



Fischer
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Foundation



A Paradigm Shift for Pupils with **SEND**: A Reading Inclusion Track in Year 1 and 2



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Report Foreword – A Message to the Government

This is a pivotal moment for our education system as thousands of children up and down the country are being failed by an out-of-date SEND system. The crisis in SEND provision and pupils' struggles with literacy development have been a source of personal and professional concern for many years.

The SEND crisis is the biggest story in town. It's bankrupting councils, keeping kids out of school, and causing political ructions left and right. This all comes at a vital time for schools and the wider SEND system as we await the SEND White Paper in Autumn.

This is why, at the Fischer Family Foundation, our Apex Project has explored the impact of providing systematic reading support for all children who are behind in Year 1 and Year 2. This kind of programme can provide a **paradigm shift in support for pupils with SEND**, whose reading skills are disproportionately worse compared to their peers in Year 1.

I am thoroughly excited by our findings. Despite the huge challenges that pupils with SEND encounter with literacy, nearly all pupils who had been identified SEND but did not have an EHCP were felt by their teachers to be effectively supported by our sustained low-cost reading inclusion track. Translated to a national level, a low-cost reading inclusion track could mean timely support for 40,000+ pupils with SEND per year.

We must support pupils with SEND to learn to read as early as possible, so that they can read to learn and have access to the transformative power of education. This is a mission that can unite the education sector: literacy matters, and it matters for everyone.

I really hope you are inspired by our report and that you will share it around - let's make the case for change to Government to ensure that pupils with SEND do not get left behind.



Mike Fischer CBE
Founder and Chairman, Fischer Family Trust

Executive summary

With the Government committed to publishing the SEND White Paper this Autumn, the education sector is awaiting any concrete detail with anticipation.

The crisis in SEND provision is leaving the needs of pupils with SEND largely unfulfilled, councils bankrupt and schools hamstrung.

Despite this, none of the proposed solutions to the crisis have proved to be both universally supported or financially prudent. Following the passage of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill and publication of Spending Review, the need for a unifying and cost-effective solution is self-evident.

This report sets us on a different path by offering an 'inclusion track' as the solution to fill this void.

Background

The Apex project explores the impact of providing systematic reading support for all children who are behind in Year 1 and Year 2 and sustaining the programme for as long as needed (i.e. until the child has reached the expected standard for their age group).

This approach represents a **paradigm shift** away from short-term reading interventions towards an 'inclusion track' for all pupils who need reading support.

We used an online platform that has been developed over 30 years, that does not require print resources, and can be used by teaching assistants or other appropriate adults after on-demand training at a ratio of 1:1, 1:2 or 1:4 pupils in a 30-minute period. This helps cost what a policy at national level would look like if we were to meet the needs of the 20-25% of pupils who currently fail to learn to read with sufficient fluency to enjoy reading and access the curriculum by the end of Year 2.¹

In January 2025 we published results of our four-year pilot (388 pupils in 5 schools during Year 1 and Year 2). These results showed that by **building an inclusion track in Key Stage 1, it is possible to reduce the number of pupils who are behind in reading by at least half and all but remove the disadvantage gap heading into year 3** (Fischer et. al., 2025).

Findings

1. The importance of reading in Years 1 and 2

- National data shows that the majority of pupils identified with (any) SEND in Year 1 are likely to benefit from reading support.
- Out of a sample of 1500 schools, just 53% of pupils with SEND but not an EHCP (SEN Support) and 26% of pupils with EHCPs in the Year 1 cohort passed the phonics screening check in June 2025.
- Around 40% pupils with SEN Support and 70% pupils with EHCPs had low phonics scores indicating major difficulties with decoding at this stage compared to their peers.
- The median reading fluency for pupils with SEND is lower than for other pupils, showing that fewer pupils with SEND make the switch from learning to read to reading to learn.

¹ 'Tutoring with the Lightning Squad' was originally developed by the Success for All Foundation, USA and has been considerably developed by FFT since 2020 in the UK. IT has scaled to work with more than 60,000 pupils in 1000 schools.

2. The relevance of a reading inclusion track for SEND

- In our project, 87% of pupils who were identified as having (any) SEND need in Year 1 were struggling with the reading curriculum.
- Nearly all (27 out of 29) pupils with SEN Support were felt by their teachers to be effectively supported by the sustained low-cost reading inclusion track.
- As the online platform helps set the curriculum and starting point, the teaching assistant can effectively assist children at a ratio of 1:1, 1:2 or 1:4. There is no delay waiting for expert diagnosis or specialised intervention.
- Translated to a national level, a low-cost reading inclusion track could mean timely support for 40k+ pupils with SEND in Year 1.

3. Impact on pupils with SEND

- Pupils with SEN Support in the project tended to have lower starting points than other pupils experiencing reading difficulties: 58% were still struggling to read simple three letter words like 'cat' and 'dog'. This finding is mirrored by looking at a larger cohort of pupils with SEND on the reading platform.
- Pupils with SEND were less likely than other pupils experiencing reading difficulties to achieve age-related expectations by the end of Year 2. Pupils with SEND often needed to slow down or redo levels in the programme. Slower progress for pupils with SEND was reflected in a review of current usage of the platform in Year 1 and Year 2 by 100+ schools.
- Pupils with SEN Support made both phonics knowledge and fluency gains in balance. 69% of pupils with SEN Support in the project passed the Phonics Screening Check in Year 1 (compared to 53% nationally) and 82% by the end of Year 2 (compared to 70% nationally).
- The small group reading programme support also benefitted pupils' communication and language needs.
- Regular sessions supported pupils' memory of sight words, and letters and sounds.
- Granular data helped schools measure and celebrate success for pupils with SEND, even where gains were small and incremental.
- Pupils with SEND particularly benefitted from sustained, long-term reading intervention, and this was critical to their inclusion in the curriculum.

4. Costs and scalability

- The cost of the reading inclusion track in Year 1 and Year 2 (average 50 hours per child) is around £1000 for a child identified with SEND (depending on adult-pupil ratios).

5. Conclusion

- Solutions that are robustly scalable and low-cost are necessary to meet the moment in 2025.
- The reading inclusion track represents a paradigm shift away from short term interventions towards more sustained support for pupils who need a much longer period of support to learn to read.

1. Defining the problem: early literacy for pupils with SEND

As pupils move through school, the curriculum moves from a phase of *learning to read*, to *one of reading to learn*. This transition is tremendously important. Repeated analysis shows that early reading outcomes are reflected in GCSE results 10 years later (Fischer et. al., 2024; Beynon, 2023; Thomson, April 2022 & 2024). All the way through school, pupils with SEND are more likely to struggle with reading. Indeed, at the end of primary school, 59% of pupils with SEND do not reach age-related expectations in reading.² Any effort to better include pupils with SEND in mainstream schools, must have support for reading at its heart.

1.1 Year 1: Decoding and pupils with SEND

When learning to read, a child first gains knowledge of letters and sounds and the ability to decode simple one and two-syllable words. In England, the ability to do this is measured by the Phonics Screening Check at the end of Year 1. Every year around 80% of all pupils pass the Phonics Screening Check, scoring at least 32 out of 40 words.

