

Making a difference with effective tutoring



Education
Endowment
Foundation

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About the Education Endowment Foundation

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is an independent charity supporting teachers and school leaders to use evidence of what works—and what doesn't—to improve educational outcomes, especially for disadvantaged children and young people.

Foreword



Closing the attainment gap for socio-economically disadvantaged pupils and supporting education recovery is a continuing challenge in classrooms. Tutoring presents a significant opportunity for all schools and their pupils.

The research is clear – done well, and aligned to high quality teaching, tutoring can be hugely successful in accelerating progress for struggling learners. It is also one of the best evidenced interventions we have to support disadvantaged pupils' attainment.

Educators across the country are determined to get learning back on track and level the playing field so that all children in their care can achieve. Many have taken advantage of the additional tuition on offer through the government's National Tutoring Programme (NTP) to do so.

This has not been without its challenges, and schools have gone above and beyond to implement the programme successfully.

But what can be done to maximise the impact of tutoring on pupils' attainment?

As part of an overarching school development strategy, one that prioritises high quality teaching and incorporates wider strategies to remove non-academic barriers to attainment, tutoring can provide specific pupils the targeted support they need to make good progress alongside their classmates.

This resource offers practical advice around the core components of effective tutoring, giving teachers and school leaders the key insights that can help to make sure this approach is a success in their school community.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Becky Francis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

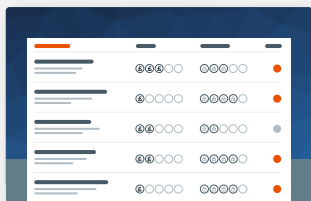
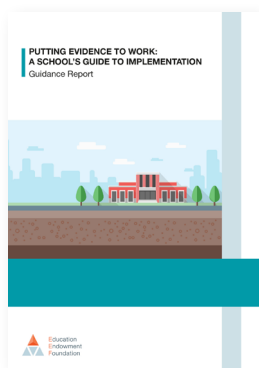
Professor Becky Francis
Chief Executive
Education Endowment Foundation

Introduction

What is the evidence base for tutoring?

Our [Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#) indicates that if tuition is high-quality and aligned to classroom teaching, pupils can make up to five months additional progress with one to one tuition and up to four months additional progress with small group tuition. For small group tuition, the smaller the group the better. Once group size increases above six or seven there is a noticeable reduction in effectiveness.

The studies that underpin our toolkit show that tuition may be more impactful in supporting progress in literacy, and when implemented in primary schools. However, it can also be a useful tool to ensure effective progress more generally when implemented well.



As with any evidence review, [the EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#) summarises the average impact of an approach across a range of academic studies. Although the impact of tutoring is positive on average, this is not true for all studies, so schools should consider how they are dedicating sufficient time, funding and resource to implement tutoring effectively.

One of the characteristics that distinguishes effective and less-effective schools, in addition to what they implement, is how they put those new approaches into practice. For advice about how to implement a new initiative or strategy in a way that gives the best chance of long-term success, school leaders can use the EEF's ["Putting Evidence to Work: A School's Guide to Implementation"](#).

1. What are the key principles of tutoring?

High quality teaching is the most powerful lever schools have for improving pupil outcomes. However, especially post-pandemic, there may be children in need of additional support with their learning.

When one-to-one and small group tutoring are implemented well—following the principles in this short guide—it is likely that it can be impactful. This may prove particularly valuable to support closing the gap for disadvantaged pupils.

These three principles are:

1. Selecting pupils and scheduling sessions effectively
2. Aligning tutoring with curriculum and assessment
3. Creating a sustainable tutoring model

Each section builds on questions and insights we have gathered from school leaders and teachers around the country.

These questions might help school leaders consider effectiveness of tuition in their own setting as part of their monitoring and evaluation.

How do you define tuition?

Small group tuition is defined as one teacher, trained teaching assistant or tutor working with two to five pupils together in a group. This arrangement enables the teaching to focus exclusively on a small number of learners, usually in a separate classroom or working area. One to one tuition involves a teacher, trained teaching assistant or other adult giving a pupil intensive individual support. On average, one to one tuition is very effective at improving pupil outcomes.

Pupils are supported with additional and intensive academic learning, targeted at specific needs. Understanding of learning gaps is key, in order to select appropriate curriculum content.



2. Selecting pupils and scheduling sessions effectively

Small group tuition approaches can support pupils to make effective progress by providing intensive, targeted academic support.

