Best Tutoring Practice

Briefing for schools

National Tutoring Programme
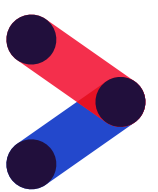
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Introduction

This brief guide aims to help state schools in England make the most of tutoring opportunities available through National Tutoring Programme (NTP) Tuition Partners. Key messages are based on the best available evidence for the tutoring models which will be delivered. A list of approved Tuition Partners (by region) will be available from November 2020.

For more information see nationaltutoring.org.uk

Rather than a new synthesis of all available tutoring evidence, this guide is based on an overview of studies related to one to one tutoring, small group tuition and teaching assistants, which will be included in the EEF's **Education Database project** (publishing 2021)[1] and a systematic review and meta-analysis of 96 studies featuring tutoring interventions undertaken in the last decade and earlier (Nickow, Oreopoulos and Quan, 2020). Practical key messages for best practice have also been shaped by experts at the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).

Evidence confirms the key role of high-quality classroom teaching, which has the greatest positive impact for disadvantaged pupils. It also consistently confirms that tutoring, when effectively implemented, yields substantial positive impacts on learning outcomes, particularly for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The NTP is designed to be a powerful additional tool for teachers and school leaders. However, studies show a range of effects and we know that it is how tutoring is implemented that really matters. Some elements of implementation are under the control of the organisation offering the tutoring, and these

aspects are covered in an accompanying guide aimed at organisations delivering NTP Tuition Partners. There will be requirements for all NTP Tuition Partners to meet rigorous safeguarding standards and to provide high-quality tutoring that aligns with the evidence. However, importantly, tutors should be seen as an additional resource and support for teachers, and this guide provides evidence-based advice for how schools can help to support the implementation of tutoring so that it can be as impactful as possible.

This guide aims to answer five key questions, with further iterations to include practical exemplifications of the key recommendations:

- How can schools ensure the content of tutoring sessions aligns with classroom teaching?
- When in the school day should tutoring take place?
- How should pupils be selected and grouped for tutoring?
- How can positive relationships between tutors, teachers and pupils be established and maintained?
- How can pupils and teachers most effectively receive feedback from tutoring sessions?

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1. The EEF database team are currently extracting additional information from the studies in the Teaching and Learning Toolkit to give us more information on which approaches, contexts and methodologies lead to differences in impact. The Teaching and Learning Toolkit is available at: **https://eef.li/toolkit/**

How can schools ensure the content of tutoring sessions aligns with classroom teaching?

It is important that the content of tutoring aligns with classroom teaching and focuses on the areas that pupils need the most support with. Teachers and tutoring providers should work together to make sure sessions cover the areas that pupils need most support with. Existing school assessment data and feedback processes should play a central role in this. Tutoring which focuses on specific subtopics or skills within a broader academic subject may be an effective way to improve attainment; for example, focusing on specific subskills of literacy, such as decoding skills and comprehension strategies, and reading and sourcing skills for writing.

A clear aim for each block of tutoring should be agreed with the tutoring provider ahead of delivery, although tutors will need flexibility to adapt the plan as tutoring progresses. Ensuring that tutoring occurs in a sustained block of sessions is the key aspect of delivery likely to result in a greater impact, rather than minor variations from the planned content of individual sessions. It is therefore important for schools to support attendance at sessions, in collaboration with tutors.

Key messages:

■ Tutors are aware of the particular areas that pupils need support with, how to align these with classroom practice and how to receive feedback on progress from tutors. It is also useful to set an overall aim for what is expected to be achieved through a block of tutoring sessions with specific pupils.

■ Systems are in place to manage and use feedback received from tutors on pupil progress.

■ Pupils and regular class teachers are supported to sustain the impact of tutoring once they finish their cycle of sessions.

When in the school day should tutoring take place?

The majority of evidence suggests that tutoring programs conducted during the school day, which may include during breakfast clubs and form-time, tend to have larger impacts than those conducted after school. Lower effects found within after-school tutoring may arise largely from difficulties in ensuring that tutoring occurs as planned — encouraging high attendance at sessions should be considered when scheduling tutoring, whether this is during the school day or after school.

Schools should give careful consideration when timetabling tutoring sessions; for example, ensuring that pupils do not miss core English and maths lessons, or any specialist support required by pupils with SEND. One option is to ensure that session times are rotated so that tutoring is not always happening during the same lessons. However, this may be difficult to arrange on a larger scale, and pupils are likely to need additional support to remember their session times if the scheduling is more flexible.