We analysed a sample of 46,876 pupils in 1500 schools within the FFT school community who took the Phonics Screening Check in 2025. As shown in Figure 1, the data show a divergence between pupils with SEND and other pupils at this stage:

- Just 53% of pupils with SEND (non-EHCP) and 26% of pupils with EHCPs in the Year 1 cohort passed the Phonics Screening Check in June 2025. This compared to 89% of pupils without identified SEND.
- Analysing raw scores, 39% of pupils with SEN Support scored below 24 (a low score indicating significant difficulties), compared to 7% of other pupils. For pupils with EHCPs, the proportion with this low score rose to 70%.

Figure 1. Pupils with SEND and the Phonics Screening Check in a sample of 1500 schools (Aspire), August 2025

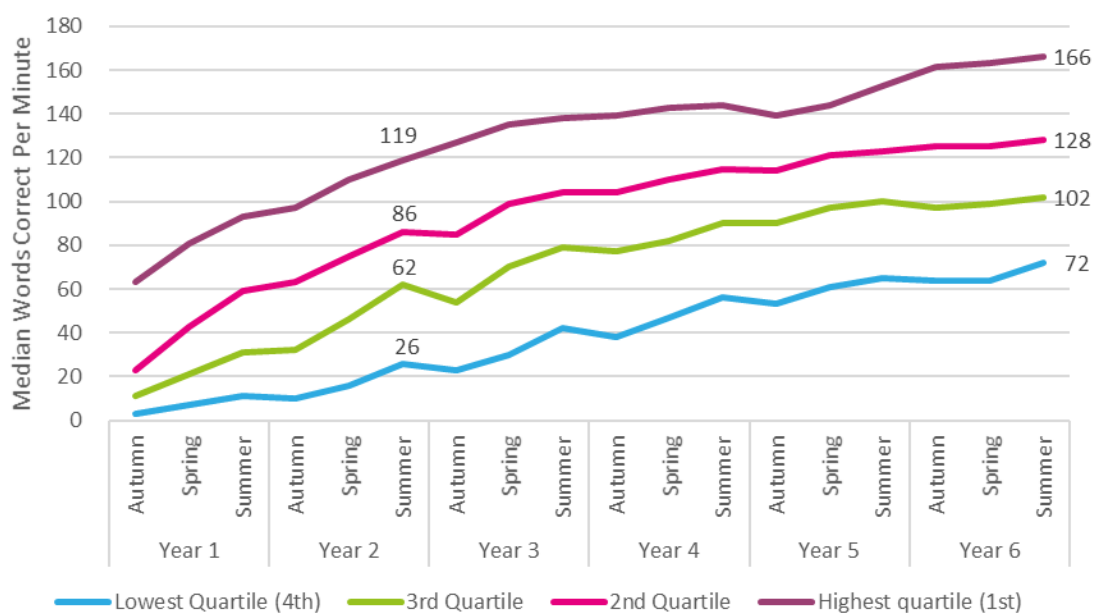
SEN Status	Passed 32+	Just missed 29-31	Lower 24-28	Further Below 24	Pupils
Not SEND	89%	2%	2%	7%	46876
SEN Support	53%	3%	5%	39%	7768
EHCP	26%	1%	3%	70%	2294

1.2 Year 2. Reading Fluency and pupils with SEND

Reading fluency, measured by the simple proxy of Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM), gives us a very clear picture of reading ability at the early stages (Hilton et. al. 2024). As shown in figure 2, the lowest quarter of pupils are a long way behind their peers, and only reach a median of 26 WCPM by the end of Year 2 (ibid.), reading less than one word every two seconds. By the end of primary school, they are around three to four years behind their peers in their basic reading ability.

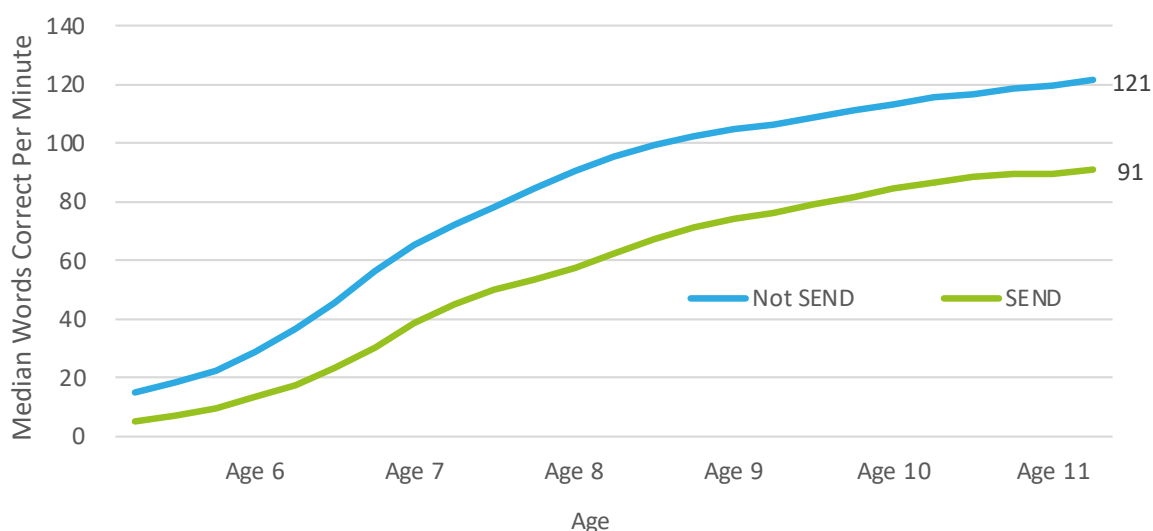
² See <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/key-stage-2-attainment>

Figure 2. Lower and higher attaining readers (quartiles) median reading fluency



Many pupils with SEND are in the lowest quartile of readers. Figure 3, shows age-related fluency for pupils with SEND and those with no SEND need identified. Pupils with SEND reach a median of 49 WCPM by the end of Year 2, and just 91 by the end of primary school.

Figure 3. SEND and Not SEND pupils oral reading fluency by age



Nationally we believe it's likely that that the majority of pupils identified with (any) SEND need in Year 1 require reading support. Supporting these pupils with reading in Year 1 and Year 2 is vital to improving their educational attainment and tackling the disadvantage gap. If the Government is serious about fulfilling their Opportunity Mission, then it must consider early reading support.

