Fluency Focus efficacy trial
Evaluation Protocol
Evaluator (institution): Verian
Principal investigator(s): Prof. Natalie Gold

Evaluation summary

Project title	Fluency Focus: A Two-Arm Cluster Randomised Controlled Trial
Developer *(Institution)*	London South Research School
Evaluator *(Institution)*	Verian
Principal investigator(s)	Prof. Natalie Gold
Protocol author(s)	Dr James Thom, Penny Stothard, Rupert Riddle, Yasmine Yared, Pieter Cornel, Prof. Kate Cain, Dr Janet Vousden and Prof. Natalie Gold
Trial design	Two-arm cluster randomised controlled trial with random allocation at school level
Trial type	Efficacy
Pupil age range and Key stage	9–10 years old (KS2)
Number of schools *(at design stage)*	120
Number of pupils *(at design stage)*	4,906
Primary outcome measure and source	Reading attainment (New PiRA; KS2 SATs from NPD)
Secondary outcome measure and source	Reading comprehension (WIAT-III), reading fluency (recording), prosody (MDFS), and reading confidence and enjoyment of reading (both from pupil questionnaire).

Protocol version history

Version	Date	Reason for revision
1.0 [*original*]	30 October 2026	N/A

Contents

Evaluation summary 1
Protocol version history 2
Study rationale and background 5
Intervention 6
Impact evaluation design 16
Research questions 17
Design 18
Participant selection 19
Outcome measures 20
Sample size 23
Randomisation 25
Statistical analysis 25
Implementation and process evaluation (IPE) design 28
Research questions 28
Research methods 29
Cost evaluation design 48
Ethics and registration 51
Trial registration 51
Research ethics 51
Participant consent 51
Data protection 52
Personnel 54
Risks 55
Timeline 57
References 59
Appendix A: Changes since the previous EEF evaluation 61
Appendix B: Additional Material 62

Tables

Table 1: PLANIT Intervention Description 7
Table 2: Trial design 18
Table 3: Sample size calculations 23
Table 4: Expected attrition 24
Table 5: Overview of planned secondary analyses 26
Table 6: IPE methods overview 39
Table 7: Overview of cost items 50
Table 8: Risks and Mitigations 55
Table 9: Timeline 57

Figures

Figure 1: Logic model 16

Appendix tables

Appendix Table 1: Changes since the previous evaluation 61
Appendix Table 2: Contextual assumptions log 62
Appendix Table 3: Causal assumptions log 64
Appendix Table 4: Available marks across each content domain of the New PiRA 66
Appendix Table 5: MDFS scoring rubric 67

Study rationale and background

One of the most important things the education system does is teach pupils to read, and for pupils to get good marks in any subject they need to be able to understand and make sense of texts. Poor reading comprehension is associated with low scores on English, maths, and science national curriculum tests (Cain and Oakhill, 2006)—commonly known as Standard Assessment Tests (SATs). Insofar as this connection is causal, improving comprehension could improve educational attainment even beyond reading.

Reading fluency is one of the elements that supports reading comprehension (Hogan *et al.*, 2011). The EEF defines reading fluency as reading with accuracy (reading words correctly), automaticity (reading words at an appropriate speed without great effort) and prosody (appropriate stress and intonation) (Education Endowment Fund, 2021). Reading fluently allows readers to focus their cognitive resources away from recognising words, thereby allowing readers to devote more mental resources to extracting the meaning of a text (Perfetti, 1988) and constructing a coherent mental representation of the situation described (Kintsch and Rawson, 2007). The EEF's KS2 Literacy Guidance Report identifies developing reading fluency as an important approach for improving reading comprehension (Education Endowment Fund, 2021). The Reading Framework also emphasises the importance of developing oral reading fluency and comprehension, and provides some guidance on how to achieve this (Department for Education, 2023). This guidance recommends that, in order to develop fluency and comprehension, teaching should focus on accurate decoding, re-reading to develop automaticity and group, modelled or echo reading.

Fluency Focus was developed by teachers at London South Research School (LSRS) to support development of oral reading fluency and, in turn, reading comprehension. The programme provides a structured scheme of work to support implementation of DfE's suggestion that schools teach reading fluency (Department for Education, 2023). It aims to improve pupils' reading comprehension by improving their reading fluency, making their reading more automatic and improving their prosody. It is designed to be delivered to Year 5 classes in place of 'business as usual' reading lessons over the course of 20 weeks.

The Education Endowment Fund (EEF) funded a pilot evaluation of Fluency Focus in 2023–2024 to determine if the programme warranted a larger efficacy trial. The pilot was delivered to 20 schools between 2023 and 2024. The evaluation reported strong evidence of promise, including evidence that the programme supported teachers' increased understanding, use and confidence in teaching and assessing fluency, and evidence of perceived improvements to children's reading fluency (Verdugo *et al.*, 2025). Findings suggested the programme helped schools meet a commonly identified need for reading support. Whilst reading aloud is common practice in primary schools, the pilot findings suggested inconsistency in whether reading fluency strategies are regularly taught (at the time of the pilot). The pilot further found that Fluency Focus was a feasible and acceptable programme that could be implemented as intended in all schools.

Following the pilot, the EEF proposed to fund an efficacy trial of Fluency Focus to establish its causal impacts on reading attainment, comprehension, and fluency measures at larger scale under 'developer led' conditions. This trial will investigate the efficacy of Fluency Focus on reading attainment among Year 5 pupils, and test the proposed Theory of Change behind the

intervention by taking measures of reading comprehension and fluency (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). We will conduct a school-level randomised control trial, which eliminates the risk of spillovers within a school and facilitates intervention delivery. We will use the measure of reading attainment from the New PiRA as our primary outcome measure (Hogan *et al.*, 2011). For secondary outcomes, we will collect recordings of pupils reading to derive a measure of prosody using the Multidimensional Fluency Scale (MDFS) (Rasinski, 2004) and a measure of reading accuracy (proportion of words read correctly per minute (WCPM) for the whole sample. We also collect a reading comprehension measure from a subset of 10 pupils per school using the WIAT-III Reading Comprehension subtest (Wechsler, 2018; Education Endowment Foundation, 2022). To measure sustained impact on reading attainment, we will request to link KS2 reading scores from the National Pupil Database. The pilot evaluation of Fluency Focus found reports of lower engagement with the intervention in some sub-groups. As a result, as part of the evaluation, we will also explore whether outcomes differ by pupils' Free School Meals (FSM) eligibility status, their English as an Additional Language (EAL) status, or their Special Educational Needs (SEN) status. Finally, we will compare impacts in pupils with different baseline reading ability by comparing quartile in reading attainment at baseline.

To complement our Impact Evaluation (IE), we will conduct a holistic implementation and process evaluation (IPE) which will examine delivery fidelity and gather qualitative data on the mechanisms, mediators, and moderators of the intervention. Specifically, the IPE will investigate the causal assumptions of the Theory of Change that underpin the IE and provide information about what schools in the control arm did with their pupils to help interpret the IE results. The IPE will also provide evidence that could be used to improve the delivery of the intervention if it were scaled up. Finally, we will conduct a Cost Evaluation. We will report the total cost per school for the intervention as implemented for three consecutive years, and the cost per-pupil-per-school-year.

Intervention

Fluency Focus is a 20-week, whole-class programme, which aims to improve the oral reading fluency and reading comprehension of Year 5 pupils (nine to ten-year-olds). Teachers receive initial training at an in-person training day, along with three webinars and two coaching sessions, and resources to deliver a carefully sequenced programme of weekly one-hour lessons in place of existing reading lessons. Developed by London South Research School (LSRS), an Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) funded Research School based at Charles Dickens Primary School in South London, the programme responds to a recent guidance report by the EEF on Key Stage 2 literacy and evidence review on literacy (Breadmore *et al.*, 2019; Bilton and Duff, 2021), bringing together six evidence-informed reading fluency strategies:

1. Identifying unfamiliar vocabulary.
2. Modelled fluent reading.
3. Text marking and phrased reading.
4. Echo reading.
5. Paired repeated reading.

6. Reading for performance.

The strategies are introduced over the course of the first seven lessons through modelling and explicit teaching, after which pupils practice applying the strategies across a range of texts. Each lesson plan includes a stimulus text, with the 20-week course offering a diverse range of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Teachers are supported throughout by coaching conversations with LSRS staff, a dedicated programme website, and a Fluency Focus champion selected from their school's senior leadership team (SLT). For more detailed information about Fluency Focus, see Table 1: PLANIT Intervention Description.

- Fluency Focus will be delivered in schools taking part in this trial and randomised into the treatment arm during the 2026–27 school year. Initial teacher trainings will take place in September 2026, and schools will deliver the Fluency Focus lessons from October 2026 until March 2027.

Table 1: PLANIT Intervention Description

Purpose
1. Name of intervention Fluency Focus: looking at reading through the lens of fluency
2. Aims and objectives of intervention Fluency Focus is designed to improve children's reading fluency and comprehension, with a particular emphasis on raising outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The programme provides a structured and consistent way of teaching reading fluency, and was developed based on the understanding that many schools currently adopt fluency-focused approaches with limited structure. It consists of twenty carefully sequenced, one-hour whole-class reading lessons, delivered once per week in place of a standard reading lesson. The structured approach relies on each lesson to cover six reading fluency strategies which are explicitly taught, modelled, and practised by pupils.
3. Rationale for intervention Reading fluency is one of the components that contributes to pupils' ability to understand texts (Hogan et al., 2011). By adopting a fluency-based approach, educators can better support disadvantaged learners to access texts that may otherwise be challenging due to unfamiliar vocabulary and complex content. This approach is supposed to not only improve decoding and prosody, but also enhance pupils' ability to make meaning from text. The design and rationale of Fluency Focus are grounded in robust research evidence, including the Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) *Improving Literacy in Key Stage Two* Guidance Report and the *Literacy Development: Evidence Review* (2019), both of which emphasise the importance of fluency as a lever for improving comprehension and overall literacy outcomes.
Learners

4. Participants

The Fluency Focus programme is designed specifically for Year 5 pupils and is delivered as a whole-class intervention. Rather than targeting selected individuals or groups, the programme is implemented across the entire Year 5 cohort within each participating setting. Depending on the size of the school, the number of learners reached per setting typically ranges from approximately 30 to 90 children.

Actors

i) Intervention developer(s)

The intervention was developed by the London South Research School team:

- David Windle – Deputy Headteacher of , Charles Dickens and Director of LSRS.
- Nicola Jacobs – Deputy Headteacher of Charles Dickens and specialist literacy ELE.
- Tom Young – head of branding and design at the Charter Schools Educational Trust.
- Kate McCole – assistant director of LSRS, project manager.

David and Nicola developed the programme and delivered both the 2022/23 and the 2025 trials. They will continue to lead on this. They will co-design the upfront training and webinars and train others to co-deliver the training and coaching. Tom will continue to work on resource design, both offline and online. Kate will continue to manage and administrate the programme.

ii) Intervention instructor(s)

The instructors for the intervention during this evaluation are:

- David Windle – co-head of Charles Dickens and Director of LSRS. Many years as a school leader and teacher, from nursery to university level.
- Nicola Jacobs – co-head of Charles Dickens and specialist literacy ELE. Very experienced leader, teacher and teacher trainer.

Intervention coaches

- Victoria Begley – assistant headteacher at Dulwich Hamlet Primary School and Deputy Director of the LSRS.
- Rebecca Huggins – Yr5 lead and literacy ELE, Charles Dickens Primary School
- Stella Dunn – Yr5 teacher and literacy ELE, Charles Dickens Primary School

Victoria participated in the 2025 pilot and has rolled fluency out in her school, training and coaching staff.

iii) Intervention facilitator(s)

The intervention will be delivered by teachers and should not be delivered by (Higher Level) Teaching Assistants. The teachers will likely be the Year 5 teachers or Reading Lead, although schools will not be rejected from the trial if they send another teacher as long as the teacher delivering the intervention has received the intervention training from LSRS. The teacher delivering the intervention must be the class's normal teacher – this is not to be assigned to cover teachers. All intervention delivery to pupils should be done by individuals who hold Qualified Teacher Status.

Nature

iv) Setting

The intervention will be delivered in the following settings:

i) State funded mainstream primary schools (not special schools)
ii) London, the South East, East Midlands, West Midlands or the East of England
iii) The target areas were selected so as to make it easier to deliver face-to-face training to participants, given where the Delivery Team is based. Additionally, there is significant disadvantage in these areas.

v) Intervention location

The locations will take place in classrooms, in a normal, formal classroom layout. This programme can be delivered in any Yr 5 classroom, whether the teachers have the children sitting in rows or groups.

vi) Intervention timing and duration

Sessions are intended to be delivered for 60 minutes, once a week, over 20 weeks. Schools who struggle with scheduling may opt to deliver two 30-minute sessions per week instead.

Full delivery of the programme consists of schools doing 20 sessions. At minimum, 15 sessions need to be delivered for the programme to be considered to still be successfully delivered. No home practice will be required, although it will be encouraged.

The content will be delivered weekly over two terms: Autumn 2026 and Spring 2027.

Instruction

vii) Delivery – professional development

The Fluency Focus programme includes a structured sequence of professional development activities designed to support effective implementation and build staff expertise. Participants engage in one half-day face-to-face CPD session at the outset, followed by a coaching call, a midpoint webinar, and a final end-of-programme webinar. These professional development activities are attended by class teachers and members of the senior leadership team (SLT), ensuring both delivery and oversight capacity within each setting.

The training is delivered through a blend of face-to-face and online formats, combining direct instruction with opportunities for collaborative reflection and problem-solving. Initial CPD sessions focus on building understanding of the rationale and evidence underpinning the intervention, while subsequent coaching calls and webinars provide opportunities to troubleshoot implementation challenges and respond to emerging themes. Additionally, optional drop-in support will be offered following the mid-point webinar for any school facing implementation challenges. A dedicated email address will be provided for any participants requiring further support.

