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Investigating the impact of the FFT Tutoring with the Lightning Squad programme on reading skills of Year 3-4 pupils

Submission date 26/09/2025	**Recruitment status** No longer recruiting	[_] Prospectively registered [X] Protocol
Registration date 09/10/2025	**Overall study status** Ongoing	[_] Statistical analysis plan [_] Results
Last Edited 30/09/2025	**Condition category** Other	[_] Individual participant data [_] Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
FFT Tutoring with the Lightning Squad is a reading catch-up programme designed to help pupils aged 7-9(Years 3-4) who are below age-expected reading levels. It's a targeted, online intervention developed by FFT Education. The programme uses a blended approach with face-to-face tutoring sessions supported by an online platform. It aims to improve reading skills, fluency, comprehension, spelling, and phonics through structured activities and specially written stories. The aim of this research is to assess the impact of the programme on the reading skills of children who are below expected reading levels in years 3 and 4 and are particularly weak with their decoding and fluency skills.

Who can participate?
The school and pupil-level eligibility criteria have been provided in detail above. Briefly, junior, infant or primary state-funded schools in England with at least two Year 3 and two Year 4 classes can participate, as long as they have the appropriate IT infrastructure, have not used TWL in the 2023/24 or 2024/25 academic years and are not participating in another EEF-funded trial in the 2025/26 academic year. This is a targeted intervention and will be delivered to 8 selected children per year group.

What does the study involve?
72 schools have been recruited to the trial. At each participating school, pupils in year groups 3 and 4 will participate in the trial.
After schools sign up, they share information about pupils they intend to screen with FFT Education and carry out the RAP. Teachers then choose eight pupils from each year group based on their professional judgement and RAP scores to take part in the trial.
Schools will be randomised to one of two study arms. Those in arm 1 will deliver TWL to the eight selected pupils in Year 3, whilst those in arm 2 will deliver TWL to the eight selected pupils in Year 4. In each arm, pupils in the year group not receiving TWL will act as the control group for the other arm. Pupils in the intervention year group work in pairs on the TWL online platform, supported by a trained tutor. Sessions run for about 30 minutes, 4 – 5 times a week, and pupils progress through reading levels together with regular checks and support from their Tutor.

Pupils will complete the RAP and PIRLS section R7 questions (only Year 4 pupils) prior to randomisation, and the WRMT-III and PIRLS questions at the end of the 2025/26 academic year. The effectiveness of TWL will be measured by how much intervention pupils have improved their reading score, compared to control pupils.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
The potential benefit to pupils taking part in TWL is improved reading skills.
No risks of participating are anticipated.

Where is the study run from?
The study is being run by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) in England. Delivery of the TWL platform occurs at schools taking part in the trial and is provided and managed by the delivery partner, FFT Education. Data on pupil participation in TWL will be collected on the TWL online platform and shared with NFER.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
February 2024 to July 2027.

Who is funding the study?
This trial is being funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (UK).

Who is the main contact?
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Study information

Scientific Title
Randomised controlled trial investigating the impact of participation in the FFT Tutoring with the Lightning Squad programme on reading skills amongst Year 3 -4 pupils

Acronym
EELS

Study objectives
The primary research question for this trial is:
What is the overall impact of FFT Tutoring with Lightning Squad (TWL) on the reading skills of children who are below expected reading levels in years 3 and 4?

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval not required

Ethics approval(s)

Primary study design
Interventional

Study design
Two-arm interleaved randomized controlled trial with random allocation at school level

Study type(s)
Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Reading skills amongst Year 3 and Year 4 pupils.

Interventions
After signing up and completing the MoU, schools nominate the lowest-attaining half of each year group for baseline reading assessments using FFT's Reading Assessment Programme (RAP).

