An innovative classroom reading intervention for Year 2 and 3 pupils who are struggling to learn to read

Evaluating the Integrated Group Reading programme
Executive summary

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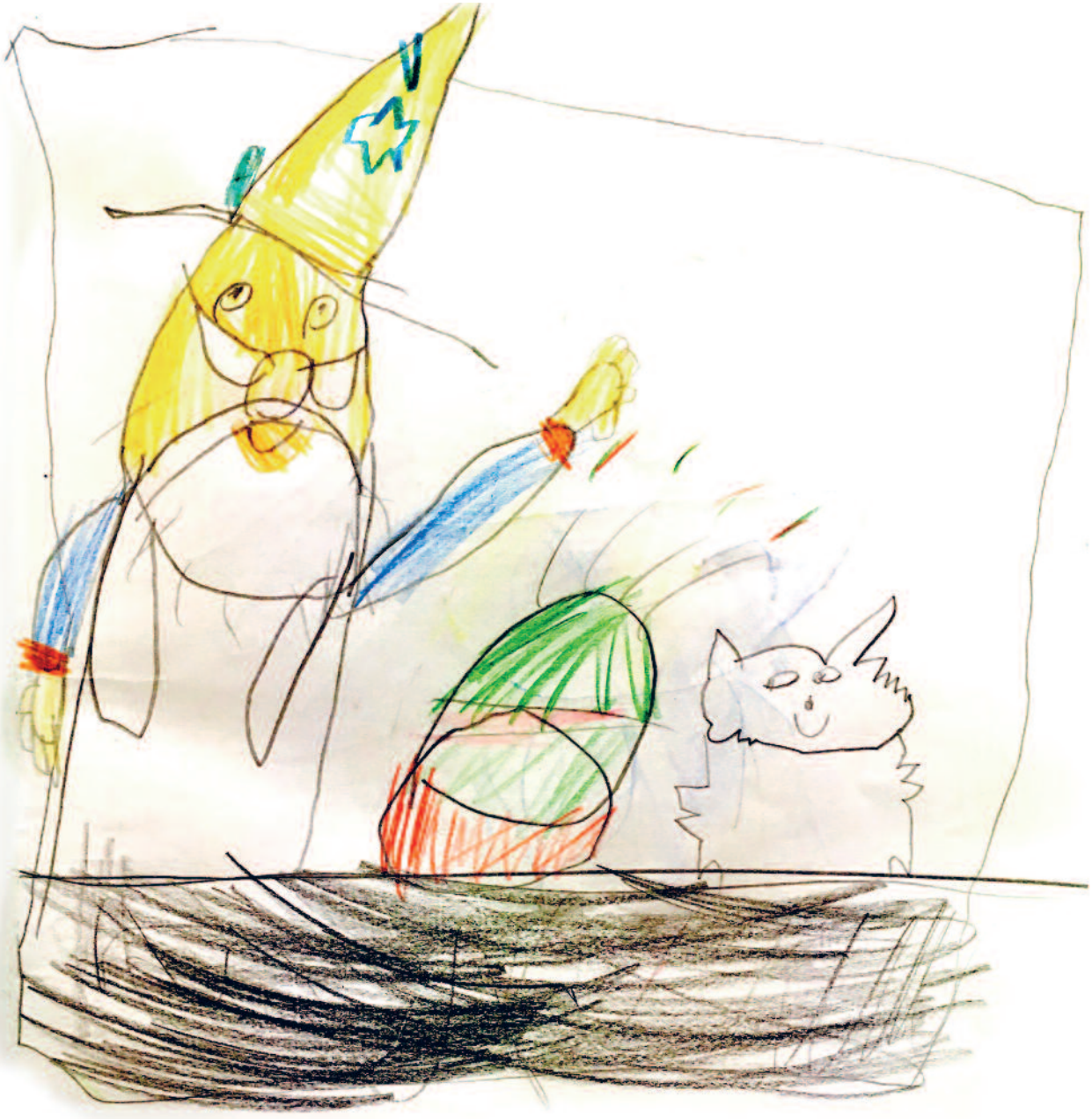


The Integrated Group Reading programme

The Integrated Group Reading (IGR) programme is a targeted[1] teaching intervention for Year 2 and 3 pupils who are delayed in reading. It is taught by class teachers in small groups during the existing small group organisation of lessons (Guided Reading or other form of group reading). It is part of a class-wide model, with all pupils being in groups receiving teacher attention over a period of a week, supported by a teaching assistant (TA).

