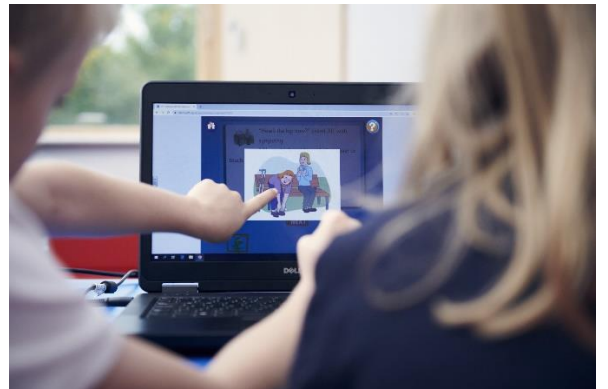
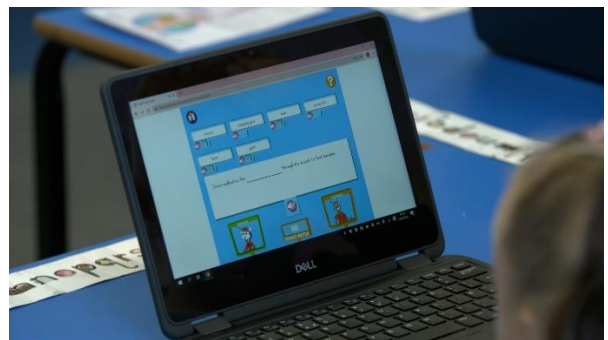


Closing the Disadvantage Gap by halving the number of pupils who are behind in reading

The power of an intensive reading programme for struggling readers in Year 1 and 2: A Case study from the Apex Project

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1. Executive Summary

Background

Every year, around a quarter of pupils, 150,000 or so, enter Year 3 without the reading skills required to fully access the widening curriculum. Around a third of these pupils are disadvantaged. This poor start has a major influence on later life chances.

The Fischer Family Foundation Apex Project is piloting a systematic programme of reading catch-up in Year 1 and 2 with the goal of reducing the number of pupils behind in reading in Year 3. The longitudinal data on prior attainment suggests this has a major influence on future educational trajectories, especially for disadvantaged pupils.

Case Study

The case study describes the experiences of 388 pupils in 5 pilot schools between 2021 to 2024.¹ The schools were selected for being in areas of high deprivation, for putting early reading right at the heart of school priorities, and for being prepared to commit to implement an intensive programme of reading catch-up.

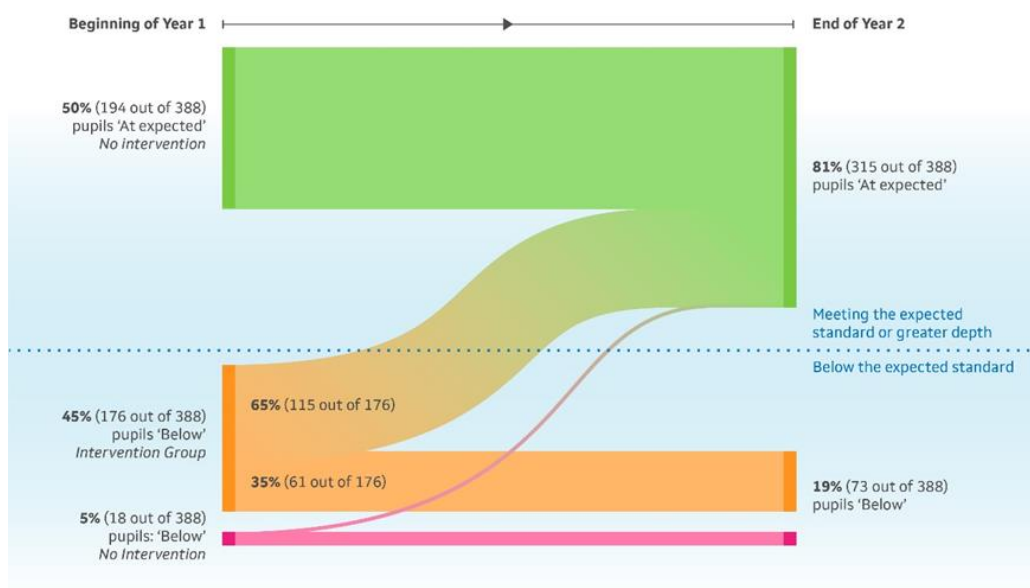
At the beginning of Year 1, 45% (176 out of 388) of case study pupils were assessed by their teachers as being below the expected standard in reading ('Below'). These students participated in an intensive reading catch-up programme during Year 1 and, if needed, continuation in Year 2.

Outcomes

By the end of Year 2, 65% (115 out of 176) pupils who took part in the catch-up programme moved from being judged 'Below' in reading to being judged 'At Expected' and having achieved adequate reading fluency for entering Year 3.

By the end of Year 2, the case study schools demonstrated a high performance in reading, with 81% of pupils assessed as 'At Expected' and 19% as 'Below'.

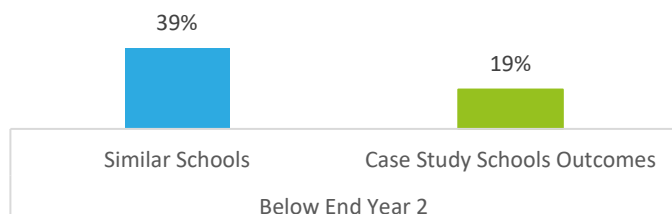
388 pupils' position beginning of Year 1 (left-hand side), and end of Year 2 (right-hand side)



¹ Representing all the pupils in two year groups who were present at the start of Year 1 and stayed until end of Year 2: including pupils who completed Year 2 in 2023, and pupils who completed Year 2 in 2024.

In comparison, in 415 schools with similar levels of disadvantaged pupils (40%+), the average of pupils 'At Expected' in reading by the end of Year 2 was 61% and 'Below' was 39%.