Teachers then select eight of these pupils per year group for the trial based on their professional judgement and the RAP scores.
Schools are then randomly assigned (1:1) to deliver the TWL programme to either Year 3 or Year 4 pupils, with the other year group acting as controls. Note that with this design all schools with receive the TWL intervention but in different year groups depending on their random assignment. Randomisation is at the school level and not stratified.
Tutors from the intervention year groups receive a one-day online training and access to additional resources, including videos, printed materials, and guides.
The eight pupils in the intervention year group complete an initial TWL assessment to determine their starting story level. The TWL initial assessment is used by teachers to pair pupils based on reading ability and compatibility. Sessions are led by trained Tutors (usually TAs or teachers), who support two pupil pairs per session to work on the TWL platform. Each session lasts ~30 minutes, with pupils expected to complete 4 – 5 sessions over 16–24 weeks (i.e., a total of 50 – 60 sessions).
During sessions, pupils alternate roles as Reader and Coach while progressing through story levels as a pair. Each story level contains four activities focused on reading fluency, spelling, practising vocabulary and reading comprehension. Tutors monitor progress, conduct checks, and adjust pairings or story levels as needed. If one pupil is absent, the other does Free Play, which involves choosing a previous story and practising the associated activities.
Tutors reassess pupils every six weeks and provide ongoing support to ensure appropriate progression.

Intervention Type
Other

Primary outcome(s)
Reading skills measured using the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test 3rd Edition (WRMT-III). A composite score will be derived from four WRMT-III subtests using Principal Components Analysis (PCA). The baseline measurement is being taken prior to randomisation in September 2025. Endpoint assessment will be undertaken after at least 16 weeks of delivery of the intervention (and an equivalent time point for control settings).

Key secondary outcome(s)
Four subtests from WRMT-III:
1. Oral reading fluency sub-test
2. Passage comprehension sub-test
3. Word identification sub-test
4. Word attack sub-test

Additionally, eight items from section R7 of the student survey from Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (IEA, 2020) will measure pupils' attitudes towards reading, and will be measured using the total score across all eight items.

The baseline measurement is being taken prior to randomisation in September 2025. Endpoint assessment will be undertaken after at least 16 weeks of delivery of the intervention (and an equivalent time point for control settings).

Completion date
31/07/2027

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
Schools:
1. All state-funded schools with primary-aged children in England and at least two year 3 and two year 4 classes.
2. A maximum of ten schools from the same Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) can be recruited provided the individual schools meet all other eligibility criteria.

Pupils:
Identifying eligible pupils in this trial will follow a two-step process:
1. In summer 2025, schools will nominate around 30 pupils each from each year group (years 2 and 3 at this point in time) to be screened using the RAP.
2. Through September – October 2025, nominated pupils (now in years 3 and 4) will be screened using the RAP. Teachers will use a combination of RAP scores and their professional judgement to select 8 pupils from each year group per school who will participate in the trial

Participant type(s)
Learner/student, Other

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Child

Lower age limit
7 Years

Upper age limit
9 Years

Sex
All

Key exclusion criteria
Schools:
1. Schools that are taking part in any other EEF funded trials within the same academic year.
2. Schools that are offering any of the following programmes: Accelerated Reader, Reciprocal Reading, Dyslexia Gold, Lexia, ReadingPlus, Fresh Start (RWI), Sparx Reader
3. Schools that are participating in the follow Evidence into Action (EiA) projects: EiA in Worcestershire - Leading Literacy, EiA in Dudley - Reading Comprehension, EiA in Southwark - Disciplinary Reading or Havering - Scaffolding in reading.
4. Schools that were using TWL in 2023/24 or 2024/25

Pupils:
1. In Year groups outside of Year 3 and Year 4 in 2025/26 academic year
2. Pupils who are severely visually impaired or those who demonstrate selective mutism are not eligible to participate

Date of first enrolment
02/02/2025

Date of final enrolment
30/05/2025

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre
National Foundation for Educational Research
The Mere,
Upton Park
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Sponsor information

Organisation
Education Endowment Foundation

ROR
https://ror.org/03bhd6288

Funder(s)

Funder type
Charity

Funder Name
Education Endowment Foundation

Alternative Name(s)
EducEndowFoundn, The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), Education Endowment Foundation | London, EEF

Funding Body Type
Private sector organisation

Funding Body Subtype

Trusts, charities, foundations (both public and private)

Location
United Kingdom

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
The datasets analysed during this study will be stored in a non-publicly available repository, the EEF data archive.
Within three months of the end of project, NFER will send school and pupil data to the Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) data archive partner. This will include enough pupil-level data for an analyst to replicate the impact analysis. At this point, EEF's data archive partner will keep a copy of the data and EEF will become the Data Controller. This data may be shared in an anonymised form with other research teams. Further matching to NPD and other administrative data may take place during subsequent research.

IPD sharing plan summary
Stored in non-publicly available repository

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Protocol file	version 1.0.0	23/09/2025	30/09/2025	No	No
Study website	Study website	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes