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Research and analysis

Independent review of tutoring in schools: phase 2 findings

Updated 31 October 2023

Applies to England

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Executive summary

This report sets out the findings from phase 2 of our tutoring review, which took place in the 2022/23 academic year. This review was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to identify how well tutoring is supplementing classroom practice and helping pupils to catch up in their learning following the pandemic. For most pupils, attending usual classroom lessons with their usual teachers will be enough to bring them up to where they need to be. This leaves space for more targeted interventions, such as tutoring, for those in need of extra support.

In [phase 1](#), we found that tutoring was effective when it was well planned and aligned with the school curriculum. This continued to be the case in phase 2. Schools with strong tutoring provision had ensured that tutoring was linked to the school's curriculum and that they used sessions to build on pupil's prior knowledge. It was clear that tutoring was embedded in school systems and was positioned to supplement the learning of pupils most in need of catching up. Leaders ensured that all staff, pupils and parents accepted tuition as a positive addition to the school.

In these schools, leaders also integrated the core principles of effective tutoring from the research literature into their provision. Small group sizes, frequent sessions and consistent tutors were commonplace. Indeed, securing a high-quality tutor was a critical factor. In secondary schools, leaders tended to source tutors with qualified teacher status (QTS) as a priority. In some cases, leaders offered tutoring opportunities as additional responsibilities for internal teaching staff to provide before- or after-school tuition. As staff often knew the pupils receiving tutoring, they frequently forged strong relationships with pupils to secure their engagement. They also made clear links between the tutoring sessions and the curriculum.

It was more common for teaching assistants to deliver tutoring sessions in primary schools. These staff were typically viewed as having the necessary expertise and relationship with pupils because they were involved in daily classroom practice. Yet we saw a clear difference between sessions with qualified teachers and those with teaching assistants. Teaching assistants often lacked the subject knowledge needed to address pupils' misconceptions quickly and with precision.

Generally, the views of leaders, tutors and pupils on the perceived impact of tutoring have remained positive. Tutors told us where they had seen pupils progress through the curriculum to the point where tutoring was no longer required for them. Most of the pupils we spoke to said that they enjoyed tutoring and found the extra support helpful. For them, tutoring sessions provided a safe, judgement-free environment away from their peers for pupils to ask questions and make mistakes. The positive effects of tutoring also extended beyond catching up on learning. Staff commonly reported wider improvements to pupils' confidence and resilience.

The re-introduction of exams following the pandemic, however, has influenced the approach some leaders have taken with their tutoring provision. In secondary schools, there has been a shift in who

is receiving tuition. Typically, more Year 11 pupils were being selected, particularly those who were borderline GCSE grade 3/4/5. This was despite many leaders telling us that pupils in key stage 3 had the most significant gaps in their knowledge and were most in need of catching up.

Consequently, the focus on exam revision has resulted in some schools overlooking some of the quality features of tutoring. For instance, these schools tended to use larger group sizes. Leaders had a strong rationale for this approach. They were keen to maximise the number of pupils that could access and benefit from the support tutoring can provide. However, tutors' precision in spotting pupils' misconceptions in real time and their ability to provide immediate support was more effective in one-to-one and small group tutoring environments. Furthermore, larger group sizes tended to cover more generic content that was not aligned to the schools' curriculum. By taking this approach, the potential learning benefits identified in the research literature will likely be diluted.

The weakest tuition provision we saw involved remote tutoring through the tuition partner route. Sessions mostly took place after school and were seen as a 'bolt-on' to classroom lessons. In these circumstances, poor communication between tutors and school staff were a concern. Schools had little involvement in the content of the tutoring sessions and/or the tutors offered by tuition partners. Consequently, tutoring was rarely linked to the school's curriculum, and pupils decided the topics they covered rather than sessions being targeted towards significant gaps in their knowledge.

Over the 2 phases of this review, the quality of tutoring that schools are providing through the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) is variable. Some have, encouragingly, built on initial starting points from last year's findings. Others have shifted their tutoring strategy to accommodate newer school priorities, such as enhancing exam outcomes. Given schools' preference for using qualified teachers as tutors, there is a risk that the tutoring programme might compound teacher shortages. This could diminish the quality of education for all pupils

In general, despite valuing the NTP offer, particularly through the school-led route, most school leaders said they would be cutting or reducing their tutoring programmes next year due to the reductions in NTP funding and increasing school costs. This suggests that, while tutoring can be a good-short term fix to supplement some pupils' catch-up, as seen across the evidence collected during the review, it remains an expensive intervention to maintain.