The term 'Integrated' refers not only to the inclusive aspect of the class-based organisation that enables pupils identified for targeted support access to teacher expertise alongside their peers, but also to the integration of several discrete professional and research-based approaches to literacy teaching underpinning its methodology.

The IGR programme is a response to three ongoing issues: firstly, almost 20% of children in English Primary Schools on entering Key Stage 2 (KS2) are delayed or non-starting readers (Department for Education (DfE), 2017), and analysis of the DfE phonics test in 2016 indicates that around 10% did not reach the nationally set threshold level at the end of Year 2. Secondly, there is an ongoing debate about the primacy of certain phonics approaches over others (synthetic versus analytic) but the research evidence is inconclusive (Henbest & Apel, 2017). Since the Rose (2006) report, English policy has favoured the synthetic phonics approach. However, the fact that 10% of pupils taught using synthetic phonics still experience difficulties in reading suggests that other approaches should be tried for these children. Thirdly, current practice is to provide 'Quality First' teaching that is meant to be differentiated, but might not be differentiated enough for pupils struggling to learn. So tailored teaching for those not progressing at the expected rate with targeted or specialist teaching is often offered as withdrawal sessions[2] with people other than the class teacher (e.g. TAs).

1 Targeted intervention, sometimes called tier 2 or wave 2, is focused on pupils struggling to learn in 'Quality first' or tier/wave 1 teaching, which is meant to be differentiated and geared to the needs of all in a class. Pupils not responding to targeted teaching will receive specialist or tier/wave 3 support.

2 Withdrawal sessions refer to sessions where the teacher or the TA takes a pupil or a group outside the regular class for any kind of supplementary teaching.

Withdrawal has two potential implications:

1. It can create a 'separation' effect (Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), 2015) by limiting the opportunities of these pupils for quality time with the class teacher and peer interactions.
2. It can mean learning time lost – for instance, it has been found that children who had immediate access to additional support rather than waiting to fail, had improved reading outcomes at the end of Year 1 (Al Otaiba et al, 2014).

