Talk of the Town

Key Conclusions
1. There is no evidence that Talk of the Town had an impact on pupil’s reading comprehension.
2. There is no evidence that Talk of the Town had an impact on oral language skills for children identified as having weaker reading comprehension skills.
3. Teachers valued the input and resources provided by The Communication Trust.
4. Teachers reported that the targeted interventions did not always provide the right level of challenge to the selected students.
5. There is scope for further research on the fact that those with low literacy were more likely to move schools.

What is the impact?
There was no evidence that Talk of the Town led to better reading levels as assessed on the New Group Reading Test (GL NGRT), a test of reading comprehension, during the time period of the intervention. Although the analysis indicated a negative effect, the effect size was very small, and the result may have occurred by chance, meaning it is not possible to say with confidence that the intervention had a negative impact on reading comprehension.

There was also no evidence that Talk of the Town led to better led to better spoken language skills among children identified as having weaker reading comprehension skills. Six children who had scored in the bottom half of each class on the GL NGRT at the beginning of the intervention were randomly selected to complete a secondary measure in spoken language, the Assessment of Comprehension and Expression (GL ACE). The impact of Talk of the Town on this secondary outcome for this group of pupils was small and may have occurred by chance. It is therefore not possible to say with confidence that the intervention had a positive impact on oral language for these pupils. When examining the relationship between the two, it did not appear that improvements in spoken language and comprehension of language had translated into better reading scores as measured by NGRT during the time period of the intervention.

There was evidence that teachers, members of school senior management teams, speech and language therapists and local authority managers perceived that the Talk of the Town intervention had a positive effect on pupil learning and confidence. In interviews conducted midway through the intervention, there was evidence that the some teachers felt that the individual targeted SLC interventions may not always have been optimally matched to children and that there may be a case for re-evaluating the processes that facilitated targeting the interventions and differentiating approaches to ensure challenge and progression. In the paper-based survey at the end of the intervention, 90% of respondents were happy that their school had adopted the programme.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>No. of pupils</th>
<th>Effect size (95% confidence interval)</th>
<th>Estimated months' progress</th>
<th>Security rating</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment vs. control, NGRT</td>
<td>2696</td>
<td>-0.03 (-0.46, 0.40)</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>£2 £3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment vs. control (FSM), NGRT</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>-0.09 (-0.73, 0.55)</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment vs. control, ACE</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>0.11 (-1.19, 1.41)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment vs. control (FSM), ACE</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>-0.23 (-2.27, 1.81)</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since this report was published, the conversion from effect size into months of additional progress has been slightly revised. If these results were reported using the new conversion, the result for “Treatment vs. control, NGRT” would be reported as 0 months of additional progress rather than -1.

How secure is the finding?

Overall, the findings from this evaluation are judged to be of moderate to high security. The trial was set up as a randomised controlled trial in which schools that received the intervention were compared to schools operating in ‘business as usual’ conditions. The negative result of the primary outcome is too small to be detected by the trial and may have occurred by chance. The trial was well designed and powered, giving confidence that the programme did not have a substantial negative or positive effect on reading comprehension. Only one school in the intervention group and one school in the control group dropped out of the trial. There was, however, greater drop out of individual students, with many unavailable for testing at the end of the intervention because they had moved schools. The final sample of pupils used for analysis was well balanced.

How much does it cost?

The yearly cost per school of the programme was £13,244.46 (calculated by converting the cost over 18 months to a cost over 12 months by multiplying by 2 and dividing by 3, and dividing that cost by the number of schools which received the intervention, which was 31). The cost per student of £50.97 was obtained by dividing the cost per school by the mean number of pupils per school, which was 259.86.