Introduction

National Tutoring Programme

The 2022/23 academic year was the third year of the NTP. The NTP aims to help the most disadvantaged pupils, prioritising those eligible for pupil premium who have on average been the most affected by pandemic disruption.

The NTP offers 3 routes to subsidised tuition:

- tuition partners – external tutoring organisations, quality assured by the DfE
- academic mentors – employed to work in-house as full- or part-time, staff members to provide intense support to pupils who need it
- school-led tutoring – schools use their own staff to provide tutoring, either staff they currently employ or staff newly engaged for this purpose

In 2021, the DfE commissioned Ofsted to review the quality of tuition in schools and how well tutoring has been integrated into curriculum planning and delivery.

Our [phase 1 review](#) found that schools preferred the school-led tutoring route. This was because it gave them more control and oversight of quality compared with using academic mentors or tuition partners. Schools with the strongest provision prioritised tutoring for disadvantaged pupils. They used assessments to identify those who would benefit the most. Tutoring was most effective when sessions were taught by qualified teachers who had a deep understanding of the subject curriculum.

Overall, in phase 1, leaders, staff and pupils were overwhelmingly positive about tutoring. They reported improvements in pupils' confidence, resilience and attitudes towards learning. However, it was too early in the programme for schools to assess the impact of tutoring on pupils' progress.

Our phase 2 review aimed to continue and expand on the focus of phase 1. In our visits to schools in phase 2, many leaders expected that the tutoring subsidy for the 2023/24 academic year would reduce from 60% to 25%. This influenced their views on using tutoring in future. However, after our visits, the DfE announced that the subsidy for 2023/24 would be 50%. This announcement may have changed some staff and leaders' views. Nevertheless, this report still offers valuable information on the sustainability of tutoring in schools.

Changes to NTP in 2022/23

In the 2022/23 academic year, the DfE reduced the subsidy from 75% to 60% and simplified access to the programme. The changes included:

- £349 million core funding directly to schools to enable them to decide how best to provide tutoring
- the academic mentors route opening to all schools
- a few changes in DfE-approved tuition partners
- simplifying the process for collecting participation data

These changes were made to give schools the flexibility and choice to develop a tutoring provision suited to their pupils' varying needs.

Aims for 2022/23

We agreed with the DfE that our phase 2 review would focus on:

- how schools were implementing tutoring
- how they were identifying pupils for tutoring
- how they aligned tutoring with their intended curriculum
- how they ensured that tutors were suitable
- the emerging impact of tutoring
- how tutoring affects schools

The full set of research questions are in our published [terms of reference](#).

Methods

We gathered evidence from research visits to 51 schools during the 2022/23 academic year: see tables 1 and 2 below.

We invited schools that had participated in phase 1 to take part in phase 2 as well. We used this longitudinal approach to see how their tutoring provision had developed over the year and what effects it had on pupils' learning.

Table 1: The distribution of schools and research visits in phase 2

	New visits	Revisits	Total
Primary schools	15	14	29
Secondary schools	12	10	22
Total	27	24	51

Table 2: NTP routes chosen by the phase 2 sample of schools

	Number of schools
Academic mentors	0
Tuition partners	5
School-led	32
School-led and academic mentors	4

To achieve a balanced sample, we selected schools based on stage of education, regional location and latest overall effectiveness score (excluding inadequate schools). Note that some caution is required when generalising the findings due to the small sample size.

Structure of visits

A team of 13 HM Inspectors (HMIs) and Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) carried out the visits over 3 terms. We trained all inspectors to carry out the research activities so that they collected data consistently. In addition, we gave them all a structured evidence and evaluation form to ensure that they made similar lines of enquiry across visits. All research visits were carried out over one day.

Around half of the visits were carried out by a single HMI or OI. On 25 of the 51 visits, a researcher from our research and evaluation team joined the HMI or OI to help with data collection.

A typical tutoring visit followed the structure below:

- meeting with the senior leadership team
- interview with the subject or programme lead
- interview with a tutor
- observation of 2 tutoring sessions
- focus group with learners
- informal meeting with senior leadership at the end of the visit

We gave schools the flexibility to determine a schedule that would minimise the burden on their staff. To capture the necessary data, we tried to ensure that inspectors carried out all activities on each visit. This meant that, through triangulating all evidence, we could get a coherent overview of the intent and implementation of the tutoring.

Tuition provider interviews

We supplemented the evidence from the research visits with 10 telephone interviews with tuition providers. This included 7 with leaders and tutors from the DfE's tuition partners and 3 from other tuition providers that were not part of the NTP. This meant that we were able to represent the perspectives and experiences of multiple stakeholders affected by the NTP.

