Best Practice in Setting

Best Practice in Setting aims to improve the educational attainment and self-confidence of students who are currently placed in attainment groups for maths or English, by preventing poor setting practices. Teachers were trained in how to use best practice principles in their schools through four twilight training workshops.

Another evaluation piloted mixed attainment teaching practices.

EEF Summary

Many schools group students by attainment, particularly in English and Maths, but the evidence suggests that setting by class does not on average have a positive impact. This project aimed to see if outcomes for students could be improved if some of the potentially negative aspects of setting were addressed.

The study provides no evidence that the Best Practice in Setting intervention had a positive impact on maths or English outcomes. However, the results have low to moderate security for the maths finding and very low security for the English finding because a large number of participant schools dropped out of the programme.

Attendance at workshops and adherence to some of the best practice principles was low. Because of this, we cannot conclude that the underlying idea – improving setting practices to tackle poorer outcomes for those in lower sets – does not work. However, it demonstrates that this particular programme was not effective at supporting the schools to adopt new setting practices.

Setting is an important issue for schools and EEF would like to generate more evidence in this area. It is clear from this trial that it is challenging for schools to adapt their setting practices and careful thought needs to be given to how best we can generate useful evidence in this area.
Research Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome/Group</th>
<th>Impact - the size of the difference between Best Practice in Setting pupils and other pupils</th>
<th>Security - how confident are we in this result?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>0 Months’ Progress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>1 Months’ Progress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths (everFSM)</td>
<td>0 Months’ Progress</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English (everFSM)</td>
<td>0 Months’ Progress</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Were the schools in the trial similar to my school?

There were 127 schools participating in the trial. In the maths trial there were 121 schools, whilst in the English trial there were 79 schools, with 73 schools participating in both trials. The majority of schools in both trials were in urban locations and 82% and 78% of schools were Good or Outstanding in the maths and English trials respectively.

Could I implement this in my school?

The programme is not currently available for schools to purchase. Schools interested in the approach could work to implement the best practice principles without external support, however caution should be taken as there is no evidence that this will result in an improvement to pupil outcomes and schools may find the approaches difficult to implement.

Delivered by Teachers

Participant group Whole Class

Intervention length 2 Years

How much will it cost?

The average cost of the Best Practice in Setting intervention per department was around £2,500, or £14.04 per pupil per year when averaged over three years. The main costs were the cost of teacher training and programme materials. Schools also needed to meet the cost of staff cover for two days of teacher training per department for the first two years of the intervention.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost per pupil</th>
<th>No. of Teachers/TAs</th>
<th>Training time per staff member</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£14</td>
<td>All Teachers</td>
<td>4 Days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schools 127, Pupils 24,742, Key Stage Key Stage 3

For more information, tools & supporting resources, please visit:
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/
Evaluation Conclusions

1. The project found no evidence that the Best Practice in Setting intervention improves maths or English attainment for children in Years 7 and 8. For English, pupils in the intervention schools made slightly less progress than the control pupils, but this finding has no meaning given its level of uncertainty and very low security rating.

2. There was no evidence of impact on pupils’ self-confidence in maths. For English there was a small positive difference in pupil self-confidence, but this result has no meaning due to its level of uncertainty and the large amount of measurement attrition.

3. School and teacher buy-in was low. Half of the schools in the maths trial and more than half of the schools in the English trial ceased intervention delivery before follow-up. Attendance at training sessions decreased over time (to 21% for the final maths session and 12% for the final English session). With this level of treatment attrition, being able to engage schools with the programme was demonstrated to be at least as important as the programme itself. Future interventions aimed at changing setting practices should be designed with the issue of engagement in mind.

4. The process evaluation revealed mixed views from participants. While some were largely positive about the intervention, many interviewees thought that what they were being asked to do represented little change from what they already do. Some schools reported that the intervention was onerous and difficult to deliver.

5. Some schools struggled to implement the intervention in full (for example, there was poor fidelity to teachers being randomly allocated to sets), this seemed to be due to schools finding it difficult to make some changes and therefore adapting principles to make them more implementable.