REACH Primary

REACH Primary is a programme for struggling readers. It is developed by academic experts in reading, and comes out of research into two interventions, one designed to improve word recognition and decoding (known as Reading Intervention) and one focused on language comprehension.

It is delivered by trained Teaching Assistants to individually targeted pupils over a period of 20 weeks. The project is being run by a team from the University of Leeds.

Why are we funding it?

REACH has been tested through a previous EEF efficacy trial with Year 7 pupils. That trial, run in 27 secondary schools, yielded very positive outcomes, but the trial was rated as having moderate-to-low security. Given these concerns, we have decided not to proceed to a very large effectiveness trial, but instead to undertake a further efficacy trial of an improved REACH intervention in primary schools, as it was originally developed for primary pupils.

The key elements will remain the same, but the training and resources for Teaching Assistants are being improved and some changes made to respond to some of the issues raised in the process evaluation in the previous trial. The scale is also now much larger than the earlier trial.

Reading Intervention (one half of REACH) is regarded as a highly promising intervention based on high-quality research, but it has not been made widely available for schools. This trial offers an opportunity to make the combined decoding and comprehension programme more scalable and test its impact on the originally intended cohort.

How are we evaluating it?

The programme will be evaluated by a team from Sheffield Hallam University using a randomised controlled trial. This will be an efficacy trial, meaning that the programme will be tested under best possible conditions.

The proposal is to recruit 80 primary schools, with half being in the North East as part of the North East Primary Literacy Campaign. Schools will choose 10 struggling readers in Year 3 and they will be randomly allocated to either receive REACH Primary or to act as a ‘Business as Usual’ control - receiving whatever support the schools would have provided for them anyway.

The evaluation will measure the impact of the REACH Primary programme on a standardised reading test and secondary measures of decoding and language comprehension. The evaluation will also include an implementation and process evaluation.

When will the evaluation report be due?

The evaluation report will be published in Spring 2021.