When one-to-one and small group tutoring are implemented well—following the principles in this short guide—it is likely that it can be impactful. This may prove particularly valuable to support closing the gap for disadvantaged pupils.

Have we focussed on those pupils who are eligible for Pupil Premium funding or facing other types of disadvantage?

How frequent should sessions be? When should they take place?

How long should the tuition last for?

The EEF Toolkit finds that frequent sessions (three times a week or so), that last up to an hour and take place over a period of six to twelve weeks, typically show the greatest impact. This may be particularly true for younger pupils, who are likely to benefit from more regular, shorter sessions.

If pupils are taken out of their usual classroom teaching to receive tutoring, it should be a prerequisite of any tutoring programme that it at least compensates for the time spent away from class.



1:1 tutoring can have the largest impact



Tutoring in groups may reduce potential sense of stigma



Groups of three are likely to maintain high impacts with good value for money. Once group size increases above six or seven there is a noticeable reduction in effectiveness.

“ We planned our tuition timetable with consistency in mind: ensuring clarity around where sessions would take place to allow for prompt session start and end to build routines; consistency of tutor and pupil groups. We also rotated timings so as not to overly impact learning in any particular subject. **”**



Secondary Head, Rotherham

3. Aligning tutoring with curriculum and assessment

Evidence suggests that tuition is likely to be most effective when it is targeted, making use of diagnostic assessment and timely feedback. Targeted tuition is likely to be well matched to a pupils' current curriculum, so that they can reinforce learning from tuition sessions in their classroom practice.

*Which staff are most appropriate for tutoring?
What support and training do tutors need to ensure maximum impact?*

How do we align tutoring content with the rest of the curriculum? How do we communicate with tutors?

How do we support transition out of tutoring sessions? How do we create a healthy feedback (and feed-forward) loop?

Tuition is most likely effective if it is targeted at pupils' specific needs. This requires sensitive and ongoing diagnostic assessment, such as quizzing, questioning, or a judicious use of curriculum assessments during tutoring sessions.

Using timely diagnostic assessment can ensure that tutoring is targeted in the following ways:

- Addressing specific pupil misconceptions
- Adjusting the level of challenge or activities
- Ensuring specific concepts or topics are retaught as necessary
- Realigning curriculum materials in the medium and longer term



Case study 1

“Some of our most concerning assessment data highlighted significant areas of need in literacy. Diagnostic assessment within and across lessons showed us that reading fluency and comprehension were a focus for Key Stage 2. We developed a ‘three strand’ tutoring approach:

1:1 same-day intervention—Linked to gaps or misconceptions identified in lessons or formative assessment tasks, for specific pupils.

Small-group reading comprehension tuition—Typically linked to specific gaps in pupils’ language comprehension, vocabulary or inferencing based upon class texts.

Pre-teaching sessions—Sessions were focused on phonics and reading fluency based on a text pupils would study in a whole class setting.

”

Primary School Leader, Bristol

What are hinge questions?

Hinge questions are key questions, often multiple-choice in format, that clearly identify whether a pupil has understood the task or objective. They are designed in a way that, if a pupil answers incorrectly, it is quick and easy for the teacher to see why they made the error. They therefore pinpoint not only success, but also potential gaps and misconceptions.

Primary Literacy Example

Tick the sentences that use an apostrophe correctly:

1. I threw the dog's ball.
2. The girl's are running outside.
3. The dolphins' are playing in the water.
4. The world's climate is changing.
5. The children's teacher is smiling.

Case study 2

“Our biggest barrier to aligning tutoring with our curricula was finding the time for teachers and tutors to feedback to one another efficiently.

Hinge questions became the starting point to a quick and easy feedback loop for us: teachers would share the question and a pupil's answer with the tutor, and vice versa. Whilst it was only one piece of the jigsaw puzzle, this allowed us to be more confident that curriculum content was aligned.

”

Assistant Head Teacher,
Secondary School, London

The EEF's '[Effective Professional Development](#)' (PD) guidance report identifies essential building blocks, or mechanisms, which increase the likelihood that PD will be effective. When thinking about how tutors are supported, school leaders may wish to consider how PD for tutors can:

- **Build knowledge:** For example by splitting PD sessions for tutors into short, manageable chunks to manage cognitive load or building in opportunities to revisit information about key knowledge and techniques.
- **Motivate tutors:** This could be achieved by working with tutors to identify specific development goals that best-suit both their needs, and those of their pupils.
- **Develop teacher techniques:** This can be done through clear modelling, feedback and opportunities for rehearsal of practices and techniques.
- **Embed practice:** For example by providing follow-up prompts and reminders, supporting tutors to plan key actions and encouraging them to self-monitor their progress with new strategies.



