

TutorMate



“It’s a fantastic opportunity to help a struggling child improve their life”

The outcomes of an online reading mentoring intervention on children’s reading skills, enjoyment, behaviours and attitudes

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Introduction

The way that technology can be used to support and enrich the literacy lives of children, young people and adults is an integral part of the National Literacy Trust’s research and programme work. We were interested to investigate this area by working with Innovations for Learning to explore the benefits of the TutorMate online volunteer tutoring programme. TutorMate is a well-established programme in the US but to date has not been run in UK school settings.

This report shares findings from our evaluation of a pilot programme to evaluate the benefits of participating in TutorMate on Year 1 pupils in nine schools in Bradford and London (see Appendix 1 for an overview of the methodology used). All schools featuring in this report work with a higher percentage of children eligible for free school meals than the national average. In addition, several face a range of other literacy challenges, such as a high percentage of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) and a lower than average percentage of pupils passing their phonics check.

Individual children were selected to participate in TutorMate by their class teacher. As part of teacher training and programme set-up, the TutorMate team recommended that participating children were those who, with extra support and practice, the teacher felt could achieve the expected Year 1 standard. The programme was not targeted at children already

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reading comfortably at or above the expected standard at the start of Year 1, or those who had significant additional learning needs.

Key findings

Reading skill outcomes

- Children who took part in TutorMate increased on average by **3.2 reading levels** (from 2.8 to 6.0). Their **phonics score** increased by an average of 9.3 points over the same time period (from 27.4 to 36.7).
- Children who participated in **22 or more sessions throughout the year saw higher increases** (3.6 levels) in their reading level than those who participated in fewer than 22 sessions (average of 3 levels). Also, the average reading level after taking part in TutorMate was higher for children who participated in 22 or more sessions than those who took part in fewer than 22 sessions, suggesting that they could read more difficult books after taking part in TutorMate.
- TutorMate targets children with low reading ability. Children who took part in TutorMate reading within the two lowest levels showed a statistically **significant higher rate of progression** in their reading compared with their peers who didn't take part, with TutorMate children on average reading at level 5 and their peers reading at level 3.3 at the end of the year.

Pupils' reading engagement outcomes

Children who took part in TutorMate showed benefits in their reading engagement over and above changes seen in their peers who hadn't taken part in the intervention:

- Children who took part in TutorMate showed **higher increases in their reading enjoyment** over the year (rising from 77.1% to 92.5%) than did their peers who didn't take part in the intervention (increasing from 75.2% to 82.2%). Overall, the rate of increase over time in the intervention group is twice that of the comparison group (19.9% vs. 9.9%).
- Children who took part in TutorMate showed **higher increases in their self-reported reading skill** over the year, with the number of children who consider themselves to be good readers rising from 62.0% to 96.9%, a change of 34.5%. By contrast, their peers who didn't take part in the intervention increased from 72.2% to 88.9%, a change of 16.7%.
- Fewer children who took part in TutorMate said at the beginning of the year that they read daily compared with their peers in the comparison group (42.6% vs. 52.3%). At the end of the year, **TutorMate children had caught up with their peers in terms of their daily reading level** (57.4% vs. 55.6%).
- **Children who took part in TutorMate also thought more positively about reading** at the end of the year than did their peers who didn't take part. For example, while the percentage of comparison group children who agreed that "reading is fun" had remained stable of the course the year, the percentage of TutorMate children who said this increased from 68.1% to 78.6% over the period of the intervention. Similarly, the percentage of TutorMate children who agreed that "there are lots of things I want to read" increased from 66.2% to 88.2% over the course of the year, while the increase in the comparison group was half this, rising from 63.3% to 74.4%.
- Overall, **nearly 9 in 10 (86.2%) children who took part in TutorMate enjoyed the experience.**

A special focus on reluctant readers

While all children taking part in TutorMate benefited, regardless of gender, there is one group for whom participating in TutorMate resulted in the best outcomes – namely those who only enjoyed reading a bit or not at all before the intervention (reluctant readers):

