

## Closing the Disadvantage Gap: Intervention Strategies from the EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit

This information was gathered from the Education Endowment Foundation Teaching and Learning Toolkit, which was correct in October 2022. All 24 intervention strategies that carry positive impact have been listed in the order of number of months of learning impact.

Toolkit Website: [Teaching and Learning Toolkit | EEF \(educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk\)](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/Teaching-and-Learning-Toolkit/)

Toolkit Strand		Impact (Months)	Closing the Disadvantage Gap
1	Metacognition and self-regulation	+7 months	There is some evidence to suggest that disadvantaged pupils are less likely to use metacognitive and self-regulatory strategies without being explicitly taught these strategies. Explicit teaching of metacognitive and self-regulatory strategies could therefore encourage such pupils to practise and use these skills more frequently in the future. With explicit teaching and feedback, pupils are more likely to use these strategies independently and habitually, enabling them to manage their own learning and overcome challenges themselves in the future.
2	Reading comprehension strategies	+6 months	<p>Studies in England have shown that pupils eligible for free school meals may receive additional benefits from being taught how to use reading comprehension strategies. However, the UK evidence base is less extensive than the global average, and UK studies show lower impact for all pupils.</p> <p>Reading comprehensions strategies involve the teaching of explicit approaches and techniques a pupil can use to improve their comprehension of written text. Many learners will develop these approaches without teacher guidance, adopting the strategies through trial and error as they look to better understand texts that challenge them. However, we know that on average, disadvantaged children are less likely to own a book of their own and read at home with family members, and for these reasons may not acquire the necessary skills for reading and understanding challenging texts</p>
3	Oral language interventions	+6 months	<p>There is evidence to suggest that pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be behind their more advantaged counterparts in developing early language and speech skills, which may affect their school experience and learning later in their school lives.</p> <p>Given that Oral language interventions can be used to provide additional support to pupils who are behind their peers in oral language development, the targeted use of approaches may support some disadvantaged pupils to catch up with peers, particularly when this is provided one-to-one</p>

4	Feedback	+6 months	There is evidence to suggest that feedback involving metacognitive and self-regulatory approaches may have a greater impact on disadvantaged pupils and lower prior attainers than other pupils. Pupils require clear and actionable feedback to employ metacognitive strategies as they learn, as this information informs their understanding of their specific strengths and areas for improvement, thereby indicating which learning strategies have been effective for them in previously completed work.
5	Collaborative learning approaches	+5 months	There is limited evidence on differential impact for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. There is some evidence that collaborative learning approaches may benefit those with low prior attainment by providing opportunities for pupils to work with peers to articulate their thinking, share knowledge and skills and address misconceptions through peer support and discussion. It is crucial that support is provided through well-structured and carefully designed learning activities to ensure that lower-attaining pupils are involved, challenged and learn successfully. If collaborative learning approaches just involve high attaining pupils solving problems with no input from their peers – this is likely to widen existing gaps in attainment.
6	Mastery learning	+5 months	<p>Mastery learning approaches aim to ensure that all pupils have mastered key concepts before moving on to the next topic – in contrast with traditional teaching methods in which pupils may be left behind, with gaps of misunderstanding widening. Mastery learning approaches could address these challenges by giving additional time and support to pupils who may have missed learning or take longer to master new knowledge and skills.</p> <p>In order for mastery approaches to be effective for pupils with gaps in understanding, it is crucial that additional support is provided. Approaches that simply build upon foundational knowledge without targeting support for pupils that fall behind are unlikely to narrow disadvantage gaps.</p>
7	Peer tutoring	+5 months	While there is limited evidence that specifically examines pupils from a disadvantaged background, studies have shown that pupils who are low attaining typically receive additional benefits from peer tutoring. Peer-led tutoring approaches may help pupils to close gaps in their learning by offering targeted, peer-led support to consolidate within class learning, practice skills, and identify and overcome misconceptions. There is also some evidence to suggest that peer-led tutoring can offer tutors the chance to revisit and revise skills, prior knowledge, and develop metacognitive understanding of topics
8	Phonics	+5 months	<p>Studies in England have shown that pupils eligible for free school meals typically receive similar or slightly greater benefit from phonics interventions and approaches. This is likely to be due to the explicit nature of the instruction and the intensive support provided.</p> <p>It is possible that some disadvantaged pupils may not develop phonological awareness at the same rate as other pupils, having been exposed to fewer words spoken and books read in the home. Targeted phonics interventions may therefore improve decoding skills more quickly for pupils who have experienced these barriers to learning.</p>