% Pupils who were 'Below' in reading: outcomes for schools with similar levels of disadvantage versus outcomes in case study schools



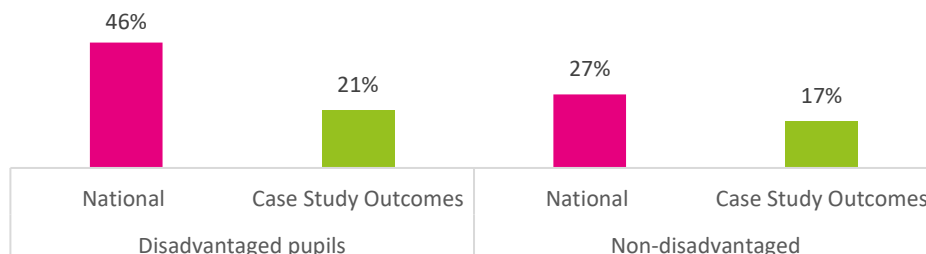
In the case study schools, ≤5% (13-20 out of 388) had not passed the phonics check, compared to a national average of 11%.

Impact on the disadvantaged pupils: 48% (185 out of 388) of case study pupils were disadvantaged.² 52% (91 out of 176) pupils in the intervention group were disadvantaged.

Benchmarking against national assessment averages at the end of Year 2, the case study schools reduced the number of disadvantaged pupils who were 'Below' in reading. 21% (38 out of 185) disadvantaged pupils in the case study schools were 'Below', compared to 46% nationally.

The case study schools also reduced the number of non-disadvantaged pupils who were judged 'Below'. 17% (35 out of 203) pupils in the case study schools were 'Below', compared to 27% nationally. Disadvantaged pupils in the case study schools attained, on average, better than non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

% Pupils who were 'Below' in reading at the end of Year 2: disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged



Costs

The main cost of the intervention was the teaching assistant time. Typically, a teaching assistant supported one pair in Year 1 and two pairs in Year 2. We estimate the teacher assistant cost to a school was around £800 per pupil who took part in the intervention.³

Conclusion

Such systematic programmes are crucial to address the issue of early literacy failure: raising attainment and closing the disadvantage gap in England.

² Defined as ever eligible for Free School Meals.

³ Considerably less, if implemented via internal recruitment rather than supply agency.

1. Background

1.1 A core problem in English Primary Education

Educational outcomes in England for the lowest quarter of pupils are poor.⁴ This leads to many actions and proposals to improve the education system for all. However, well-established best practice in process improvement has shown that substantial performance improvement requires identifying the 'vital few' sources of failure which are most fundamental to poor outcomes, and addressing these effectively.⁵ Without this discipline, breakthroughs in performance will not be achieved.

In the first years of primary school, the main academic curriculum focus is on learning to read. A reading ability which gives adequate access to the broader curriculum is a critical success factor on entry to Year 3. Every year around a quarter of pupils in England, 150,000 or so, enter Year 3 without a minimum required reading level to access the widening curriculum.⁶ In most schools, these reading difficulties are unlikely to be fully addressed in a timely manner.

The Fischer Family Foundation analyses have shown that this 'Early Literacy Failure' is associated with poor outcomes at all subsequent stages of school age education and beyond.⁷ Education is a serial process where success at each stage is largely a requirement for success at the next stage. Our contention is that Early Literacy Failure is the most fundamental driver of the subsequent poor outcomes.

Formal teaching of reading takes place in the three years of Reception, Year 1, and Year 2. We see clearly that some pupils are not accessing the reading curriculum well by the end of Reception.⁸ By this time it is clear that the lower performers are substantially behind the expected track and are unlikely to be benefitting adequately from first teaching. Social deprivation (as well as month of birth and gender) is a major factor in determining whether you are in this group.⁹

1.2 The Apex Project

The Fischer Foundation Apex project was set up to pilot an approach of early, substantial action taken to address the needs of these pupils at risk of Early Literacy Failure. This has provided a proof of concept that a systematic programme of additional reading development optimised for this cohort in Year 1 and 2 can get most pupils back 'on track' in reading by the start of Year 3.

⁴ See, for instance, Plaister, 2024, on pupils who do not achieve a Level 4 in English and Maths at GCSE & Education Policy Institute, Annual Report 2024, showing the disadvantage gap at GCSE.

⁵ There are many thousands of references to the science of process improvement in industry and management, based on original work by Philip B. Crosby, W. Edwards Deming, and Joseph M. Juran. For a useful overview see Oakland, 2012. For 'vital few' see the 'Pareto principle', also known as the 80/20 rule.

⁶ See Hilton, E. et.al, 2024, showing the lowest quarter of pupils enter Year 3 with an Oral Reading Fluency of less than 45 Words Correct Per Minute. The gender, month of birth, deprivation breakdown of this group looks similar to earlier analyses of pupils who get very low scores in reading and writing assessments at Key Stage 1, see Fischer et. al. 2024.

⁷ See work from FFT Education Datalab: Thomson et. al., 2022 and 2024 and Keynon et. al., 2023, Part 1 & 2.

⁸ Unpublished analyses of Reading Assessment Programme internal data, 2024.

⁹ Fischer et. al. 2024. For how summer-born pupils are over-represented having SEND, including EHCPs, see Campbell, T. 2021.

1.3 The Programme

The 5 schools in the case study were supported by the Fischer Family Foundation to use a low cost, high dosage, scalable reading programme delivered for 30 minutes within the school day (or in an extended school day) as often as possible (3 – 5 times per week), led by a Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) in Year 1 and Year 2.

FFT Tutoring with the Lightning Squad (TWL) is a programme that was originally developed by Professor Robert Slavin and Nancy Madden of the Success for All Foundation, USA, aimed at addressing the needs of struggling readers. It has since been developed substantially by FFT Education. It enables a solid reading pedagogy embedded within an online platform, including initial assessment, and structured progression through a range of core reading skills (building phonics, spelling, vocabulary, comprehension and fluency). The pupils work in cooperative pairs and use cooperative learning (taking turns to be 'reader' or 'coach') and are guided by the adult who reinforces and teaches as needed. The programme is grounded in real texts, with real storybooks available to supplement teaching in the first part of the programme. The programme includes an 'at home' function for consolidation and work with parents.

