

Evaluation of the best practice in setting year 7 and 8 students within English and mathematics

Submission date 04/09/2015	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	<input type="checkbox"/> Prospectively registered <input type="checkbox"/> Protocol
Registration date 13/10/2015	Overall study status Completed	<input type="checkbox"/> Statistical analysis plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Results
Last Edited 14/09/2018	Condition category Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

In the UK, students have long been divided into groups based on their ability in schools, particularly for academic subjects such as English and Math. This is based on the principle that children do not all learn the same way or at the same pace. This practice is often debated by teachers, as although it can be an efficient way to organize students, there are several problems with this arrangement. The first problem is that ability grouping tends to encourage segregation of students, for instance students from disadvantaged backgrounds are often placed in lower sets. The second problem is that students in lower sets tend to make less progress than those in higher sets, ever increasing the gap between their achievement levels, making it more difficult to "move up" a set. The aim of this study is to explore the long-term consequences for pupils in low sets, to find out whether the set the pupil is placed in has an impact on their performance in English and mathematics.

Who can participate?

Secondary schools which currently (or are willing to) divide children into sets for English and Math in year 7 and 8.

What does the study involve?

Included schools are randomly allocated into two groups. English and Math teachers at the schools included in the first group (intervention group) attend workshops which aim to improve teaching skills, and improve the curriculum for different sets in English and mathematics. Pupils are then assigned into one of four sets based on ability according to specific instructions for setting. Schools allocated to the second group (control group) continue with their usual teaching practices.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

There are no direct benefits of participating, however students may benefit in the long run as this research will increase knowledge on education policies in England. There are no foreseeable risks of participating.

Where is the study run from?

National Foundation for Educational Research, Slough (UK)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
March 2015 to November 2017

Who is funding the study?
Education Endowment Foundation (UK)

Who is the main contact?
Dr Ben Styles
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Contact information

Type(s)
Scientific

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number
N/A

Study information

Scientific Title
Randomised controlled trial of best practice in setting year 7 and 8 students within English and mathematics

Study objectives
This study aims to explore poor outcomes for pupils in low sets and streams which are related to poor associated setting practice.

The primary research questions are:
1. What is the impact of best practice in setting on pupils' attainment in mathematics?
2. What is the impact of best practice in setting on pupils' attainment in English?

The secondary research questions are:
1. What is the impact of best practice in setting on pupils' self-confidence in mathematics?
2. What is the impact of best practice in setting on pupils' self-confidence in English?

Ethics approval required

Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)

National Foundation for Educational Research Code of Practice Committee, 05/03/2015

Study design

Multi-centre cluster randomised controlled trial

Primary study design

Interventional

Study type(s)

Quality of life

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

This study aims to explore poor outcomes for pupils in low sets and streams which are related to poor associated setting practice.

Interventions

120 Secondary schools will be randomly allocated into the intervention group or the control group. For all schools, key stage 2 results will be used as baseline test data and GL assessment's English and mathematics tests will be used as follow-up tests at the end of year 8, where a random sample of 60 pupils will be selected from each school.

Intervention group: Heads of Maths and English departments along with teachers delivering Maths and English to the Year 7 cohort in intervention schools will attend an initial workshop in July 2015. This will be focused on the KS3 leadership developing a department-wide approach to addressing the factors identified: Increasing fluidity, raising teacher expectations and pedagogy, improving access to the whole curriculum and higher status qualifications, improving pupil engagement and attitudes and tackling the self-fulfilling prophecy. There will be four workshops provided across the two-year intervention.

Control group: Schools from this group will continue with their student grouping practices as usual. Once they have completed the year 8 tests at the end of the trial, they will receive £1,000.

Intervention Type

Other

Primary outcome(s)

Pupil attainment in English and maths will be measured using the New Progress in English (NPiE) and New Progress in Mathematics (NPiM) tests developed by GL assessment at the end of year 8 in summer 2017. Key stage 2 test results from academic year 2014-15 will be used to measure pupil attainment at baseline.

Key secondary outcome(s)

Pupils' self confidence in English and mathematics will be measured using a pupil survey at the start of year 7 in September 2015 and at the end of year 8 in summer 2017.

Completion date

30/11/2017

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

1. Schools that currently divide children into sets for English and/or maths in years 7 and 8
2. Schools willing to change practices to divide children into sets for English and/or maths in years 7 and 8

Participant type(s)

Healthy volunteer

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Child

Sex

All

Key exclusion criteria

Schools who organise and teach year 7 pupils in mixed-attainment groups.

Date of first enrolment

26/03/2015

Date of final enrolment

12/06/2015

Locations

Countries of recruitment

United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre

National Foundation for Educational Research

The Mere

Upton Park

Slough

United Kingdom

SL1 2DQ

Sponsor information

Organisation

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)

ROR

<https://ror.org/03bhd6288>

Funder(s)

Funder type

Charity

Funder Name

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan**IPD sharing plan summary**

Stored in repository

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Funder report results	results			No	No
Participant information sheet	Participant information sheet	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes
Study website	Study website	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes