NFER Classroom | Research Bites

Tutoring: What's next for schools?

Insights from the latest research on tutoring, with practical tips and considerations for school leaders and teachers.

Based on evidence from evaluations of the National Tutoring Programme conducted by NFER and its partners, as well as others.

Welcome and thank you

Schools have been working tirelessly following the pandemic to put strategies in place to support pupils' learning recovery. Tutoring may be one of the ways you are offering additional support to learners – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

To support your continued efforts, this Research Bite summarises key findings and practical recommendations from the latest research on the National Tutoring Programme (NTP). It is based on evaluations of the first three years of the NTP, conducted by NFER and our partners.

This summary builds on the guidance set out in our **Implementing Effective Tutoring guide**, published in January 2023.

We set out what these findings mean for schools and what evidence suggests about the actions you may wish to consider for your future tutoring plans.

This research has only been made possible because of the fantastic support received from our community of schools and teachers. We would like to say a huge thank you for your engagement and contributions.

What are NFER Classroom Research Bites?

At NFER, we create and share research evidence and insights to support positive change across education systems.

Research Bites have been developed to share key insights and learning from that research to support your practice. They also aim to set out the ways that your engagement enables us to develop evidence that informs policy across the education sector.

What does the latest research tell us?

The introduction of the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) in 2020-21 has led to considerable focus on the potential of tutoring to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

Research conducted by NFER in March 2023 found that among school leaders who were using the NTP at the time:

- Almost all (91%) felt it had allowed them to offer more support to disadvantaged pupils at their school.

- Three quarters (76%) felt it was improving the attainment of disadvantaged pupils at their school.

In addition, our latest evaluations of the NTP have found:

- Small positive effects of school-led tutoring (SLT) on maths attainment at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 which were equivalent to roughly one months' additional progress.

- Some limited evidence that SLT had a positive impact on Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 English attainment.

- Receiving more hours of SLT was associated with better outcomes.

- Teachers perceived that tutoring had improved pupils' confidence and self-esteem.

However, the NTP has not been without its challenges. Our research has shown:

- Issues with NTP funding arrangements are the main reason schools have been unable to continue delivering the programme.

- The ability to source suitable tutors, the administrative burden and time required to implement the NTP have also reduced take-up and/or caused drop-out from the NTP.

- Scheduling tutoring sessions at times that suit teachers, tutors and pupils can be challenging (see also Ofsted's **Independent review of tutoring in schools: phase 1 findings, 2022**)

- Participation in the academic mentors (AM) or tuition partners (TP) routes did not appear to lead to better outcomes in English or maths at Key Stage 2 or Key Stage 4.
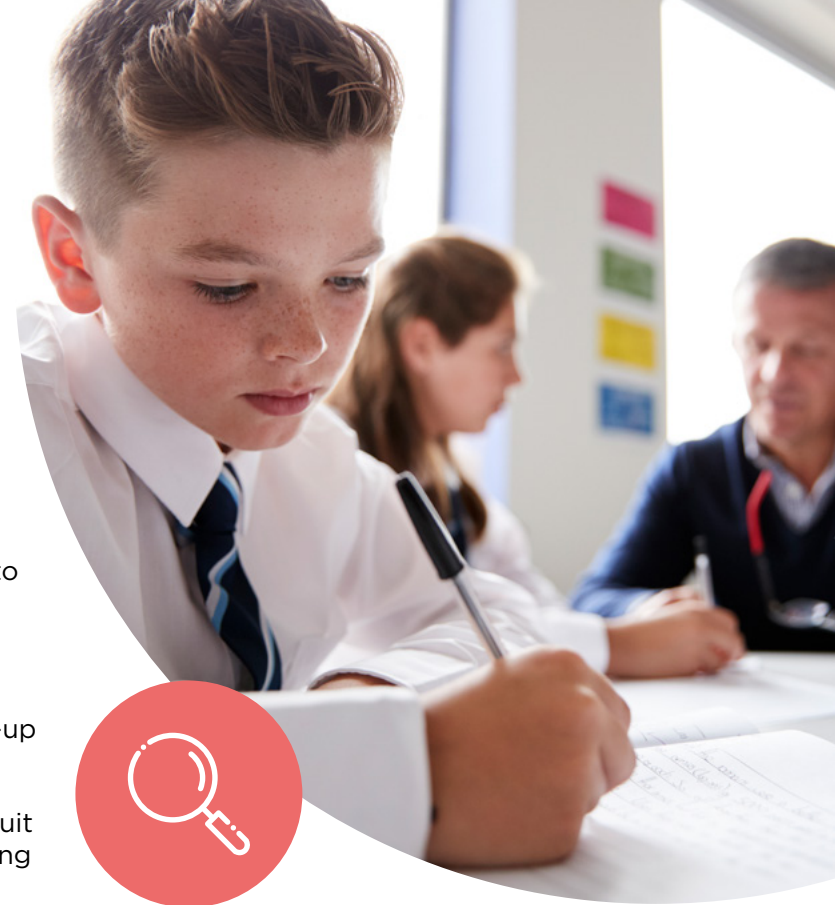
> **It's the nurture of the smaller groups that we had after school with our teachers. It has given kids the confidence and the can-do attitude to bring into the lessons.**
>
> Secondary senior leader

What do these findings mean for schools?