Findings

Tutoring was most effective when embedded in the school day

Schools that were more successful at providing tutoring had embedded it in their structures and day-to-day processes. It was more common for primary schools to have done this.

In schools with stronger tutoring provision, all staff, pupils and parents tended to have a positive view of tutoring. Leaders had ensured that tutoring was accepted as a positive addition to the school. In these schools, leaders were fully aware of the school's strategy and were actively involved in managing the tutoring provision. They had taken a research-informed approach when setting it up, whereby they integrated up-to-date research on most effective tutoring practices with staff expertise, and pupils' and parents' feedback, to ensure that they implemented tutoring as effectively as possible.

When leaders were clear about their school's tutoring strategy, this was more likely to filter through the rest of the staff and become embedded into everyday school processes. In some schools with particularly strong tutoring provision, tutoring sessions and classroom lessons were linked in terms of curriculum and pedagogy. For example, when tutors found pedagogical strategies that worked well, they then explained these to the pupil's class teachers so that they could continue to use them to help the pupil.

When schools had an effective tutoring culture, they were also more likely to review how effective it was. They were willing to make changes if things were not working as they intended. Between phase 1 and phase 2, several schools had changed their tutoring route and/or tutors to make sure it reflected their strategy.

“ First wave [was] more scatter gun. This year [is] more focused.”

(Primary headteacher)

For some schools, the NTP was an opportunity to expand the tutoring strategy that they already had. The extra funding enabled them to increase the number of pupils involved and expand the subjects tutoring focused on. In other schools, tutoring was introduced as an alternative intervention that complemented and worked alongside other interventions, for example homework clubs and pastoral or well-being support.

Leaders and staff said that, for tutoring to be successful, it was important to have parents' support. In schools that achieved this, leaders and staff had worked hard to address any misconceptions around tutoring with parents.

“ Buy-in from parents [has led to] positive support [and tutoring is] not [seen as] a negative from parents. Now it is seen as something they are open to and lots of children get it. It is something seen as part of the offer.”

(Secondary senior leader)

“ We've led parents through our process, making it very clear to parents where the rationale is

and why.”

(Secondary assistant headteacher)

Some of the common strategies schools used to engage parents included:

- leaders running parents’ evenings to share and discuss the school’s tutoring strategy
- creating parent feedback surveys
- sharing updates in general communications with parents (for example, weekly newsletters)
- leaders asking parents to be present during online tutoring at home
- leaders asking parents for their help in encouraging pupils’ attendance at sessions

These approaches helped leaders to ensure that, within the wider school community, tutoring was seen as a benefit rather than a burden for pupils who required extra support. In these schools, parents were making requests for their children to be involved in tutoring.

Some leaders included parents’ views when evaluating their tutoring strategy. They saw this as an important way to ensure parents’ support and to find out parents’ views on what was – and was not – working well for pupils. This often led to improvements to tutoring attendance. For example, some parents said they did not feel comfortable with their child travelling to school in the dark to attend before-school tutoring sessions. As a result of that feedback, the school changed the timings of tutoring sessions. Pupils were then able to continue attending.

However, when schools did not have a clear approach to embedding tutoring, the tutoring provision tended to be weaker. This was because there was no clear understanding and strategy of the aims of tutoring throughout the school. In many of these schools, leaders’ perceptions of their tutoring provision did not match what was being implemented.

In schools with particularly weak tutoring provision, tutoring was clearly provided in a very ad-hoc form. Leaders were choosing to use the funding for other things, such as small group teaching or exam preparation/skills, and calling it tutoring.

Schools without a clear tutoring strategy or positive culture of tutoring tended to use tuition partners for online tutoring. In these cases, school leaders saw tutoring as a bolted-on addition to their curriculum offer. In many cases, pupils would complete the tutoring sessions after school from home. Tutors had little or no communication with school staff to discuss pupils’ starting points. Unsurprisingly, these pupils were also less likely to enjoy and see the benefits of tutoring.

Some leaders prioritised quantity over quality

One of the main developments since phase 1 was that group sizes had reduced. In the majority of schools we visited, group sizes did not exceed 6 pupils. In 18 schools, leaders had opted to use tutoring for one-to-one provision only. We mainly saw this in primary schools (through on-site tutoring). Six secondary schools chose to use one-to-one as their preferred method (through online tutoring). Leaders in these schools said that they had used the research available (from both the Education Endowment Foundation and our own phase 1 report) to reflect and make changes to

their tutoring strategy. This included reducing group sizes to improve tuition.

Seventeen of the 51 schools had set maximum group sizes of 6 pupils in order to reach as many pupils as possible. However, 4 schools had chosen group sizes of above 6. Some schools had also opted to use the tutoring funding as an intervention for whole classes. In these schools, leaders had a rationale for choosing to maximise the number of pupils receiving tutoring. Given the priority for catching up after the pandemic, they were keen for as many pupils as possible to access and benefit from the funding. By doing this, however, leaders may have diluted the potential benefits that tutoring could provide. Research shows that smaller group sizes are shown to be most effective when targeting pupils' individual needs.^[footnote 1] In larger group sizes, the content of the sessions rarely focused on misconceptions or specific knowledge that pupils needed to progress. Instead, these small-class teaching interventions were typically covering generic, sometimes exam-focused, content.

In these schools, and despite the effort to develop their tutoring provision, there was little to suggest that they were 'research-informed'. Most leaders had not considered the frequency or length of tutoring and when to stop it. Some pupils continued, therefore, working in small groups throughout the academic year, regardless of when tutoring was taking place or the progress that they had made.

With some schools concentrating on reaching large numbers of pupils rather than providing bespoke, individualised support, the tutoring provided became a more general and potentially less impactful, intervention.

Some schools were prioritising exam preparation within tutoring sessions

Tutoring strategies had changed since our phase 1 report. More schools had started to use NTP funding for generic interventions such as exam revision, rather than for bespoke support targeted at specific pupils. This appeared to be because exams had returned, following teacher assessment being used throughout the pandemic.

In primary schools, tutoring tended to be with a range of year groups. Twelve primary schools included tutoring sessions focused on national tests preparation. In contrast, 16 out of 22 secondary schools were solely focusing their tutoring on exam preparation and success for Year 11. They were not using it as part of a carefully considered programme to help pupils fill gaps in their learning.

In most of these secondary schools, the bulk of their funding was allocated to exam preparation for pupils in Years 10 and 11. There was a clear focus on ensuring that pupils who were borderline GCSE 3/4/5 grade had extra provision. However, schools were aware of key stage 3 pupils with significant curriculum knowledge gaps who needed to catch up. By using tutoring almost exclusively for exam preparation, these schools were providing a short-term solution for key stage 4 pupils, but not supporting younger pupils.

Furthermore, 5 of the schools revisited had not developed their tutoring strategy since our last visit. At both visits, these schools had focused on exam preparation. We found little evidence to suggest that leaders had fully engaged with or understood the research literature on tutoring. They had also

not evaluated their strategy effectively to reach the pupils most at need.

Generally, when tutoring was focused on exam success, the tutoring curriculum was ad hoc and consisted of generic revision content. It did not attempt to determine pupils' misunderstandings or misconceptions in subject-specific contexts. Sessions failed to secure the component knowledge that pupils needed to allow them to progress and access the school's curriculum.

Despite the focus on exam years, several of these schools still provided high-quality tutoring provision. In these schools, staff were doing more than just concentrating on question-and-answer tasks or past exam papers. Instead, they had identified the gaps in pupils' knowledge. They used the tutoring sessions to focus on developing pupils' conceptual understanding so they could respond to the exam syllabus effectively. Tutors also used effective pedagogical techniques during the tutoring sessions. For example, they spotted and corrected pupils' misconceptions by continuously checking pupils' understanding and giving individual pupils the foundations they needed to build knowledge. In these schools, the subject and tutoring curriculums were aligned. This was mainly because high-quality class teachers or subject specialists gave the tutoring sessions. Tutors/teachers planned class and tutoring sessions to work together.

Only 2 secondary schools focused their tutoring on key stage 3 pupils. Here, leaders thought carefully about how to use tutoring funding to maximise the impact for as many pupils as possible, while still prioritising disadvantaged pupils. There were clear aims to build component knowledge and not just prepare for an end-of-key-stage exam. They used regular ongoing assessments, which allowed tutors to keep class teachers informed of pupils' progress. This meant that the schools could move pupils in and out of tutoring when they had caught-up on specific knowledge gaps. It also ensured that the school could prioritise pupils with the greatest need to receive the extra support through tuition.

Many pupils were selected for tutoring based on test performance

Most secondary schools selected pupils for tutoring based on summative exam results. In these schools, the priority was on pupils who were borderline 3/4/5 grade for GCSEs. This is despite school leaders highlighting that pupils in lower year groups commonly had more knowledge deficits and misconceptions that were hindering their learning.