This approach aligns closely with the EEF's recommendations for effective professional development by integrating key mechanisms such as building knowledge, motivating staff through shared purpose,

refining teaching strategies, and supporting sustained practice change through ongoing support and reflection.

viii) Delivery – Modes and content

The lessons are delivered face-to-face and whole-class. Each lesson consists of the same sequence of fluency strategies taught in order. Each lesson explores a single text extract through these strategies. The strategies are:

1. Unfamiliar vocabulary
2. Modelled fluent reading
3. Phrased reading/text marking
4. Echo reading
5. Paired reading
6. Reading for Performance

Every lesson is delivered face-to-face to the whole class in Year 5. The average class size is 30 children to 1 teacher. The lessons are sequenced in three phases:

- Establish
- Embed
- Extend

During the establish phase the class become familiar with the core strategies, before then growing in confidence using them during the embed phase.

The extend phase is a chance for children to take more ownership of the strategies. By this time, much of the class will be able to use them independently and with confidence.

Each session focuses on one specific text selected and provided by the delivery team:

Establish

1. Iron Man
2. Krishna Fights the Serpent King
3. Harriet Tubman
4. Henry King
5. Stonehenge
6. Malala's Speech
7. The Railway Children

Embed

8. Rainforests
9. Arabian Nights
10. Jainism
11. Peter Pan
12. John Snow's Discovery
13. Caged Bird
14. The Marine Food Chain
15. Tom's Midnight Garden

Extend

16. Continents
17. Colonel Fazackerley
18. Moons
19. Black Beauty
20. Samuel Pepys' Diary

It is important that teachers work through the lessons in sequence, completing each phase in turn.

Over the course of twenty, one-hour lessons this sequence gradually releases responsibility for fluent reading to the children in your class. It has been designed to move from whole class input to independent fluent reading, with each step planned to remove a potential stumbling block on the way to fluency.

The teaching sequence & strategies

This sequence has been designed to move from whole class input to independent fluent reading. Each step of the way has been planned to remove a potential stumbling block on the way to fluency and to gradually release responsibility for reading to the children.

1. Unfamiliar vocabulary

Introducing new, complex vocabulary before reading the text ensures that children are not struggling to decode these words or phrases while trying to understand the text as a whole. Teachers are expected to review the text and identify which words are likely to be new or considered complex.

Before teaching the children what a word means, it is important for them to say the word out loud as many times as necessary for them to say them fluently. Teachers can do this by:

- Beating out the syllables
- Stretching the word
- I say, you say (you say it and then they say it back)

Once the children are able to say the new word fluently, the delivery team recommend teachers provide a child-friendly definition with a visual or action attached if necessary. Vocabulary to introduce is provided to teachers as part of the programme materials.

2. Modelled fluent reading

The delivery team consider this the most important strategy. The aim is to show the children how to read fluently while also enabling them to experience the whole text, expertly read. This aims to support comprehension.

Teachers are told they can prepare for this stage by reading the text aloud in advance, experimenting with varied expression, volume and pace. Teachers could also explore strategies for bringing the text to life, such as gesture, facial expression and movement.

Before teachers read to the class, they are instructed to:

- Introduce the text and author

- Explain the text type

After reading to the class, teachers chair a discussion about the text focused on:

- What the text was about/what happened
- Who the characters were
- As the children listened, what did they think or feel?
- Whether it reminds the children of anything they've already read/seen/experienced

3. Phrased reading/text marking

Phrased reading utilises marking on the text when a phrase unit ends. It aims to aid readers' comprehension. One slash stands for a short pause; two slashes stand for a long pause. While punctuation often works as a guide to this, teachers are told to instruct children to read the text out loud to identify where the natural pauses are. For example:

Next to the great forest,/ there lived a woodcutter/ with his wife and his two children.// The boy's name was Hansel/ and the girl's name was Gretel.// He had but little to eat.// Once, when a great famine came to the land,/ he could no longer provide even their daily bread.//

Teachers are instructed to model phrased reading carefully and consistently until the children have mastered the skill. They are told to:

- Show the children an example paragraph with the phrases marked (teachers will need to mark these up themselves to practice in advance). Discuss how punctuation helps and guides the process, but does not necessarily mark every phrase. Model read this fluently using the marking as a guide
- Select an unmarked paragraph and ask for the children's help in marking the phrases together
- Select a final, unmarked paragraph and get them to mark the phrases independently or in pairs, reading out loud. Go through it together afterwards and identify any errors.

4. Echo reading

This builds on the teacher fluent modelling and is a bridge from phrased reading to independent reading.

The teacher is instructed to read a section of text to the children (using appropriate prosody), and they then echo it back, copying the teacher's fluent delivery. The teacher could choose to read a paragraph they have phrased marked or use a different one. They should repeat the same section up to 3 times, improving it each time through discussion and feedback.

The class should then discuss the purpose of the text and the author's intended impact on the reader and how this leads the reader to read it in a particular way. The teacher's prosody here aims to bring the text to life for the children.

The teacher should identify and discuss helpful punctuation, such as that commas help convey sense and exclamation marks and question marks give information about expression. It is important that the children are listening carefully to the teacher's example, and the teacher should provide feedback to the children after they have had a go, highlighting any areas for improvement.

5. Paired repeated reading

During paired reading, children begin to take more responsibility for their reading.

Teachers should give children the chance to practise the text in pairs, either a section or the whole text. They can encourage them to employ all the techniques previously taught and take it in turns to read and listen. Children should provide specific feedback to each other and then read the same part of text again. This will require significant modelling in the early lessons, and the teacher will need to circulate to provide feedback and direction. They are instructed to ask the children to assess each other's performances using the fluency scale.

6. Reading for performance

This final step completes the circle – the process started with the teacher reading to the class and now ends with children reading to the class. Again, the emphasis is on the children communicating the meaning of the text through fluent reading.

Teachers can do choral reading where the whole class reads the text together fluently. They can also choose grouped choral reading; for example, half the class reads to the other half and vice versa.

The teacher is invited to also select specific children to read a section of text to the class in pairs or individually. The teacher and the children then discuss to evaluate whether the meaning of the text has been communicated effectively and provide feedback.

Teachers may also experiment with reading around the class phrase by phrase, i.e., sitting in a circle passing the story along, each child saying the next phrase. This will really challenge children's listening and fluency skills.

Where a text lends itself to role-playing, teachers may instruct the children to act out the scene, with different children playing each character and others reading narration.

Comprehension questions are woven through the lesson by the teacher, along with fluency-specific feedback. This allows the teacher to monitor children's performance and adjust delivery if needed.

ix) Delivery – Procedures

The intervention is embedded in the core curriculum through formal teaching, replacing one guided reading lesson per week. It aligns and builds upon common pedagogical practices. There is no home practice involved and no assessment requirement for teachers beyond the usual ongoing assessment for learning during lessons.

x) Materials

Teachers will be provided with a link to a Google Drive containing lesson PowerPoints and PDFs of teacher guide and pupil workbook for each lesson.

They will be given teacher guide at the initial training and pupil booklets will be posted to the schools.

Teacher Guide

This contains the text and lesson plans for each lesson as well as a guide to the entire programme.

Pupil Workbook

This contains a copy of each text and the fluency scale for each lesson.

PowerPoints

Each lesson has a PowerPoint which guides the teacher through each strategy with relevant text and instructions on the slides.

Tailoring

xi) Implementation - behaviours

To support schools in preparing for, delivering, and sustaining the Fluency Focus programme, a number of strategies will be employed in line with the *EEF Implementation Guidance Report*. At the outset, senior leadership teams (SLT) will be engaged to promote whole-school buy-in and to ensure implementation is prioritised and adequately resourced. An upfront CPD session will build a shared understanding of the rationale behind the intervention and clarify roles and expectations. During the delivery phase, structured coaching calls will provide opportunities to troubleshoot issues, reflect on implementation progress, and reinforce fidelity to the programme. Regular touchpoints, such as webinars, will respond to themes emerging from delivery, creating a responsive and adaptive professional learning environment. To further embed practice, schools will be encouraged to identify an internal lead who can support staff throughout the implementation, facilitate reflection, and champion the intervention.

xii) Implementation – contextual factors

Several contextual factors support successful implementation.

Systems and structures include scheduled time for lesson preparation, access to comprehensive resources (teacher guides, lesson PowerPoints, pupil workbooks), and a clear delivery schedule embedded within the existing timetable (replacing one weekly guided reading session).

Support will be provided through an implementation team comprising expert trainers and coaches, with additional input from senior leaders in schools. The SLT will play a key role in enabling change by prioritising the intervention, monitoring delivery, and offering strategic oversight.

Features that support implementation include the clarity and sequencing of the programme, consistency across lessons, and high-quality explanatory materials that make the approach accessible and straightforward for teaching staff.

xiii) Planned adaptations

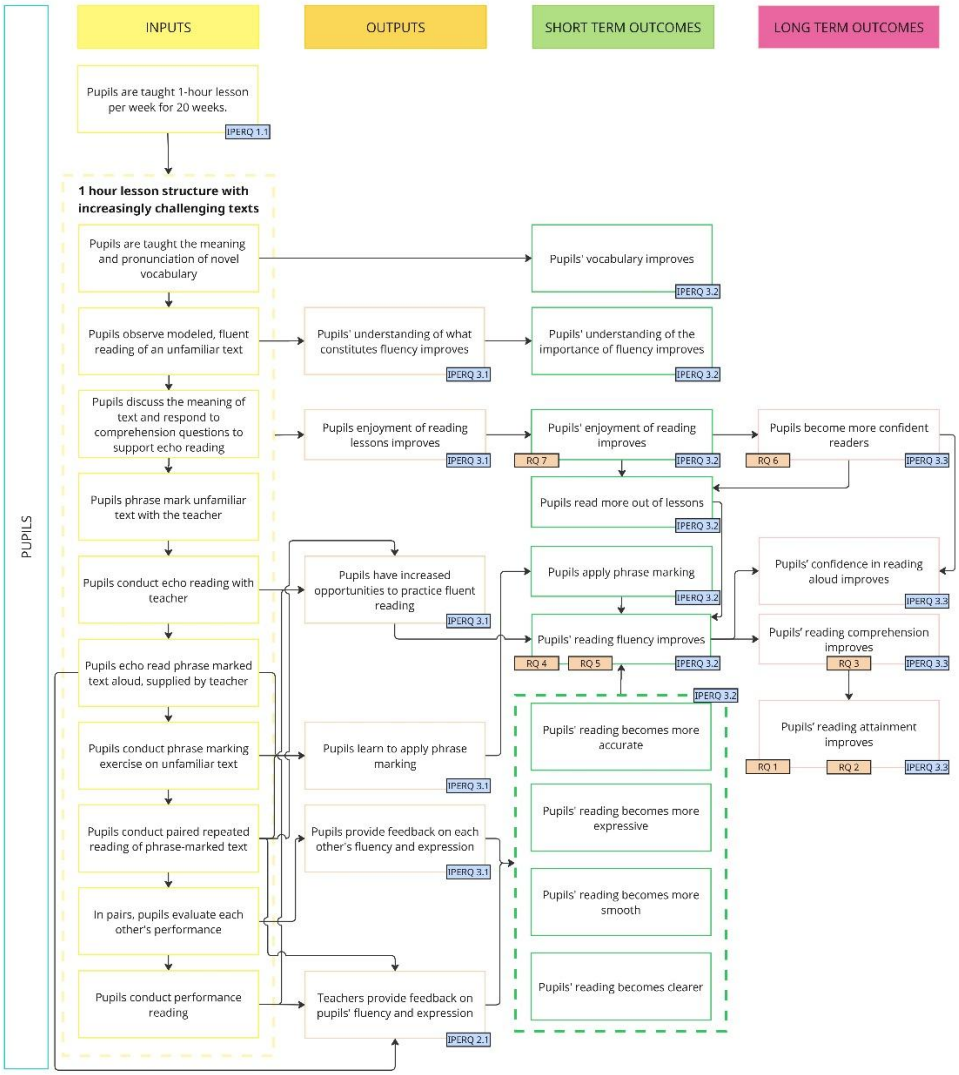
While the core lesson structure and teaching sequence should be followed consistently to maintain programme fidelity, a degree of flexibility is built in to support specific learner needs. This includes the option to incorporate visuals into vocabulary banks, use visual sequencing for SEN learners, adapt or shorten texts for accessibility, and deliver content in smaller guided groups where appropriate. These adaptations allow teachers to maintain the integrity of the fluency approach while ensuring that all pupils can access the content and make progress. Schools can split the lesson into two half hour sessions if required to make it easier to fit into timetables. As the comprehension questions are going to be woven into class discussion there will be no extra time needed to complete these. This should make the lessons easy to fit into one hour.

xiv) Unplanned adaptations [to be completed at reporting stage]

Any unplanned adaptations will be reported during the project's reporting stage.

The logic model (See Figure 1) sets out the theoretical relationships between elements of the intervention and the pupil outcomes that will be measured in the IE. The IPE will explore the key causal and contextual assumptions which underly the class teacher component of the logic model, including the effectiveness of the training provided by LSRS, class teacher's motivation, skill and knowledge to deliver the programme with fidelity and their access to resources, materials and support from SLT Staff. The IPE will also explore key assumptions which relate to the pupil component of the logic model, including whether lessons are delivered to pupils with fidelity and how successfully pupils engage with the content of the lessons. For a full overview of the causal and contextual assumptions identified by the delivery team, please refer to Appendix B.

Figure 1: Logic model



Impact evaluation design

Research questions

This trial's **primary research question** is:

RQ1: What is the difference in **reading attainment**, as measured by the New PiRA, of Year 5 pupils in schools receiving Fluency Focus in comparison to those pupils in control schools receiving business-as-usual (BAU)?

Our **secondary research questions** seek to determine whether the impact of Fluency Focus is sustained and to test the causal mechanisms by which the intervention is believed to act by probing more proximate outcomes in the intervention's logic model:

RQ2: What is the difference in **reading attainment at Key Stage 2**, as measured by performance on the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum Reading Test, of Year 5 pupils in schools receiving Fluency Focus in comparison to those pupils in control schools receiving BAU?

RQ3: What is the difference in **reading comprehension**, as measured by the WIAT-III reading comprehension subtest, of Year 5 pupils in schools receiving Fluency Focus in comparison to those pupils in control schools receiving BAU?

RQ4: What is the difference in **reading fluency**, as measured by an assessment of WCPM, of Year 5 pupils in schools receiving Fluency Focus in comparison to those pupils in control schools receiving BAU?