> Tutoring implementation is important as there is evidence of potential differences in effectiveness between different NTP routes.

Differences in implementation are likely to account for the different outcomes between NTP routes. It is therefore important to consider how to implement tutoring most effectively within a school context.

Our **Implementing Effective Tutoring** guide, published in January 2023, offers insights into how to maximise the benefits of tutoring based on earlier research findings.

Building on this, our latest research plus the evidence from Ofsted's **Independent review of tutoring in schools: phase 2 findings, 2023** suggests that tutoring will be most effective when:

- There is good communication between tutors and school staff and positive relationships between tutors and pupils.

- Tutoring is delivered in-person rather than online.

- The tutoring provided is high quality, tutors are knowledgeable about the subject area, can spot misconceptions and tailor sessions to meet pupils' needs.

- Tutoring sessions are well-aligned to the school curriculum.

- Tutoring sessions are scheduled to balance maximising attendance with minimising disruption to other lessons.

- There is parent/carer support for the approach.

What do these findings mean for schools?

> **Providing more hours of tutoring to the pupils who will benefit most is likely to lead to better outcomes.**

Results from our NTP impact evaluations indicate that receiving more hours of tutoring can lead to better outcomes. In addition, Ofsted's **Independent review of tutoring in schools: phase 2 findings (2023)** found that working with smaller groups of pupils led to more bespoke, individualised support, which is likely to result in better outcomes.

- Working consistently with small groups of the right pupils is likely to lead to greater benefits than offering more pupils smaller amounts of tutoring.

It is also important to consider tutoring frequency. Short, regular sessions (30-60 minutes, three to five times a week) over around one term have previously been found to have the optimum impact (Smyth, 2008; EEF, 2021). This means:

- 15 - 30 hours of tutoring is likely to result in the greatest impact, as highlighted in EEF's **One to one tuition (2021)** and **Small group tuition (2021)** reports.

- Short, regular sessions are key.

However, we recognise that scheduling sessions more frequently may create additional logistical challenges for schools and acknowledge the importance of ensuring that pupils receive a rounded school experience.

What do these findings mean for schools?

> To help close the attainment gap, tutoring needs to complement other types of support and be offered to more disadvantaged pupils.

For any kind of support to be effective it needs to be offered to the right pupils at the right time. The needs of disadvantaged pupils can be many and varied, so having the flexibility to offer pupils the right type of evidence-based support is key.

- We found that higher proportions of disadvantaged pupils were selected for the NTP relative to the population, but overall, less than half of pupils selected for the NTP were from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Schools likely selected pupils for tutoring who they felt were most in need of support and/or were most likely to benefit from tutoring. Tutoring may not be the right option for all disadvantaged pupils and there are likely to be other pupils who will benefit.

In addition, more than half (61%) of school leaders we surveyed in March 2023 said they believe other types of support are more effective than tutoring for improving attainment among disadvantaged pupils. Going forward, this means that:

- To close the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils, either more disadvantaged pupils need to be offered tutoring or another type of support is needed.

- A flexible funding approach would help ensure disadvantaged pupils get the most appropriate, evidence-based support, at the right time to help them achieve their potential.

- Understanding the range of different types of support available for disadvantaged pupils, as well as their relative cost-effectiveness, would help inform best practice.

More information

This summary is based on findings from the following research, published in 2023.

- Survey data referred to in this summary comes from NFER's Teacher Voice Omnibus survey conducted with 439 senior leaders from a nationally representative sample of schools in England between 10-15 March 2023.

  You can find the full report **Tutoring sustainability: Understanding the views of school leaders** on the NFER website.

- Impact evaluation results for the NTP referred to in this summary come from the **Independent Evaluation of the National Tutoring Programme Year 2: Impact Evaluation**

  The full report can be found on the gov.uk website.

- Process and implementation evaluation results for the NTP come from **Evaluation of the National Tutoring Programme Year 3: Implementation and Process Evaluation**.

  The full report can be found on the gov.uk website.

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If you found this summary helpful, please don't forget to share it with your colleagues.

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