The majority of established tutoring interventions include sessions of 30 to 60 minutes, on average. For one to one tuition, short, regular sessions over a set period (six to twelve weeks) appear to result in optimum impact. Based on the evidence, it is reasonable to expect that longer tutoring sessions result in higher effect sizes until the point at which pupils' attention span is affected: therefore, schools may wish to consider sessions on the shorter end of this average scale for younger pupils.
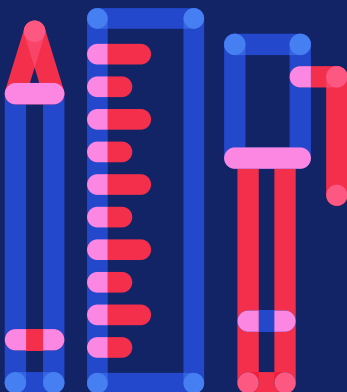
Key messages:

- Arrange tutoring sessions during standard school hours and rotate wherever possible, to minimise pupils missing core curriculum time.

- The timetabling of tuition is clear so that the planned block of tuition can be delivered with consistency.

- Individual tutoring sessions are relatively short; for example, 30–60 minutes.

- Delivery of tutoring sessions is sustained, with more regular, shorter sessions for younger pupils.

How should pupils be selected and grouped for tutoring?

We expect that the majority of pupils selected by schools to receive tutoring through NTP Tuition Partners will be eligible for Pupil Premium funding, as this is likely to be where we see the attainment gap widen the most between disadvantaged pupils and their more advantaged peers, as a result of school closures. However, school closures will have affected pupils and families in a range of ways, and professional expertise is critical in deciding which pupils are most in need and likely to benefit from this support. Evidence does suggest that lower attaining pupils are most likely to benefit from this type of additional support and teachers and school leaders should use assessment data to help guide these decisions.

Although not specific to tutoring interventions, which means that the findings should be interpreted with caution in this context, an initial analysis of FSM pupils included in all **EEF trials** to date[2] showed that a range of interventions delivered in small group settings had the highest impact on literacy outcomes, followed by one to one, then whole-school approaches and then whole-class interventions. This overview suggests that small group interventions can help to close the literacy gap between FSM pupils and their more advantaged peers.

NTP Tuition Partners will have a focus on small group learning, with an expected group size of three pupils to one tutor. Overall, evidence shows that small group tuition is effective and, as a rule of thumb, the smaller the group the better: with one to one having the largest impacts and effects starting to diminish with group sizes of six or more pupils.

Groups of three pupils therefore represent good value-for-money, whilst also maintaining high impacts. One to one and one to two models will also be available through NTP Tuition Partners for pupils who need this support, including pupils with SEND and pupils attending Alternative Provision, as well as other pupils who may have specific needs.