RQ5: What is the difference in **prosody**, as measured by the MDFS, of Year 5 pupils in schools receiving Fluency Focus in comparison to those pupils in control schools receiving BAU?

RQ6: What is the difference in **confidence in reading**, as measured by a bespoke survey measure, of Year 5 pupils in schools receiving Fluency Focus in comparison to those pupils in control schools receiving BAU?

RQ7: What is the difference in **enjoyment of reading**, as measured by a bespoke survey measure, of Year 5 pupils in schools receiving Fluency Focus in comparison to those pupils in control schools receiving BAU?

We also have several **subgroup research questions** to explore the impact of Fluency Focus in pupils from key subgroups of interest:

RQ8: What is the difference in **reading attainment**, as measured by the New PiRA, of Year 5 pupils who are **eligible for Free School Meals (FSM)** in schools receiving Fluency Focus in comparison to those pupils in control schools receiving BAU?

RQ9: What is the difference in **reading attainment**, as measured by the New PiRA, of Year 5 pupils who speak **English as an additional language (EAL)** in schools receiving Fluency Focus in comparison to those pupils in control schools receiving BAU?

RQ10: What is the difference in **reading attainment**, as measured by the New PiRA, of Year 5 pupils with **Special Educational Needs (SEN)** in schools receiving Fluency Focus in comparison to those pupils in control schools receiving BAU?

RQ11: What is the difference in **reading attainment**, as measured by the New PiRA, of Year 5 pupils of **different baseline reading ability** (quartiles in performance on the baseline reading assessment) in schools receiving Fluency Focus in comparison to those pupils in control schools receiving BAU?

Design

Table 2: Trial design

Trial design, including number of arms		Two-arm cluster-randomised controlled trial, with a 'business-as-usual' control arm
Unit of randomisation		School
Stratification variables (if applicable)		A single stratum variable using the follow: (1) school-level FSM and EAL percentage halves (split by the median) (2) whether the school is single-form or multi-form entry (3) which batch the school was randomised in
Primary outcome	**Variable**	Reading attainment
	Measure (instrument, scale, source)	New PiRA Summer Test 5 age-standardised scores, 70-130, Hachette Learning
Secondary outcome(s)	**Variable(s)**	(1) Reading attainment at Key Stage 2 (2) Reading comprehension (3) Reading fluency (4) Prosody (5) Confidence in reading (6) Enjoyment of reading
	Measure(s) (instrument, scale, source)	(1) Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests, KS2_READSCORE (80-120), NPD (2) WIAT-III reading comprehension subtest, 40-160, Pearson Clinical (3) Words Read Correctly per Minute (4) Multidimensional Fluency Scale, 4–16 (Rasinski, 2004) (5) Reading confidence scale, 0-5, bespoke survey (6) Reading enjoyment scale, 0-5, bespoke survey
Baseline for primary outcome	**Variable**	Reading attainment
	Measure (instrument, scale, source)	New PiRA Summer Test 4, if schools administer the test in Summer 2026, age-standardised scores, 70-130, Hachette Learning (or the Autumn Test 5, if schools administer the test in Autumn 2026, age-standardised scores, 70-130, Hachette)
Baseline for secondary outcome	**Variable**	(1) Reading attainment at Key Stage 2 (2) Reading comprehension (3) Reading fluency (4) Prosody (5) Confidence in reading (6) Enjoyment of reading
	Measure	(1) New PiRA Summer Test 4, if schools administer the test in Summer 2026, age-standardised scores, 70-130, Hachette Learning (or the Autumn

	(instrument, scale, source)	Test 5, if schools administer the test in Autumn 2026, age-standardised scores, 70-130, Hachette) (2) New PiRA Summer Test 4, if schools administer the test in Summer 2026, age-standardised scores, 70-130, Hachette Learning (or the Autumn Test 5, if schools administer the test in Autumn 2026, age-standardised scores, 70-130, Hachette) (3) Words Read Correctly per Minute (4) Multidimensional Fluency Scale, 4–16, (Rasinski, 2004) (5) No baseline (6) No baseline

The present study is a cluster-randomised efficacy trial with two arms, randomised at the school level. To improve the precision of our endline estimates, we will stratify randomisation using a single variable determined by school-level FSM and EAL percentage halves (split by the median), whether the school is single-form or multi-form entry, and which batch the school was randomised in.

Schools in the intervention arm will receive Fluency Focus (at a subsidised cost of £300 to each school), while control schools will operate BAU. Control schools will receive a £500 'thank you' payment to help cover administrative expenses related to participation in the evaluation, conditional on provision of New PiRA scores and facilitating the WIAT-III assessments at baseline and endline.

The primary outcome is reading attainment, as measured by the New PiRA, a measure of general reading ability that is in the EEF's shortlisted[1] outcome measures database. The New PiRA generates age-standardised scores for an assessment aligned to the UK's National Curriculum for reading. Our secondary outcomes are: reading attainment at Key Stage 2 (RQ2; KS2_READSCORE, from the NPD), reading comprehension (RQ3; the WIAT-III reading comprehension subtest), reading fluency (RQ4; WCPM), prosody (RQ5; the MDFS), and self-reported confidence in (RQ6) and enjoyment of reading (RQ7; both bespoke survey measures).

Participant selection

Participants are Year 5 pupils in schools that have signed up to take part in the evaluation with LSRS. This evaluation is open to publicly funded primary schools offering Year 5 in 2026/27 in London, the South East of England, East Midlands, West Midlands, or the East of England. Fluency Focus has not been designed for delivery in schools with mixed Year 5 and 6 classes or in Special Education schools, so those schools are not eligible to participate in the trial. Middle schools, which start in Year 5, are also excluded as they would be unable to carry out the trial's planned Year 4 baseline data collection. Also ineligible are any schools who are already delivering Fluency Focus or have received training on it within the last three years. Lastly, we will exclude all schools who are taking part in similar EEF studies that overlap with this trial (PALS-UK, Power

[1] 'Shortlisted' in this context means the outcome measure met the criteria for full evaluation in the EEF's outcomes review: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/evaluation/eef-outcome-measures-and-databases/attainment-measures-database

of Reading) or who are part of EEF's Evidence Into Action partnerships in Dudley, Enfield, Havering or Worcestershire.

The trial aims to include 120 schools in total, of which half will be offered the intervention, at random. LSRS will recruit schools into the project, relying on their existing networks, EEF communication channels, webinars, mass marketing communications and by building networks through local authority engagement. Participation is voluntary, and schools will need to sign a Memorandum of Understanding to commit to undertake the data collection and data sharing activities required by the evaluation. We will exclude those who do not from the evaluation prior to randomisation.

Outcome measures

Primary outcome

The trial's primary outcome is reading attainment, which we will measure using the New PiRA, a termly standardised reading assessment for pupils aged 5–11. The New PiRA's content is aligned to the UK National Curriculum for reading at Key Stages 1 and 2, giving it strong face validity as a measure of attainment. It also has broad conceptual coverage as its constituent strands – vocabulary, comprehension, summary, inference, prediction, structure, impact, and comparison – correspond to a number of different elements in the 'reading house' model of reading comprehension (Hogan *et al.*, 2011). For an overview of how marks are distributed across each strand, please refer to

Appendix B: Additional Material. Further information on the New PiRA is available here.

Endline data collection will take place in the summer term so that schools in the intervention arm have two full terms in which to complete delivery of Fluency Focus. We will therefore use the Year 5 summer version of the assessment. The New PiRA can be administered to whole classes at a time, with pupils completing the assessment either online or by filling out a paper test booklet. Previous EEF trials have encountered difficulties using the online assessment tool, so we will use the pen-and-paper version (Lewin *et al.*, 2024). We will ask Year 5 teachers in participating schools to conduct the assessments, with mop-up sessions to collect data from any pupils who missed the main assessment. The assessments should take up to 55 minutes, which is the maximum recommended in the manual for the New PiRA.

To minimise the burden on schools, trained assessors rather than teachers will score the assessments. The schools will return the unmarked tests by post for marking. To ensure the tests have been marked properly, we will deliver mandatory training to all assessors before they can begin. We will quality assure each assessor's marking by double marking their first ten assessments. If we find good inter-rater reliability (Cohen's kappa of at least 0.61), then we will clear the assessor to continue marking assessments. If the inter-reliability does not meet our minimum threshold, then we will repeat the exercise with another ten assessments.

We will then derive an age-standardised score for each pupil, which compares the pupil's raw score on the entire test to children of the same age in the New PiRA's nationally representative standardisation sample. The age-standardised score is calculated using a lookup table provided by the assessment's publisher, Hachette Learning. It starts from the pupil's raw score (between

0 and 45) and adjusts it according to the child's age in (completed) months at the time they completed the assessment. For the Year 5 summer term test, New PiRA age-standardised scores can range from 69 to 131. Pupils outside the age range intended for the assessment may not be assigned an age-standardised score, so we will also run a sensitivity analysis using the raw score with an additional covariate representing the child's age in months, as was done in the EEF's second trial of the PALS-UK intervention (Lewin *et al.*, 2024).

The New PiRA is only available on commercial license, so we are unable to supply a copy of its assessment materials in this protocol.

Secondary outcomes

Our first secondary outcome is **reading attainment at Key Stage 2 (RQ2)**, which we will measure using scores on the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum Reading Test. The test is a standardised national assessment conducted in May of Year 6. RQ2 will therefore gauge whether any improvement seen on reading attainment shortly after the intervention is sustained through the next academic year and translates into improved performance on milestone nationwide assessments of reading.

The test includes a reading booklet with three texts and a separate answer booklet containing questions about them. Pupils have a one hour to complete the assessments, which are then marked by trained external examiners. Each pupil is assigned a raw score from 0 to 50, which is converted to a scaled score between 80 and 120 to allow for comparison across cohorts. We plan to use the scaled score ('KS2_READSCORE') by linking to the NPD. We will also request access to the raw score ('KS2_READOUTCOME'), which we will use for a sensitivity analysis if >5% of pupils enrolled in the trial failed to achieve the lowest scalable score (in which case KS2_READSCORE will be missing).

Key Stage 2 results are typically scheduled for release on a provisional basis in the September following the assessment, with revised figures to be released in December of that year. For the present trial, that means September and December of 2028, sometime after the trial finishes in 2027. To ensure the timely publication of the rest of the trial's results, we will analyse and report the Key Stage 2 findings separately, based on the revised figures, when they are available.

The **remaining secondary outcomes will test the causal mechanisms by which Fluency Focus is expected to act** in the intervention's Logic Model.

Fluency Focus intends to achieve advances in reading attainment by improving **reading comprehension (RQ3)**, which we will measure using the Reading Comprehension Subtest of the WIAT-III UK. The test will be blindly administered face-to-face by a trained independent assessor from ACER UK (a sub-contractor which is part of EEF's Data Collection Panel) one pupil at a time. The assessors will ask the pupil to read an age-appropriate passage and then answer a series of literal and inferential comprehension questions about it. The assessor will read each question aloud and score the pupil's response, assigning 2 points (full credit), 1 point (partial credit), or 0 points (no credit). From those raw item-level scores, we will derive a weighted raw score that accounts for item difficulty, and then an overall standardised score for the subtest ranging from 40 to 160.

For cost reasons, it is not practical to carry out a one-on-one assessment with every pupil enrolled in the trial. We will therefore randomly select one Year 5 class in each participating school, and ten pupils within that class to complete the WIAT-III Reading Comprehension Subtest. The smaller sample size for this measure means that attrition is a greater risk to statistical power than it is for other outcomes. To mitigate that risk, we will also randomly select five pupils as a reserve sample if one or more of the selected pupils are unable to take part in the assessment.

The WIAT-III is only available on commercial license, so we are unable to supply a copy of its assessment materials in this protocol. Further information about the WIAT-III is available on the publisher's website.

In the shorter term, Fluency Focus sets out to achieve improvements in pupils' **reading fluency (RQ4)** and **prosody (RQ5)**. These two outcomes are linked, with prosody often being considered one of three key elements of reading fluency, alongside *accuracy* and *automaticity* (Education Endowment Fund, 2021). To assess them, we will ask teachers to collect one-minute recordings of pupils reading aloud a short grade-level passage, of approximately 150 words. Our assessors will then blindly score the recordings for WCPM and on the MDFS.

WCPM is a count of the number of words read minus the number of errors made, giving a measure of reading fluency focused mainly on accuracy and automaticity. The MDFS then provides a complementary scoring rubric for prosody (Rasinski, 2004). MDFS assessors score the passage on expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness, and pace, giving each a score from 1 to 4. The total MDFS score is then the sum of scores for each dimension. See Appendix Table 5**Error! Reference source not found.** for the full MDFS scoring table.

Lastly, Fluency Focus aims to instil **confidence in reading (RQ6)** and **enjoyment of reading (RQ7)** in participating pupils. We will collect both measures using bespoke survey Likert scale questions, created for this trial. To minimise the burden on both schools and pupils, we will keep the survey short (a maximum of eight questions). Pupils will complete the questionnaire on paper and teachers will return their responses alongside those from the New PiRA.

Baseline measures

In the summer term of 2026 (Year 4, for the participating pupils), we will collect baseline measures of reading attainment, reading fluency, and prosody. The processes for collecting and scoring these outcome measures will be as described above, with two exceptions: (i) the baseline measure of reading attainment will use the Year 4 summer term New PiRA (instead of the Year 5 assessment used at endline), and (ii) we will use a different age-appropriate passage for the one-minute recording on which we will score WCPM and the MDFS.

Schools that cannot complete the Year 4 summer term New PiRA by the end of the 2025/26 school year, for any reason, will be instructed to complete the Year 5 Autumn term New PiRA at the start of the Autumn 2026/27 term to enter the trial.

To constrain costs, we will not collect a baseline measure of reading comprehension. We will instead use our measure of Year 4 reading *attainment* as the baseline for our endline analysis of reading comprehension outcomes. To minimise burden on schools, there will be no baseline for

the measures of confidence in reading or enjoyment of reading, so the corresponding analyses are likely to be less well powered than those for the primary outcome and other secondaries.

