Introduction and background

This paper from the Department for Education reviews catch-up strategies and interventions which are intended for low-attaining pupils in literacy or numeracy at the end of key stage 2. This includes interventions which have been trialled with low-attaining year 7 pupils, or interventions which have been trialled and proved successful with younger or older pupils which may be applicable to low attaining year 7 pupils. The review is intended to support teachers to make evidence-informed decisions about how they support low-attaining year 7 pupils in the school setting. It looks at what is involved in implementing the interventions, including cost. The paper only includes programmes where independent analysis has provided an assessment of effectiveness.

Key findings

Literacy: Phonics interventions

- A number of phonics interventions were evaluated in the review; they are discussed below.
- The Fresh Start programme is delivered by teachers over a period of 33 weeks. The average cost is £116 per pupil. The programme involves groups or one-to-one sessions with pupils. It was shown to be moderately effective in a recent study (Gorard, Siddiqui & See (2015). It should, however, be noted that the schools involved in the trial were those which had previously performed poorly. This may make the intervention less representative.
- Butterfly phonics, costing £108.50 per pupil, involves 2 one-hour group sessions a week. Its trial by the Education Endowment Foundation showed moderate effects in terms of progress over the school year, but the sample size was too small to allow firm conclusions to be drawn about its effectiveness.
- The Rapid programme is delivered by teachers for 6 weeks in the summer. It costs £29 per pupil.
- The Butterfly phonics programme is delivered by teachers over a period of 33 weeks. The average cost is £116 per pupil. The programme involves groups or one-to-one sessions with pupils. It was shown to be moderately effective in a recent study (Gorard, Siddiqui & See (2015). It should, however, be noted that the schools involved in the trial were those which had previously performed poorly. This may make the intervention less representative.
- The SHINE Saturday School Programme, costing £870 per pupil for 25 weeks, aimed to revisit areas in which children were struggling through enrichment activities. It was shown to have a small effect on literacy competency, although the EEF concluded that, due to the small scale of the pilot, it could at present only be considered to be showing promise.
- One of the greatest barriers to the success of Summer Schools is a failure in achieving high levels of attendance. Those which appear to be most successful have a clear academic focus (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017b).

Literacy: Oral language interventions

- Oral interventions aim to help pupils who are low-attaining in literacy with their pronunciation, discussion skills, and speech. They can be individually focussed or targeted towards a group of pupils.
- Evidence related to year 7 catch-up comes from two programmes. Talk for Literacy was shown by an efficacy trial to lead to a high improvement in children’s passage comprehension, although no improvement was seen in reading, writing, or speaking abilities (Styles & Bradshaw, 2015). This intervention consists of 2 x 40-60-minute sessions over a period of 23 weeks. It costs £29 per pupil.
- Another intervention, Rhythm for Reading, aims to improve reading ability by asking children to read to a rhythm like stamping or chanting (Styles, Clarkson & Fowler, 2014a). It involves short 10-minute sessions when pupils are taken out of normal lessons. It is delivered by specialists who later train class teachers. The cost of the intervention is £56 per pupil. Research has found a positive, low effect upon pupils’ progress through an efficacy trial (Styles,
Clarkson & Fowler, 2014), although this may have been
down to chance as findings were not statistically
significant.

Reading comprehension interventions

- Overall, reading interventions generally have a positive effect on pupil’s attitudes towards reading. Furthermore, they appear to have a moderate, positive effect upon
  general learning (Education Endowment Foundation, 2017).
- A number of interventions appeared to have a positive effect, although there are some caveats in terms of the robustness of the evidence. The interventions found to
  have some positive impact were: Reach, involving three 35
  minute sessions per week; Switch on Reading, a daily one-
  on-one intervention; and Catch-up literacy, which provided
  lower achieving children with two 15-minute sessions per
  week to improve their literacy attainment.
- Other interventions were not found to have a positive effect; these were Paired Reading, which aimed to improve
  year 7 pupils’ reading by pairing them with year 9 pupil
  reading partners, and TextNow, which involved one-to-one
  sessions with a coach each weekday.
- Computer-based interventions have been found to be
effective. Accelerated Reader involved reading eBooks and
eTextbooks to promote text comprehension alongside
playing online quizzes and games to aid learning. The
intervention was found, through an efficacy trial, to have a
moderately positive effect upon participating pupils’
progress compared to pupils who did not participate.
- RM Books, another intervention using eBooks and
eTextbooks to improve reading skills, also found a high
positive effect on both reading enjoyment and frequency of
independent reading.
- Although the extra-curricular programme, Chatterbooks,
was reviewed positively by teachers, an efficacy trial found
that it has a slightly negative effect on pupils’ reading
ability.
- Computer-based interventions are relatively inexpensive,
for example Accelerated Reader worked out at £9 per
pupil, whereas most one-to-one interventions are more
expensive at up to £796 per pupil for the Catch up literacy
programme.
- Research has found that reading comprehension
interventions are likely to work best when used in
combination with other approaches. It is also important for
teachers to assess pupils’ needs prior to implementation as
the interventions appear to be less effective when pupils
lack phonics or vocabulary skills.