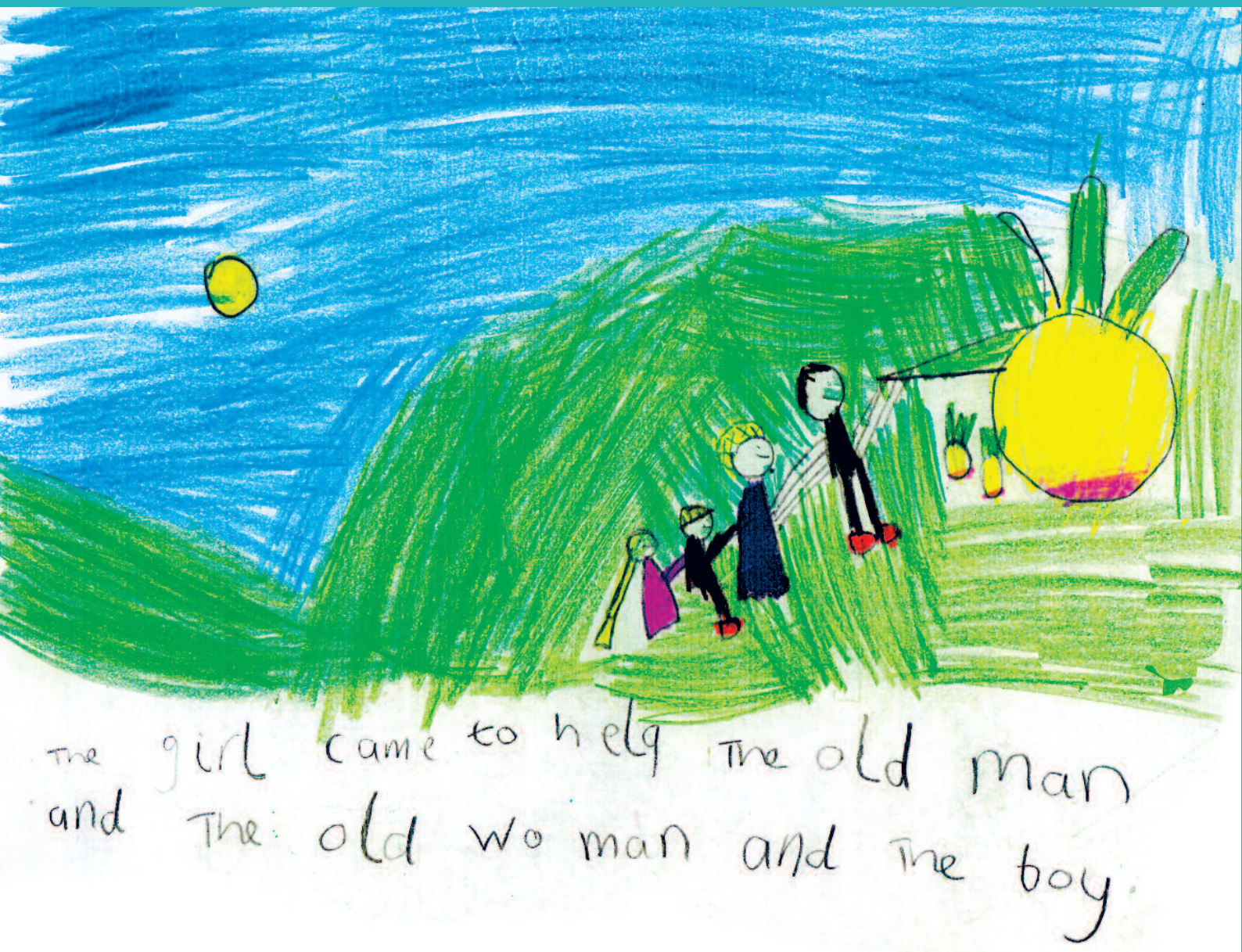
The IGR programme addressed all three ongoing issues, by introducing tailored targeted teaching (tier 2) in the 'Quality First' teaching setting, thus enabling the teacher to deliver a multi-perspective intervention (including phonics) to struggling pupils during a whole-class session that was literacy-related for all.

The IGR programme involves appealing books and games tied into an incremental progression, which are ready for busy teachers to use. The learning through books and games is story-focused to support the enjoyment of reading and encourage deep pupil engagement with the text.

The programme trial

Integrated Group Reading was trialled by the Graduate School of Education of the University of Exeter with Year 2 and 3 pupils in 34 English schools in four varied local authority areas across two years (2015-2017). The programme was delivered four times a week for 30 minutes over two terms during whole-class sessions as part of the usual group reading organisation (typically the class is organised into four to six groups). The teacher taught the IGR group (comprised of four pupils identified by their teacher as in need of literacy support) twice a week and introduced a new book at each session. TAs worked twice a week with the group in-between the teacher sessions for consolidation. During teacher-led IGR, the rest of the class (organised in reading groups) worked independently or with a TA on various reading-related activities. Teachers would work with other groups once a week on a carousel basis when not teaching the IGR group. So, teachers and TAs had discrete yet interconnected roles, with the teachers keeping the main role. IGR was designed to be part of the usual group reading schedule, allowing teachers to organise their group reading rota in a more structured way for all pupils.

