Rhythm for Reading

Key Conclusions

1. Rhythm for Reading had no significant impact on reading ability overall.

2. There was some evidence that Rhythm for Reading worked differently across the ability range. Analysis suggests that the intervention caused lower reading scores among the lower attaining pupils and higher scores among higher attaining pupils within the sample.

3. Previous evaluation work in combination with the process evaluation findings indicates that the intervention may be more suitable to be trialled and evaluated with more able younger pupils (i.e., below Year 7).

What is the impact?

Rhythm for Reading demonstrated an effect size for all pupils of 0.03 and an effect size for children on free school meals (FSM) of 0.11. Effect sizes of this magnitude can be translated into approximately one month of additional progress for the pupils who received the intervention compared to those who did not. However, neither of these findings is statistically significant, suggesting that the difference in outcomes between the control and the intervention group occurred by chance. As a result, it is not clear that Rhythm for Reading is an effective intervention to use with Year 7 pupils who had not achieved the expected level of attainment in literacy at the end of primary school.

There is some evidence of pupils responding differently to the intervention depending upon their pre-test score. The relationship suggests that children of lower ability are likely to perform worse after the intervention than children of similar ability in the control group. For children of higher ability, they are likely to perform better after the intervention than similar children in the control group. It is unclear what accounts for this difference across the ability range. More research is needed to understand this interaction more fully and therefore this finding should not be used to justify Rhythm for Reading’s use with a particular ability group without further work.

The programme was delivered in each school by the developer of Rhythm for Reading so it is unclear how effective it would be in a wider context. From the observations and interviews with staff and pupils in the process evaluation, a lack of engagement and poor behaviour spoiled the delivery of some of the sessions. This may have contributed to the lack of impact in the intervention group.

As this evaluation had a waitlist design, the control group received the intervention in the first term of Year 8. These sessions were delivered by teaching assistants who had received training from the developer. Follow-up interviews suggest that the sessions were popular with pupils although some of the pupils were sceptical as to how useful they would be in improving their reading and this may have contributed to a lack of engagement. As the intervention was designed for younger pupils, it is likely that by Year 8 the pupils were too old to engage with the Rhythm for Reading activities.

Combining the findings from the randomised controlled trial (RCT) and the process evaluation suggests that Rhythm for Reading might be more suited for evaluation with younger children.
How secure is the finding?

There is some evidence from previous research of a link between the processing of rhythm and how this might impact on reading behaviour. The Rhythm for Reading programme has, to date, been evaluated using small scale non-randomised studies that showed promising results. This report is the first independent evaluation of the programme, and the first one to use randomised controlled trial methodology.

The trial was run as a small scale efficacy trial, randomly allocating 419 pupils in six schools to an intervention group or a waitlist control group. Efficacy trials seek to test evaluations in the best possible conditions to see if they hold promise. They do not indicate the extent to which the intervention will be effective in all schools since the participating schools are selected from one area, and the programme is delivered by the developers.

The primary outcome was reading ability as assessed by scores from the GL Assessment New Group Reading Test (NGRT). The secondary outcomes were the two NGRT subscales: sentence completion and passage comprehension. The tests were administered by the schools and therefore not blind, but the deliverer had no role in their administration.

Analysis was completed on an ‘intention to treat’ basis, reflecting the reality of how interventions are delivered in practice, followed by an ‘on-treatment’ analysis where information from teachers was used to determine the extent of each pupil’s involvement with the intervention. On-treatment analysis allows for an estimate of ‘pure intervention effect’.

85% of the pupils were included in the final analysis. However, both control and intervention group suffered similar levels of attrition and further analysis shows there was no evidence of bias in pupil characteristics in either group.

This was a successful trial and the outcomes are secure.

To view the project’s evaluation protocol click here.

How much does it cost?

Rhythm for Reading training costs £5,000 per school. Schools need to renew their licence to continue accessing the online resources; this costs £500 per year. As the cost is per school and not per pupil, per pupil cost depends on the number of pupils who experience the intervention, delivered by either a specialist or a trained teacher. If we assume a total of 90 Year 7 pupils receive the intervention in the first year (half the size of an average secondary school cohort), this is a per pupil initial cost of £56, dropping to £6 per pupil in subsequent years providing staff capacity to deliver is maintained.