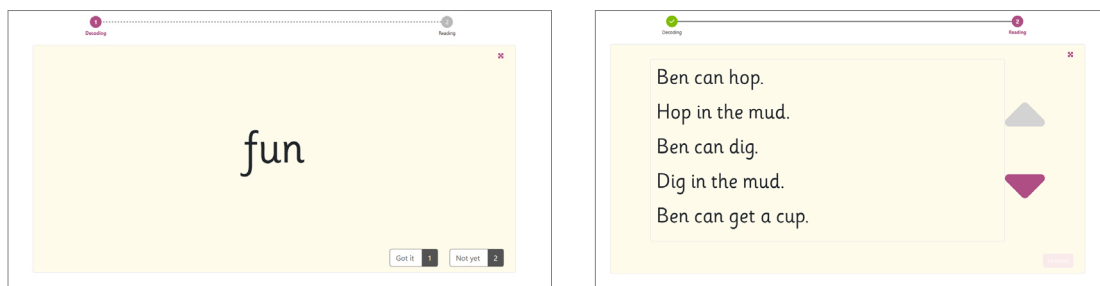
2. The Apex project and pupils with SEND

In the project, five pilot schools put ‘whomsoever was behind and would benefit’ on a reading support programme that was designed for all struggling readers, rather than limiting it to pupils with specific special educational needs.³ This programme has been developed and designed over thirty years to be low-cost and scalable.⁴ Its scalability was tested in the National Tutoring Programme and shown to be robust.⁵ These features (scalability and low-cost) make it particularly relevant to the current SEND crisis, given the large number of pupils who urgently need support.

2.1 About the reading programme

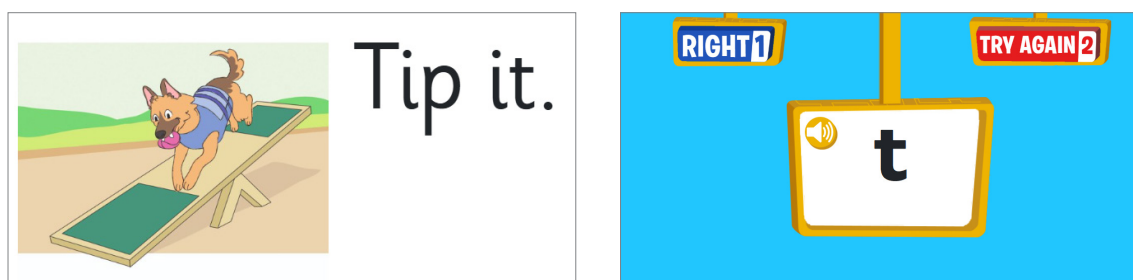
The reading track starts by assessing and placing pupils on the programme in a suitable cooperative learning pair or as an individual working with the adult tutor. The programme assesses reading of words, as well as the ability to read a short passage fluently as these two skills (decoding and reading fluency) should come together in balance. The programme suggests a starting point for each pupil and an adult makes a final decision about where the child starts on the programme.

Figure 4. Formative assessment example pages – decoding and fluency



The first story level in the programme requires the pupil to practice and read three letter words with the sounds s, a, t, p, i, n, m, d. This represents the difficulty of an initial reading book in most phonics schemes. After story level 1, new sounds and letters are added sequentially within in each level.

Figure 5. Pages from Story level 1 Power Reader (repeated read) and Letter Launch (phonics practice)



³ For more information about the programme see www.fischerfamilyfoundation.org.uk

⁴ See for instance Ross et. al. 2017 & Wang et. al. 2024

⁵ See Bibby et. al. 2022. Tutoring with the Lightning Squad platform has now been used with more than 60,000 pupils in the UK and has been translated for use in Germany and Denmark

Within the programme, word reading is embedded in real stories, which are designed to be engaging for this group of readers. Previous stories are practiced to build fluency. Pupils also practise rapid recall of letters and sounds, as well as reading and spelling out words, developing new vocabulary, hearing the story read aloud while following along, and reading together with a partner and answering simple questions about the story.

The level ends with a five minute 'check' completed by the supporting adult with the pupil. If a child can decode words, but cannot read a passage, or vice versa, the level can be repeated. The emphasis is on consolidation and mastery at each level.

2.2 About the Apex pilot project

The Apex pilot study looked at the progress of 388 pupils (non-mobile) pupils in 5 schools over 2 year-group cohorts. In this report we looked at those pupils who had identified SEND needs in Year 1. We found:

- In these cohorts, 17% (47 pupils out of 388) were identified as having SEND in year 1.

Of these 47:

- 9% (35 out of 388) were identified as SEND without an EHCP (SEN Support).
- 3% (12 out of 388) had an EHCP.
- This was in line with national averages which in 2024/25 were 5.3% EHCP (all years), and 14.2% SEN Support (all years).⁶

The national picture that shows most pupils with SEND struggling with the reading curriculum in Year 1, was upheld by our project:

- 87% of pupils with identified with SEND (41 out of 47) were judged to be working below the expected standard in reading by their teachers. This included 82% of pupils with SEN Support (29 out of 35) and all 12 pupils with an EHCP.
- This was compared to 44% of other pupils (149 out of 341) who were identified as being below the expected standard in reading.⁷

We did not gather data on different types of SEND. However, in informal discussions with teachers, we learned that children in the project had all the common primary SEND needs including: Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Speech, Language and Communications needs, Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and Moderate Learning Difficulties.

Of the 47 pupils with SEND:

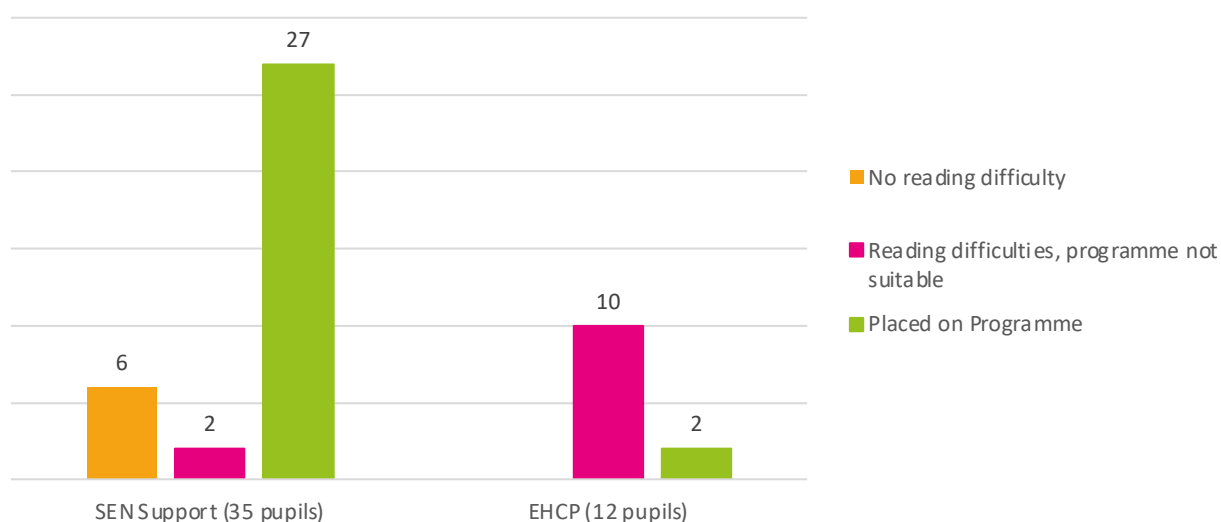
- 6 pupils with SEN Support did not need reading support as their SEND related to other needs.
- 27 pupils with SEN Support needed reading support, and could access the reading programme, either 1:1, 1:2 or 1:4.
- 2 pupils with SEN Support needed reading support but could not access a general reading track due to absence and other issues that made it unsuitable.
- 2 pupils with an EHCP needed reading support and were placed on the programme 1:1.
- 10 pupils with an EHCP needed reading support but the programme was unsuitable as they needed an adapted curriculum.