Both primary and secondary schools with weaker tuition practice tended to select pupils for tutoring based on one variable or characteristic. For instance, they selected all pupils below or not on track for predicted exam grades. They did not routinely explore additional information that would give them additional insights around pupils' specific learning needs. When combined with the generic content being covered in the tutoring sessions, pupils were unlikely to develop secure knowledge and understanding of concepts.

However, in schools using tutoring well, staff and leaders used their in-depth knowledge of their pupils to identify those most in need of tutoring. Teachers used classroom assessments alongside other evidence to identify pupils who were not on track, had significant gaps in their knowledge and had been most affected by lockdowns.

Research has shown that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were affected more than their peers by the pandemic.^[footnote 2] However, only 10 schools stated that they had selected pupils with SEND for tutoring. Other schools mentioned that they did not feel that tutoring was the best support for those pupils as they were already offered additional support, so had prioritised others.

There is currently a national need to improve attendance across schools. Fewer children are reaching the expected standard in mathematics, reading and writing.^[footnote 3] Only 4 schools discussed taking attendance into account when selecting pupils for tutoring. Instead, leaders were not targeting those low attendees because of the increase in workload it would cause staff. Leaders suggested that this would lead to staff spending a large amount of time chasing pupils to attend tutoring. They would rather select pupils who would be more likely to attend and therefore get the most benefit out of the extra provision.

The quality of tutors and tutoring was crucial

One of the main changes made to the DfE's guidance this year was to provide funding for tuition directly to schools. This was intended to grant leaders more flexibility and freedom in how they could develop and implement their tutoring strategy, particularly around recruiting tutors.

As in phase 1, school-led tutoring remained schools' preferred approach. Leaders continued to choose the freedom of being able to implement their own tutoring strategy that best fit the needs of the school and pupils:

“ [School-led] allows us to dovetail lessons to curriculum, by using those people who know the curriculum and know the lessons.”

(Secondary Senior leader)

As shown in [table 2](#), only 5 schools used tuition partners exclusively, while 4 used academic mentors in addition to school-led tutoring. No schools used academic mentors alone.

Those that had opted to stay with tuition partners had done so for 2 main reasons:

- schools that had a positive experience with the tuition partners had built a tutoring model that suited both the tutor and the pupils
- a few small schools did not have the capacity to use their own staff as tutors, so a tuition partner was their only viable option

Regardless of their chosen approach, leaders had become much more specific about the skills and expertise they wanted in their tutors. For both school-led and tuition partner routes, leaders preferred using qualified subject-specific teachers, especially in secondary schools.

In some primary schools, the use of qualified subject-specific teachers was less of a priority. The concept of subject specialists in primary is more complex. All primary teachers are trained to teach the whole curriculum. However, for some, their degree qualifications may not necessarily relate

directly to single curriculum subjects. This means that the focus on subject specialists has tended to have more relevance for primary schools who used tuition partners for tutoring in a specific subject area, rather than employing a school-led approach. In fact, in many primary schools, tuition was often delivered effectively by teaching assistants, who, on the whole, do not have degree qualifications. These staff were typically viewed as having the necessary expertise because they were involved in daily curriculum delivery and had usually received subject-related training, for example in phonics.

Overall, we found that the quality of tutoring was better with qualified teachers. Their understanding of how pupils learn and their ability to use a wide range of pedagogical approaches meant that sessions were more effective and matched the needs of the pupil. As a result, pupils' engagement and responsiveness in the sessions were greater. In the most effective sessions, we saw that:

- tutoring was carefully linked to the school's curriculum. Schools with a well-sequenced curriculum used tutoring to build on pupils' prior knowledge.
- tutoring was designed to fill identified gaps in pupils' knowledge. Tutors were clear what pupils need to know. Tutors and classroom teachers worked together. They ensured that content covered in tutoring met the needs of the pupil for them to progress through the curriculum.
- it was essential for tutors and classroom teachers to collaborate to ensure that pupils experienced the same strategies, methods and vocabulary, which reduces pupils' cognitive overload.
- experienced tutors/qualified teachers with secure subject knowledge were able to correct misconceptions and errors in real time.

By comparison, when tutors were not sufficiently knowledgeable in the subjects they were tutoring in, weaker sessions were observed. This was particularly the case for tutors without teaching qualifications. In these sessions, tutors did not address pupils' misconceptions well enough and used less effective teaching strategies. For example, some tutors without phonics training struggled with how to enunciate pure sounds. This led to sounds being enunciated incorrectly, meaning pupils were being taught wrongly.

We found 2 main reasons for weaknesses in tutoring sessions:

- first, the tutoring was focused on exam success. This meant the curriculum was based on building exam skills and not on filling pupils' curriculum knowledge gaps.
- second, schools used external agencies that were not aware of, or following, the school's curriculum. Pupils, therefore, were receiving a disconnected series of learning experiences and pedagogical approaches.

Some of the weakest tutoring was provided remotely

Eleven schools chose to use remote tutoring as part of their tutoring offer. These schools had little influence over the tutors supplied by tuition partners. This often caused issues. Tutors could cancel sessions without offering a replacement and tutors could change without warning. This meant there was a lack of consistency for the pupils.

Most sessions took place after school. In some cases, pupils would have remote sessions off the school site where there was little or no communication between teachers and online tutors. In these sessions, tutoring was not linked to the curriculum and tutors used different pedagogical approaches. This meant that tutoring sessions did not fill gaps in pupils' knowledge. Many tutors relied on pupils telling them about the gaps in their knowledge rather than working with the school to identify them.

Communication between teachers and external tutors tended to be better when tutoring was provided in person. However, we found that good and clear communication generally only happened when the tutor was employed as a member of school staff. It also happened in small schools, where the logistics of communication between school staff and tutors (internal or external) are easier. For example, a tutor could more easily communicate with more than one teacher on tutoring content and pupils' progress.

In schools where communication was strongest, individual tutors made the effort to speak to teachers informally and update them on pupils' progress. This cemented a positive learning environment focused on pupils' achievement.

Quality assessment practice was crucial to understanding how much progress pupils had made

Similarly to phase 1, we saw some variation in the duration of tutoring. The DfE's guidance states that tutoring of 12 to 15 hours' duration in total has a meaningful effect on pupil attainment. If schools think that more tutoring is needed, they can offer this.

This change has given schools freedom to use tutoring as a continuous intervention throughout the academic year. We saw this mainly in schools that focused on exam years. Consequently, pupils experienced exam revision sessions continually as tutoring, rather than tutoring that focused on targeted areas of need. There was no meaningful movement in and out of tutoring to allow other pupils to receive catch-up provision as needed.

In the schools visited, quality assessment was crucial to understanding how much of the intended content had been learned. When done well, tutors and class teachers could determine whether pupils had caught up and no longer required tuition, irrespective of the number of hours completed. We saw some of the best practice in primary schools, specifically within Years 1 and 2, where the focus was on reading and phonics. In these schools, teachers clearly communicated pupils' start and end points to tutors. This allowed tutors to monitor progress and to suggest ending tutoring when the pupil had reached the required target. In some cases, this was before the full 15 hours suggested. This enabled other pupils to benefit from receiving extra support as they stepped into those available slots.

However, some of the schools we visited did not use assessment well. In many cases, this was because they had not used baseline assessments to determine what parts or components of subject knowledge pupils did not know at the outset. In other cases, it was because tutoring was focused on exam classes, and assessment was based on the composite knowledge needed for exam success. Here, pupils often did the same assessments as those pupils who were not

receiving tutoring.

In several schools, the lack of tutor expertise contributed to poor assessment. Tutors did not notice when pupils were finding learning difficult so their gaps in learning were not rectified well enough.

Leaders do not have sufficient assurance of the quality of tutoring sessions

In most schools, there was no system to monitor the quality of tutoring. In schools with the weakest tutoring provision, leaders were not aware of the focus of tutoring sessions. The intent and implementation of tutoring sessions did not align. Most schools relied on informal systems, in particular pupils' and parents' feedback, to assess the success of tutoring. Often, this led to a lack of quality assurance of tutoring sessions and leaders not being able to respond to issues as they came up.

Schools with good tutoring provision were more likely to have systems in place to monitor the quality of tutoring. In these schools, leaders ensured that both tutors and tutoring sessions were quality assured in the same ways as the usual curriculum. Leaders often observed tutoring sessions. Schools also used a combination of classroom assessments and end-of-term assessments to assess pupils' progress.

Schools continued to find it challenging to recruit tutors

Most secondary school leaders said that they preferred to use qualified teachers as tutors, but many struggled to recruit high-quality tutors.

Due to previous negative experiences with tutors and tuition partners, schools had rigorous recruitment processes to ensure that they employed good tutors. However, most leaders could not specify what they were looking for in a tutor compared with a class teacher. As a result, leaders opted to use current teaching staff to provide tutoring. This often resulted in tutoring sessions morphing into additional classroom teaching rather than being focused, individualised sessions.

In primary schools, recruiting teachers with qualified teacher status (QTS) was not seen as a priority. Fifteen primary schools chose teaching assistants to take tutoring sessions. It was important to leaders that pupils already knew the tutor, and teaching assistants tended to have good knowledge about those pupils receiving tutoring. Many leaders put this forward as a strength of their tutoring approach. However, the positive effect of this was often taken for granted rather than established as the most effective tutoring model.

We saw differences between sessions given by teaching assistants and those by teachers with QTS. Teaching assistants often lacked both the subject knowledge and the subject pedagogical knowledge needed. Occasionally, some of the weaker sessions were scripted and focused on topic worksheets. In these sessions, tutors failed to address misconceptions in real time.

This year the Education Development Trust has introduced training for tutors employed through the

school-led or academic mentor route who do not have QTS. This has enabled schools to give tutors sufficient training before they start. However, only 7 of the schools visited had used the training. It was not clear why leaders had chosen not to access it. However, we found that in many schools following the school-led route, leaders had chosen staff either with QTS or with previous teaching experience. These staff were involved in in-school training, for example on the school's phonics or mathematics scheme.

In the schools with the best tutoring provisions, tutors were well trained. School leaders either appointed well-qualified tutors or included tutors in whole-school professional development and departmental training. Tutors had a better understanding of the curriculum and pedagogy used in the school. Some schools ensured that the resources used in tutoring sessions mirrored those used in classroom sessions. Other schools collaborated closely with tutors to ensure that methods, practices and vocabulary were the same. They saw this as having a positive impact on pupils' understanding. Discussions with pupils confirmed this. In these schools, tutors built good working relationships with staff as tutoring was embedded into the culture of the school. This allowed them to work together easily.

The positive effects of tutoring on pupils outweighed the extra workload on leaders and staff

All schools visited mentioned the workload of setting up, managing and delivering tutoring. Most leaders acknowledged the increase in workload for school staff. Tutoring was often being managed, planned and delivered on top of normal workloads.

Nevertheless, staff and leaders said that the benefits of tutoring for pupils justified the extra work:

“ It is incredibly high profile, valued and appreciated. It is a team thing. It is not just a job; all adults really care about making a difference. This is what makes it successful.”

(Primary tutor)

“ It is really worthwhile and the difference is huge. You feel, as a teacher, this is what teaching is about. It gives me great joy to do it. The pupils know they are loved when they do tutoring. It is all smiles and kindness; they benefit from the pastoral kindness and care.”

(Primary teacher)

Some leaders and staff reported no increase in workload. However, in these schools, tutoring was often set up as a standalone intervention. Staff were employed specifically to run the tutoring provision. Most of these schools were using remote sessions provided through tuition partners, which, as noted previously, were often not clearly linked to the school curriculum and classroom lessons, so tutoring was often weaker.

To pupils, tutoring was more than just an opportunity to catch up with missed learning

Pupils tended to speak very positively about their tutoring. Most said that they did not feel comfortable speaking up or asking questions in normal lessons before they started tutoring. They feared being judged or looking stupid in front of their peers. In most schools, tutoring provided a safe, judgement-free learning environment for pupils to ask questions and make mistakes:

“ It’s a lot easier than in class. If I don’t understand, I can just ask without stopping the whole class. It’s more comfortable.”

(Year 11 pupil)

Many schools spoke at length about the benefits of tutoring for pupils’ confidence:

“ Self-confidence has gone up because they know they can do it.”

(Secondary senior leader)

“ The children who are tutored get this super confidence; [you] can’t really measure that but you notice it!”

(Primary senior leader)

“ Tutoring gives them the confidence to achieve.”

(Primary maths subject lead)

Teachers also said that pupil engagement with tutoring sessions had improved their engagement in classroom lessons. They reported an increase in pupils’ involvement and participation in whole-class and group activities:

“ It supports them to be more articulate. [Because they are] having to prove their understanding, they have to talk through their answers with reasoning and proving their answer.”

(Primary maths subject lead)

Subject leaders said that pupils chosen for tutoring tended to struggle to understand and keep up with the pace of classroom lessons. This often led to them being disengaged. Several pupils mentioned they were now more willing to put their hand up and contribute in lessons. Pupils gained confidence and were gaining a more secure understanding of the lesson content:

“ I wasn’t understanding what my teacher was saying in class about algebra, it was too fast. In tutoring, we talked through it.”

(Year 9 pupil)

“ She [the tutor] repeats it a lot and goes back to basics on it.”

(Year 10 pupil)

“ They try to understand what you don’t understand.”

