

Fischer Family Foundation Education Programme

A single-minded focus on the single most important issue

Early literacy – how well a child can read and write at Key Stage 1 – is the single biggest determinant of a child’s success at Key Stage 4 and very often in life. That’s why it is our single biggest focus as a foundation.

Not being able to read has a huge impact on a child’s life and education. The data shows that children who are a long way behind in literacy at the age of seven have a high probability of staying behind. Repeated longitudinal analysis shows more than half of all summer-born, deprived boys are in this group.



Reading catch-up intervention in Year 1

The Apex Project

In 2019, we began a pilot project – the Apex Project – to evolve and validate a systematic model for eradicating most early literacy failure. We support a small number of schools to identify pupils who are behind in Year 1 and Year 2, and develop those pupils’ early reading skills via small group intervention, delivered by a proven online platform, facilitated by teaching assistants. We are also implementing school-based vision checking and corrective follow-through. So far, project learning indicates that at least two thirds of children who are at high risk of educational failure can be successfully supported back ‘on track’, the majority before the end of Year 2. The Apex project applies the successful model of data-driven process improvement to the education sector.



“Our Apex project explores the question of what happens when you provide sustained, high frequency reading tutoring for the youngest learners – and then measuring success.”

Mike Fischer CBE
Chair, Fischer Family Foundation

Case study: Sama's story

Sama entered Year 1 with a good attendance record but had very little confidence around reading and didn't have many reading strategies to support herself. Sama is one of five children with Arabic as her first language and English as a second language. Sama was chosen for tutoring due to the gaps in her learning identified on entry to Year 1.

Sama started having daily tutoring sessions with Tutoring with Lightning Squad in January 2022. In spring 2022, Sama was assessed using the Salford Sentence Reading Test and had a reading age of 5 years and 7 months. She was re-assessed in summer and her reading age had risen significantly to 6 years and 11 months, an increase of 1 year and 4 months.

By the end of Year 1, she was enjoying reading independently and with her peers.

"I feel good and focused when using Lightning Squad. It helps me to concentrate. I feel happy because it helps me to be smart and read well."

Sama – age 6



Hussein – age 7

Case study: Hussein's story

At the beginning of Year 2, Hussein, who has SEND, needed additional support to help further his reading skills and abilities. Hussein started tutoring in November and had daily tutoring for around 18 hours in total. This helped Hussein's understanding of breaking down words, blending, reading with fluency, and reading out loud. Hussein also made significant improvement within his class and his teacher said that, through his development with reading, they have seen great improvement in his confidence when he joins in with class discussions, answering questions as well as reading aloud in front of the class.

With the support of his parents, one-to-one reading with a teaching assistant, and the tutoring he received, Hussein's reading improved greatly in Year 2, and his reading SAT score (just below the pass mark) was a clear reflection of this.

In September 2024, Hussein is entering Year 5 reading at age-related expectations.

Case study: Kyle's story

When Kyle started Year 1, having only just turned five a few weeks before, he showed no interest in reading or writing. As he entered Year 2, he was reading books which were a year below the expectations for his age.

Kyle began Tutoring with Lightning Squad in Spring term of Year 1 and had fifty hours of tutoring in total. At the end of tutoring, he was reading books at the level of Y3 and also enjoying reading. Kyle's teacher said, *"It's clear to see that Kyle has now discovered a love of reading and books. He told me his parents took him and his brother to a bookshop*

and was very excited about it." Kyle's mum also saw a big shift in Kyle's attitude towards reading. She said: *"Kyle likes to read to himself now. We even have to FaceTime nanny to read. He is more fluent, and his confidence has increased a lot."*

Kyle said, *"I like reading now because it's really interesting. I'm faster at reading now. I read lots of different books. My favourite is Charlie and the Chocolate Factory."*

In September 2024, Kyle is entering Year 5 reading at age-related expectations.



Kyle – age 7



Addressing vision

Poor eyesight is an overlooked reason for a child's early literacy failure – and school-based eye checks offer a surprisingly simple solution. The Apex project has worked with the same schools to conduct a simple in school eye-sight screening that highlights if a child needs an optician's appointment. We are finding around 20% of children are recommended eye tests at an optician as a result of the screen, and so far of those seen by an optician, the majority have required either glasses or a different prescription for existing glasses.

Case study: Freya's story

Freya attends a school in Oxford which took part in a school-based vision check. The short check took place in school, just outside Freya's classroom, to reduce disruption. It was a simple and quick process which detected a vision issue.

Freya's parents were contacted and promptly took her to a local optician. It was found that Freya required glasses, which were ready to pick up within a week. Freya is short sighted, so her glasses are

helping her to see things that are further away in the classroom, like the writing board at the front of the class. Freya had her eyes tested at an optician around 18 months beforehand, everything was fine, and it was noted for her to come back in 3 years for another eye test.

She never mentioned anything about her eyes to her parents, so without the vision screening her parents wouldn't have gone back to the opticians for another 18 months.



Freya – age 7



Pupils learn in pairs with a trained member of staff

A manufacturing challenge inspires a lifetime's mission

The Fischer Family Foundation has a distinctive – and highly effective – model of change that defines all of our work.

It's based on the insights gained by Mike Fischer and his study of Total Quality Management (TQM) that began over 40 years ago. Mike first encountered TQM when he was looking for a management approach that would ensure consistently high standards of quality as production at his technology business, Research Machines, scaled up. What he discovered was a management methodology that institutionalised innovation and emphasised the vital importance of a data-driven approach to choosing key projects and to validate systematic changes that improve performance. Applying these principles to solve problems within education and health has since become a life mission for Mike.

Mike's passion for improving the education system began in the early 1990s when Research Machines was providing IT support to Education 2000 – a major educational experiment at a school in Hertfordshire. He discovered

that a staggering 30% of 11-year-olds did not have the reading and writing skills fully to join in with lessons. It was clear to him that the cost of not fixing this was huge. Inspired to help address this critical issue, Mike set up the Fischer Family Foundation (then called the Fischer Family Trust) and arranged for a proven literacy teaching method – Success for All (SfA) – to be introduced in the UK. This was just the start of the foundation's work in education, which has since expanded to tackle issues within the health sector with the creation of Systems Biology Laboratory in the early 2000s.

The foundation's use of high-impact, data-driven solutions to address the big issues within education and health continues to this day. Within education, it means directly listening and talking with teachers and school leaders in primary school while creating tools and metrics for success and improvement of the system.



A menu of reading activities for more than 100 stories



Building fluency and motivation for reading in class and at home