⁶ See <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2024-25>

⁷ Pupils with SEND joined the reading track alongside 147 other pupils experiencing reading difficulties. This high number is due to the high level of social disadvantage in the pilot schools (49% of the cohort were eligible for Free School Meals).

In summary, as shown in Figure 6, nearly all pupils with SEN Support who were struggling to access the reading curriculum (27 out of 29) could access a general programme that has been designed for all struggling readers without specialised diagnosis or specialised intervention.⁸

Figure 6. Pupils with SEND in the Apex Project (47 out of 388)



2.3 Relevance to national policy

This finding has vital significance at national level. Nationally, approximately 80,000 pupils are identified as having SEN Support needs (non-EHCP) in Year 1.⁹

It is likely, therefore, that at least 40,000 to 50,000+ pupils with SEN Support could be assisted effectively in Key Stage 1 with a low-cost reading inclusion track. A programme improving literacy skills in Year 1 and Year 2 may also prevent children not classed as having SEN in Year 1 subsequently being classified as SEN, as the probability of being identified with SEN continues to increase up to the end of Y6 (Thomson, D., Oct 2022).

This demonstrates the robust evidence that underlines a low-cost reading inclusion track as a paradigm shift for pupils with SEND.

⁹ See <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2024-25>

3. The Impact on pupils with SEND

The project has run for over four years and gathered whole cohort data on all those involved. This monitoring showed how pupils with SEND started below other pupils, and made slower progress, but did build a solid base of decoding and improved fluency over the course of Year 1 and Year 2.

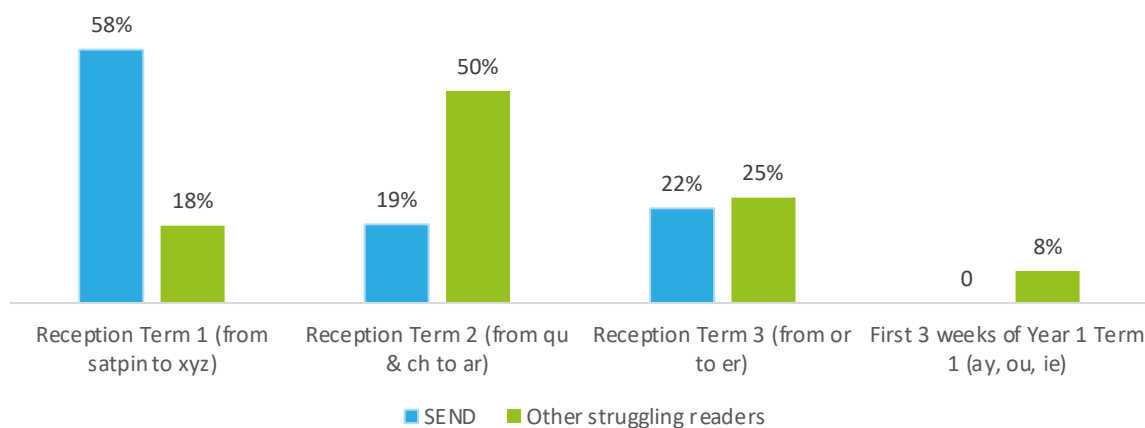
We also made school visits and held termly meetings with school leaders. During these observations, we gathered case study data and reports of how schools found the programme positively impacted both learning and other social, emotional and behaviour needs.

3.1 Starting points for pupils with SEND in Year 1

When we looked at 27 pupils with SEN Support and 133 other pupils experiencing reading difficulties, we found that pupils with SEN Support had lower starting points when formatively assessed on the programme. As shown in Figure 7:

- 58% of pupils with SEN Support (Year 1) were placed on the programme at a point where they are still learning single-letter alphabet (a, b, c) sounds usually taught in the first part of the autumn term of Reception year.
- Other pupils experiencing reading difficulties were mostly placed on the first levels that introduce two-letter-one-sounds (digraphs) such as ch, sh, oo, ee and ar, generally taught before and after Christmas of Reception Year.¹⁰

Figure 7. Formative assessment starting points in Year 1 for pupils with SEN Support (27) and other pupils experiencing difficulties with reading (133) on the reading track



This shows that pupils with SEND who were struggling readers were almost a year behind their peers in Year 1, and actually behind other pupils experiencing reading difficulties on the journey to learning to read.

¹⁰ The first digraphs in most phonics schemes include the sounds ch, sh, ck, qu, oo, ai or ay, as well as double consonants such as ff, zz and tt

This finding was replicated when looking at internal data analytics for 284 pupils who used the same platform in 100+ schools in 2025. As shown in figure 8, a majority of pupils with SEND started at a curriculum level relating to Reception autumn term.

Figure 8. Formative assessment starting points in Year 1 for pupils with SEND (284) and other pupils experiencing reading difficulties (759) in 2025 on the Tutoring with the Lightning Squad reading platform, quartiles and percentiles

	Pupils with SEND starting level in Year 1	Non-SEND starting level in Year 1
25th Percentile	Story level 1 - Reception autumn	Story level 4 - Reception autumn term (after half term)
Median	Story level 4 - Reception autumn (after half term)	Story level 10 - Reception spring term (after Xmas)
75th percentile	Story level 10 - Reception spring Term (after Xmas)	Story level 17 - Reception spring term (before Easter)
Number of pupils	284	759

3.2 Impact on decoding and fluency

As summarised in Figure 9, pupils with SEN Support in the programme achieved a solid basis of decoding and fluency during Year 1 and 2, although it was lower than other pupils who were experiencing reading difficulties:

- 66% (24 out of 35) pupils with SEN Support in pilot schools passed the Phonics Screening Check in Year 1, compared to 52% nationally.
- 82% (29 out of 35) pupils with SEN Support had passed the Phonics Screening Check in Year 2, compared to 70% nationally.
- 37% (13 out of 35) pupils with SEN Support reached age-related expectations in reading by the end of Year 2, compared to 32% nationally (in 2023, the last time this figure was published).

