited, intervention programmes had little impact on the curriculum for English and mathematics. Provision was often variable within the schools, with intervention commonly better organised and more effective in Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4. The school where the impact had been greatest had a mentoring and intervention programme for Year 7 pupils who had achieved Level 3 in mathematics. This led to individual work using the Springboard programme and some non-Strategy materials. Another school, after reviewing the effectiveness of the literacy progress units, formed intervention classes in each year group where the scheme of work in English drew on some of the literacy progress unit materials and other intervention programmes. A range of more individualised programmes supported some pupils through time taken out of other subjects, using mainly non-Strategy materials. The school's full programme of intervention was extensive.

There is an established and very broad range of revision and booster classes to support Years 9 and 11. For example, weekly, after-school classes are held for targeted Year 9 pupils on the National Curriculum Level 4/5 borderline. The classes are separated for reading and writing skills and supported by materials developed by the school, as well as those adapted from the National Strategy. Improvement clubs run most afternoons in a full range of subjects for Year 11. Both staff and students report the clubs have had a demonstrable impact on achievement. Pupils follow key elements of courses, for example early entry for English GCSE and functional skills tests.

Specific programmes for those with weak literacy skills in Years 7 and 8 are based on National Strategy 'catch up' materials. Individual pupils benefit from computer programs for spelling and reading. Access to the programs, three times every week, ensures skills are practised regularly and consolidated. The school's data on reading and spelling ages show improvement but with varied success overall.

Withdrawal is not the main intervention. Most funding is directed towards an extra teaching group in each half-year cohort. The purpose of such groups is to raise the achievement of pupils at risk of not meeting the standards expected for their age.

32. The impact of intervention across the curriculum varied in the secondary schools visited. Five schools had pockets of effective provision – for example in two cases for pupils who spoke English as an additional language – alongside less effective provision for other pupils. Over half of the secondary schools in the sample used some variety of computer program for individualised support and intervention, either to build skills or as part of the revision of key concepts

and processes. The secondary schools usually used the Year 9 booster materials in some form. Some built them into the class teaching programme, while others offered after-school sessions, either for invited pupils or sessions which were open to all. When the programme was run outside lesson time, pupils' attendance varied and those most likely to benefit were often among the hardest to engage consistently.

## **The leadership and management of intervention**

33. The leadership and management of intervention were good or outstanding in eight of the 12 primary schools compared to just two of the nine secondary schools. As described above, the discrepancy resulted largely from the more dispersed responsibility for intervention programmes in the secondary schools where subject leaders, staff with responsibility for inclusion, special educational needs coordinators and others all shared oversight for different elements of provision.
34. In the primary schools which coordinated intervention effectively:
- key staff monitored pupils' progress closely
  - pupils who would benefit from further support were accurately identified
  - provision was carefully planned to bring about improvement.

Usually, this synchronised approach was part of long-term, planned and coordinated provision for as long as intervention was necessary. In the best examples, this was also linked to the evaluation of the impact of programmes in previous years. As a result, successful elements were repeated and, often, National Strategy materials were supplemented with other approaches.

35. As described in the section on the curriculum, the processes of auditing and reviewing pupils' progress often led to an intervention strategy which combined different elements of the Waves of support and did not rely only on class teaching, small-group work or individual support. Such a complex programme required careful planning by teachers and teaching assistants to achieve the best outcomes for pupils. In the primary schools where intervention was more effective, senior leaders ensured that teaching assistants were thoroughly trained and encouraged to work alongside teachers in planning programmes and building up their own subject knowledge. In the most effective examples, they also supported the pupils with whom they worked in withdrawal classes in their main class and so knew them and their needs well.

36. The more effective primary schools visited monitored pupils' progress regularly and used this information to refine the planning of intervention. This was done at different levels:
- by the teacher or teaching assistant as part of the programme
  - by a coordinator to gain an overview of the progress made
  - by a senior leader to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention.