The IGR programme evaluation had a mixed methodological design, involving i. a clustered randomised control trial with the comparison group in control schools (phase 1) and the control schools using IGR in phase 2, ii. a process evaluation of implementation and teachers' and pupils' experiences of using the programme and iii. teaching case studies where the quality of IGR teaching was and was not related to the extent of reading gains.


The girl came to help The old man
and The old woman and The boy.

Key findings: the experimental evaluation

Participating children in schools using IGR in phase 1 and phase 2 made the same degree of progress in reading accuracy/ comprehension, compared to similarly struggling children in control schools who were mainly using phonics approaches (no statistically significant differences). The mean reading progress in intervention and control groups was equivalent to 11.5 months across phases 1 and 2 using two measures of reading, often seen as a 'modest' impact. In phase 2 one reading test (accuracy and comprehension) showed a gain of 14 months ('useful' impact) not captured by the other test (word reading). There were also no statistically significant changes for reading and school attitude in either the treatment or control group. This suggests that our initial hypothesis that IGR would improve reading gains and attitudes for the IGR group compared to the control group was not supported by the findings.

There were no statistically significant differences between boys/girls and Year 2/3 pupils in their responses in the IGR and control classes. Some analyses showed that pupils having English as an Additional Language (EAL) and being identified for Pupil Premium made significantly greater gains with IGR, but these findings were not replicated across phases, measures or levels of significance.

In Phase 1 there was no statistically significant difference in gains between treatment and control classes for non-IGR children. This confirms our initial hypothesis that IGR in the classroom would not have any negative effect on the classroom pupils not having the intervention. In Phase 2, non-IGR children showed somewhat better progress on the Hodder standardised scale in the treatment classes compared to the control classes ($d = 0.2$). This effect was statistically significant, but this is interpreted as probably due to the high baseline scores for the girls in the control group and possibly because of a measurement error.

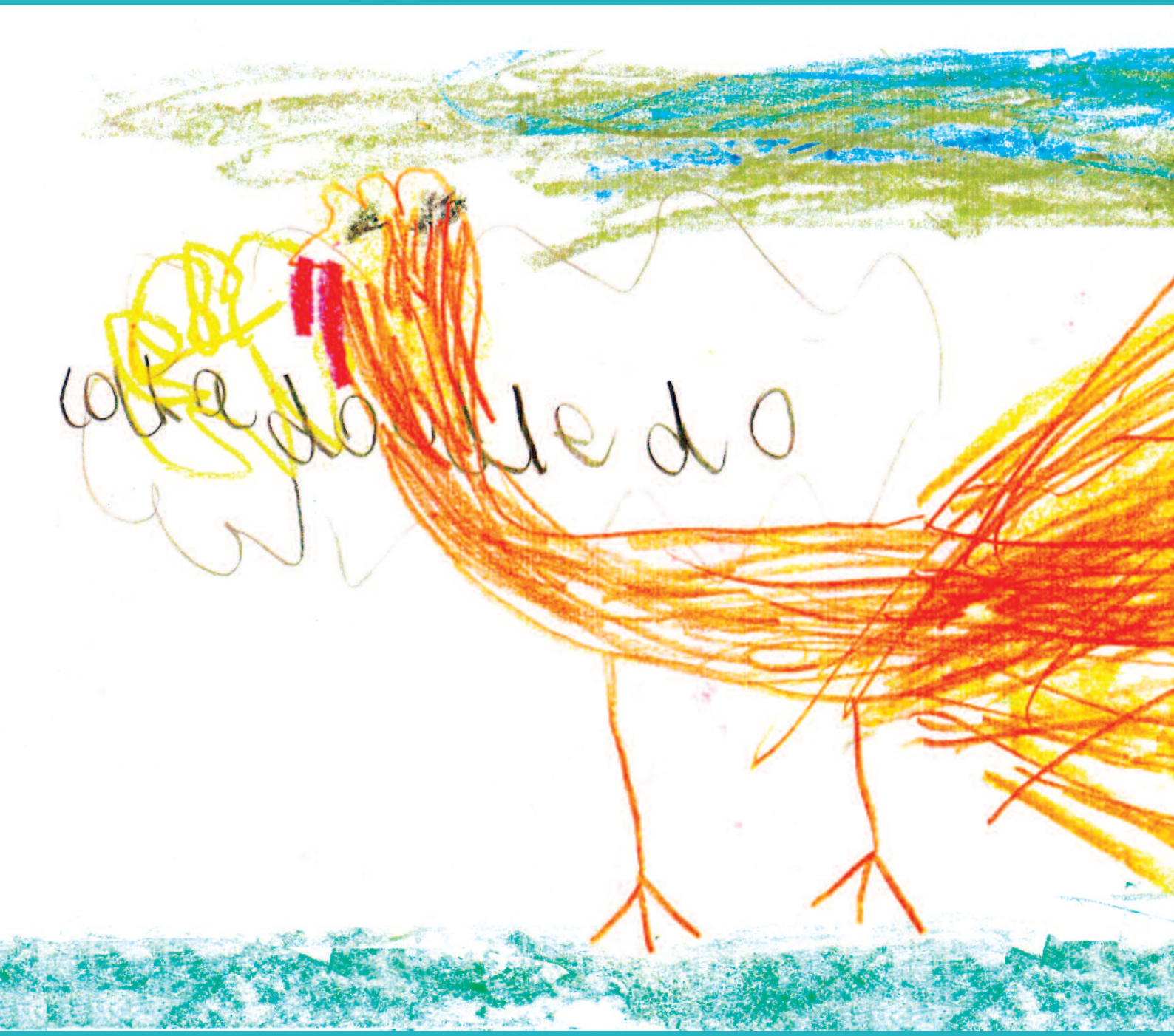
For teachers using IGR, their self-efficacy in teaching reading through a self-report measure improved significantly in both phases. Control teachers did not complete this measure, so this change is hard to interpret.