Figure 9. Summary of pupils with SEN Support in the project, with national comparisons

All SEN Support (SEN not EHCP): 35 pupils	Pass Phonics Check Year 1	Pass Phonics Check Year 2	Age-Related Expectations Year 2
6 pupils no reading difficulty: not placed on programme	6	6	6
2 pupils: programme unsuitable	0	0	0
27 pupils placed on programme	18	23	7
	Total pass: 24 /35 (69%)	Total pass: 29 /35 (82%)	Total pass: 13 /35 (37%)

National comparison:
52%

National comparison:
70%

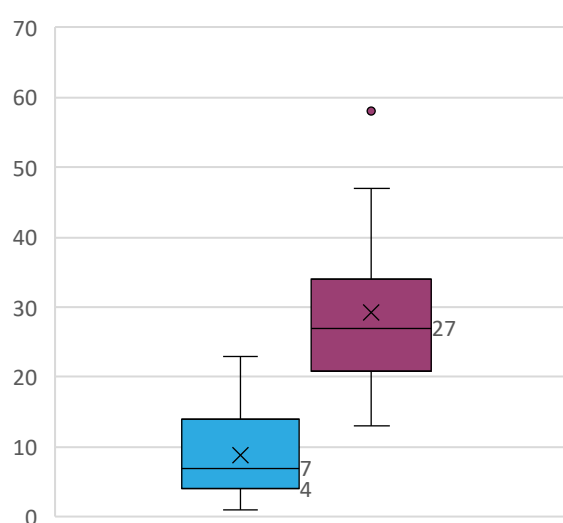
National comparison:
32%* (*2023)

We also see solid, balanced progress, when we look at the granular data gathered as they worked through the levels on the platform. Appendix A details the tutor check data for 25 of 27 pupils over time, and is summarised in Figure 10 below. We note that:

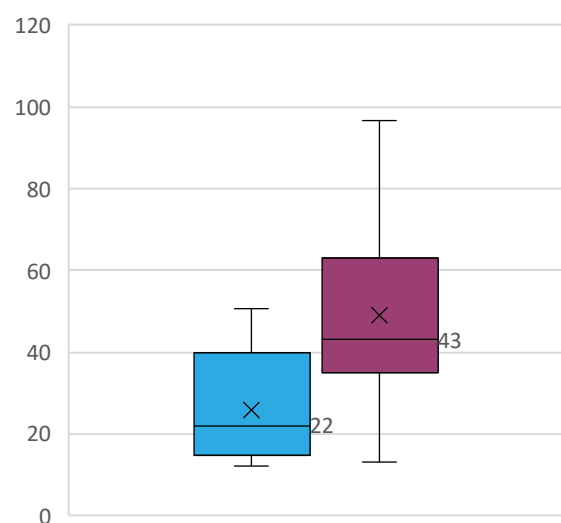
- 25 pupils with SEN Support started in Year 1 with an initial median Story level of 7 (Autumn Reception), and finished in Year 2 with a median Story level of 27 (Autumn Year 1).
- Median reading fluency increased from 22 WCPM to 48 WCPM, showing considerable gains while keeping pace with developing word-reading knowledge.
- In some cases, we see pupils repeating stories and going both forward and backwards in the platform levels as their tutors felt that they needed further consolidation before moving forward.

Figure 10. Median ranges for pupils with SEN Support (25 pupils): Story level and Fluency (average of 3 data points) at the start and finish of the reading programme

Story level: start and finish



Words Correct Per Minute: start and finish

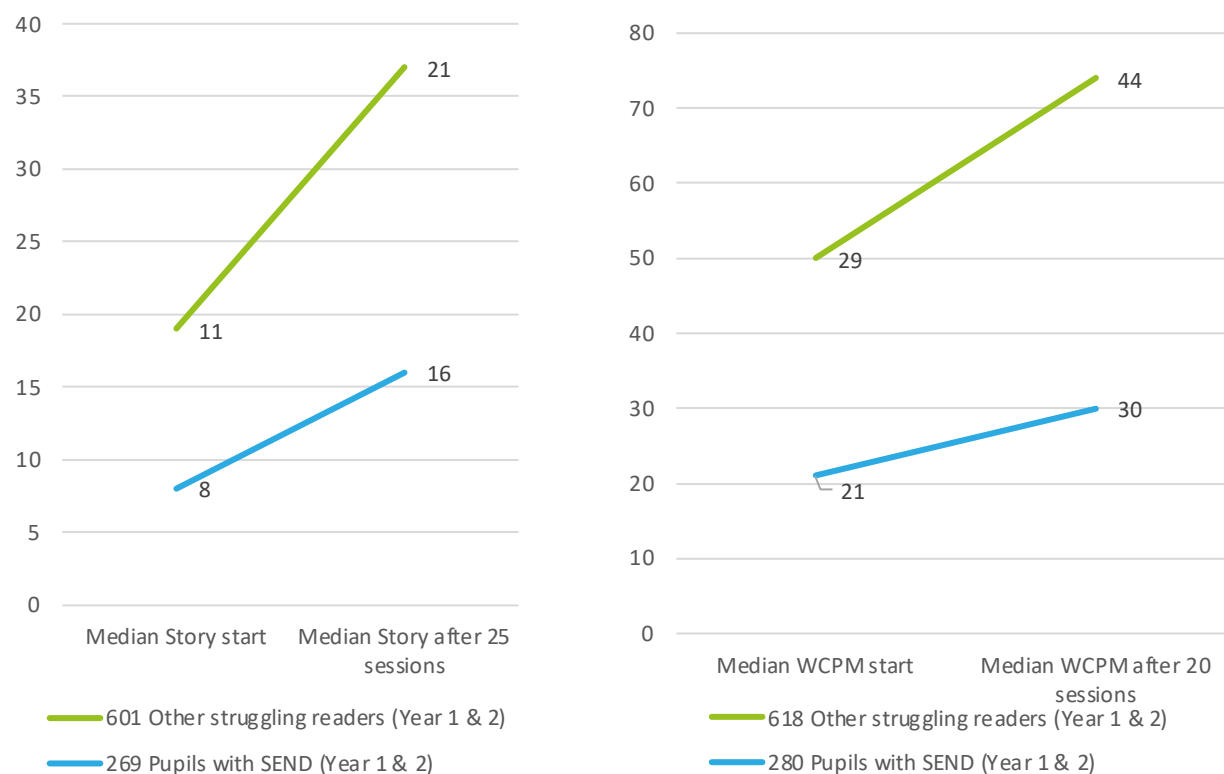


As shown in Figure 11, similar findings are reflected when we look at progress of around 1000 Year 1 and Year 2 pupils in 100+ schools who have been supported by the Tutoring with Lightning Squad platform in 2024-2025, although this shows only a snapshot of short-duration tutoring:¹¹

- 269 pupils with SEND had a median starting Story level of 8 (Reception autumn term) and after 25 sessions the median final Story level was 16 (Reception spring term).
- 601 other pupils experiencing reading difficulties, the median starting Story level was 11 (Reception autumn term) and after 25 sessions the median final Story level was 21 (Reception summer term).
- Among 280 pupils with SEND, the median fluency went from 21 WCPM to 30 WCPM after 20 sessions.
- Among 618 other pupils experiencing reading difficulties, the median fluency went from 29 WCPM to 44 WCPM after 20 sessions.