The programme was designed to be a cost-effective catch-up programme for pupils who were behind in reading and has been positively evaluated several times in the US.¹⁰ Since 2021, the platform has used at scale with more than 60,000 pupils in England, as part of the National Tutoring Programme (NTP). During NTP, pupils made 3 to 5 months progress in reading fluency during 6 weeks of tutoring.¹¹

The pilot schools were selected because they put the outcome of adequate reading by Year 3 at the top of their agenda. The Foundation has provided supplementary budget support for the adult time needed to deliver the programme and the platform with significant commitment also made by the school. There were no directives as to when the programme is used, or how much each child should get, or which child should be placed on the programme, as we wanted to learn from what good schools choose to do for their pupils, rather than impose a formula on headteachers. However, it was generally found that the platform worked best 1:2 in Year 1 and either 1:2 or 1:4 in Year 2.

In addition, the Foundation have supported an eye-sight screen in case study schools which, in some cases, has helped schools identify pupils who need vision support.

¹⁰ See for example Ross, 2017 and Wang et. al. 2024.

¹¹ See Bibby, et. al., FFT tutoring Data Impact Report, 2021-2022. An EEF trial of TWL is recruiting in 2025.

2. Case Study

2.1 Context

Apex schools are high performing schools in high needs areas. We've anonymised the 5 schools but included a summary of their pupil data in the Appendix, which reveals all have 40%+ disadvantaged pupils, as defined as ever being eligible for Free School Meals (Table 2.) Schools in the case study are located in Suffolk, Croydon, Manchester and Peterborough.

2.2 Limitations

The sample of 5 schools and two year groups (388 pupils) is small. The pilot does not include a control group and therefore does not directly address how many pupils would have achieved well without it. The pilot *does* offer both a proof of concept that up to two thirds of pupils with reading difficulties can be turned around in Years 1 and 2 with effective reading intervention, and we have stress-tested a replicable, substantial, and rapidly scalable system for doing so.

2.3 Pupils

5 schools were given varied additional financial and in-kind resources over the last four years on request, in order to implement 'tutoring for all' in Key Stage 1 (i.e. for all who would benefit and for as long as beneficial) using the Tutoring for Lightning Squad reading tutoring platform. The analysis has been restricted to the pupils who were there from the beginning of Year 1 to the end of Year 2 (the non-mobile cohort). This is because we could not be sure if pupils who have left the school have maintained their progress. For pupils who have joined the schools we cannot be sure if they got reading support sufficiently early in Year 1.

2.4 Indicators

When longitudinally tracking the cohorts, we worked with the schools to analyse all their data (including phonics check, KS1 National Assessments, fluency data, tutoring data, and other in-school comprehension data and 'book bands' where they are used systematically). This encompasses all aspects of reading including comprehension, reading across the curriculum, in reading for pleasure, and in one-to-one reading with an adult.

All the schools we work with have rigorous systems of assessment and at the end of each year the schools use their judgement to put the pupils into four categories for Reading:

- Greater Depth
- Age-Related Expectations (ARE), i.e. 'At Expected'
- Below Age-Related Expectations or 'Below Expected' or 'Below'
- Well below (sometimes 'pre-key-stage') or 'Well Below'

We've focused on the category of 'Below', covering both pupils who are 'Below Expected' and 'Well Below Expected' at the end of Year 2, as this is the most reliable and universal indicator of the number of pupils who enter Year 3 with sub-optimal reading skills.

We also examined an indicator of pupils not passing the government phonics check by the end of Year 2, representing approximately the lowest-performing 10% of pupils nationally. A pupil who has had intervention support may have made a lot of progress in reading from a low starting point, while still being 'Below' by the end of Year 2. This is partially indicated by having passed the phonics check.

2.5 Pupils selected for the Intervention

As shown in Table 1, at the beginning of Year 1, 50% (194 out of 388) of pupils were judged to be 'At Expected' in reading. They were not given intervention support in Year 1. We have not tracked what, if any, additional support they were given subsequently. This group remained 'At Expected' by the end of Year 2.

As shown in Table 1, 45% (176 out of 388) of pupils were judged to be 'Below' in reading and were placed on the catch-up programme. This proportion is reflective of the high level of disadvantage in the schools in the case study. 48% (185 out of 388) of case study pupils were disadvantaged (see section 3.4 below). FFT Tutoring with the Lightning Squad starts with being able to segment and blend 3-letter Consonant-Vowel-Consonant (CVC) words, and schools were advised that pupils should be able to do this before they start the programme. The programme was selected for the vast majority of pupils who were perceived to be behind in reading in Year 1.¹²

Finally, a small number of pupils (18 out of 388) who were either such a long way behind were not able to start the catch-up programme in Year 1 (likely 12 pupils) or they were only very slightly behind and were not seen as needing the programme (likely 6 pupils). We've been monitoring and working with schools to understand what they do with pupils who are very far below, mostly needing very short, one-to-one interventions focused on phonemic awareness and segmenting and blending a few letters, language support, or support for other aspects of their Special Needs.¹³

Table 1. Case study pupils beginning Year 1: entire non-mobile cohort, 5 schools, 2 year groups

At Expected: No Intervention	50%	194
Below: Selected for Intervention	45%	176
Below: Not selected for Intervention	5%	18
Total pupils		388

¹² The fact that so many of the pupils who were behind could access the programme is partly due to the excellent work done in Nursery and Reception in the case study schools. 4 out of the 5 schools have nursery provision. All the schools believe that a strong nursery education is a critical factor in how well the pupils fare in the reading curriculum.

¹³ This analysis is not part of this report, and SEND will be a focus of our next case study in the Apex Project.

3. Outcomes

3.1 Pupils below the expected standard at the end of Year 2

We've tracked all the indicators for all the pupils for the last four years, and developed an understanding of how schools form summative judgements, combining classroom data with statutory data, as well as feedback from the tutoring platform and, where possible, the FFT Reading Assessment Programme.

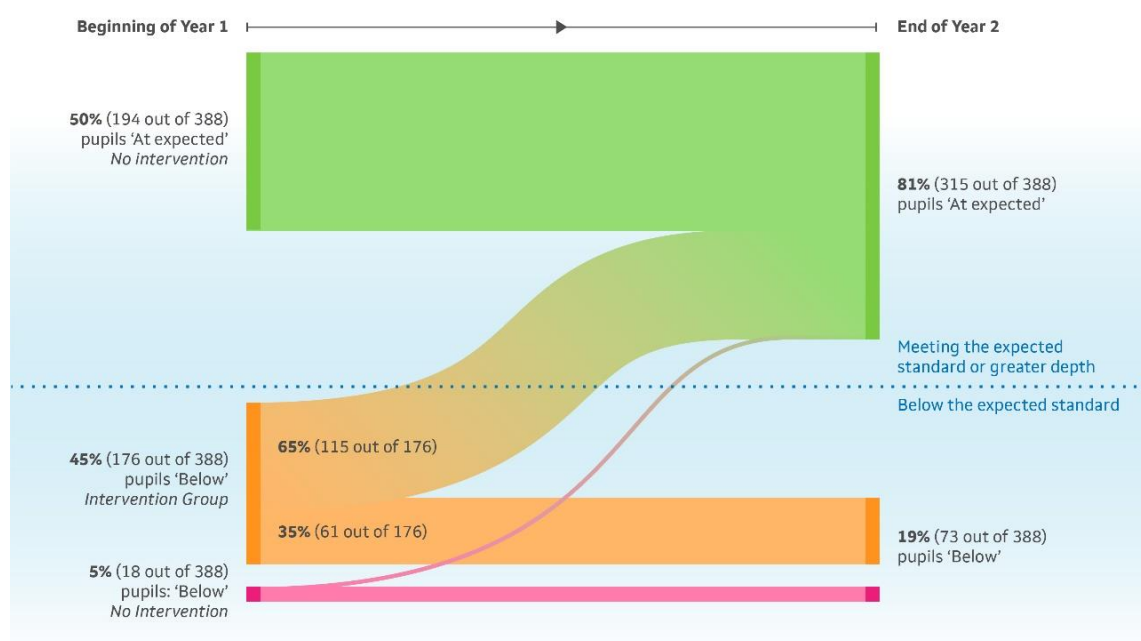
Figure 1, below, shows the overall case study pupils' position, at the beginning of Year 1 (on the left-hand side) and after the intervention (on the right-hand side). 50% (194 out of 388) of pupils are judged to be 'At Expected' in reading at the beginning of Year 1 and are not placed on the programme (represented by the green-shaded section).

Under that, we see 45% (176 out of 388) of pupils were in the intervention group (represented in the orange-shaded section). We show that 65% (115 out of 176) of these pupils join the group 'At Expected' in reading by the end of Year 2 after the period of intensive reading support. 35% of the intervention group also receive this support but are still 'Below' at the end of Year 2.

5% (18 out of 388) of pupils, who are below at the beginning of Year 1, are not placed on the programme (represented by the pink-shaded section). This is due to it being deemed unsuitable, or unnecessary by the schools.¹⁴ Out of these 18 pupils, 6 reach the expected standard by end of Year 2 and 12 are still below.

Overall, 81% (315 out of 388) of case study pupils are 'At Expected' by the end of Year 2, and 19% (73 out of 388) are 'Below'.

Figure 1. 388 pupils' position beginning of Year 1 and end of Year 2

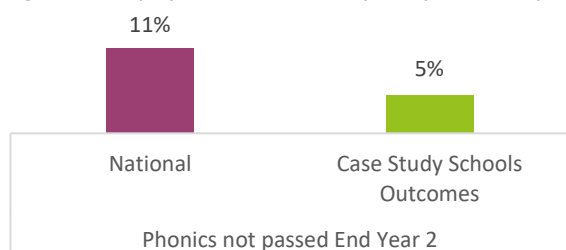


¹⁴ Our tracking shows that some of these pupils are placed on the programme in Years 3 and 4. It also shows a high proportion of these pupils have EHCPs.

3.2 Pupils who pass the phonics check

By the end of Year 2, all but $\leq 5\%$ (13 – 20 out of 388) of case study pupils passed the phonics check. Of those who did not yet pass, 9 were in the non-intervention group and 4 to 11 were in the intervention group.¹⁵ This low percentage is indicative that some pupils, despite not getting to 'At Expected' during the programme, did get a significant benefit, although it is hard to quantify. As shown in Figure 2., the case study schools had less than half the proportion of pupils who did not pass the phonics check by end of Year 2 than the national average in 2023/24, which was 11%.¹⁶

Figure 2. % pupils who did not pass phonics by the end of Year 2: national and case study



3.3 Comparison to schools with a similar level of disadvantage

We do not know how many pupils would have reached the expected standard without the intervention. However, to provide some indication of the impact, we benchmarked our results against Year 2 National Assessment data for 2023.¹⁷ We focused on 415 schools which use FFT Aspire, and have a similar level of disadvantage to our case study schools (40%+ disadvantaged pupils).¹⁸ This is not an exact like-for-like comparison as:

- There are a total of 2,600 schools with 40%+ FSM so this may not be a representative sample.
- Mobile pupils are known to underperform, but they are excluded from our case study.
- Our teacher assessment is informed by a number of different factors rather than just National Assessment results.
- Our case study covers 2 year groups: Year 2 in 2022-2023, and Year 2 in 2023-2024 (when there were no statutory assessments)
- Our case study was 48% disadvantaged, so even within the group of 40%+ disadvantaged pupils, the case study pupils had a very high level of deprivation.

However, even with the above caveats, it looks that attainment in the Apex case study schools in reading is extremely high, and may have halved the number of pupils who are below the expected standard in reading by the end of Year 2. As shown in Figure 3., 19% of our case study pupils were judged 'Below' the expected standard in reading, compared to 39% average for pupils in the schools with 40%+ disadvantaged pupils.

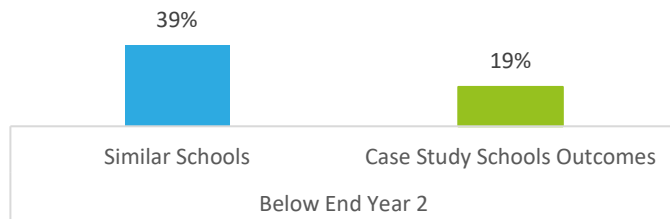
¹⁵ Results were missing for 7 pupils.

¹⁶ For National Averages in 2023 see <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-1-and-phonics-screening-check-attainment>

¹⁷ 2023 was the last year of statutory national assessment in Year 2.

¹⁸ Around 5,000 primary schools actively use FFT Aspire. Nationally, 2,600+ of 24,000+ primary schools have 40%+ disadvantaged pupils. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>

Figure 3. % pupils 'Below' in reading: schools with similar levels of disadvantage and case study



3.4 Impact on disadvantaged pupils

The whole cohort of 388 pupils consisted of 185 disadvantaged pupils and 203 non-disadvantaged pupils. 49% (91 out of 185) of the disadvantaged pupils were chosen for the reading programme (representing 52% of the intervention group). 42% (85 out of 203) of the non-disadvantaged pupils were chosen for the reading programme (representing 48% of the intervention group). Figures 4a and 4b show the starting points and outcomes for the two groups of pupils separately.

Out of 91 disadvantaged pupils who were placed on the reading programme, 64% (58 out of 91) were judged 'At Expected' by the end of Year 2. A slightly higher proportion, 67% (57 out of 85) of non-disadvantaged pupils who were placed on the programme moved from 'Below' to 'At Expected'.

By the end of year 2, 21% (38 out of 185) of disadvantaged pupils were 'Below' in reading and 17% (35 out of 203) of non-disadvantaged pupils were 'Below'.

Figure 4a. 185 Disadvantaged pupils' position beginning Year 1 and end of Year 2

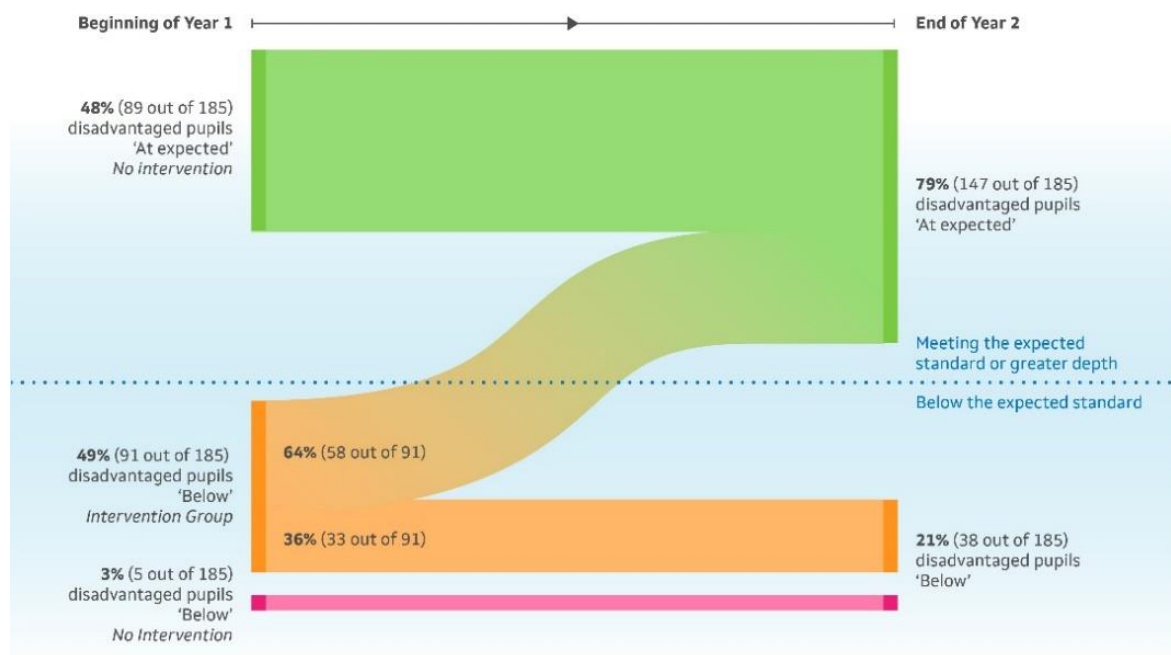
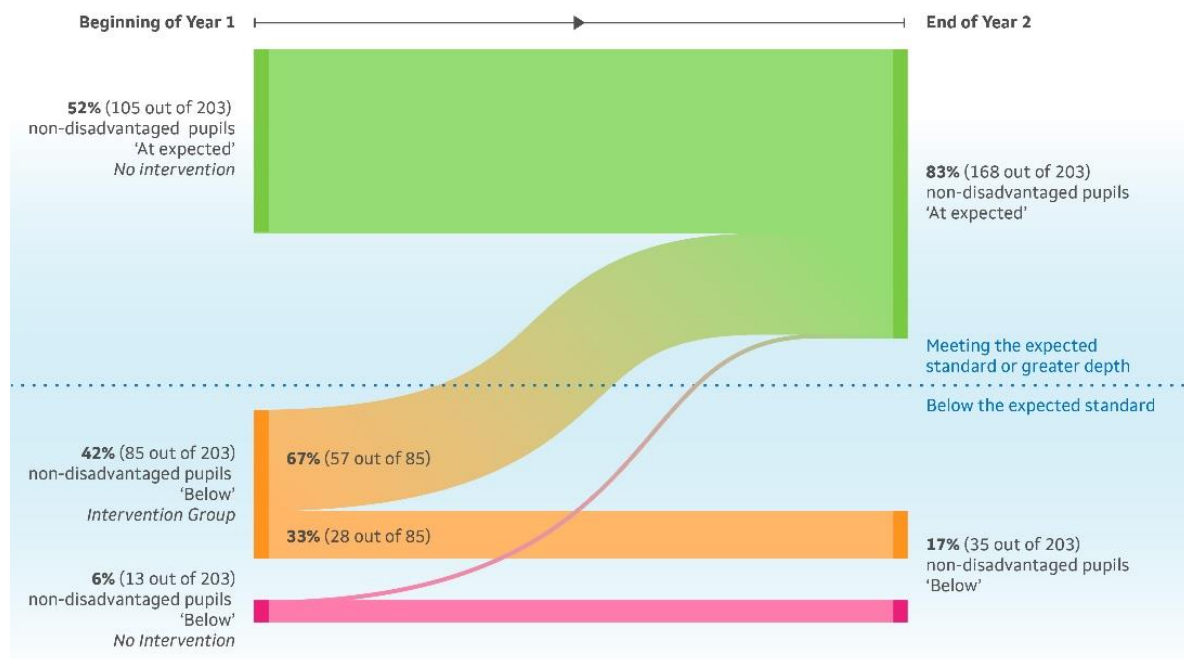
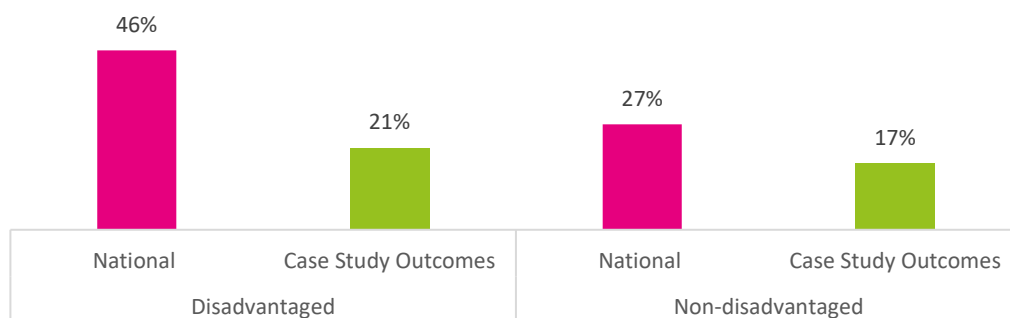


Figure 4b. 203 Non-disadvantaged pupils' position beginning Year 1 and End of Year 2



Again, with the caveats outlined in part 3.3, we can see that the case study schools have high attainment for their disadvantaged pupils, reducing the number who are 'Below' at the end of Year 2 to 21%, compared to 46% national average (see Figure 5).¹⁹ Their non-disadvantaged pupils are also faring well, with just 17% 'Below' at the end of Year 2, compared to 27% nationally. In fact, disadvantaged pupils in the case study are attaining better in reading than non-disadvantaged pupils nationally (21% below compared to 27% below nationally). Finally, for the pupils in the case study, the disadvantage gap appears to have been reduced to 4% (from 19% nationally).

Figure 5. % Pupils who were 'Below' at the end of Year 2: disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged



¹⁹ For National Averages in 2023 see <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-1-and-phonics-screening-check-attainment>

4. Continuing the Apex Longitudinal Pilot

4.1 Staying on track in Year 3

The case study is part of the Apex longitudinal pilot project and we intend to continue to track these cohorts. One of the key questions after making this effort, is whether the pupils who get to 'At Expected' in reading by the end of Year 2, continue to make progress in reading, converting their early reading gains into developing reading for pleasure and comprehension, and also whether these improved skills support other areas of the curriculum.

Currently, one year group, (186 pupils) have completed year 3 in 2024. We looked at their teacher judgements at the end of Year 3, and particularly to see if any pupils had slipped back. This year group went from 81% at the end of Year 2, to 75% on track by the end of Year 3, a change of 14 pupils from 'At Expected' to 'Below' in teacher judgement. In fact, as shown in table 2 below, 19 pupils who were judged 'At Expected' at the end of Year 2, were judged 'Below' by the end of Year 3 (12 from the intervention group and 7 others), and 5 pupils went the other way, previously being judged as 'Below' and now judged 'At Expected' in reading.

Table 2. pupils who moved 'up' or 'down' in reading during Year 3

	Intervention group	Non-intervention group
Pupils who went from 'At Expected' end Year 2 to 'Below' end Year 3	12	4
Pupils who went from 'Below' end Year 2 to 'At Expected' end Year 3	7	1

All the schools have plans for continued recovery. The TWL platform content goes to Year 6, so some pupils have had the same intervention in Year 3, and other schools are developing a more comprehension-focused intervention in Key Stage 2, such as Reciprocal Reading, building on a strong base of fluency and decoding.

4.2 Achieving a year-on-year system

What is striking about the cohorts is that while primary schools are small and cohorts vary, the 2 year groups for just 5 schools following a systematic approach look similar in aggregate. As shown in Table 3, in Year Group 1 and Year Group 2, around 45%-46% of the year group benefited from tutoring in Year 1. Of these, 43%-44% of pupils were 'At Expected' by the end of Year 1. By the end of Year 2, 65% to 66% of the intervention group are 'At Expected'.

We added a further year group to see if the pattern held: Year Group 3 represents pupils who were in Year 1 in 2023 to 2024 and who are therefore in Year 2 in 2024 to 2025. While a smaller percentage were given the programme in Year 1 (27%) a very similar proportion of these appear to get to the 'At Expected' judgement at the end of Year 1 (42%).²⁰

²⁰ The lower number of pupils placed on the programme in Year 1, was largely due to one school unable to tutor in Year 1 for context-specific reasons.

Table 3. Status of intervention group pupils after one year and two years

	Intervention Group	At expected end Year 1		At expected end Year 2	
Year Group 1: Year 1 in 2021-2022	86 out of 186 (46%)	38	44%	56	65%
Year Group 2: Year 1 in 2022-2023	90 out of 202 (45%)	39	43%	59	66%
Year Group 3: Year 1 in 2023-2024	66 out of 246 (27%)	28	42%	Not complete	Not complete

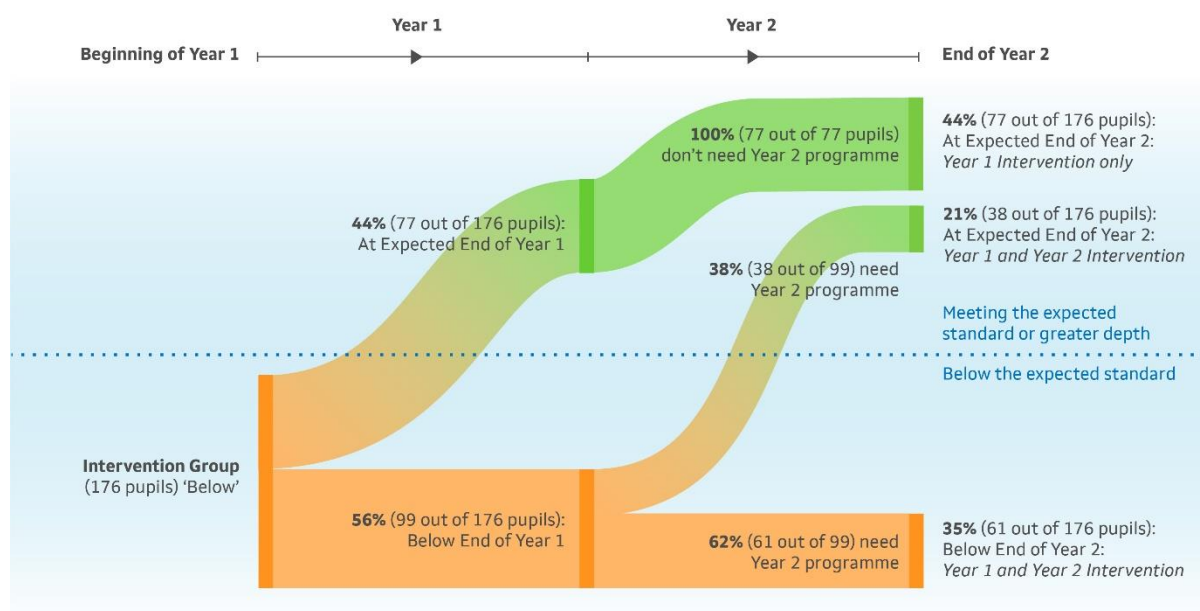
4.3 Median dosages of tutoring: a systematic reading intervention

For the intervention group, we wanted to understand the dosage and success rate in Year 1 and Year 2 more clearly.

As shown in Figure 6. below, 44% (77 out of 176) of the intervention group were judged to be 'At Expected' by the end of Year 1. 56% (99 out of 176) of the intervention group were 'Below' at the end of Year 1, and required support in Year 2. Of these, 38% (38 out of 99) then moved to being judged 'At Expected' by the end of Year 2, and 62% (61 out of 99) stayed 'Below'.

The summary of this situation was that 44% (77 out of 176) of the intervention group were At Expected at the end of Year 2 with Year 1 Intervention only. 21% (38 out of 176) of the intervention group were 'At Expected' at the end of Year 2 with intervention support in Year 1 and Year 2. Finally, 35% (61 out of 176) of the intervention group were Below End of Year 2 even though they had the intervention in both Year 1 and Year 2. (We note that, as described in section 3.2, 51-57 out of this group of 61, had passed the phonics check).

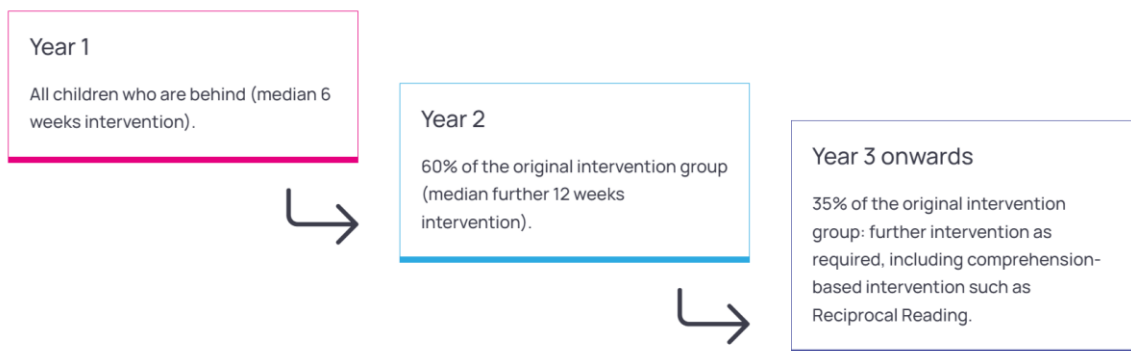
Figure 6. 176 pupils in the intervention group, beginning year 1 and end year 2 position, showing balance of tutoring in year 1 and year 2



We calculated the median amounts of tutoring in the case study schools to show how this system worked a bit more closely. The Year 1 reading intervention tended to start after Christmas once the cohort had settled into school year. The median number of sessions was 29 (daily for 6 weeks, representing a dosage of 14.5 hours). For those that continued in Year 2, the tutoring generally started earlier and went on for longer. The median dosage was 60 sessions (daily for 12 weeks representing a dosage of 30 hours). The mean dosage for 176 pupils was 64 sessions (daily for 13 weeks representing an average dosage of 32 hours per pupil).

We now understand this process as a systematic Plan B for pupils who are behind in reading in Year 1. We are continuing to understand, improve and develop this system with our Apex pilot schools.

Figure 5. A systematic reading Plan B for pupils who are behind in Year 1



4.4 The combined school effect

There are 7 other schools in the Apex Project selected for being innovative ambitious schools in deprived areas, putting early reading right at the heart of school priorities. We work with these schools in a non-directive and discursive way, and at varying levels of intensity. Some of these schools get similar results, but have had less need, or fewer resources, for the reading intervention.

In all cases, strong early reading results are driven by passionate leaders, and a combination of systematic catch-up in reading combined with:

- Quality nursery provision (where possible)
- Strong reading teaching in Reception
- Strong reading teaching in Year 1 and Year 2 (often using some aspects of 'stage not age' in phonics and reading teaching)
- Strong oracy and language teaching, connecting phonics to real reading and real books
- School culture on reading for pleasure
- Prior interventions in Speech and language
- Strong partnerships with parents and good attendance

Similarly, we looked at the 415 schools using FFT Aspire in England that have 40%+ disadvantaged pupils and found that 15 (4%) of these achieved 80% of pupils 'At Expected' in reading by the end of Year 2. As part of the Apex project going forward, we want to explore what these schools are doing to bring about such disruptive change in early reading attainment outcomes.

5. Costs

5.1 Cost of the programme

Pupils in the case study worked on the FFT Tutoring with the Lightning Squad platform in cooperative pairs or individually for 30 minutes a day. One HLTA supported a pair of learners (mostly in year 1) 1:2, or two separate pairs, working independently (mostly in year 2) 1:4.²¹ Training and support is provided on demand by the programme as a part of the annual platform cost (around £1200 per school). In one school pupils were requested to come in early and did reading intervention before the school day.

The average dosage for 176 pupils was 64 sessions (13 weeks of daily) representing an average dosage of 32 hours.

Using very basic cost calculations from the FFT implementation of NTP, provides a good benchmark for the full cost of recruitment, support and backup for an external HLTA to go into school exclusively for a 6-week block. While none of our schools used this model, nor would we recommend using external staff, it gives a 'worst case scenario' for costing.

NTP tutoring cost £7,500 per block of 6 weeks (30 sessions / 15 hours) for 40 pupils each day (£188 per pupil). If we reduce the ratio to 1:2 rather than 1:4, then the cost of each 6-week block is £375 per child. So, an average dose of 12 weeks of daily tutoring, would cost, £750 per pupil (at an absolute maximum while using a supply agency). We can round this up to £800 to include time for assessment and the additional 2 hours dosage.

If a school recruits their own reading coach for Year 1 and Year 2 then they can probably reduce this cost substantially.

²¹ In Key Stage 2, the platform can support up to 8 pupils with one adult working in cooperative pairs.

6. Conclusion and Next Steps

Four years of work in the Apex schools, including continuous engagement and feedback and improvement of the programme, makes the Foundation confident that our schools have developed a fairly straightforward and reliable reading catch-up programme that, alongside a strong first teaching curriculum, delivers a very high level of early reading skills in the cohort by Year 3, and means that Key Stage 2 will focus mainly on comprehension-related activities, rather than phonics, decoding and fluency.

However, most pilot schools have relied on at least some element of external funding to deliver this level of reading support. We believe a national dedicated 'Plan B' reading programme designed for struggling readers and applied comprehensively in Year 1 and Year 2 may be the most powerful policy to reduce the disadvantage gap and improve overall attainment in the English school system.

In the Apex Project we recognise the need to support the whole reading system. We intend, in future, to focus a more qualitative lens on particular areas where we get strong feedback from schools including:

- Reading catch-up challenges and successes for pupils who have joined the school after the beginning of Year 1 (in some schools the mobile cohort is very large)
- Reading catch-up for pupils who needed other interventions in Year 1 (often those with SEND) and were then tutored in Year 2 or Year 3
- Particular groups of pupils such as EAL pupils and pupils who arrive in the UK with little or no English
- Pupils with less severe SEND who engage with the platform. We would like to explore how measuring smaller increments of progress and other aspects of the programme may be particularly supportive of SEND pupils.

Appendix: Data tables

Table 1: Pupils chosen for 'tutoring for all' in Year 1 in 5 schools over 3 years

School	Year 1 in 2021-2022			Year 1 in 2022-2023			Year 1 in 2023 - 2024			3 year total		
	Total pupils	Y1 TWL pupils	% cohort TWL	Total pupils	Total TWL pupils	% cohort TWL	Total pupils	Total TWL pupils	% cohort TWL	Total pupils	Total TWL pupils	% cohort TWL
School B	44	20	45%	46	24	52%	63	0	0%	153	44	29%
School C	23	16	70%	19	13	68%	25	13	52%	67	42	63%
School D	32	25	78%	44	23	52%	52	14	27%	128	62	48%
School G	48	10	21%	42	12	29%	59	19	32%	149	41	28%
School S	39	15	38%	51	18	35%	47	20	43%	137	53	39%
TOTAL	186	86	46%	202	90	45%	246	66	27%	634	242	38%

Table 2. Pupil Context for TWL Early Intervention in Y1 2021-24

Combined data for 5 Apex Schools who have used TWL as reading intervention in Y1 since 2021.

Table includes Y1 cohort data from 21-22, 22-23 and 23-24.

Pupil Context	TWL Total Pupils	% TWL COHORT	Non TWL Total Pupils	% Non TWL COHORT	Total Pupils	% Total Cohort
Summer born	115	47.5%	163	41.6%	278	43.8%
DISADVANTAGED	112	46.3%	166	42.3%	278	43.8%
EAL	105	43.4%	207	52.8%	312	49.2%
SEN	40	16.5%	38	9.7%	78	12.3%
EHCP	4	1.7%	12	3.1%	16	2.5%
Male	120	49.6%	211	53.8%	331	52.2%
Female	122	50.4%	182	46.4%	304	47.9%

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