Usually, this last stage of evaluation remained the weakest element. In general, there was more monitoring of class teaching than teaching in small groups. The performance management of teaching assistants was usually weak; in a third of the primary schools visited, there was no formal monitoring of teaching assistants' work. Some teaching assistants had not been formally observed with their groups.

37. The National Strategy recommends a structure for managing intervention in secondary schools, namely, a designated leader and a trained team. However, in seven of the nine secondary schools visited the boundaries between the responsibilities of staff managing programmes for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those coordinating programmes for those who met the National Strategy's definition of pupils requiring intervention were indistinct. Responsibility for intervention programmes often rested with subject leaders and, therefore, provision varied in range and quality between English and mathematics.
38. The quality of the leadership and management of intervention varied greatly in the secondary schools visited. Two of the schools coordinated intervention centrally, linked to a whole-school policy. These schools had the more comprehensive programmes and, generally, the more obvious impact on pupils' achievement. Elements of intervention practice were successful in the other secondary schools but, overall, their programmes were not coherent: either there were gaps in the provision or too great a variation in quality. In two of the schools, although the staff reviewed data on pupils' attainment and progress, there was no concerted plan to intervene with specific pupils to tackle key weaknesses. Because the process of identifying needs was inadequate, the provision lacked focus and appeared to run only because there was an expectation that there would be some form of intervention. Usually, there was little training for staff, weak communication between teaching assistants and teachers, and limited or no evaluation of pupils' progress.
39. The quality of leadership and management had a direct influence on the range, quality and effectiveness of the intervention programmes. Although the National Strategies promote auditing, progression mapping and the coordination of intervention by a key member of staff, only eight of the primary schools and two of the nine secondary schools visited responded in this way. The detailed suite of online training materials was seldom mentioned by the staff involved in providing intervention programmes.

## Notes

The small-scale survey is based on the inspection of 21 schools (12 primary and nine secondary) during the spring term 2008. Eleven visits focused on mathematics and 10 on English. Five of the secondary schools had national test results in 2007 that were below average in relation to all schools. Three had results that were above average and the remaining school was broadly in line with the average. Of the 12 primary schools visited, four had results above the national average, four broadly average and four below average.

The focus of the survey was the effectiveness of National Strategy intervention programmes in raising pupils' achievement and increasing their progress, particularly in Key Stages 2 and 3. The visits considered a range of interventions. Where necessary, inspectors reviewed the impact of interventions selected by the school which were not part of the National Strategy programmes, since almost all of the schools used both National Strategy and other intervention programmes. Schools complemented pupils' programmes with computer-based activities and some resources designed for special educational needs. Although some National Strategy programmes were delivered in their entirety, this was not usually the case.

Inspectors held discussions with headteachers and key staff, observed lessons and intervention sessions, reviewed documentation and talked to pupils about their work.

## Further information

Details of the National Strategies' guidance, materials and training relating to intervention can be found at:

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primaryframeworks/](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primaryframeworks/)

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/secondary/keystage3/](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/secondary/keystage3/)

More specific information can be found at:

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/intervention/](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/intervention/)

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/progressionmaps/](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/progressionmaps/)

## Annex. Schools visited in the survey

### Primary

Beechwood Primary School	Middlesbrough
Lympsham Church of England VC First School	Somerset
Melbury Primary School	City of Nottingham
Northgate Primary and Nursery School	City of Nottingham
Rawmarsh Thorogate Junior and Infant School	Rotherham
St Finian's Catholic Primary School	West Berkshire
St Hubert's Catholic Primary School	Sandwell
St Luke's Catholic Primary School	Knowsley
St Pius X Roman Catholic Primary School	Middlesbrough
Sycamore Infant and Nursery School	City of Nottingham
Westvale Primary School	Knowsley
Whitegate Primary and Nursery School	City of Nottingham

### Secondary

Abbeydale Grange School	Sheffield
Chichester High School for Girls	West Sussex
Kirk Balk School	Barnsley
Knowsley Hey School	Knowsley
Little Heath School	West Berkshire
Manning Comprehensive School	City of Nottingham
Stanchester Community School	Somerset
Swinton Community School	Rotherham
The Weald School	West Sussex