¹¹ When looking at 'Story level' we restricted the sample to pupils who had had at least 25 sessions and looked at their score after 25 sessions (even though many had gone on to do more tutoring after that). When looking at WCPM we restricted the sample to pupils who had had 20 sessions from the date of the first tutor check (i.e. when they have completed their first level and have an initial WCPM score). We took the final WCPM score as their last WCPM score after 20 sessions (even though many had gone on to do more tutoring after that).

Figure 11. Median Starting story and story after 25 sessions, median WCPM and after 20 sessions for pupils with SEND vs other pupils experiencing difficulties in reading in Year 1 & 2

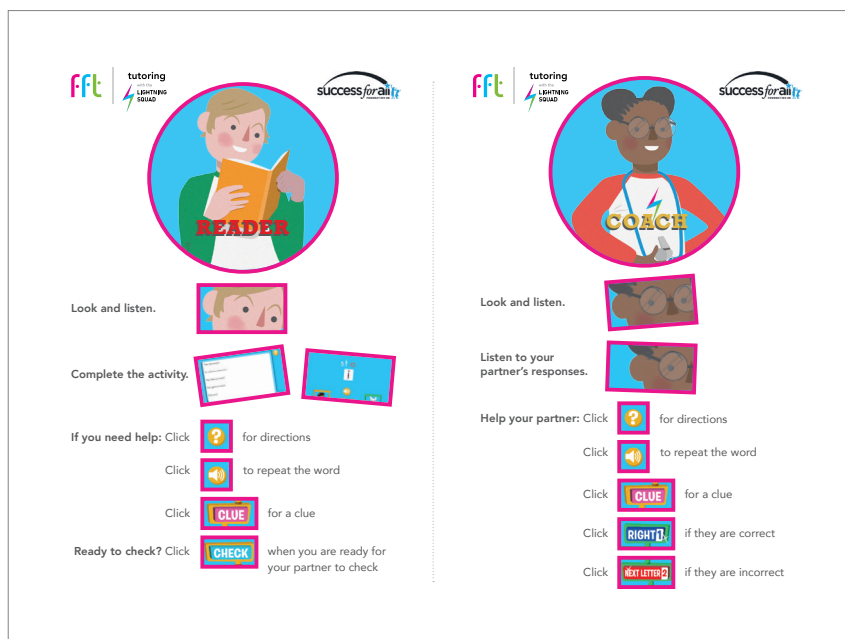


3.3 Impact on oracy and language needs

When asked about pupils with SEND, schools described complex difficulties and interactions between poor speech and language, low confidence, limited expression, weak listening skills and challenges with turn-taking. Importantly, weak oracy impacted the ability of pupils with SEND to access the full curriculum including reading. School leaders felt that the daily programme intervention supported the oracy and language needs of pupils in certain ways:

- By being placed with a similarly levelled peer, or for some children 1:1 with an adult playing the peer role, the programme guided the children to take turns being the ‘reader’ and being the ‘coach’. The child in the coaching role is encouraged to listen and check their partners’ responses and can also call up a ‘clue’ if they think their partner needs more help. This helped develop listening skills in a supportive, stable learning relationship with their peer. Figure 12 shows a printed ‘prompt sheet’ to help develop those roles.

Figure 12. Example of a co-operative learning prompt sheet

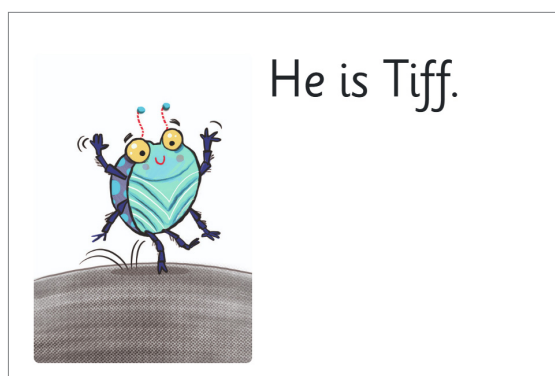


- The sequential structure of the stories involves repeated reading aloud of familiar texts which have been commissioned and authored to contain engaging subject matter. Repeated reading of these stories and non-fiction texts helped build confidence and familiarity, and this supported understanding of story genres and language.
- Over time, the daily reading track has supported pupil confidence and ability to talk and interact, alongside improved engagement of pupils back in class.

Case Study P

Pupil P started the programme on Story 4 learning the letters h, b, f and consolidating knowledge of 17 single alphabetical letters (see figure 13). She was very quiet and would not initiate a conversation, show emotion and answered most questions 'I don't know'. She attended 110 programme sessions in Years 1 and 2, which helped her get 23 out of 40 in her Phonics Screening Check by the end of Year 2. This base has helped her enormously in Year 3. She has become steadily more animated, initiates conversations and jokes and is reading Year 2 level texts with around 60 Words Correct Per Minute fluency.

Figure 13. Page from Power Reader - Story level 4



3.4 Impact on cognitive load and working memory

School leaders told us how many pupils struggle with different aspects of reading – including a lack of concentration to maintain focus, and weak working memory to recall what has previously been learned, especially in a classroom environment. They also particularly struggle with segmenting and blending letters and sounds, involving mentally processing a sequence, as well as poor recall of the letter sounds and the common exception words that are taught alongside the phonics sequence such as ‘the’, ‘were’ and ‘be’. Throughout our project school leaders have said:

- The core skills are exactly applied to the needs of early reading and repeated throughout the phase (the same six core activities): Reading aloud, letter-sound recall, word reading, spelling, vocabulary development and comprehension. The structure of the stories and activities is exactly the same throughout the first 48 stories, reducing any need to explain activities.
- The flexible pace meant that pupils could repeat either a single activity or a whole story more than once.
- The comprehension questions in this phonics phase are heavily focused on simple retrieval, with a focus on reading for meaning and enjoyment.
- Moreover, the balance of skills means a story level represents a moment on a ladder for pupils. The steps move at a pace suited to the pupils – each story taking 3-5 sessions on average (1.5-2.5 hours/week) covering mostly one or two new letter-sounds while rehearsing others.
- The intervention took place out of class which enabled pupils who needed a quieter environment with fewer distractions to concentrate. The programme included adaptations for different needs, such as the ability to increase or decrease font size, a ruler to underline particular content, and the possibility of changing text background colour.

Case Study M

When Pupil M, started her 1-2-1 reading sessions in the Spring term of Year 1, she was a long way behind, starting on Story 8 (zz, qu, ch) with little fluency (18 Words Correct Per Minute) (see figure 14). She would often find it difficult to settle down and engage with her work, or she would rush through it. She managed to pass her Year 1 Phonics Screening Check, but was still behind in reading, so support continued throughout Year 2. She completed 132 sessions by end of Year 2 and reached story 33, the equivalent of mid-Year 1 level text. With continued support and now in Year 4, she is a confident reader with a reading fluency on age-related texts of 114 Words Correct Per Minute (figure 15).