9	One-to-one tuition	+5 months	<p>Studies in England have shown that pupils eligible for free school meals typically receive additional benefits from one-to-one tuition. Low attaining pupils are particularly likely to benefit.</p> <p>One to one tuition approaches can enable pupils to make effective progress by providing intensive, targeted academic support to those identified as having low prior attainment or at risk of falling behind. The approach allows the teacher or tutor to focus exclusively on the needs of the learner and provide teaching that is closely matched to each pupil's understanding. One to one tuition offers greater levels of interaction and feedback compared to whole class teaching which can support pupils to spend more time on new or unfamiliar, overcome barriers to learning and increase their progress through the curriculum.</p>
10	Homework	+5 months	<p>Pupils eligible for free school meals typically receive additional benefits from homework. However, surveys in England suggest that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have a quiet working space, are less likely to have access to a device suitable for learning or a stable internet connection and may receive less parental support to complete homework and develop effective learning habits. These difficulties may increase the gap in attainment for disadvantaged pupils.</p> <p>Homework clubs can help to overcome these barriers by offering pupils the resources and support needed to undertake homework or revision. Broader evidence suggests that homework should not be used as a punishment or penalty for poor performance</p>
11	Teaching assistant interventions	+4 months	<p>Schools should carefully consider how teaching assistants are used to support learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. There is evidence that when a teaching assistant is used to support specific pupils routinely in the classroom, the teacher may interact less with these pupils, meaning that those who need additional teacher monitoring and support may not receive it. Therefore, additional care should be given to how teachers respond to the deployment of teaching assistants and who they are supporting, particularly for previously low attaining or disadvantaged pupils.</p> <p>However, well-evidenced teaching assistant interventions can be targeted at pupils that require additional support and can help previously low attaining pupils overcome barriers to learning and 'catch-up' with previously higher attaining pupils.</p> <p>Schools should carefully monitor teaching assistant interventions to ensure they are well-delivered, so that pupils receive the large benefits of structured interventions and not the limited impact of general deployment.</p>

12	Parental engagement	+4 months	<p>Disadvantaged pupils are less likely to benefit from having a space to conduct home learning. Evidence also suggests that disadvantaged pupils make less academic progress, and sometimes attainment levels even regress during the summer holidays, due to the level of formal and informal learning activities they do or do not participate in. By designing and delivering effective approaches to support parental engagement, schools and teachers may be able to mitigate some of these causes of educational disadvantage, supporting parents to assist their children's learning or their self-regulation, as well as specific skills, such as reading.</p> <p>However, parental engagement strategies have the risk of increasing attainment gaps, if the parents that access parental engagement opportunities are primarily from affluent backgrounds. It is crucial to consider how parental engagement strategies will engage with all parents.</p> <p>While encouraging parents to become directly involved in homework might appear attractive, schools should consider whether parents have the knowledge and skills to provide the right support, particularly at secondary level. Interventions designed to engage parents in homework have generally not been linked to increased attainment. Students who are struggling academically may be more likely to request parental assistance with homework, but parents may be unfamiliar with the most effective teaching methods. As a consequence, it may be more effective to encourage parents to redirect a struggling pupil to their teachers rather than to take on an instructional role.</p>
13	Social and emotional learning	+4 months	<p>Evidence suggests that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have, on average, weaker SEL skills at all ages than their more affluent peers. These skills are likely to influence a range of outcomes for pupils: lower SEL skills are linked with poorer mental health and lower academic attainment.</p> <p>SEL interventions in education are shown to improve SEL skills and are therefore likely to support disadvantaged pupils to understand and engage in healthy relationships with peers and emotional self-regulation, both of which may subsequently increase academic attainment.</p> <p>Schools should carefully consider how targeted approaches are deployed to support pupils with additional social or emotional needs. SEL needs will be based on a variety of factors that may not correspond to academic progress and should be carefully monitored.</p>

14	Behaviour interventions	+4 months	<p>According to <a href="#">figures</a> from the Department for Education, pupils who receive Free School Meals are more likely to receive a permanent or fixed period exclusion compared to those who do not.</p> <p>The most common reason for exclusion is persistent disruptive behaviour. Pupil behaviour will have multiple influences, some of which teachers can directly manage through universal or classroom management approaches. Some pupils will require more specialist support to help manage their self-regulation or social and emotional skills.</p>
15	Small group tuition	+4 months	<p>Studies in England have shown that pupils eligible for free school meals typically receive additional benefits from small group tuition.</p> <p>Small group tuition approaches can support pupils to make effective progress by providing intensive, targeted academic support to those identified as having low prior attainment or at risk of falling behind. The approach allows the teacher to focus on the needs of a small number of learners and provide teaching that is closely matched to pupil understanding. Small group tuition offers an opportunity for greater levels of interaction and feedback compared to whole class teaching which can support pupils to overcome barriers to learning and increase their access to the curriculum.</p>
16	Individualised instruction	+4 months	<p>Disadvantaged pupils may be more likely to be affected by higher school absence rates and lower attainment, on average, when compared to their more advantaged peers. This means disadvantaged pupils may be more likely to progress through school with gaps in their understanding, which will affect how quickly and easily they can acquire and connect new learning.</p> <p>For pupils identified as having low prior attainment or at risk of falling behind, individualised instruction may allow the teacher to provide activities that are closely matched to a pupil's attainment. Provided they have the skills to manage their learning independently, this can support pupils to consolidate their learning and practice skills or develop mastery before progressing to the next stage of the curriculum. More targeted assessment and feedback may also support pupils to address misconceptions or overcome specific barriers to learning.</p>
17	Arts participation	+3 months	<p>There is intrinsic value in teaching pupils creative and performance skills and ensuring disadvantaged pupils access a rich and stimulating arts education. Arts participation may be delivered within the core curriculum, or through extra-curricular or cultural trips which can be subject to financial barriers for pupils from deprived backgrounds.</p> <p>There is some evidence to suggest a causal link between arts education and the use of arts-based approaches with overall educational attainment. Where the arts are being taught as a means to boost academic achievement for those eligible for the pupil premium, schools should carefully monitor whether this aim is being achieved.</p>

18	Summer schools	+3 months	<p>There is some evidence that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds can benefit from summer schools, where activities are focused on well-resourced, small group or one to one academic approaches. There is less evidence for the effectiveness of light-touch interventions such as summer book sharing programmes.</p> <p>Studies indicate that attendance and drop out are key challenges for voluntary, out-of-term time provision, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. To overcome these issues, schools should aim to identify any potential barriers (such as food or transport costs, clashes with planned holidays or religious events) early on, such as through communication with parents/carers to improve engagement. When targeting summer schools at pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, approaches should seek to minimise any risk of stigmatisation.</p> <p>Including additional non-academic activities such as sports, arts or cultural enrichment are valuable in their own right and can offer opportunities to pupils from low-income households who may not otherwise be able to afford them. A mix of activities may also help to promote engagement and take up of summer schools.</p>
19	Extending school time	+3 months	<p>There is some evidence to suggest that disadvantaged pupils might benefit more from additional school time.</p> <p>To increase the likelihood of additional school time benefitting disadvantaged pupils, school leaders should consider how to secure engagement and attendance among those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is possible that if targeted tuition or enrichment activities are offered universally, those who could benefit the most would be the least likely participate or engage. Adopting a more targeted approach also has its challenges though, as selected pupils may feel singled out and stigmatised.</p> <p>Additional non-academic activities may also provide free or low-cost alternatives to sport, music, and other enrichment activities that more advantaged families are more likely to be able to pay for outside of school.</p>
20	Within class attainment grouping	+2 months	<p>As with setting and streaming, evidence suggests that disadvantaged pupils can suffer from lower teacher expectations which increases their chances of being grouped with lower prior attainers. If groups are not arranged flexibly, and the impact of grouping on pupil engagement and motivation not monitored, within-class grouping could have negative effects for disadvantaged pupils.</p> <p>One <a href="#">recent study</a> commissioned by the EEF found that schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged pupils seem to be more likely to use whole-class teaching with KS2 pupils, as opposed to within-class grouping. This finding was not consistent across Key Stages however.</p>



21	Reducing class size	+2 months	<p>International research evidence suggests that reducing class size can have positive impacts on pupil outcomes when implemented with socioeconomically disadvantaged pupil populations. Some studies also have also found that smaller class sizes in primary schools can have a greater positive impact on disadvantaged pupils than their peers.</p> <p>In the UK, there is some indicative evidence to suggest that reception and Key Stage 1 pupils with lower prior attainment and from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may benefit from small classes, although the class size threshold at which this impact is identifiable varies between literacy and maths, and potentially also geographical area.</p>
22	Mentoring	+2 months	<p>While mentoring is not generally as effective in raising attainment outcomes as small group or one to one tuition, it is possible to target the approach to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with particular needs. Some evidence suggests that some pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds show low engagement with or have low expectations of schooling. Mentoring interventions may be more beneficial for these pupils, as the development of trusting relationships with an adult or older peer can provide a different source of support.</p> <p>Mentors dropping out of programmes can result in detrimental effects for pupils. For pupils who may have already experienced disillusion at their perceived lack of support from teachers and school, this risk may be intensified. Therefore, additional care should be given to the recruitment of reliable mentors when interventions are being used to support disadvantaged pupils.</p>
23	Physical Activity	+2 months	<p>Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds may be less likely to be able to benefit from sport clubs and other physical activities outside of school due to the associated financial costs (e.g. equipment). By providing physical activities free of charge, schools give pupils access to benefits and opportunities that might not otherwise be available to them.</p> <p>When considering hosting sports activities that may require contributions from parents, schools should consider whether places could be provided free of charge or subsidised for disadvantaged pupils</p>
24	Performance Pay	+2 months	<p>Studies in England have shown that pupils in disadvantaged communities are less likely have access to high performing schools and are more likely to attend schools staffed by teachers without qualified teacher status or with fewer years of experience.</p> <p>Limited access to high-quality teaching is likely to be a key contributor to the disadvantage attainment gap, with research consistently demonstrating the positive impact of high-quality teaching on pupil attainment. Pay may be utilised as part of a strategy to attract and retain experienced, qualified and specialist teachers to schools with higher numbers of pupils eligible for the pupil premium.</p> <p>The small impact of performance pay, specifically, may mean that schools and policymakers consider other approaches to attracting high quality teachers to schools in disadvantaged communities.</p>