There is limited evidence on the ideal grouping structure for small group tuition and whether small group tuition should be for pupils of mixed attainment or a similar level of attainment, as examples of both have shown positive effects. Evidence for within-class attainment grouping (based on teaching in a classroom setting, by pupils' usual teachers and support staff) shows a positive average attainment impact when pupils with similar levels are grouped together for tasks. However, there may also be benefits from mixed-attainment tutoring groups; with certain peer tutoring showing consistently strong effects for small groups of students tutoring one another in mixed attainment groupings. There may therefore be benefits from structured, well-facilitated peer-to-peer activity in mixed-attainment tutoring groups.
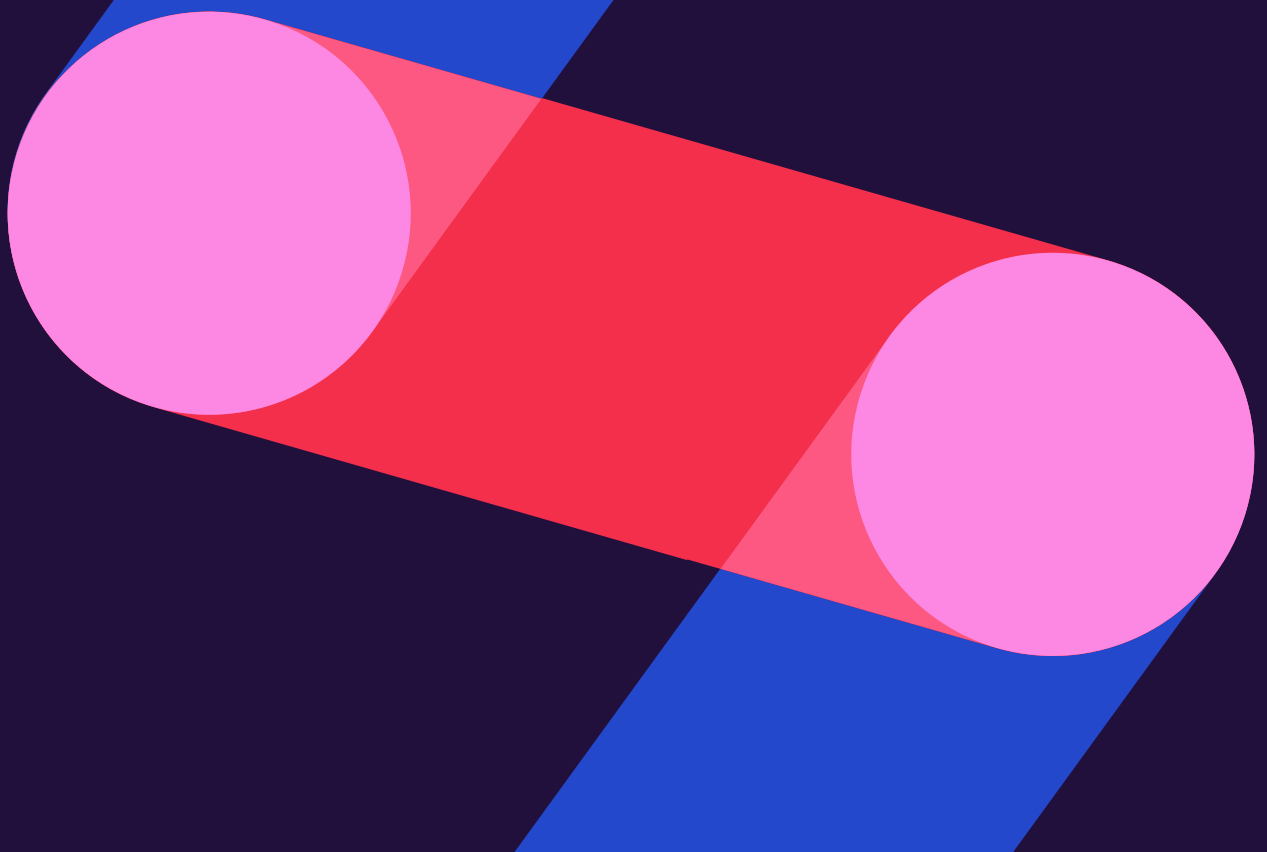
2. 88 trials, with data from over half a million pupils.

Schools should use their expert professional judgement when deciding the grouping arrangements for the pupils that they have identified to receive tutoring and communicate this information to tutoring providers.

If you have decided that pupils in your school would benefit from both one to one and small group tuition models and tutors with a range of experience are available, you could work with your tutoring provider to prioritise more experienced tutors, who are used to working with larger groups of pupils, to deliver small group tuition.

Key messages:

■ When selecting pupils, focus on those who are eligible for Pupil Premium funding. Consider using data on prior attainment, with low attaining pupils most likely to benefit, along with professional judgement on who would benefit the most.

■ If you are undertaking a mixture of small group and one to one tuition, prioritise more experienced tutors/teaching professionals in delivering small group tuition.

■ Arrange the majority of pupils into groups of three: consider the best approach based on the needs of your pupils along with advice from the tutoring provider who will be working with your pupils. One to one and one to two tutoring will also be available for pupils who need this support, including pupils with SEND and pupils attending Alternative Provision, as well as other pupils who may have specific needs.

How can positive relationships between tutors, teachers and pupils and their parents/carers be established and maintained?

Fostering positive relationships between tutors, schools and pupils and their parents/carers helps to maximise the positive impacts of tutoring. It is important to ensure pupil buy-in and that there is external support to motivate them to take part in sessions, including positive messaging from parents and carers.

How the tutoring opportunity is explained to pupils and communicated more widely to families is key and it should be presented as a positive opportunity to further their learning, with a clear plan for communication formulated in advance of programme delivery, including suggestions where possible on how parents/carers can support pupils to make the most of their tutoring and encourage positive attitudes towards the opportunity.

Efforts should be made to ensure that school inclusion criteria, based on Pupil Premium eligibility or low prior attainment is not explicit to pupils.

Tutoring in pairs or small groups may have the additional benefit of reducing any potential sense of stigma that could be associated with being selected to take part in tutoring.

The evidence suggests that more instruction appears to result in more learning, but there may be a minimum, threshold duration needed for tutoring to be effective, particularly with adolescents, which may reflect the amount of time required to build a positive relationship between tutor and tutee. Pupils will be able to access sustained blocks of 15 hours of tutoring through NTP Tuition Partners.