Sample size

The target sample size for the trial at the point of randomisation is 120 schools, which we estimate to be sufficient to achieve a target **minimum detectable effect size (MDES) of 0.20 for the full trial sample, after attrition**. By convention, an MDES of 0.20 means a trial is sufficiently powered to detect all 'small' effect sizes. Previous EEF trials of interventions targeting reading fluency at Key Stage 2 have aimed to be similarly well-powered, such as the KS2 Reading Fluency Project (MDES = 0.21) and the first and second trials of PALS-UK (MDES = 0.23 and 0.21, respectively). We arrived at our target MDES and sample size after carrying out power calculations, the results which are summarised in Table 3. We performed all power calculations in R statistical software using the 'PowerUpR' package version 1.1.0 (Dong and Maynard, 2013).

Table 3: Sample size calculations

		Overall		FSM[2]	
		No attrition	With expected attrition[3]	No attrition	With expected attrition[3]
Minimum Detectable Effect Size (MDES)		0.20	0.20	0.22	0.22
Pre-test/ post-test correlations	level 1 (pupil)	0.70		0.70	
	level 2 (class)	-		-	
	level 3 (school)	-		-	
Intracluster correlations (ICCs)	level 2 (class)	0.05		0.05	
	level 3 (school)	0.10		0.10	
Alpha		0.05		0.05	
Power		0.8		0.8	
One-sided or two-sided?		Two-sided		Two-sided	
Average cluster size for level 1 (per level 2 unit – class)		27		6.48	
Average cluster size for level 2 (per level 3 unit – school)		1.52		1.52	
Number of schools	Intervention	60	58	60	58
	Control	60	58	60	58
	Total	120	116	120	116
Number of pupils	Intervention	2,462	2,202	591	528
	Control	2,462	2,202	591	528
	Total	4,924	4,404	1,182	1,056[4]

[2] Estimated pupil numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number
[3] Figures using an attrition multiplier are shown to the nearest whole number

[4] Rounded down to the nearest even number

Table 4: Expected attrition

	School level	Pupil level
Expected attrition (%)	3.5%	7.5%

The results of power calculations always rest on the assumptions made, and ours were as follows:

- Randomisation at the school level with an equal probability of being allocated to each arm (as described above);
- Mixed-effects analysis reflecting clustering of pupils within classes and classes within schools (again, as described above);
- A 70% correlation between baseline and endline reading attainment scores from the New PiRA at the pupil level – assumed at the protocol stage of the second PALS-UK trial, which also used the New PiRA (the observed correlation was slightly higher at 0.73, so our assumption here is conservative);
- No gain in precision from the use of covariates used to stratify the randomisation (a modestly conservative assumption);
- An intracluster correlation (ICC) of 0.10 at Level 3 (schools) and 0.05 at Level 2 (classes) – also assumed in the protocol for the second PALS-UK trial (with observed ICCs being very similar);
- An average of 27 pupils per class and 1.52 classes per school (drawn from 2024–25 DfE data published on gov.uk for state-funded primary schools in the target areas, using harmonic means, as recommended by the manual for PowerUpR); and
- Attrition rates of 3.5% at the school level and 7.5% at the pupil level (non-overlapping), which are conservative compared to the equivalent figures drawn from the recent KS2 Reading Fluency Project trial (2.36% and 4.28%, respectively).

We also ran power calculations for the **sub-sample of pupils eligible for FSM, for which we estimated the MDES to be 0.22**. That estimate assumes that approximately 24% of pupils in the participating Year 5 classes are FSM-eligible, as DfE statistics suggest was true in state-funded primary schools as a whole in the target areas. We used the same school-level attrition rate as for the full sample, which effectively assumes that no additional schools are lost to the analysis because of missing endline responses from *all* of their FSM-eligible pupils. While that assumption is difficult to verify, doubling the assumed school-level to attrition rate to 4.8% did not affect the headline MDES.

The present study is an efficacy trial, and as such is not expected to be fully powered to detect the impact of Fluency Focus for FSM-eligible pupils alone, or to robustly examine heterogeneity across any pupil sub-groups. All sub-group analyses should therefore be treated as exploratory.

Randomisation

We will randomise recruited schools into the trial's two arms with equal probability. Following EEF guidance, we will apply stratification to improve the precision of endline estimates. We will develop a single stratum variable using the following:

- school-level FSM and EAL percentage halves (split by the median), which we will calculate from school-level data published by Explore Education Statistics
- whether the school is single-form or multi-form entry
- which batch the school was randomised in (see below)

We will randomise using the R package 'randomizr' (Coppock *et al.*, 2023). One researcher will conduct the randomisation, but the code will be checked by another researcher to ensure it has been conducted correctly and can be reproduced. We will use unique school ID numbers such that both researchers will be blinded to the identity of schools to treatment and control groups for the randomisation. The randomisation code will be saved and made available in the statistical analysis plan (SAP) that will be published for this trial.

We will conduct the randomisation in two batches to ensure all schools have time to complete their baseline assessments. First, in July of 2026, we will randomise the schools completing their New PiRA in the Summer term, as originally planned. Second, a mop-up randomisation the following September with those schools who asked to complete their baseline assessment at the start of the Autumn term.

At the request of LSRS, we will carry out the first randomisation batch before the final week of the Summer term so that they can contact schools assigned to the intervention arm before the end of the school year. We expect to have received baseline New PiRA data for most school by this point, but a small number in the first batch have indicated they will complete their baseline too late for that. Following discussions with the EEF, we have agreed to include these schools in the first randomisation batch provided they have booked a courier to collect their completed New PiRA booklets before the date of randomisation. We will not, however, communicate the result of those schools' randomisation to them or to LSRS until we have actually received their baseline data.

Statistical analysis

Primary analysis

The primary analysis for RQ1 will estimate the effect of Fluency Focus on reading attainment, on an intent-to-treat (ITT) basis. ITT analyses consider the impact of offering the intervention to schools in the intervention arm, regardless of whether they engage with it. They typically provide the most conservative estimate of impact and are regarded as robust because they preserve the benefits of randomisation as far as possible.

The analysis will take the form of a linear mixed-effects model with random intercepts representing school and class IDs to reflect the clustering of pupils within them. The response variable will represent reading attainment (New PiRA age-standardised scores) for each pupil in

the summer term of Year 5. The main predictor of interest will represent whether the pupil's school was allocated to the intervention or control arm. Following EEF guidance, we will also include baseline covariates representing baseline reading attainment and the school-level stratum variable used to stratify the randomisation, as fixed effects.

Secondary analysis

To address RQs 2–7, we will carry out further ITT analyses on each of our secondary outcomes. In most cases, these analyses will mirror the structure of the primary analysis model but with different outcome and baseline variables. Because we will only collect data on reading comprehension from a subset of pupils in one class per school, the secondary analysis model for RQ3 will not include a random intercept for class ID. Our secondary analyses are summarised in Table 5, below.

Table 5: Overview of planned secondary analyses

RQ	Outcome	Baseline	Clustering
2	**Reading attainment at Key Stage 2** (KS2 assessment)	**Reading attainment** (New PiRA, Year 4 summer or Year 5 Autumn)	Class, School
3	**Reading comprehension** (WIAT-III reading comprehension)	**Reading attainment** (New PiRA, Year 4 summer or Year 5 Autumn)	School
4	**Reading fluency** (WCPM)	**Reading fluency** (WCPM)	Class, School
5	**Prosody** (MDFS)	**Prosody** (MDFS)	Class, School
6	**Confidence in reading**	No baseline	Class, School
7	**Enjoyment of reading**	No baseline	Class, School

Estimation of effect sizes

We will estimate the effect size of the intervention using an adaptation of Hedges' g (Hedges, 2007), as done in previous EEF efficacy trials involving measures of reading attainment, comprehension, and fluency (Dimova and Illie, 2021). Specifically,

$$g = \frac{(\hat{Y}_T - \hat{Y}_C)_{adjusted}}{\sqrt{\sigma_s^2 + \sigma_c^2 + \sigma_{error}^2}}$$

where $(\hat{Y}_T - \hat{Y}_C)_{adjusted}$ is the mean difference between treatment and control groups adjusted for the baseline covariate specified in the planned analysis above and $\sqrt{\sigma_s^2 + \sigma_c^2 + \sigma_{error}^2}$ is an estimate of the population standard deviation (school level σ_s^2, class level σ_c^2 and individual level σ_{error}^2 variance).

We will calculate confidence intervals for the effect size using

$$g - c_{\alpha/2}\gamma_g \leq \hat{g} \leq g + c_{\alpha/2}\gamma_g$$

where $\hat{g}$ is the estimated effect size, γ_g is the estimated variance, and $c_{\alpha/2}$ is the 100(1 – $\alpha/2$) percentage point of the standard normal distribution.

Sub-group analyses

We will carry out analyses to explore whether and how the impact of Fluency Focus varies, across four sub-groupings:

- Pupils who are eligible for FSM (using the NPD variable EVERFSM_6_P);
- Pupils who speak EAL (using the NPD variable KS2_EALGRP);
- Pupils with SEN (using the NPD variable KS2_SENF); and,
- Pupils with varying baseline reading abilities (using the baseline reading attainment collected on the Year 4 Summer New PiRA or Year 5 Autumn New PiRA).

The first of these is a core requirement for all EEF trials, while the latter three focus on sub-groups among whom we might expect to see heterogeneity in the impact of Fluency Focus. For each, we will follow EEF guidance, running both an interaction model and a sub-group model. These analyses should be treated as exploratory, as we do not expect the trial to be well-powered to detect sub-group effects.

Analysis in the presence of non-compliance

The intervention protocol for Fluency Focus sets out a minimum of 15 (of a total 20) sessions for the programme to be considered successfully delivered. This threshold will serve as our measure of compliance, and because it is possible for some pupils within a class to be absent when a session is delivered, we will apply it at the pupil level. Participating teachers in intervention arm schools will take a register of attendance at each session, which we can use to gauge whether the pupil is to be considered compliant (1) or not (0). Lastly, we will estimate the Complier Average Causal Effect (CACE) using a Two Stage Least Squares approach, treating our binary compliance measure as an endogenous indicator of treatment.

Additional analyses and robustness checks

We will carry out two **sensitivity analyses** to check the robustness of our findings on the planned analyses addressing RQ1 (reading attainment at endline) and RQ2 (reading attainment at Key Stage 2). For RQ1, we will replace the age-standardised scores for the New PiRA with raw scores, alongside a covariate representing the child's age in months. This check will account for any loss of sample if pupils are outside the age range to be assigned an age-standardised score. For RQ2, we will replace the scaled scores for Key Stage 2 reading attainment (KS2_READSCORE) with raw scores (KS2_READMRK) if we find more than 5% missingness on the scaled scores (which can happen if raw scores do not meet a minimum threshold).

Additionally, we will run a **dosage model** to explore whether the impact of Fluency Focus on a pupil's reading attainment depends on the number of sessions they attend. We will derive dosage from the registers of attendance used in the compliance analysis (described above), substituting the binary indicator representing allocation to treatment with a count of sessions attended.

Missing data analysis

We will explore attrition across both trial arms to ascertain the scale and pattern of missingness on endline outcomes. Where total missingness is less than 5%, we will conduct the planned analysis on a complete-case basis as the risk of bias is low. Where total missingness exceeds 5%, we will seek to ascertain whether outcomes are missing conditional on observable covariates and conduct appropriate sensitivity analyses and imputation, following EEF guidance.

Implementation and process evaluation (IPE) design

Research questions

The IPE will investigate four overarching research questions relating to the implementation of the intervention and the Theory of Change. The IPE research questions (IPERQs) support the overall objective of the study by examining, through a mixed-method approach, the fidelity, the teacher and pupil mechanisms and scale up of the intervention and are outlined below:

IPERQ1. To what extent was the programme delivered with fidelity, and how did it differ from BAU?

1.1 Fidelity, dosage and reach: Were the training and programme delivered as intended as set out in the intervention inputs in the Theories of Change for pupils and teachers, in terms of content, scale and volume; what were the barriers and facilitators for successful delivery (including support and resources from SLT); how did teachers and pupils engage with the programme?

1.2 Adaptation: What adaptations were made to facilitate delivery; why and when were these changes made; how were they implemented; were they feasible and acceptable?

1.3 Programme differentiation: Which elements of the programme were new to teachers and schools; how were they different or similar to business as usual; to what extent did control schools change practices during the trial?

IPERQ2. Are the causal pathways in the teacher Theory of Change supported?

2.1 Mechanisms (input > outputs): How did the Fluency Focus programme affect teachers':

- Skills and knowledge to deliver the programme as intended
- Understanding of fluency and comprehension constituents (via assessments)
- Opportunities to share successes and problem solving (via webinars and coaching sessions)

2.2 Outcomes (short-term outcomes): To what extent did this improve teachers' understanding of teaching and modelling fluency strategies, their motivation for teaching

fluency and ability to apply effective teaching strategies, and their skills in assessing results and giving feedback, as set out in the Theory of Change?

2.3 Outcomes (long-term outcomes): To what extent were the components and principles of the Fluency Focus approach adopted, embedded, sustained, cascaded and championed within the school reading curriculum; were there any unintended consequences?

IPERQ3. Are the causal pathways in the pupil Theory of Change supported?

3.1. Mechanisms (input > outputs): How did the Fluency Focus programme affect pupils':

- understanding of what constitutes fluency
- ability to apply phase marking,
- opportunities to practise fluent reading
- enjoyment of reading lessons;
- ability to, and practise of, monitoring and evaluating each other's fluency and expression?

3.2. Outcomes (short-term outcomes): To what extent did pupils' vocabulary, enjoyment of reading, fluency, comprehension and confidence in reading aloud improve; how consistently and confidently did they apply fluency and comprehension strategies; were there any unintended consequences? Did these vary by pupils' prior reading attainment and disadvantaged pupils.

3.3. Outcomes (long-term): Did pupils become more confident readers; to what extent did pupils' confidence in reading aloud improve as well as their reading comprehension and attainment? Was there any variation based on pupils' prior reading attainment and disadvantage (FSM-eligible pupils, pupils with SEN and EAL status).

3.4. Moderators: What are the facilitators and barriers to engagement with the programme for pupil sub-groups (pupils with prior low and high reading attainment) and disadvantaged pupils (FSM-eligible pupils, pupils with SEN and EAL status)?

IPERQ4. What would facilitate scaling up the programme?