Key findings: the process evaluation

Overall, participants were enthusiastic about the intervention, the project materials, and accompanying support. Teacher-reported outcomes for IGR pupils included increased confidence, motivation and interest in reading, and improved reading, oral language and social skills. Some teachers were concerned that these gains had not yet transferred outside of the IGR group setting. Most pupils were not worried about being seen in a low attainment group, and did not see IGR as an intervention, but as an exciting classroom activity. Other class pupils were often very interested in the IGR resources, especially the games.

IGR was used with varied fidelity, and many teachers had limited understanding of the theory underpinning the programme, which could partly indicate a training limitation. In phase 1, this resulted in the programme support team having to produce a table with acceptable and unacceptable variations to programme implementation to advise teachers accordingly. This reflected individual variation in the way the programme was used, and that fidelity was operating along a continuum. Some departures from the suggested methodology were seen in some cases to be justifiable (such as, slowing down the pace of the programme in response to pupils' needs), whereas others were less acceptable (for instance, delivering all programme sessions in withdrawal sessions).

In addition, control schools did not just continue with typical teaching; teachers recognised that control pupils had significant additional needs, so they also had a great deal of additional, mainly phonics-based teaching input, making what was being compared to the experimental evaluation varied and complex.



Case studies

Data from two different teachers showed that when high reading gains followed high IGR teaching fidelity, several supportive factors were identified, e.g. teacher and pupil enthusiasm, school leader and adviser involvement, teacher understanding the theory and rationale of IGR and the IGR model fitting the pre-existing reading organisational arrangements. When low gains were followed by low fidelity in the cases of two other teachers, the above factors were not identified.

In teacher cases where low or no reading gains followed medium to high IGR fidelity, there was evidence of factors that were barriers to reading progress, such as, a mechanical teaching approach that did not engage pupils, having a TA who could not manage the other groups during IGR teaching and unsatisfactory teacher job-sharing arrangements. In the case of one teacher where quite high reading gains followed low IGR fidelity, there was evidence that the fidelity measure was affected by a change in teaching which did not affect the otherwise high quality IGR teaching.

