Word and World Reading Programme

Key Conclusions

1. The Word and World Reading programme was introduced as intended, and was well received by the majority of primary schools participating in the project.

2. Some teachers felt that the programme had a positive impact on pupil learning, including improved vocabulary and writing skills.

3. In some lessons, teachers’ subject knowledge did not appear to be sufficient to support an in-depth discussion with pupils about some of the topics within the programme curriculum. This suggests that additional training or support materials may have been beneficial.

4. The programme appeared to be more successful for older, higher attaining students, and less successful for Year 3 students or low attaining students. Greater differentiation, for example adapted vocabulary lists, may have made it easier for lower attaining students to engage with the programme.

5. The study did not seek to assess impact on attainment in a robust way, however the attainment data which was collected did not indicate a large positive effect. This suggests that any future trial of the programme should involve a large number of schools in order to provide a precise assessment of the cost-effectiveness of the programme. It may also be valuable to test the approach over a longer period of time.

What is the impact?

The pilot study found that the Word and World Reading programme was feasible and could be successfully integrated into the school curriculum. The programme was well received by most schools participating in the project. Five more schools registered interest in the project than were required by the original evaluation design.

There was mixed evidence of promise for the approach. Some teachers felt that the approach had led to noticeable improvements’ in pupils writing and reading comprehension skills. In many lessons pupils were highly engaged, sometimes to the surprise of teachers who believed that their classes would not enjoy the highly-structured nature of the programme.

Overall, pupils were positive about the approach, and appeared to enjoy the lessons more as the programme progressed. It appeared that Year 4 pupils were more engaged in lessons than Year 3 students. Some lower attaining students or students with English as an additional language appeared to find it harder to engage with the material, suggesting that some simpler texts should be provided.

In some lessons, teachers’ subject knowledge did not appear to be sufficient to support a deep and engaging discussion of the material included in the curriculum. This might be improved by more intensive teacher training, and by pointing teachers towards additional resources or information sources that could be used to support lessons.

The study did not seek to assess impact on attainment in a robust way and the security of the quantitative findings was affected by a high level of attrition. However, the attainment data which was collected did not indicate a large positive effect. This suggests that any future trial of the programme should involve a large number of schools, in order to provide a precise assessment of the cost-effectiveness of the programme. It is also possible that a trial conducted over a longer time period would provide a better assessment of the true impact of the approach.
How secure is the finding?

Data was collected through lesson observations and interviews with pupils and staff by the independent evaluators, with input from developers. In total 12 visits were made to 8 participating schools and 56 classes were observed. In addition, eight visits were made to schools in both the intervention and comparison groups when pupils sat the end of project test.

Data was collected in participating schools and nine comparison schools in order to support an assessment of the appropriate size of any future trial. Schools were allocated to follow the approach or join the comparison group through random allocation. The impact assessment did not indicate that the approach had a large positive effect.

How much does it cost?

The cost is estimated as £50 per pupil. This includes the cost of globes, atlases, pupil workbooks, teacher workbooks, teacher supply cover when on training, teacher training, and other administrative costs. These represent an initial investment only, since the teaching resources can be re-used. The costs for subsequent implementation would be largely for replacement of staff and resources, and further professional development.