4.1. Breadth of implementation: What will facilitate efficient and effective delivery of the programme to a larger number of schools; what barriers need to be addressed?

4.2. Sustained implementation: How can schools be encouraged and supported to continue delivering the programme once it has been implemented for the first year; what barriers need to be addressed?

Research methods

We will answer the IPERQs using a pragmatic and mixed method approach which combines administrative, survey and qualitative data, while minimising the requirements for teachers and schools. In summary:

- we will use management information to assess delivery of and engagement with the programme;

- we will conduct longitudinal surveys of teachers and senior leaders at baseline and endline to gain a broad picture of the context and experiences of implementation, and at a follow-up stage to assess future intentions;

- we will conduct eight longitudinal qualitative school case studies involving staff and some pupils to add depth of insight, as well as observations of teacher training and contact with the programme delivery team;

- we will conduct interviews with eight schools in the control arm to understand business-as-usual practices, their response to being in the control arm and whether they adapted any of their practices during the trial;

- we will interview representatives from the delivery team to understand their experiences of delivering the training and support to schools and implications for scale up.

Triangulating between different data sources will increase our ability to answer our IPERQs and will ensure we consider data from appropriate stakeholders in the process of answering them (see Table 6). It also enables us to draw on the strengths and perspectives of each method and afford greater clarity of results and better understanding of the links between the Theory of Change and empirical findings. Below we describe the data that will be used, how we will sample participants for these research activities, and how we will maintain diversity and inclusion to address the research questions among disadvantaged pupils, including those receiving FSM and with EAL status.

Investigation of subgroups

The IPERQs will examine how the intervention is delivered, the hypothesised mechanisms and its perceived impact on different pupil subgroups, including pupils with lower or higher prior reading attainment and those experiencing disadvantage, such as pupils with FSM, EAL or SEN status. Drawing on reading session observations and interviews with pupils and teachers, we will explore whether the intervention is delivered, received or experienced differently across these groups. We will examine the aspects of the intervention that may impact different subgroups including whether texts, instructions and teaching approaches could systematically advantage or disadvantage particular pupils, e.g., whether vocabulary demands affect EAL pupils or whether the pace of delivery allows sufficient consolidation for lower prior attainers. These factors will be discussed in interviews and added to the analysis framework.

Triangulating evidence from multiple sources will strengthen this analysis, including monitoring pupils' attendance, completion of activities and any variation in how pupils engage with the intervention. Subgroup considerations are embedded across the evaluation design, including the IPERQs, sampling, analysis and reporting. However, we recognise the limitations of subgroup analysis, particularly small sample sizes and the risk of overgeneralisation. Qualitative findings are also shaped by context, such as the classroom, teacher or school environment, meaning differences between subgroups may reflect contextual factors rather than subgroup characteristics alone. In addition, there may be considerable variation within subgroup categories in pupils' characteristics and experiences. As a result, we will report observed patterns but interpret findings cautiously.

Business as usual: We will discuss schools' usual approach to teaching of fluency, including teaching strategies; approaches, e.g., whole class, group and 1-2-1; and support for subgroups (pupils with FSM, SEN and EAL status) and then discuss how these differentiate from the

intervention strategies and approaches. We will triangulate data from baseline and endline teacher and SLT surveys, teacher and SLT interviews and interviews pupils and control schools.

Management information **Teacher and senior leadership team (SLT) attendance data*:*** *The delivery team will be asked to share data on attendance at the initial one full-day in-person training, a coaching call, a midpoint webinar, and a final, end-of-programme webinar, as well as data on engagement with optional drop-in support and support via email. This will tell us whether the intended volumes of teachers and SLT staff attend the training sessions and whether teachers and SLT staff attended the intended volume of training sessions.*

Delivery logs*:* *Teachers in treatment schools will be asked to keep weekly Fluency Focus delivery logs to record pupil attendance, compliance with the programme protocol and pupils' engagement for each session. We will work with LSRS to design an effective form (likely an Excel spreadsheet) which is as non-burdensome as possible for teachers but support the evaluation. Teachers will be asked to complete the attendance log weekly and submit to Verian at the end of the intervention delivery window. LSRS will include the delivery log as part of the training day, making clear the importance of the logs for the evaluation and demonstrate how to complete the log. We will also discuss ways for LSRS to monitor this and check in with and support teachers with completing the delivery logs as part of its ongoing provision of support. We will also send out reminders for schools to fill in attendance forms. This will give insight into the fidelity and dosage of programme delivery and whether pupils receive the intended number of sessions*.

Survey research: *We will design questions to explore the assumptions underpinning the teacher- and child-specific causal pathways in the Theory of Change. We will draw on our experience from the KS2 Reading Fluency Evaluation to develop the surveys. Survey questions will primarily be pre-coded.*

Teacher surveys

Baseline: We will survey teachers responsible for Year 5 during the intervention period in all trial schools. The survey will be delivered before randomisation (June 2026) and online. In cases where the Year 5 teacher is not in post at this time, the survey will be sent to a current Year 5 teacher to understand current school practices. The participant-level questions (related to teacher knowledge and confidence of assessing and teaching reading fluency) can be removed in reporting. Conducting the survey before randomisation is expected to both increase survey response rate and reduce the risk of randomisation influencing survey responses among control schools. The baseline survey will be used to:

- establish a full picture of school and teacher contextual factors;
- understand business as usual for teaching reading fluency in Year 5 and the extent to which fluency is incorporated into their current approach (this would include any structured interventions that may be running concurrently);
- assess baseline teacher knowledge and confidence in their ability to assess fluency and teach fluency strategies, including Fluency Focus strategies, such as modelled fluent, echo and phrased reading.

Endline**:** The same members of staff will be asked to complete an endline survey just after the intervention, which will cover the baseline topics again, e.g., teacher knowledge, skills and

confidence to assess change (or levels of continuity in the control arm). We will repeat questions about any additional fluency offering at the school and pupil level to be able to discuss validity of control arm and any supplementary support to intervention arm pupils. Teachers in the intervention arm will also be asked about their experience of the ongoing support and delivery, and the perceived impact on pupils. The survey will also collect data on staff time associated with programme delivery (to inform the cost evaluation). Teachers in the control arm will be asked about experience of being in the control arm and any changes to business as usual with regard to school reading culture and practices in that school year. In incidences of teacher turnover, we will seek to identify the most appropriate staff member to complete the survey and remove responses to teacher-level questions from reporting.

Follow-up: During the summer term 2027, we will conduct a follow-up survey of the same teachers from treatment schools to capture longer-term views of the programmes impacts, and to assess the extent to which they plan to use fluency-based approaches within their teaching in the future. Again, where staff changes have occurred, we will seek to identify the most appropriate member of staff to complete the follow-up survey.

SLT surveys

Baseline: the member of the SLT responsible for supporting Year 5 teachers with reading and/or literacy teaching in the academic year 2026-2027 in all trial schools will be asked to complete an online survey in the summer term of 2026. It will be designed to:

- understand motivations for signing up to the trial;
- learn about current practices, including: school approach to teaching reading, the perceived importance of fluency teaching, other reading interventions delivered in the school, staff CPD relating to teaching reading;
- understand how Fluency Focus would be promoted, resourced and supported in the school;
- assess confidence in their capacity to support Fluency Focus delivery.

If the member of the SLT is not in post at this time, we will ask a current member of the SLT who supports Year 5 teachers with reading and/or literacy teaching to complete the survey to understand current Year 5 practice.

Endline: At endline (just after the end of the intervention delivery period), senior leaders will be asked to complete a survey which will explore their perceptions of the programme and its implementation; the perceived impact of the programme on teachers, schools and pupils, and costs associated with the programme (intervention arm); or any changes to business as usual during the trial period (control arm).

***Follow-up*:** we will ask senior leaders in treatment schools for longer-term views on impact, how implementation could have been improved or facilitated, and whether they plan to maintain Fluency Focus approaches and introduce these in other year groups in the future. This will be during the summer term 2027.

Pupil reading survey

All pupils in the trial will be invited to complete a short reading survey at endline. The survey will ask up to four questions about pupil reading enjoyment and confidence and enable us to compare responses between treatment and control arms.

Qualitative research

Teacher training observations

Members of the evaluation team will attend the initial in-person training session, and the final 'celebration event'. The purpose of attending the initial training will be to further our understanding of Fluency Focus, to observe teachers' and SLT responses to it, to assess engagement with the training, and to initiate recruitment for IPE case study schools (see below).

Attending the final event will allow us to gauge lasting engagement with and feelings towards the programme, and to collect further anecdotal evidence of its implementation and impacts. A further purpose will be to assess the importance of *in-person* delivery versus other potential modes, to assess the implications for future scale-up.

School case studies

We will conduct longitudinal case studies with eight treatment schools, two in each of London, the South East, East Midlands, West Midlands or the East of England. This represents 14% of schools in the intervention arm and an equal split across the regions from which schools will be recruited. This volume of schools also aims to achieve a balance between sufficient level of breadth by region with an in-depth exploration by school within the given budget. Case studies will focus on between case analysis to compare differences and similarities in delivery of the intervention and any factors that may drive these differences and similarities. Schools will be sampled to represent a range of school sizes, urban/rural location, and proportion of pupils with SEN, FSM and EAL status. We will invite these eight schools to take part in the evaluation as a case study school informing them of the associated responsibilities, e.g., observations, facilitating interviews with teachers and pupils etc. In cases where schools decline to take part in the evaluation as a case study school, we will contact a school with similar characteristics until we are fully recruited.

As part of the case studies, we will conduct a 1-day school visit to each school. We will aim to stagger these visits across the intervention period to observe delivery of the Embed and Extend phases so that the observed lessons and the strategies taught differ across schools and focus on when strategies are more embedded. During each school visit we will:

- Observe one Fluency Focus lesson, to assess fidelity in how various session components are delivered, e.g., specific fluency teaching strategies, overall teacher engagement with the programme, and witness classroom management and pupils' engagement.
- Conduct interviews after observing the sessions with 4–5 pupils across a mix of characteristics. Selected pupils would be broadly representative of the pupil characteristics of their class including gender, SEN, FSM and EAL status. These would be short (20–30-minute) 1-2-1 interviews and conducted with parental consent (see below). These interviews will explore perceptions and experiences of the programme and how it has affected their enjoyment of, engagement with and confidence in reading, as well as views of their reading ability and attitudes to reading.

- Interview 1x Year 5 teacher who is delivering Fluency Focus sessions in a 60-minute interview to explore their experiences and views regarding training and support from the delivery team, how the programme was delivered, pupil engagement, and perceived impact on pupils, teachers and schools.
- Interview 1x SLT staff member who is responsible for the school literacy strategy and supporting Fluency Focus delivery in a 30-minute interview to explore wider contextual barriers and facilitators to programme delivery, how Fluency Focus contributes to their school's approach to teaching reading, and future plans for using fluency-based approaches within their wider reading curriculum.

For **observations**, the research team will use a framework, including a checklist and rating scale, to record the occurrence and frequency of specific categories, e.g., teacher interaction with pupils, pupil response and logistical challenges. This will help to simplify and standardise the data collection process and help to reduce observer bias. Detailed notes of behaviours will also be taken in real-time to capture a more descriptive account of the intervention. Directly after the observational session, researchers will voice-record their thoughts and expand on their observational notes on a password-encrypted digital device. We recognise several limitations of observations. What researchers notice, record and interpret may be influenced by their expectations, assumptions or the focus of the study, leading to selective attention or subjective interpretation of classroom events. Teachers and pupils may also alter their behaviour because they know they are being observed. In addition, observations can show what happens in practice, but not always explain the reasons behind it. Combining observations with interviews, surveys, attendance data and assessment data will therefore help provide a more complete picture.

The first case study site visit will be conducted by a pair of researchers following an initial joint training session. Both researchers will observe the same intervention and collect data simultaneously but independently of each other. Following the observation, the two researchers will compare and discuss their data, and explore differences and commonalities and seek to agree a standardised approach to subsequent data collection and analysis. The joint training session and practice observation will support consistent interpretation of observed behaviours across the team. We will also review inter-rater reliability, the level of agreement between observers, regularly to identify any bias or inconsistency and make adjustments where needed. The first visit will be scheduled at the start of fieldwork, with two weeks built in for the research team to review and reflect on the initial observation before making any necessary changes for later observations.

Verian will share parental consent forms with schools, for schools to distribute to parents to opt-in their child(ren) into the **1-2-1 pupil interviews**. Schools will collect parental consent forms and share consent information with Verian to keep a record of consent and purposively select pupils, ensuring that only pupils selected for interview have parental content. We will review pupil demographic data (collected as part of the school recruitment process) and identify and recruit pupils (for whom we have parental consent to interview) to represent the demographic profile of their class, i.e., gender, FSM and EAL status. We will also monitor recruitment and achieved sample across all case study schools during fieldwork and will adjust recruitment to ensure we interview a representative range of pupils from across the full sample. Our researchers will also

obtain assent from the pupil prior to starting the interview. Parental consent to be observed will be incorporated into the trial (opt-out) consent process prior to randomisation.

Staff and pupil interviews will be conducted independently to encourage participants to speak freely about their experiences and minimise any sources of influence. We will use semi-structured topic guides and use a set of prepared questions to guide the conversation while allowing researchers to adapt the interview based on participants' responses. We will develop our guides based on our experience of evaluating other fluency interventions in primary schools and use the first interviews with participants to pilot and adapt the guides if necessary. Researchers will reiterate in each interview that there are no right or wrong answers and reassure staff and pupils that what they say will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team. We note that we cannot rule out response bias among pupils, as a representative of the school will be in the room during the interview for safeguarding purposes.

Follow-up teacher and SLT in-depth interviews

Teachers and senior leaders from the eight case study schools will be interviewed again at a follow-up point, towards the end of the summer term 2027. These follow-up interviews will be conducted remotely and will explore any changes in school practices and plans in terms of cascading fluency-based approaches to teaching reading to other year groups and sustainability of using these approaches within the school reading curriculum. They will also be used for any final reflections on implementation and perceived impact of the programme.