Although tutoring differs from mentoring, there may be similar positive interaction effects as a result. The personal relationship fostered by a tutoring experience may carry over to pupils' positivity toward the educational content of their normal lessons and toward their academic learning more broadly.

Key messages:

■ Careful consideration of messaging to pupils and their parents/carers as to how and why they have been selected to receive tutoring, ensuring it is perceived as a positive activity.

■ Work collaboratively with tutors to identify and monitor any issues with pupil non-attendance to ensure that tuition can be delivered as planned.
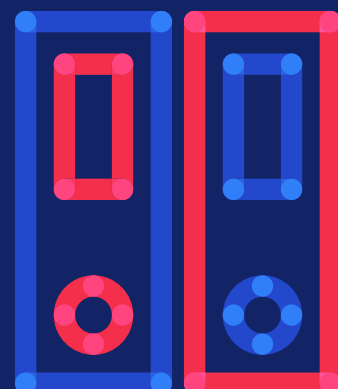
How can pupils and teachers most effectively receive feedback from tutoring sessions?

Effective assessment and feedback both play a key part in the teaching and learning process.

Before tutoring starts, schools should consider what assessments conducted over the first part of the 2020–21 academic year can be used to support the selection of pupils for tutoring, as well as helping to set the focus of tutoring for certain pupils.

Schools should also consider how to best use ongoing assessments to identify if tutoring is having the impact you are hoping for, and if not, to help you identify — and discuss with the tutoring organisation working in your school — where improvements could be made. For example, assessments may indicate that a pupil needs to move groups as they are not progressing as hoped, or that a group of pupils needs extra support on a specific topic or idea.

It is important to determine with the organisation delivering tutoring, before a block of tuition starts, how often and in what format a school will receive feedback from tutors. Schools should also consider how they would use feedback from tutors; for example, it may help teachers to suggest content for future tutoring sessions, provide support to pupils who are lacking motivation, or provide additional support — through classroom teaching and homework — for any areas that appear to be a common issue for groups of pupils.

Key messages:

- Consider how appropriate assessment will be used, particularly in the first half term of the 2020–21 academic year, in preparation for tutoring and to help set the aims for tutoring sessions.

- Clear outcome measurement/assessment structures are in place for pupils receiving tutoring. This will be important in enabling you to see if the tutoring is having the effect that you are hoping for and for informing any changes to tutor groupings.

- Feedback mechanisms are in place between tutors and schools; teachers are briefed on how to use this information.

Working effectively with tutors — key checklist questions for schools

- When planning for tuition delivery, have we ensured that the tutoring organisation we want to work with has tutors with the necessary expertise in the key areas that our pupils are struggling with and that their model of delivery (online/face-to-face/blended) is appropriate for our timetabling, facilities and the pupils who will receive the tuition?

- Have we considered how best to select and group pupils for tutoring, focusing on those pupils who are eligible for Pupil Premium funding or face other types of disadvantage, and those who we feel are most likely to benefit from tutoring?

- Have we communicated in advance with tutors the particular areas in which these pupils will benefit from tutoring and helped to give a steer on which topics can be covered?

- Is there a check-in process in place with tutors, so that we can identify any issues with non-attendance and suggest changes to tuition groupings if pupils are not making progress as planned?

- Have we planned how the block of tutoring will be linked to other learning that happens within the school and how we will support pupils to transition out from receiving tutoring?

How can schools ensure the content of tutoring sessions aligns with classroom teaching?

- Teachers are aware of the particular areas that pupils need support with, how to align these with classroom practice and how to receive feedback on progress from tutors. It is also useful to set an overall aim for what is expected to be achieved through a block of tutoring sessions with specific pupils.

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Useful tools and resources

Resource	Description	Link
AQA preparing for 2021 support package	Curriculum experts have compiled a range of free subject-specific resources into three key themes to help plan and adapt teaching.	https://www.aqa.org.uk/preparing-for-2021/
EEF Teaching & Learning Toolkit	The Teaching and Learning Toolkit provides an accessible summary of the evidence across 35 different approaches aimed at improving pupil outcomes.	https://eef.li/toolkit/
EEF Guidance Reports	EEF guidance reports provide clear and actionable recommendations for teachers on a range of high-priority issues based on the best available evidence.	https://eef.li/guidance/

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The following Education Endowment Foundation Teaching & Learning Toolkit strands:

- Small Group Tuition

- Teaching Assistants

- One To One Tuition

- Within Class Attainment Grouping

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