The project

Switch-on Reading is an intensive 10-week literacy intervention. It is delivered on a one to one basis by staff, most commonly teaching assistants, who have been trained in the approach. The purpose of Switch-on is to achieve functional literacy for as many pupils as possible, and so to close the reading achievement gap for vulnerable children working below age-expected levels. It is inspired by the well-established intervention Reading Recovery, which is teacher led and delivered over a 12-20 week period.

In this evaluation, the programme involved regular sessions for pupils who had not achieved Level 4 English at Key Stage 2. The identified pupils in Year 7 attended regular 20-minute reading sessions over the course of the Spring term. The students were removed from class to attend the sessions, which aimed to improve their reading comprehension and fluency. Each session required students to read from four different books graded on the basis of their difficulty. Training and support for staff was provided by the Every Child a Reader staff of Nottinghamshire Local Authority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>NUMBER OF PUPILS</th>
<th>EFFECT SIZE*</th>
<th>MONTHS' PROGRESS</th>
<th>EVIDENCE STRENGTH**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Pupils</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>+0.24</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Attainers</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>+0.39</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSM-eligible</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>+0.36</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEN Reported</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>+0.31</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Effect sizes are based on differences in post-test scores, except for the FSM-eligible results, which are based on raw gain scores. See full report for explanation.

**Evidence ratings are a new measure under development based on a number of factors including study type, size and drop-out. Ratings are provisional and are not given for sub-group analyses, which will always be less secure than overall findings. For more information about ratings visit: [http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evaluation](http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evaluation).

What impact did it have?

The overall result was an effect size of +0.24, based on the pooled standard deviation of the post-test score for both groups, meaning that the programme made a noticeable positive impact. This effect can be envisaged as suggesting that on average pupils receiving the intervention would make approximately three additional months’ progress over the course of a year compared to similar pupils who did not.

The evaluation identified positive results for all groups of pupils (defined by sex, first language, ethnicity, special educational needs, free school meal eligibility and measured attainment at the outset). However, it is important to note that conclusions about specific groups of pupils are more tentative than the overall finding, because the study was primarily designed to test the average impact on all identified children.

Pupils with low attainment prior to the intervention showed particularly positive results, making five additional months progress on average. Pupils eligible for free school meals and pupils identified as having special educational needs made four additional months progress on average. As such, this evaluation suggests that Switch-on can be an effective intervention for weak and disadvantaged readers at the stage of transition to secondary school.

The intervention was generally well-conducted and the pupils seemed to enjoy the sessions. Staff needed training and then some monitoring to ensure that they adhered to the protocol devised by the developers, which was necessary for the intervention to have the largest possible effect.

How secure is this finding?

The evaluation was set up as a small-scale efficacy trial to test the impact of Switch-on as delivered with the developer leading the training and overseeing the provision of the intervention. Efficacy trials seek to test evaluations in the best possible conditions to see if they hold promise, but do not seek to demonstrate that the findings hold at scale in all types of schools. The findings do not indicate the extent to which the intervention will be effective in all schools since the participating schools were intentionally selected within one local authority, and training was provided by the programme developers. To test this question, a future evaluation run on a larger scale in a wider variety of areas could be conducted.

The findings are based on a randomised controlled trial, with individual random allocation to groups and a waiting list for pupils who were initially not selected to receive the intervention. There was low dropout and no sign of post-allocation demoralisation, indicating that the findings are not biased. Though a trial involving 400 pupils would have been ideal, with 308 cases in 19 schools this is nonetheless the largest trial conducted to date of this kind of 10-week reading intervention.

The results were analysed in a number of ways. The same result appeared whether the data were analysed in terms of ‘gain scores’ (which are based on the improvement made by pupils who receive the intervention compared to those in the control group), or by only comparing the post-test scores of those who received the intervention with those in the control group. The same effect size also appeared for each specific group of pupils when the gain scores were used instead of the post-test scores. This is because these groups (such as boys and girls) were balanced in terms of pre-test scores between the
treatment group and control group by the randomisation. The one exception was free school meal eligibility (FSM): FSM pupils in the treatment group had, by chance, a higher pre-test average, meaning that the post-test score is a less accurate assessment of the intervention’s impact. It is also possible that the age-standardised pre-test scores may have distorted the progress made by very low-scoring pupils. As a consequence, the table above reports an effect size based on raw gain scores for FSM-eligible pupils.

The results found here are consistent with those of a similar 10-week reading intervention, and with the 12-20-week Reading Recovery intervention that has been trialled in the US. The existing evaluation of Switch-on prior to this study was a small, developer-led study with 100 pupils in Key Stage 2. That trial showed a larger effect size but followed a less robust methodology.

How much does it cost?

The cost of the approach is estimated at £627 per pupil. This estimate includes resources (estimated at £77 per pupil), direct salary costs of teaching assistants (£500), initial training (£32) and on-going monitoring and support (£18). Estimates are based on a school delivering the intervention to 24 pupils and training four teaching assistants.

Key conclusions

- Switch-on Reading appears to be effective for weak and disadvantaged readers at the stage of transition to secondary school.
- It can be delivered by teaching assistants after two-days of training, and full training and support is required for all relevant staff.
- Challenges to successful implementation may include timetabling and the availability of age-appropriate texts.
- There is a tendency for some staff to stray away from the explicit schedule and this is likely to reduce the programme’s impact. Regular monitoring will increase fidelity but may also increase cost.
- Further research is required to understand: i) whether Switch-on can have an impact in all types of schools; ii) whether the impact lasts, iii) which are the essential components of the intervention, and iv) whether any harm is done to progress in other subject areas due to the time out of class required by the intervention.