Control school teacher interviews

We will recruit eight schools from the control arm with similar characteristics as the case study schools in terms of size, urban/rural location, and proportion of pupils with SEN, FSM and EAL status. Interviews will be online and will understand whole-class business-as-usual practices within schools. We will also explore their response to being placed in the control group and whether they made any changes to reading fluency and comprehension teaching practices during the trial. We will explore whether any strategies, which are similar to the Fluency Focus Project, are offered to control arm pupils and may impact the validity of the control arm.

Delivery team group discussions

We will conduct two 90-minute group discussions with the delivery team, London South Research School, who devised the Fluency Focus programme and is responsible for delivering the training and coordinating the intervention delivery. One group discussion will follow the midpoint webinar for school staff and the other at the end of programme delivery. Participants will be asked to feedback on how their input has been received by teachers, and their observations about barriers and facilitators to intervention delivery, uptake of fluency-based approaches to teaching reading, and how the programme could be scaled up. We will also explore what constitutes effective engagement from their perspective and whether this was achieved during programme delivery.

Analysis

Analysis of the survey data will be descriptive in nature, and we will report descriptive statistics at the pupil, teacher, or school level where appropriate.

Survey items will be mapped to the IPE research questions and Theory of Change constructs, with responses summarised using appropriate descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, means and distributional summaries) at pupil, teacher and school level.

Analysis of administrative data will include descriptive recording of attendance and comparisons to the maximum number of sessions (both for training sessions and for fluency sessions). This data will be used for the CACE analysis, and to report descriptively on intervention attendance (as an indication of engagement with the intervention). This will help provide context to qualitative findings relating to the fidelity of the intervention.

For qualitative data, we will use a framework analysis method. Framework analysis is a qualitative method that is suited for applied policy research (Huberman and Miles, 2002; Srivastava and Thompson, 2009). Framework analysis is flexible and permits a mixed deductive-inductive approach to analyse the results from interviews with multiple-stakeholders as we have here i.e. interviews with teachers, SLT staff and pupils and the observed classroom sessions. A deductive-inductive approach balances pre-defined themes with openness to new areas identified from the data. It is often used in education trials such as the predecessor Reading Fluency Trial conducted by Verian and others including *Learning Together* (Bonell et al., 2020) In this project, we will first construct an initial thematic framework around implementation dimensions (e.g., fidelity, reach, dosage and acceptability) and including casual mechanisms from the Theory of Change, and compare our data against this, noting any themes not captured by the initial framework. We will then add these themes and revisit our data to update the coding to this expanded framework.

Upon completion, we will identify features such as correspondence between thematic variation and sample criteria, as well as the apparent strength of findings against each question. We will use the case study structure of the fieldwork to assess whether certain practice among teachers and in schools appears linked to certain outcomes for pupils and look across cases to identify examples of best and poor practice to provide deeper illustrations of how to deliver well (and less well).

Throughout the analysis process, our researchers will meet regularly to explore participant responses, variations in these and common themes. The framework below is therefore an indicative framework that will act as a starting point for analysis, yet is flexible in its design and structure to adapt to new themes identified through the analysis. The procedure we will use for the analysis is as follows:

1. **Set up the analytic framework** based on the IPERQs and dimensions leaving space for new themes to be identified

2. **Prepare and organise data –** we will transcribe interviews using Microsoft AI transcription (asking for participant content for this) and clean these and observations notes, keeping each data source clearly labelled. We will treat surveys with closed questions as supporting quantitative summaries and not code in the same way.

3. **Code qualitative data using the framework** applying the framework across all datasets

4. **Create a framework matrix** – we will summarise data into the matrix separately by data source, e.g., teacher interview evidence, pupil interviews evidence, observation evidence

5. **Addition of data into the framework** – we will develop and expand the framework as appropriate, including considerations for subgroup analysis

6. **Identification of further patterns** – we will look at correspondence between thematic variation and sample criteria, and the apparent strength of findings against each IPERQ and the causal pathways

7. **Integrate across data sources (triangulation) –** we will compare data including convergence - do sources tell the same story, divergence - do sources tell different stories, and complementarity - do difference sources add different pieces to the story.

8. **Bring in survey data** to quantity patterns and support or challenge any qualitative findings

9. **Identification of good and poor practice**, which can enable case study descriptions by linking findings on good delivery to those on the experience of recipients in the same school, and vice versa

10. **Link to outcomes of trial –** we will map qualitative findings onto outcome patterns to support with conclusion writing

11. **Write up –** we will structure findings around the framework summarising patterns, drawing on multiple sources, e.g., teachers, pupils and observations, highlighting agreement or mismatch and using survey data where helpful and IPE/IE synthesis for the overall conclusions.

We are aware that qualitative research, particularly when using observational techniques, can be a potential source of (researcher) bias. The following steps will be taken in our data analysis process to ensure rigor and quality:

- The research team will proactively consider and discuss how their own beliefs, experiences and biases may affect data collection and analysis and how to reduce any impact on the quality. Discussions will take place prior to fieldwork, at analysis meetings and during QA of reporting outputs.

- Each qualitative interview will be transcribed, charted against the analysis framework and then discussed as a team to agree themes and standardise and strengthen the analytical process, seeking to minimise the risk of potential researcher bias. This will provide a trail that will demonstrate how the data has been interpreted, and is how we will address data interpretation bias. Within the charting framework, we will also record and include reference to researcher beliefs, experiences and biases and their possible influence on the research, which will be referred to within the final reporting.

- Throughout we will triangulate research methods and data sources (observational, qualitative interviews with teachers, SLT and pupils) to provide multiple lines of evidence for the efficacy of the intervention, thereby mitigating the impact of potential biases inherent in using a single method or data source. Observational and interview data will be integrated so that it can be analysed together with the same analysis framework. Survey data will be collected and analysed independently and will be integrated after interpretation. To minimise discrepancies and enhance the validity of our findings, we will identify the sources of any conflicting data (sampling, human bias, external conditions etc.) and then analyse and interpret any discrepancies using triangulation techniques. We will report discrepancies, explain possible reasons and discuss how discrepancies shape the overall conclusions.

Table 6: IPE methods overview

* indicates primary source

IPE dimension	IPERQ addressed	Research methods	Data collection methods	Sample size and sampling criteria	Data analysis methods
Fidelity	IPERQ 1.1	Observations*	Structured observation (teacher training)	Treatment Year 5 teachers and SLT	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.1	Administrative data*	Training attendance data	Treatment Year 5 teachers and SLT	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.1	Administrative data*	Teacher delivery logs (weekly pro-forma)	Treatment Year 5 teachers	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.1	Administrative data*	Coaching session, webinars, and ongoing support data	Treatment Year 5 teachers and SLT	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.1	Observations*	Structured observation (session deliver)	8 treatment schools	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.1	Interviews*	Semi-structured Teacher and SLT interviews (school visit)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.1	Interviews*	Mid-intervention delivery team group discussion (online)	3–4 delivery team members	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach

	IPERQ 1.1	Surveys	Endline teacher and SLT surveys (online)	All Year 5 teachers; a senior leader from all schools	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.1	Surveys	Follow-up teacher and SLT surveys (online)	Treatment Year 5 teachers and SLT	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.1	Interviews	Follow-up teacher and SLT interviews (online)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.1	Interviews	Post-intervention delivery team group discussion (online)	3–4 delivery team members	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
Adaptation	IPERQ 1.2	Observations	Structured observation (teacher training)	Treatment Year 5 teachers and SLT	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.2	Administrative data	Teacher delivery logs (weekly pro-forma)	Treatment Year 5 teachers	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.2	Administrative data	Coaching session, webinars, and ongoing support data	Treatment Year 5 teachers and SLT	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.2	Observations*	Structured observation (session delivery)	8 treatment schools	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.2, 4.1, 4.2	Interviews*	Semi-structured Teacher and SLT interviews (school visit)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach

	IPERQ 1.2	Interviews*	Delivery team group discussion (online)	3–4 delivery team members	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.2	Surveys*	Endline teacher and SLT surveys (online)	All Year 5 teachers; a senior leader from all schools	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.2, 4.1, 4.2	Surveys	Follow-up teacher and SLT surveys (online)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.2, 4.1, 4.2	Interviews*	Follow-up teacher and SLT interviews (online)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.2, 4.1, 4.2	Interviews	Delivery team group discussion (online)	3–4 delivery team members	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
Dosage	IPERQ 1.1, 4.1, 4.2	Observations	Structured observation (teacher training)	Treatment Year 5 teachers and SLT	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.1	Administrative data*	Training attendance data	Treatment Year 5 teachers and SLT	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.1	Administrative data*	Teacher delivery logs (weekly pro-forma)	Treatment Year 5 teachers	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.1	Administrative data	Coaching session, webinars, and ongoing support data	Treatment Year 5 teachers and SLT	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.1	Observations	Structured observations	8 treatment schools	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach

	IPERQ 1.1, 4.1, 4.2	Interviews	Semi-structured Teacher and SLT interviews (school visit)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.1	Interviews	Delivery team group discussion (online)	3–4 delivery team members	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.1	Surveys	Endline teacher and SLT surveys (online)	All Year 5 teachers; a senior leader from all schools	Descriptive analysis
	PERQ 1.1	Surveys	Follow-up teacher and SLT surveys (online)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.1, 4.1, 4.2	Interviews	Follow-up teacher and SLT interviews (online)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.1, 4.1, 4.2	Interviews	Delivery team group discussion (online)	3–4 delivery team members	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
Quality	IPERQ 1.1, 1.2	Observations*	Structured observation (teacher training)	Treatment Year 5 teachers and SLT	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.1	Administrative data	Training attendance data	Treatment Year 5 teachers and SLT	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.1, 4.1, 4.2	Interviews*	Semi-structured Teacher and SLT interviews (school visit)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.1	Surveys	Endline teacher and SLT surveys (online)	All Year 5 teachers; a senior leader from all schools	Descriptive analysis

	IPERQ 1.1, 4.1, 4.2	Surveys	Follow-up teacher and SLT surveys (online)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.1, 4.1, 4.2	Interviews	Follow-up teacher and SLT interviews (online)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.1, 4.1, 4.2	Interviews	Delivery team group discussion (online)	3–4 delivery team members	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
Responsiveness	IPERQ 1.1	Observations	Structured observation (teacher training)	Treatment Year 5 teachers and SLT	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.1	Administrative data	Coaching session, webinars, and ongoing support data	Treatment Year 5 teachers and SLT	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.1	Observations*	Structured observation (session delivery)	8 treatment schools	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.1	Interviews*	Semi-structured Teacher and SLT interviews (school visit)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.1	Interviews*	Pupil interviews (school visit)	32–40 treatment pupils	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 1.1	Interviews	Delivery team group discussion (online)	3–4 delivery team members	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach

	IPERQ 1.1	Surveys*	Endline teacher and SLT surveys (online)	All Year 5 teachers; a senior leader from all schools	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.1	Surveys	Follow-up teacher and SLT surveys (online)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 1.1	Interviews	Follow-up teacher and SLT interviews (online)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
Differentiation	IPERQ1.3	Surveys*	Online surveys (baseline)	All Year 5 teachers (to be); a senior leader from all schools	Descriptive analysis
		Interviews*	Semi-structured Teacher and SLT interviews (school visit)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
		Surveys*	Endline teacher and SLT surveys (online)	All Year 5 teachers; a senior leader from all schools	Descriptive analysis
		Surveys	Follow-up teacher and SLT surveys (online)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Descriptive analysis
		Interviews	Follow-up teacher and SLT interviews (online)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
		Interviews	Control school teacher interviews (online)	8 control teachers	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
Monitoring of the control group	IPERQ 1.3	Surveys	Online surveys (baseline)	All Year 5 teachers (to be); a senior leader from all schools	Descriptive analysis

		Surveys*	Endline teacher and SLT surveys (online)	All Year 5 teachers; a senior leader from all schools	Descriptive analysis
		Interviews*	Control school teacher interviews (online)	8 control teachers	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
Mediators	IPERQ 2.1, 2.2	Surveys	Online surveys (baseline)	All Year 5 teachers (to be); a senior leader from all schools	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ2.1	Observations	Structured observation (teacher training)	Treatment Year 5 teachers and SLT	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 2.1, 2.2, 3.1	Interviews*	Semi-structured Teacher and SLT interviews (school visit)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 3.1	Interviews	Pupil interviews (school visit)	32–40 treatment pupils	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 2.1, 2.2, 3.1	Surveys	Endline teacher and SLT surveys (online)	All Year 5 teachers; a senior leader from all schools	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 2.1, 2.2, 3.1	Surveys	Follow-up teacher and SLT surveys (online)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 2.1, 2.2, 3.1	Interviews	Follow-up teacher and SLT interviews (online)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
Perceived impact	IPERQ 2.3, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4	Interviews*	Semi-structured Teacher and SLT interviews (school visit)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach

	IPERQ 3.2, 3.3, 3.4	Interviews*	Pupil interviews (school visit)	32–40 treatment pupils	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 2.3, 3.2, 3.3	Surveys*	Endline teacher and SLT surveys (online)	All Year 5 teachers; a senior leader from all schools	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 2.3, 3.2, 3.3	Surveys	Follow-up teacher and SLT surveys (online)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 2.3, 3.2, 3.3	Interviews	Follow-up teacher and SLT interviews (online)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 3.2, 3.3	Surveys*	Endline pupil reading survey	All pupils	Descriptive analysis
Context/Moderators	IPERQ 3.4, 4.1, 4.2	Interviews*	Semi-structured Teacher and SLT interviews (school visit)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 3.4	Interviews*	Pupil interviews (school visit)	32–40 treatment pupils	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach
	IPERQ 3.4	Surveys*	Endline teacher and SLT surveys (online)	All Year 5 teachers; a senior leader from all schools	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 3.4, 4.1, 4.2	Surveys	Follow-up teacher and SLT surveys (online)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Descriptive analysis
	IPERQ 3.4, 4.1, 4.2	Interviews	Follow-up teacher and SLT interviews (online)	8 treatment teachers 8 treatment SLT staff	Framework analysis using a deductive-inductive approach

	IPERQ 3.4	Surveys	Endline pupil reading survey	All pupils	Descriptive analysis

Cost evaluation design

Following EEF guidelines, the evaluation team will provide a cost-per-pupil-per-school-year of this intervention. This covers the full cost of delivering the intervention in schools. We will report the total cost per school for the intervention as implemented for three consecutive years, and the cost per-pupil-per-school-year. The total cost per school will be divided by the number of pupils per school-year expected to benefit from the intervention – i.e., those across in Treatment arm who were eligible to receive the intervention – to create the pupil-per-school-year estimate of cost.