Figure 14. Page from Power Reader - Story level 8 (sounds zz, qu, ch & first two-syllable word) Buzz the Dragon

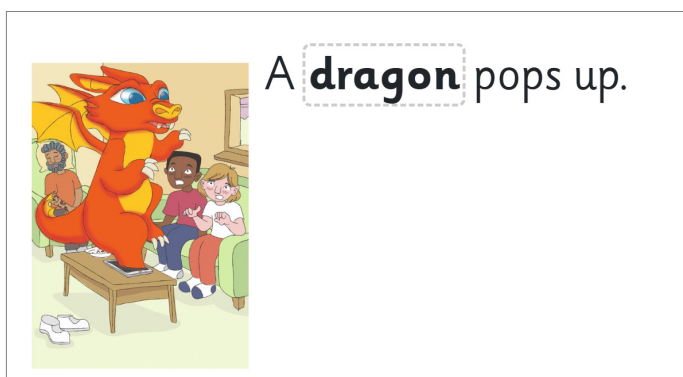
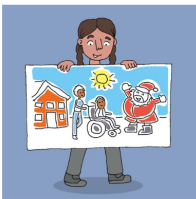


Figure 15. Page of Level 33 story text – Christmas in New Zealand

A cartoon illustration of a young girl with brown hair, wearing a blue shirt and grey pants, holding up a drawing. The drawing shows a red house with a chimney, a sun, and Santa Claus standing in front of the door. A person in a wheelchair is also visible near the house.

Yig and Pip looked at the drawing. Hafsa's **pen-pal** had drawn Santa at his door. Santa was standing in the sun!

3.5 Impact on social inclusion and other behaviour needs

The schools in our pilot reported that pupils who were struggling with behaviour or anxious about coming to school enjoyed the regularity, the small group, the learning partnership, and the adult support outside the classroom. The step-wise progress and data analytics made small increments of progress tangible for the pupils. This was especially important for pupils with SEND who otherwise may be marked as 'Well below' in all statutory data throughout their school career.

In particular:

- Pupils continued to enjoy the programme for long periods of time as they liked working with a partner rather than 'for the teacher' and they liked the way the programme offered clues, help outs, and congratulations.
- The gamified nature meant that pupils were congratulated and could earn points, that were then paid back with a short spelling game celebration at the end of each level.
- In line with the philosophy of cooperative learning there are no individual rewards, the pupils are always in a team, even when they are working one-to-one with an adult.
- Some pupils with SEND take up to 10 sessions or more to complete a story. However, this is the ladder to reading and pupils are inherently motivated. Each level can be celebrated and reinforced with communication home and certificates in assembly.

Case Study - Pupil A

Pupil A found the transition to Year 1 very challenging. She found loud noise difficult, and struggled to make eye contact or look at the teacher or the board. She was reluctant to stay on the carpet for taught sessions and would cry and shout if given any directed activities. When she started the programme in the spring of Year 1 she would often become dysregulated when making any mistakes, and found the comprehension questions very difficult. However, the structures and repetition benefitted her, and the adult often reworded the comprehension questions to support. This, along with the option to 'check the text', have really empowered her to work independently. Her partner was also very supportive and patient and helped and encouraged her when she needed to focus. Overall, she is more confident and engaged in class and loves coming to school. By the end of Year 2 she reached Story 47 on the programme, an end of Year 1 level text, and her reading fluency had increased significantly (see figure 16).

Figure 16. Question page and ‘Check the Text’ function on Story level 47: Mission to the moon



Travelling back to Earth
After almost a full day on the Moon, the astronauts **cautiously** travelled back to Earth.
Their rocket had a special heat shield to stop them from burning up.

What did the shield protect them from?

- A Cold
- B Heat
- C Wind
- D Hail

TEXT

3.6 The impact of sustaining the ‘base’ work

One of the most powerful findings of the project is that when pupils spend longer on the ‘base’ of early literacy, they can really flourish as they move through the school. What was astonishing was how long the schools put the pupils on the programme for, and how they continued to believe in the positive impact, and how much belief they have in their pupils to achieve and continue to develop their reading skills. This sustained level of intervention, which has been continued into Year 3 and sometimes Year 4, has meant that pupils with SEND have been able to flourish.

Case Study – Pupil B

Pupil B started receiving reading tutoring in the spring of Year 1, as he was far behind in reading and started on story 9, the equivalent of working at early Reception level. Support continued throughout Year 2 and Pupil B completed 89 sessions by the end of Year 2. Pupil B was still behind in reading so continued with tutoring in Years 3 and 4. Pupil B has completed 202 sessions to date and is currently reading level 57, the equivalent of mid-Year 2 level (see figure 17).

Pupil B has always been very motivated, focused and hard working. He loves books even though reading is a huge challenge for him. At the start of Year 3, he was still insecure with phonics, despite passing Phonics Screening Check at the end of Year 2, and had almost no sight vocabulary. No matter how many times a memorable word appeared on a page, it was as though he was seeing it for the first time. Twenty-one months later, there is still much to do. However, he is more secure with his phonics, he has quite an extensive sight vocabulary and he reads with increasing expression and fluency. The variety of activities have been used to facilitate and reinforce B’s learning, whilst resisting the temptation to move on to the next stage before he has consolidated his skills. When he began tutoring in Year 1 Pupil B was reading at 13 WCPM but he is now reading at an average of 74 WCPM in Year 4.

Figure 17. Page from Level 57 – Water in Your Life



Don’t **Complain About the Rain**

The freshwater that humans and animals need to survive comes from rain. All the water that we find in rivers, streams and lakes **originally** came from rain. So next time it’s raining when you want to go out, don’t **complain!** That rain is actually a good thing. Although it might seem that new water arrives on Earth every time it rains, in fact that’s not true. The same water keeps coming back again as rain.

4. Costs and Scalability of the Programme

Setting up a reading inclusion track is very different from implementing traditional interventions. With a track, schools expect all pupils to be able to learn to read, and believe that school is the best place to learn to read however long it takes. Primacy is given to early reading and out of class reading intervention in Year 1 and Year 2, with the understanding that for some pupils this will be a significant resource outlay.

The systematic application of a reading track for pupils behind in reading shows the potential for systematising inclusion and rigorously identifying SEND needs before pupils fall too far behind.

The advantage of using the online platform was that the programme was easy to set up and implement. The programme operates with single day training and on demand videos for staff to administer the programme. The data capture allows for assessment, reassessment, benchmarking, visible progress, fidelity and monitoring of fidelity. School leaders can track their pupils' progress, and also check on the implementation and attendance at the programme. The track is led by the adult, not the computer, but the learning is structured by the programme, allowing the adult to focus on flexible intervention structures, judgements and pairing decisions. Every step forward is confirmed by the adult and there is space to stop and start, repeat, or regroup the pupils.

Elements of the programme and the online platform have been used in more than 1000 schools in the UK since 2021. The low-cost nature reflects the fact that the adult resource can support 4 pupils in a 30-minute session, without losing time to set up resources. During the National Tutoring programme (2021-2023), the platform was used to provide 15 hours of tutoring to more than 60,000 pupils nationally. It was also shown to be effective (Bibby et. al., 2022).