Overall findings

The experimental evaluation indicates that the multi-perspective IGR approach that supports enjoyment of reading resulted in as much reading gain as the more phonics-oriented programmes used in control classes. The process evaluation and case studies illustrate further benefits and some challenges not found in the measured outcomes. This means that IGR might be considered by schools and teachers as an alternative to the current pattern of targeted interventions that involve more phonics-based programmes delivered by TAs.

The lack of negative effects on reading in non-IGR pupils is a noteworthy finding suggesting that using IGR in the classroom had no negative effects on other children's progress. This reinforces the use of IGR as an alternative to the usual model of offering additional support in withdrawal sessions often led by TAs.

The gains in teachers' perceived self-efficacy in teaching reading following the use of IGR point to possible confidence benefits in teaching reading.

While, on one hand, the process evaluation showed IGR strengths (e.g. teacher enthusiasm and enhanced pupil confidence) and limitations (e.g. insufficient understanding of the theory of IGR teaching), on the other hand, the teaching case studies illustrated how useful reading gains depended on IGR teaching fidelity and other supportive factors.

The programme does not have considerable implementation costs apart from the one-off cost of materials; however, it has particular staffing demands (teachers and TAs), and it can be used more effectively in classrooms that have a regular TA.

Significance of the key findings

Integrated Group Reading adopts a multi-perspective approach that includes phonics, but also enables pupils to engage more deeply with text and allows for comprehension to emerge naturally. Following the Rose (2006) report, schools in England largely use phonics approaches to teach early reading, with explicit phonics teaching showing good results (Wyse & Goswami, 2008).

The experimental evaluation indicates that the multi-perspective IGR approach that supports enjoyment of reading resulted in as much reading gain as the more phonics oriented additional programmes used in control classes (as evidenced by the data collected from control schools). Since we had decided not to intervene with the teaching decisions in the control classes, the trial was in fact comparing IGR to a programme influenced by the dominance of the phonics approach and driven by the national curriculum and the assessment requirements. This means that IGR might be considered by schools and teachers as an alternative to the current pattern of targeted interventions that involves more phonics-based programmes delivered in most cases by TAs.

The IGR trial also found that IGR organisation made it possible for the teacher to deliver targeted (tier 2) teaching to pupils who are delayed in their reading in the regular class, without this having a negative impact on the rest of the class pupils. These findings are relevant to teachers, advisers and policy makers who are looking for more inclusive approaches for targeting pupils in Years 2 and 3 who are delayed in their reading.

The bigger picture

The IGR organisation that enables teachers to offer targeted (tier 2) teaching in a 'Quality First' (tier 1) setting proved to be challenging but viable. This has implications about the way additional provision is organised for pupils identified as in need of targeted support. It particularly shows how it is practically possible for the teacher to take responsibility for the learning of all pupils, even by offering extra time to some most needing it, without hindering the learning of the rest of the class.

This model for the organisation of additional support (group organisation, coordinated teacher-TA collaboration and well-prepared materials) could be extended beyond reading to other areas of learning, e.g. aspects of mathematics or science. Future research and development might explore this approach to inclusive targeted support beyond the teaching of reading.

Areas for future research and development

As a first step after completing the study, there is scope to explore how and whether IGR is being used by teachers in participating schools with the restrictions of the RCT protocol removed. It is likely that teachers would use the programme materials mainly in a loose way, but there is still value in exploring the reasons behind their decisions.

Future studies could also be designed with greater focus on teacher professional learning about the principles of IGR and more focussed training and coaching of IGR-related teaching skills.

With regards to programme development, the IGR programme developer, building on teacher feedback, has designed a synthetic phonics game that could be added readily to future versions of IGR (the version trialled here had an analytic phonics component). This game is story-specific and fits with the existing programme principles and materials.