Data about the costs of implementation will be systematically identified in the IPE (through observations, teacher baseline and endline surveys, and teacher and SLT interviews) and through direct discussion with the LSRS delivery team. Following the 2023 EEF cost evaluation guidance (Education Endowment Foundation, 2023), we will exclude the costs associated exclusively with participating in this trial (e.g., personnel time reporting to Verian about attendance or completing questionnaires) and will evaluate costs of the programme as implemented during the trial.

Table 7 provides an overview of the items Verian and the LSRS expect to be included in the cost evaluation, although this list may not be comprehensive and will be updated following the interviews with schools.

As there may be heterogeneity in costs across schools depending on their existing processes, we will explore the possibility of breaking down different cost models for schools starting from different business-as-usual conditions. This will be based on an assessment of variation in the cost data received from observations, baseline and endline surveys, staff interviews, interviews with LSRS, and information gathered during teacher interviews.

For pre-requisites and start-up costs we will account for the value-of-money over time by using 3.5% as the discount rate, following the EEF cost evaluation guidance. We will report costs incurred across the 2026–27 academic year, using 2026 as the base year. We will apply the GDP Price Deflator Index rate to account for inflation as we report cost-per-pupil over three years.

We will:

- Gather cost data for each year of implementation of the programme.
- Deflate nominal cost in each year to the value in Base Year (2026) using the GDP price deflator by dividing the costs by the price index.[5]

$$Cost_{Base\ Year} = \frac{Cost_{Base\ Year}}{GDP\ Deflator_{Year\ i}/GDP\ Deflator_{Base\ Year}}$$

- Take the present value of this cost using a 3.5% discount rate by diving each cost.

$$Present\ Value_{Base\ Year} = \frac{Cost_{Base\ Year\ (incurred\ in\ Year\ i)}}{(1+0.035)^{Year\ i-Base\ Year}}$$

[5] The price index is constructed by dividing the value of the GDP price deflator in the year the cost is incurred by the value of the GDP price deflator in the Base Year

- Inflate this cost forward to the Analysis Year (2027) using the GDP price deflator by multiplying the costs by the price index.[6]

$$Cost_{Analysis\ Year} = Present\ Value \frac{GDP\ Deflator_{Analysis\ Year}}{GDP\ Deflator_{Base\ Year}}$$

[6] The price index is constructed by dividing the value of the GDP price deflator in the Analysis Year by the value of the GDP price deflator in the Base Year.

Table 7: Overview of cost items

Category	Item	Data Source(s)	Pre-requisite	Start-up costs	Recurring costs
Personnel for preparation and delivery	SLT time for project setup	SLT Interviews; SLT surveys		x	
	SLT time for supporting delivery	SLT Interviews; SLT surveys			x
	Teacher time for preparing for session delivery	Teacher Interviews; Teacher endline survey			x
Personnel for training	Personnel cost (e.g. cost of cover, time cost of staff) of attending training sessions	Teacher Interviews; LSRS		x	
Programme costs	Fluency Focus Programme costs	LSRS		x	
Facilities, equipment and materials	Cost of photocopies of programme materials and other related expenses	Teacher Interviews			x

Ethics and registration

Trial registration

The trial was preregistered with the Open Science Framework (OSF) on 27/08/2026 and the Trial Protocol will be uploaded once it is published on the EEF website. The OSF registration of the project, and the Trial Protocol as uploaded, can be found here: https://osf.io/nd7jz/overview.

Research ethics

Verian is the independent evaluator for this research, and as such is responsible for securing ethical approval. During the project planning and design phases, we followed Verian's internal research ethics review process to ensure the proposed project approach met ethical standards and represented a balanced and responsible approach to achieve the aims of this evaluation.

Under this process three (Senior) Directors with extensive research experience with young people and schools, and at least one with a specific focus on data governance, jointly reviewed the project proposal and recruitment approach and requested amends prior to signing the project off. The members of the panel were all external to the project team and to Verian's Evaluation Practice, and their only role on this project was to ensure it meets the organisation's high ethical standards.

The Verian ethics panel reviewed the trial design and materials in May 2026. Ethical approval for the full Trial Protocol was sought by Verian. Ethics clearance and input was granted by Verian's internal Research Ethics Committee on 26/08/2026 (reference: 26/B001/02).

Participant consent

This project relies on schools to actively consent and opt into participating in the trial. During the recruitment process, led by LSRS, schools receive a *School Information Sheet* which details the purpose of the study, what it would require, and any further information that may help schools decide if they wish to partake. If they do, they receive a more detailed *Memorandum of Understanding* to sign which sets out clearly what the project will involve, what the roles and responsibilities are, how data is protected and used, etc. If the school signs the *Memorandum of Understanding*, they are then asked to sign a Data Sharing Agreement with Verian to ensure schools understand the data governance implications of participating in the research.

Each school that has signed up for the project is then asked to disseminate the *Parent Information Sheet and Withdrawal Form,* which is designed to inform parents of the evaluation that will be happening in their school and offers parents the opportunity to withdraw their child(ren) from participating in the study. This document also contains links to the LSRS and Verian *Privacy Notices* for this project, which detail how data will be used and kept secure. Parents can withdraw their child(ren) from the evaluation through completion of the *Withdrawal Form* or by contacting Verian.

The Impact Evaluation relies partially on routinely collected school data (e.g., demographic details for pupils, KS2 SATs) and partially on project-specific data collection. The primary data collection methods for the IE are the baseline and endlines assessment, administered to pupils

by their teachers (New PiRA and reading recordings) and by independent assessors from ACER UK (WIAT-III). As this independent assessment takes place in partnership with the school, on school property and during school hours, and with school consent, no parental opt-in consent is required. However, the assessment will not be conducted with any pupils who have been withdrawn from the evaluation by their parents.

Verian will also conduct surveys among school staff, as well as observations of Fluency Focus session and interviews with school staff and pupils. In each of these instances, potential interviewees will be contacted by their school – with schools contacting parents on behalf of their children – to invite them to participate. At this stage, the potential participants can access information about the research activity(ies) they have been invited to partake in, as well as the *Privacy Notice* governing the activity(ies). For data provided under these activities, we will rely on participant consent as the basis for collecting and using personal data (parental consent, and pupil assent). Participants who decline to participate will not be involved in these specific research activities. If a participant does not complete the survey, or asks us to end an interview prematurely and asks us not to use their data, that participant's data will be deleted and will not be used.

A responsible adult employed by the school (most likely an administrative member of school staff) will be nearby during interviews with pupils, as well as during the independent endline assessments. This adult will independently confirm the pupil is happy to proceed with the interview/assessment (i.e. if they assent) prior to it being administered. Verian researchers will adhere to our internal responsible research policy when conducting interviews with pupils. If Verian receive any safeguarding disclosures from young people or observe any safeguarding issues during the research, we will report these to the school for follow-up.

Data protection

Verian (trading as Verian Group UK Ltd.) will serve as data controller for data used for the Project's evaluation. For information about the roles of other parties in relation to data for this project, and detail about how Verian will process data, please refer to the project Privacy Notices. The Privacy Notice relating to data shared by schools can be found here.

Verian is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office for all our research and other activities, holding ISO27001 accreditation which certifies the legal, physical, and technical controls involved in our information risk management process. We also hold the Cyber Essentials Plus Certificate, abide by the Data Protection Act 2018, the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025, and we embed data protection by design in all our work. We have a GDPR champion and Quality and Information Security team who consult on all data privacy issues.

Each variable has a clear reason as to why we need this data, and why it is important for the evaluation. Verian has conducted a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) to ensure this is the case.

Data protection laws require us to meet certain conditions before we are allowed to use data in the manner described in the project privacy notices, including having a lawful basis for the processing.

For all information collected via schools (and from schools via the National Pupil Database) about pupils and school staff, Verian is relying on the lawful basis of:

> LEGITIMATE INTERESTS: Our lawful basis for processing personal data is legitimate interests (as per Article 6 (1) (f) of the UK GDPR) and we have considered that participants' interests and fundamental rights do not override those legitimate interests. It is necessary in Verian's 'legitimate interests' to process the personal data identified in the privacy notice in order to deliver a meaningful randomised controlled trial (RCT) that has been commissioned by the EEF. It also supports equity of educational outcomes, in the public interest, by allowing for the recruitment of representative participants for supplementary primary research. The research project fulfils Verian's core business aims including undertaking research, evaluation and information activities in sectors that will deliver social impact.

For the processing of and any data collected via observations, surveys, and/or interviews, Verian is relying on the lawful basis of:

> CONSENT: As per Article 6 (1) (a) of the UK GDPR, personal data will be processed only if an appropriate signatory consents to such processing in accordance with the terms set out in the project's Memorandum of Understanding.

We take reasonable steps to protect personal information and follow procedures designed to minimise unauthorised access, alteration, loss or disclosure of personal information. Data will be accessed by a limited number of researchers and advisors in Verian's team working on this project. Taking into account the technological developments, the costs of implementation and the nature, scope, context and purposes of processing as well as the risk of varying likelihood and severity for the rights and freedoms of natural persons, we implement appropriate technical and organisational measures to ensure a level of security appropriate to the risk of processing.

We ensure that those who have permanent or regular access to personal data, or that are involved in the processing of personal data, are trained and informed of their rights and responsibilities when processing personal data. We provide such access on a need-to-know basis, and have measures in place which are designed to remove that access once it is no longer required.

London South Research School (the delivery team) and Verian (the evaluation team) may deal with and share personal data in accordance with a data sharing agreement between the two organisations. The agreement sets out the purposes for which we may process and share personal data and our agreement to cooperate to protect personal data and deal with any requests participants may have.

Finally, following the completion of the project, the impact evaluation data outcome measure data shared with us as part of this project will be provided to the EEF to be stored in their data archive in an anonymised form. The EEF will then become data controller for this data.

Personnel

LSRS:

- David Windle –Deputy Headteacher of Charles Dickens and Director of Research School.
- Nicola Jacobs –Deputy Headteacher of Charles Dickens and specialist literacy ELE.
- Kate McCole – Assistant director of LSRS, project manager.
- Tom Young – Head of branding and design at the Charter Schools Educational Trust.
- Victoria Begley – Assistant headteacher at Dulwich Hamlet Primary School and Deputy Director of the LSRS.
- Rebecca Huggins – Yr5 lead and literacy ELE, Charles Dickens Primary School
- Stella Dunn – Yr5 teacher and literacy ELE, Charles Dickens Primary School

Verian:

- Prof. Natalie Gold (Head of Trials, Principal Investigator)
- Dr James Thom (Senior Director, Quantitative Analysis)
- Rowan Foster (Senior Director, Qualitative Analysis)
- Pieter Cornel (Director, Delivery)
- Penny Stothard (Research Manager, IPE)
- Rupert Riddle (Research Manager, IE & IPE)
- Yasmine Yared, (Research Executive, IPE)

Verian is receiving support from:

- Prof. Kate Cain (Professor of Language and Literacy, Lancaster University)
- Dr Janet Vousden (Senior Lecturer in Developmental Psychology, Nottingham Trent University)

Risks

Table 8: Risks and Mitigations

Risk Description and Impact	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigations
Not enough schools are recruited, reducing power	5	2	We will work with EEF and the delivery team to ensure the intervention is framed positively for schools and that the evaluation imposes a limited burden. We will offer incentives of £500 per control school and work with the delivery team to offer control schools priority for the intervention in subsequent years, if possible.
Data loss during data collection	4	2	We will pre-pay for couriers to deliver and collect paper-based data (New PiRA and pupil questionnaires) directly from schools. We will collect other data digitally (teacher surveys and pupil recordings) and have tried-and-tested processes that minimise teacher burden and risk of data loss.
Attrition or low response rates for data collection (outcome measures, and interviews)	5	3	We will minimise the data collection burden on schools by not requiring teachers to mark the assessments. Schools have an incentive to return New PiRA data, since they will receive individual pupil reports. We will escalate to the EEF with urgency if schools do not return data, to allow for rapid response (e.g. targeted conversations with non-compliant schools). We are also able to extend the endline data collection period to cover the summer term if allowing schools more time will encourage more to complete the endline measures. The qualitative research will be recruited from the case study schools, where we will have a named contact who can assist in setting up interviews.
Refusal to cooperate in data collection/ attrition of control schools. introducing bias	5	3	Schools will be asked to commit to returning data in a Memorandum of Understanding, and we will structure the £500 incentive to control schools to incentivise completion of data collection activities (at least £350 paid at endline). We will monitor data collection as for all schools (above).
Control schools adopt elements of the intervention (contamination)	3	2	We will ask the delivery team to check with schools being recruited if they have any familiarity with teaching fluency strategies and modelling, and to instruct control schools not to use the Fluency Focus approach. We will assess usual practice, any changes to usual practice during the trial and the use of strategies similar to the Fluency Focus Project in the IPE via interviews with eight control schools and the baseline and endline surveys with teachers and SLT in control schools.
Assessments graded inconsistently	2	3	We will use independent assessors to mark the outcome measures; we will train them, including checking for interrater reliability at the start and only proceeding to mark the full sample once we are satisfied that it is good (standardly considered to be a Cohen's kappa of 0.61 or above).

Interference from other EEF-funded trials on reading	4	1	We will ask the delivery team to exclude schools that are participating in other EEF trials of reading interventions.