Our pupils with SEND had on average 97 sessions in Years 1 and 2, equating to around 50 hours of tutoring, and some of these pupils required 1:2 rather than 1:4, or in some cases 1:1. Often an adult can do two shorter sessions to support pupils more intensively over a half hour and the platform is well designed for this. We estimate that 50 hours of tutoring, depending on the pupil ratio required, will cost £1000 of additional adult time resource.

5. Conclusion

As we look forward to the Government's publication of their SEND White Paper, the sector is pondering the next steps for pupils with SEND. Moreover, as a country, there is a powerful push towards moving towards an inclusion lens. School leaders in the project reminded us that the multiplicity and overlapping nature of pupil challenges, made it difficult to identify single diagnoses easily. Nonetheless, they also noted that cohorts of pupils were becoming more heterogenous and more complex - thinking that is in line with leading specialists on SEND.¹²

With this in mind, this report serves as a reminder that:

- Early reading support is the core learning need of most pupils identified with (any) SEND in Year 1 and Year 2.
- Most pupils with SEN Support (non-EHCP) do not need specialised interventions but benefit from sustained small group, personalized, and high-quality early reading support at the right time with a flexible pace, level of adult support and starting point.¹³
- Pupils with SEND don't need short term interventions in reading – they need longer term, sustained, regular, engaging, supportive, personalized support that allows them to celebrate incremental progress and small gains in reading ability.
- The country needs rapidly scalable, low-cost early literacy support for pupils who are behind.
- Pupils with SEN Support may benefit from around 50 hours of small group tuition at a cost of approximately £1000 per pupil. This will ensure that many more pupils with SEND will be included in the mainstream curriculum in Year 3 and beyond.
- Providing a 50-hour entitlement to personalized reading support for 40,000 pupils with SEN Support in Year 1 and Year 2 would cost the government £40 million.

This is a mission that can unite the education sector: literacy matters, and it matters for everyone.

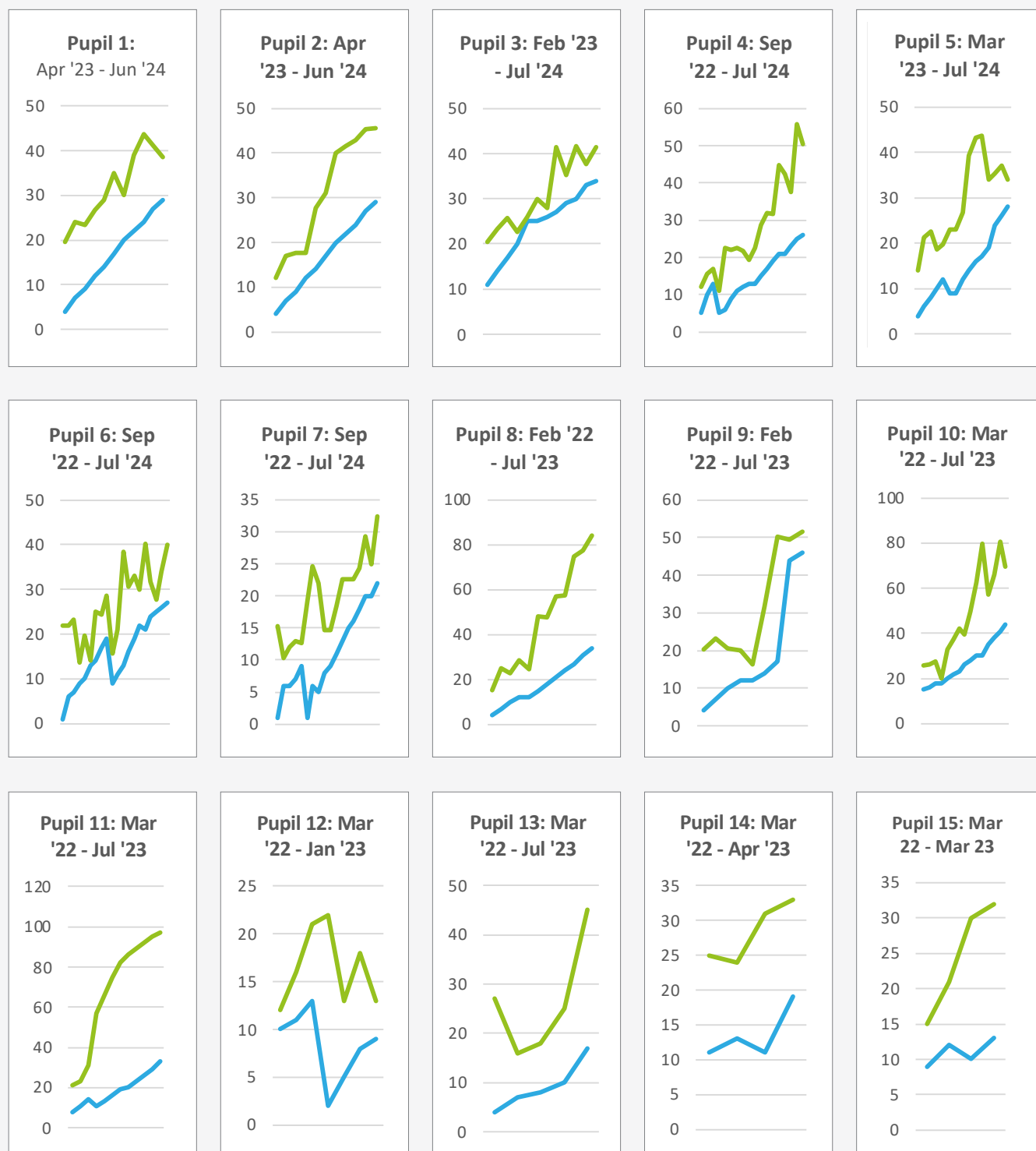
¹² “We have to plan for heterogeneous, not homogeneous, cohorts. The co-occurrence of social, emotional, cognitive and economic barriers experienced by our learners is the new normal...There's now more than enough evidence of the problems caused by the significant education barriers our learners encounter. Rising SEND numbers (now 40 per cent “ever SEND”); stubbornly high levels of persistent absence; increased exclusions and suspensions; parental decisions to home educate.” (Margaret Mullholland – SEND advisor ASCL, TES, 13 Jan 2025)

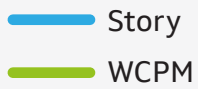
¹³ The pilot helps validate the view recommended by the English Hubs in the training programme for schools: ‘Reading Ambition for All’ (DFE, 2024). This states that the process of learning to read once a child has mastered basic segmenting and blending of three letter words, follows a fairly well-defined track of building GPC knowledge, phonemic awareness, decoding and encoding, (described as an orthographic store), practice, engagement, fluency and comprehension (see Reading Ambition for All – pp 7 – 15). What needs to vary for the child who is a struggling reader is the starting point, pace and level of adult support (DFE, 2024).

Appendix A: Pupils with SEND progress in the Apex Project

25 out of 27 pupils, changes over time. WCPM is 3-point average. Pupil 20 and Pupil 25 – missing data

Story
WCPM





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