References

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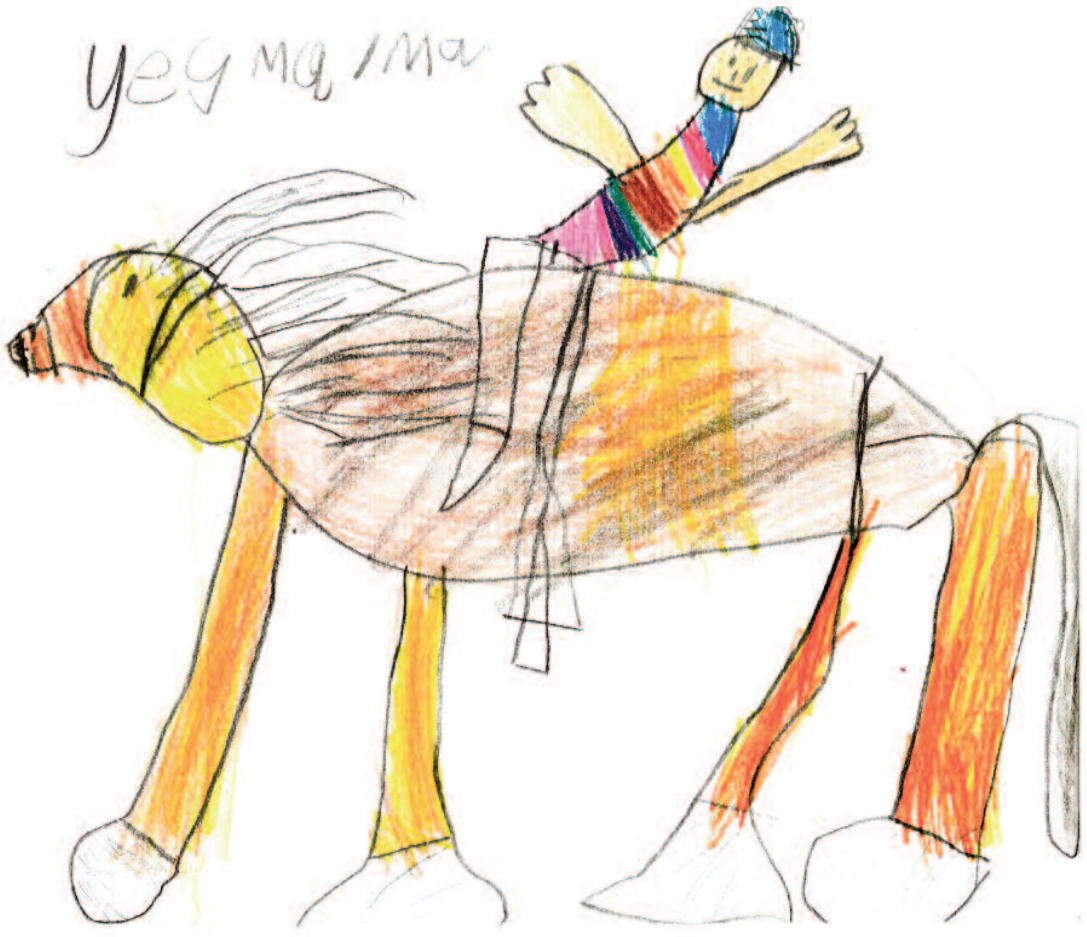

To find out more about Integrated Group Reading as a multi-perspective learning programme, please visit: **http://www.integratedgroupreading.co.uk**

The website contains information about IGR principles and practices, programme materials and classroom organisation, including videos of teaching and learning. It also offers details of the IGR evaluation, access to the full research report and an invitation to join the IGR network.

The drawings in this summary were made by Year 2 and 3 children as part of their Integrated Group Reading response-to-text follow-up work. The cover photograph shows children playing a phonological-to-visual mapping Lotto game. All the illustrations are included with permission.

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