Case study 3

“Our literacy tutor became a familiar face in our staff body, attending our weekly staff CPD sessions and PPA time with specific year groups.

Reading techniques were modelled during an initial training session, and tutors and teachers then had the opportunity to rehearse these before implementing them in the classroom.

Following this initial training, our leadership team has offered follow-on support through coaching for tutors, using a professional learning community approach where tutors meet every four weeks to discuss learning and specific elements of practice.”



**Head Teacher,
Primary School, Bolton**

4. Creating a sustainable tutoring model

Establishing processes to consistently monitor and evaluate the impact of tutoring enables school leaders to track its progress and refine their approach over time.

What evidence can I gather to ensure we understand whether our approach to tutoring is having a positive impact?








Is there a check-in process in place with tutors, so that we can identify any issues with attendance, tuition groupings and progress?

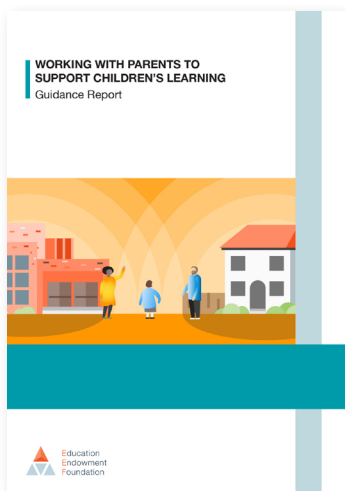
How can positive relationships between tutors and pupils be established and maintained?

As with trying anything new, when tutoring is first introduced in your setting it is likely that challenges may arise such as pupils not attending sessions or topics not being aligned with the curriculum and classroom practice.

So it's important to continually monitor the implementation of tutoring to identify potential difficulties and adapt practice.

Monitoring can take many different forms:

-  **Observations and learning walks**
-  **Review of documentation, including for planning**
-  **Staff and pupil feedback via surveys, interviews and focus groups**
-  **Parent/carer surveys**
-  **Attendance data**
-  **Samples of pupils' work**
-  **Assessment data**



Ensuring tutors take time to build relationships with pupils and understand needs is key to the success of tutoring.

We know that parental/carer engagement is consistently associated with children's academic outcomes. Schools should consider how to foster positive relationships between tutors, pupils and parents/carers to maximise the positive impacts of tutoring.

Working together to secure pupils' ongoing participation in tutoring could contribute to its success. Potential strategies could include initial parent/carer contact to share reasons for and logistics of tutoring; followed by regular digital communications, charting attendance milestones and celebrating tutoring successes.

EEF Study



An EEF study tested whether prioritising pupil-tutor relationships could improve attendance at tutoring sessions.

The study indicates that getting tutors and pupils to find common ground at the start of a block of tutoring could boost attendance at sessions.

Pupils and tutors answered quick-fire questions via a 'Snap-Survey' about their personal interests, hobbies, and values. One question asked participants to choose from a list of major sporting events which one they'd most like to attend. Another asked whether laughter, loyalty or listening is most important for a friendship.

Tutors and pupils received instant feedback on their similarities. Tutors also received reminders of their similarities with their pupils for the next five weeks, including some suggested conversation prompts.

The evaluation found that pupils randomly selected to receive the Snap Survey had higher attendance rates than pupils in the 'business as usual' control group, where tuition partners used their usual strategies to encourage attendance.

Case study 4

“ We met as a tutoring team to agree how we would monitor our approach to ensure it had the impact we were looking for. We introduced ‘reflective practice’ meetings to review provision. These groups took place twice each half term, and gave tutors and class teachers the opportunity to discuss the effectiveness of our tutoring groups, and to adapt provision.

During these meetings, we carried out book looks from both tutoring sessions, and pupils’ class work, to see whether pupils applied their learning in their independent work. This was also helpful as it allowed tutors and class teachers to talk together about the topics they were covering, identify areas of progress, and agree next steps for individual pupils. We collected Pupil Voice information and sent out a parent/carer survey to find out how pupils and families felt about tutoring, including what was going well and what could be improved.

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Key Stage 2 Lead, Primary School, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.




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