(Year 11 pupil)

All schools spoke about pupils wanting to be involved in tutoring sessions. Several pupils described tutoring as ‘booster lessons’ and would like more sessions like this in all their subjects. Many pupils said they enjoyed tutoring. They found the extra support helpful, including when the tutoring sessions were out of lesson times:

“ People ask me are you annoyed you have to come into school earlier, but I say I’d rather have it than not. It’s better than last year, when I missed out on class.”

(Year 10 pupil)

“ We asked for more sessions because it was working well for us.”

(Year 10 pupil)

“ People want to be there, people ask to be there and ask really good questions.”

(Year 10 pupil)

Schools reported that other pupils were asking to take part in tutoring. They had seen and heard from their peers about the benefits of tutoring and would like to receive it themselves:

“ Pupils do come up and ask for support. Even if they haven’t been identified.”

(Secondary tutor)

Pupil engagement in tutoring sessions tended to be better when the sessions were in person. Some schools and tuition partners recognised and acknowledged this. This was particularly the case for primary schools. Primary school pupils are more likely to struggle to stay engaged in online sessions.

Leaders valued tutoring but had concerns over its future

In all the schools we visited, leaders and staff reported positively on the broader value of tutoring. Leaders said that pupils were increasing in confidence and showing improvements in the classroom. Some schools commented on the importance of providing tutoring to ensure that pupils can fully access the curriculum.

“ Tutoring made me more interested in learning. Because in class, I feel like I am restricted to a certain topic. In tutoring, we do different things.”

(Year 6 pupil)

“ Within the lessons, pupils say, “Oh, I can do this because we’ve done it in tutoring”.”

(Primary Senior leader)

Leaders gave mixed responses when asked about the future of tutoring at their school. All wanted to continue it. However, leaders said that without continuing funding, it may not be sustainable. Most planned to end or reduce their tutoring provision next year. This decision was because of the expected reduction in NTP funding and continuing increases in school costs:

“ The legacy will be far beyond. We’re going to be limited in the future, it’s a lot to take on, and we welcome that. But if we had the funding, we could do it. Without that, we wouldn’t be able to do it.”

(Secondary deputy headteacher)

The schools planning to continue tutoring next year tended to be large schools with high pupil premium funding. In contrast, small schools said they were less likely to continue with tutoring. In small primary schools, leaders were extremely concerned about the sustainability of tutoring without the NTP funding:

“ Without funding, tutoring could not happen at this small school; the funding is very tight.”

(Primary senior leader)

Tuition partners also had mixed responses and concerns.

“ ...Even though schools want to use us they can’t.”

(Tuition partner lead)

“ I might give NTP up. The amount that we get, it’s sometimes more hassle than it’s worth.”

(Tuition partner lead)

“ There will be schools who will struggle to afford it but there will be other schools who would have never considered it before and now know that it works and are looking for the right provider for them.”

(Tuition partner lead)

Tuition providers established before the NTP were likely to have a secure tutoring business model that could continue despite the reductions in the NTP funding. A few tuition partners were likely to drop the NTP from their business model next year. For most, this was a direct result of the changes to the subsidy level. The schools they were currently working with were unable to keep tutoring in their budgets.

Annex

Analysis

Alongside collecting the primary data from the visits, we also asked HMIs and OIs to evaluate the evidence they had collected to explain the effectiveness of the provision they had seen. Although much of the data collected during the study was based on participants' views, we have also included observations of tutoring sessions and a wider investigation into curriculum alignment.

The external literature available, combined with our expectations on the quality of education from the education inspection framework (EIF), gave us criteria to determine the strengths and weaknesses of tutoring across the sample. This means that we have confidence that our review can comment on the influence of some aspects of tutoring beyond individuals' perceptions.

To analyse the qualitative data we collected from interviews and focus groups, we used an inductive thematic approach. This involved identifying the emerging patterns or ideas that would help shape analysis. We then grouped these into themes and sub-themes.

Sample

Our aim was to visit 80 schools over the year. However, during the summer term 2023, it proved challenging to recruit schools. Schools were not able to take part in research due to no longer running tutoring sessions in that term, or not wanting to increase workload for staff. This situation had some implications for our achieved sample, and we may have recruited more schools into the study that were particularly keen on tutoring.

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1. [‘Small group tuition’](#), Education Endowment Foundation. ↩
 2. [‘SEND: old issues, new issues, next steps’](#), Ofsted, June 2021. ↩
 3. [‘Key stage 2 attainment, academic year 2021/22’](#), Explore education statistics. ↩

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