Writing interventions

- Two writing interventions were assessed by the EEF. The
first was Grammar for writing, an intervention which
encourages pupils to improve how their writing
communicates with the reader. This is done through
making connections between a linguistic feature and the
effect it has on the piece of writing, rather than by focusing
on grammatical inaccuracies. This intervention costs
around £20 per pupil.
- The other intervention, Improving Writing Quality, involves
pupils taking part in memorable experiences like trips to
local caves. The trips are then used as topics for pupils to
write about; the writing is supported by Self-Regulated
Strategy Development - a guideline to help pupils plan,
monitor and evaluate their writing. This intervention costs
around £2 per pupil.
- Both writing interventions assessed were found to be
effective by the EEF. In the Improving Writing Quality
intervention, a very high positive effect was seen on
progress over the course of the programme in an efficacy
trial (Torgerson & Torgerson, 2014c). The Grammar for
writing intervention was found to have a low, positive effect
upon pupils’ progress. However, the evaluation concluded
that it was likely the result of teaching in small groups as
opposed to the intervention itself (Torgerson & Torgerson,
2014b). Findings appear more positive when writing
interventions are delivered to small groups rather than as a
whole class.

Blended interventions

- Blended approaches tackle a number of skills (e.g. phonics
and writing) within a single package. Those found to have
the most positive impact are discussed below:
- The Perry Beaches Coaching Programme provides one-to-
one support in reading and writing, mainly by external
graduate coaches. It costs around £1,400 per pupil. An
efficacy trial showed that it had a moderate positive effect
and showed promise. The Reach Language
Comprehension intervention involves meta-cognition,
reading comprehension, making inferences from text,
writing stories and vocabulary training. It is delivered by
teaching assistants and the cost of training a teaching
assistant is £486. This intervention was found to have high
effectiveness through an efficacy trial, although
researchers raised some concerns about the robustness of
the methods,
- A number of other interventions were found to yield
inconclusive evidence or were found to have no impact.

Numeracy interventions

- There is limited evidence exploring the effectiveness of
numeration catch-up interventions specifically for low
attaining year 7 pupils, or those about to enter year 7. The
existing evidence relates to the two interventions discussed
below.
- The Future Foundations Summer School, was found to be
relatively expensive and not effective at helping pupils
make progress with numeracy.
- The Tutor Trust provides affordable small group and one-
to-one tuition by recruiting university students or recent
graduates to provide mathematics and English tuition in
year 6 and 7. Research assessing the effectiveness of this
intervention was not sufficiently robust to draw firm
conclusions, however it did appear to have a small
negative effect on pupil progress.
- There is, however, evidence from interventions
independently trialled with younger pupils, which may be
applicable for year 7 pupils. One such programme,
Catch-Up Numeracy, is a one-to-one intervention
consisting of two 15-minute sessions per week that are
delivered by teaching assistants. It has received promising
results from trials with primary aged children (NFER,
2014). Another programme, Every Child Counts, uses daily
30-minute lessons with specially trained teachers to
improve pupils’ numeracy attainment. It was trialled with
younger pupils but is thought to be applicable to struggling
year 7 pupils and has been found to support pupils’
progress.
- Interventions such as Philosophy for Children which aim to
focus on cognitively challenging talk have also found an
improvement in numeracy progress, albeit with younger
pupils.

The full document can be downloaded from:

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