Timeline

Table 9: Timeline

Dates	Activity	Responsible/ leading
February 23rd–May 31st 2026	Schools sign up to the evaluation	LSRS
May–June 2026	Schools sign MOU Schools identify SLT staff and Year 5 Teachers	LSRS
May–June 2026	Schools sign data sharing agreement Schools send the Parent Information Sheet and Withdrawal Form to the parents School shares pupil data with Verian	Verian
June–July 2026	Schools complete baseline assessments and share data with Verian (New PiRA, MDFS) Year 5 Teachers (to-be) and SLT staff complete baseline survey	Verian
July 2026	Verian randomly allocates schools to treatment and control arms, and informs schools of their allocation	Verian
September 2026	[Treatment schools only] Year 5 Teachers and SLT staff attend 1-day training session	LSRS
September 2026–March 2027	[Treatment schools only] Schools deliver Fluency Focus programme in schools	LSRS
October 2026 – February 2027	Purposively select and recruit case study treatment schools and conduct case study school visits to observe Fluency Focus session and interview Year 5 teachers, SLT and 4–5 pupils (with parental consent to be interviewed).	Verian
November 2026	Teachers complete ‘Coaching conversation’ with LSRS	LSRS
December 2026	SLT conducts ‘Lesson observation 1’	LSRS
January 2027	Schools attend ‘mid-point webinar’	LSRS
February 2027	Conduct discussion group with delivery team	Verian
February 2027	SLT conducts ‘lesson observation 2’	LSRS
March 2027	Schools attend ‘online celebration event’	LSRS

April–May 2027	Year 5 Teachers and SLT staff complete endline survey	Verian
June–July 2027	Conduct follow-up interviews with treatment schools Year 5 teacher, SLT and delivery team and interviews with control schools Year 5 Teachers and SLT staff complete follow-up survey Schools complete endline assessments and share data with Verian (New PiRA, MDFS, pupil reading survey) Assessors visit schools to conduct endline assessment (WIAT-III)	Verian
November 2027	Submission of Draft Report	Verian
May 2028	Submission of Final Report NPD Application Submitted	Verian
November 2028	Submission of draft addendum report	Verian
March 2029	Submission of final addendum report Completion of data archiving	Verian

References

Bilton, C. and Duff, A. (2021) *Improving literacy in Key Stage 2*. London: Education Endowment Foundation. Available at: https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/eef-guidance-reports/literacy-ks2/EEF-Improving-literacy-in-key-stage-2-report-Second-edition.pdf (Accessed: 23 March 2026).

Breadmore, H.L. *et al.* (2019) *Literacy Development: Evidence Review*. London: Education Endowment Foundation. Available at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/evidence-reviews/literacy-development (Accessed: 23 March 2026).

Cain, K. and Oakhill, J. (2006) 'Profiles of children with specific reading comprehension difficulties', 76(4). Available at: https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1348/000709905X67610.

Coppock, A. *et al.* (2023) *Package 'randomizr'*, *CRAN*. Available at: Available at: https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/randomizr/randomizr.pdf (Accessed: 15 December 2023).

Department for Education (2023) *The Reading Framework*. London: Department for Education. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/664f600c05e5fe28788fc437/The_reading_framework_.pdf.

Dimova, S. and Illie, S. (2021) 'Peer Assisted Learning Strategies UK: Statistical Analysis Plan.' Available at: PALS_SAP_update_2021.pdf (d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net) (Accessed: 15 December 2023).

Dong, N. and Maynard, R. (2013) '*PowerUp!* : A Tool for Calculating Minimum Detectable Effect Sizes and Minimum Required Sample Sizes for Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Design Studies', *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 6(1), pp. 24–67. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/19345747.2012.673143.

Education Endowment Foundation (2022) *Wechsler Individual Achievement Test – Third UK Edition for Teachers*, *Attainment Measures database*. Available at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/measures-database/wechsler-individual-achievement-test-third-uk-edition-for-teachers (Accessed: 24 March 2026).

Education Endowment Foundation (2023) *Evaluation design*, *Education Endowment Foundation [website]*. Available at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/evaluation/evaluation-guidance-and-resources/evaluation-design (Accessed: 23 March 2026).

Education Endowment Fund (2021) *Improving Literacy in Key Stage 2*, *EEF*. Available at: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/literacy-ks2 (Accessed: 19 January 2026).

Hedges, L. (2007) 'Effect sizes in cluster-randomized designs', *Journal of Educational and Behavourial Sciences*, 34(4), pp. 341–370. Available at: https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3102/1076998606298043.

Hogan, T.P. *et al.* (2011) 'Increasing Higher Level Language Skills to Improve Reading Comprehension', *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 44(3). Available at: https://doi.org/10.17161/foec.v44i3.6688.

Huberman, A. and Miles, M. (2002) *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*. 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States of America: SAGE Publications, Inc. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412986274.

Kintsch, W. and Rawson, K.A. (2007) 'Comprehension', *The Science of Reading: A Handbook*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 209–226.

Lewin, C. *et al.* (2024) 'Peer Assisted Learning Strategies – UK (PALS-UK): A whole-class reading approach - Second Trial'. Available at: https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/projects/PALS_report_final.pdf?v=1774435175.

Perfetti, C.A. (1988) 'Verbal efficiency in reading ability', *Reading research: Advances in theory and practice*. Academic Press, pp. 109–143.

Rasinski, T. (2004) 'Assessing reading fluency', *Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL)*.

Srivastava, A. and Thompson (2009) 'Framework Analysis: A Qualitative Methodology for Applied Policy Research', *Journal of Administration & Governance*, 4(2), pp. 72–79.

Verdugo, P. *et al.* (2025) *Fluency focus pilot - Evaluation report*. London: Education Endowment Foundation. Available at: https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/projects/fluency_focus_pilot_evaluation.pdf?v=1772139472 (Accessed: 23 March 2026).

Wechsler, D. (2018) *Wechsler Individual Achievement Test – Third UK Edition for Teachers (WIAT-IIIUK-T): Examiner's Manual*. London: Pearson Assessment.

Appendix A: Changes since the previous EEF evaluation

Appendix Table 1: Changes since the previous evaluation

		Pilot to efficacy stage
Intervention	Intervention content	The three comprehension questions at the end of each lesson have been removed and woven into class discussion throughout the lessons. Visuals have been added to the unfamiliar vocabulary section of each lesson to support understanding.
	Delivery model	The number of coaching sessions for teachers and SLT has been reduced from two to one, as the second coaching session proved redundant in the Pilot trial.
	Intervention duration	
Evaluation	Eligibility criteria	To be eligible during the pilot, schools had to be mainstream, state-funded primary schools within South London or the South-East region. This evaluation is open to mainstream, state-funded primary schools in London, the South-East of England, East Midlands, West Midlands, or the East of England. We further exclude schools with mixed Year 5 and 6 classes, any schools who are already delivering Fluency Focus or have received training on it within the last three years, and all schools who are taking part in similar EEF studies that overlap with this trial (PALS-UK, Power of Reading) or who are part of EEF's Evidence Into Action partnerships in Dudley, Enfield, Havering or Worcestershire.
	Level of randomisation	Not applicable to pilots.
	Outcomes and baseline	Not applicable to pilots.
	Control condition	Not applicable to pilots.

Appendix B: Additional Material

The deliver team (LSRS) developed contextual and causal assumptions that were used to develop the Fluency Focus Theory of Change.

Appendix Table 2: Contextual assumptions log

Contextual Assumption	Assumption Strength[7]	Assumption Risk[8]
All practitioners attend the whole training session before the intervention starts	Amber/Green	Red
Before the training teachers have limited knowledge about how to teach the range of fluency strategies effectively	Green	Green
Teachers will be motivated to deliver the approach	Green	Amber/Green
Training prepares teachers to deliver lessons effectively	Green	Red
Resources are high quality and sufficient to ensure faithful delivery of lessons	Green	Red
Teachers will be able to accommodate the lessons within their existing timetable	Green	Red
Children engage in the approach in the classroom	Green	Red
Fluency strategies are implemented consistently	Green	Red

[7] Assumption strength ratings: Green – This assumption will hold in the vast majority of circumstances where the programme is delivered; Amber/Green – This assumption will hold in most of the circumstances where the programme is delivered; Amber/Red – This assumption will often not hold in the circumstances where the programme is delivered; Red – There is a good chance of this assumption not holding / do not know whether this assumption will hold or not

[8] Assumption risk: Green – The programme could continue to be delivered with very minor impact; Amber/Green – The programme could continue to be delivered, but the impact would be substantial; Amber/Red – The programme could continue to be delivered, but without fidelity to original design; Red – The programme could not be delivered

SLT support ensures teachers are released for training and lesson time is protected	Amber/Green	Amber/Green
Teachers engage in webinars and ongoing support	Amber/Green	Amber/Green
SLT conduct lesson observations as intended	Amber/Green	Green
Able to recruit and retain schools willing to participate	Amber/Green	Red
The support offered to school staff is adequate to problem solve issues quickly	Amber/Green	Amber/Red
Able to identify and support struggling schools quickly	Green	Amber/Red
Teachers will be able to attend training at a central location even if they do not live in that area	Green	Red
CDRS will have the capacity to deliver training and support (even if there is a change in the team)	Green	Red
We will be able to recruit 100 schools to take part	Green	Red
We will maintain contact with schools in the control group	Green	Red

Appendix Table 3: Causal assumptions log

#	Assumption / Causal Mechanism	Where in the ToC does the assumption apply?		Evidence	Evidence Strength[9]
1	Initial training gives teachers the skills, motivation and knowledge to start to deliver the programme	Input/Activity	Output	Feasibility and Acceptability Study Summer 2022; EEF Effective Professional Development Evidence Review	Amber/Green
2	Follow-on webinars allow issues to be addressed in a timely manner	Input/Activity	Output	Feasibility and Acceptability Studies 2022 & Pilot 2025	Green
3	Follow-on webinars and coaching conversations maintain engagement	Input/Activity	Output	EEF Effective Professional Development Evidence Review	Amber/Green
4	Follow-on webinars further build teacher knowledge	Input/Activity	Output	EEF Effective Professional Development Evidence Review	Amber/Green
5	Teachers are motivated and have the skills and knowledge to deliver the programme with fidelity	Output	Short-term outcome	Feasibility and Acceptability Study Summer 2022 & Pilot 2025	Green
6	Teachers have the resources and materials needed to deliver the programme with fidelity	Input/Activity	Output	Feasibility and Acceptability Study Summer 2022 & Pilot 2025	Green
7	Teachers deliver the programme with fidelity and with minimal impact on workload	Output	Short-term outcome	Feasibility and Acceptability Study Summer 2022 & Pilot 2025	Green
8	Explicit teaching of fluency strategies leads to improved pupil fluency	Output	Long-term outcome	EEF Improving Literacy at Key Stage 2 Guidance report; further fluency evidence (e.g. Rasinski & Cheeseman)	Green

[9] Green – The evidence base is very strong. There are peer-reviewed academic studies, meta-analyses or independent experimental evaluations directly linked to the assumption; Green/Amber – The evidence base is strong. There are academic studies or independent evaluations linked to the assumption; Red/Amber – The evidence base is developing. There are academic studies, internal evaluations or recorded observational evidence that are adjacent to the assumption; Red – The evidence base is limited. There is some anecdotal evidence to substantiate the assumption. May not be aware of any evidence linked to the assumption.

9	Explicit teaching of fluency strategies leads to improved pupil comprehension	Output	Long-term outcome	EEF Improving Literacy at Key Stage 2 Guidance report; further fluency evidence (e.g. Rasinski & Cheeseman)	Green
10	Pupil engagement with and participation in fluency lessons results in secure understanding and application of fluency strategies	Input/Activity	Short-term outcome	Feasibility and Acceptability Study Summer 2022 & Pilot 2025	Green
11	Strong models of fluency (teacher read aloud and echo reading) build pupil understanding of good fluency	Input/Activity	Output	EEF Improving Literacy at Key Stage 2 Guidance report; further fluency evidence (e.g. Rasinski & Cheeseman)	Green
12	Opportunities for repeated practice (echo reading and paired reading) improve fluency	Input/Activity	Long-term outcome	EEF Improving Literacy at Key Stage 2 Guidance report; further fluency evidence (e.g. Rasinski & Cheeseman)	Green
12	Text marking (aka phrased reading) builds pupil understanding of phrasing	Input/Activity	Short-term outcome	EEF Improving Literacy at Key Stage 2 Guidance report; further fluency evidence (e.g. Rasinski & Cheeseman)	Green
13	Explicit vocabulary instruction removes barriers to fluency and comprehension	Input/Activity	Output	EEF Improving Literacy at Key Stage 2 Guidance report; further fluency evidence (e.g. Rasinski & Cheeseman)	Green
14	Peer assessment develops metacognitive knowledge of good fluency	Output	Long-term outcome	EEF Improving Literacy at Key Stage 2 Guidance report; further fluency evidence (e.g. Rasinski & Cheeseman); EEF Metacognition and Self-Regulation Guidance Report	Green

Appendix Table 4: Available marks across each content domain of the New PiRA

Test	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Summary	Inference	Prediction	Structure	Impact	Comparison	Total	Extension question marks
Summer – Year 4	4	8	4	13	2	2	5	2	40	
Autumn – Year 5	6	10	1	12	3	4	6	3	45	5
Summer – Year 5	8	12	5	12	2	2	2	2	45	5

Appendix Table 5: MDFS scoring rubric

Dimension	1	2	3	4
A: Expression and volume	Reads with little expression or enthusiasm in voice. Reads words as if simply to get them out. Little sense of trying to make text sound like natural language. Tends to read in a quiet voice.	Some expression. Begins to use voice to make text sound like natural language in some areas of the text, but not others. Focus remains largely on saying the words. Still reads in a quiet voice.	Sounds like natural language throughout the better part of the passage. Occasionally slips into expressionless reading. Voice volume is generally appropriate throughout the text.	Reads with good expression and enthusiasm throughout the text. Sounds like natural language. The reader is able to vary expression and volume to match his/her interpretation of the passage.
B: Phrasing	Monotonic with little sense of phrase boundaries, frequent word-by-word reading.	Frequent two- and three-word phrases giving the impression of choppy reading; improper stress and intonation that fail to mark ends of sentences and clauses	Mixture of run-ons, mid-sentence pauses for breath, and possibly some choppiness; reasonable stress/intonation.	Generally well phrased, mostly in clause and sentence units, with adequate attention to expression.
C: Smoothness	Frequent extended pauses, hesitations, false starts, sound-outs, repetitions, and/or multiple attempts.	Several “rough spots” in text where extended pauses, hesitations, etc., are more frequent and disruptive.	Occasional breaks in smoothness caused by difficulties with specific words and/or structures.	Generally smooth reading with some breaks, but word and structure difficulties are resolved quickly, usually through self-correction.
D: Pace	Slow and laborious.	Moderately slow.	Uneven mixture of fast and slow reading.	Consistently conversational.