- At the end of the year, **initially reluctant readers had caught up with their peers in terms of reading enjoyment**, with 87.5% of them now enjoying reading compared with 93.9% who had already enjoyed reading at the beginning of the intervention.
- At the beginning of the year, half as many reluctant readers as their peers considered themselves to be good readers (37.5% vs. 71.7%). Reluctant readers had **caught up with their peers in terms of their self-perception as good readers** (93.3% vs. 97.9%).
- Half as many reluctant readers as their peers also said that they read daily outside class at the beginning of the year (21.4% vs 48.1%). At the end of the year, this number had more than **doubled** to half (50.0%) of initially reluctant readers now saying that they read daily in their free time and **they had started catching up their peers in terms of their daily reading level** (59.6%).
- Reluctant readers also had **more positive attitudes towards reading** than their peers who enjoyed reading before they started the intervention. For example, only 1 in 4 (26.7%) reluctant readers agreed before taking part in TutorMate that there are lots of things they want to read. This figure nearly tripled to 3 in 4 (75.0%) who said this at the end of the year. Agreement with this statement also increased over time for their peers who already started in TutorMate enjoying reading. However, the rate of increase was much smaller for this group (from 77.8% to 94.0%).
- Those who started the intervention not enjoying reading enjoyed taking part more so than those who already enjoyed reading at the start of the programme (92.9% vs. 83.7%).

Teachers' perspectives

12 teachers from participating schools also shared their experiences and perceptions of the intervention, which support the pupils' experiences and views:

- **All teachers** (12/12) believed that the TutorMate programme had been **beneficial for participating pupils**, with one third (4/12 or 33.3%) feeling it had been 'very beneficial' and two-thirds (8/12 or 66.7%) 'quite beneficial'.
- Most teachers (8/12 or 66.7%) said that participating in TutorMate had **increased pupils' reading confidence**, (7/12 or 58.3%) noticed **increases in reading enjoyment and improved comprehension and phonics skills**, while half (6/12 or 50.0%) noticed **improvements in children's reading frequency and fluency**, and one quarter (3/12 or 25.0%) said that pupils now had **increased intrinsic motivation to read**.
- When asked specifically about the **reading skill of participating pupils**, three quarters (9/12 or 75%) felt children had made their expected level of progress, and one quarter (3/12 or 25%) thought they'd made more than the expected level of progress. While one-third (4/12 or 33.3%) felt participating pupils had more progress than their peers, two-thirds (8/12 or 66.7%) felt they had made about the same progress.
- **Teacher satisfaction** with the programme was high, with more than 9 in 10 respondents (91.7%) saying they were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the programme overall.

- **Most teachers (8/11 or 88.3%) would be interested in running TutorMate again.** The convenience of the programme, and its lack of demands on staff time, were seen as particularly helpful given the demands of the curriculum.
- Most teachers reported a **very positive experience of working with their volunteers**, with one quarter (3/12 or 25%) rating it 'excellent', two-thirds (8/12 or 67%) rating it 'good' and one respondent 'average'.

Volunteer views

TutorMate is delivered by volunteers, and 75 volunteers from a range of organisations shared their experience and insight of the programme:

- Almost all (98.7%) of respondents rated their **volunteering experience** as 'excellent' (50.7%) or 'good' (48.0%).
- All (100%) of volunteers responding to the survey believed their volunteering had made a **positive difference for the child or children they worked with**.
- As with teachers, volunteers were most likely to notice that children were **more confident in their reading** (92.0%). However, volunteers were much more likely than teachers to feel children's reading was **more fluent** and they were less likely to say they'd noticed **improvements in children's reading comprehension and enjoyment**, with just over half saying this (56.0% and 54.7% respectively).
- When asked about what they valued about participating in TutorMate, 90.7% of volunteers said it had been the **chance to support a child directly**, 58.7% valued the **flexibility of being able to volunteer from their desk**, and 38.7% valued the **regular commitment**.
- Alongside benefits for pupils, volunteers also felt their involvement with TutorMate **had improved them personally**. 79.2% said their **awareness of literacy as a social issue** had increased, and 54.2% believed they had **better communication skills** as a result of taking part in the programme. Almost half of volunteers reported an **increased sense of well-being** (47.2%), and 43.1% felt they now **better understood other people**.
- **100% of TutorMate volunteers would recommend the opportunity to a friend.**

Overall, teachers and volunteers thought highly about TutorMate and the changes it could achieve. Pages 14 to 22 contain detailed analysis of their comments and quotes about their experiences of TutorMate. In the words of a volunteer and a teacher:

I think it is a wonderful initiative to be involved with. I hope it continues and becomes even more widespread. The children really benefit from this and I also think the adults benefit too as they get to be involved in something worthwhile. It seems like a big deal to commit to a whole year but 30 minutes a week is nothing and most people can find that amount of time a week to help enrich a child's life. (Volunteer)

[The volunteers] made a great effort to ensure the children felt special and most importantly for some children it was the only time they were listened to and encouraged in a one to one reading experience consistently. The [tutors] built very positive relationships with the children and left a lasting impact.

(Teacher, London)

Findings in greater detail

Reading skill outcomes

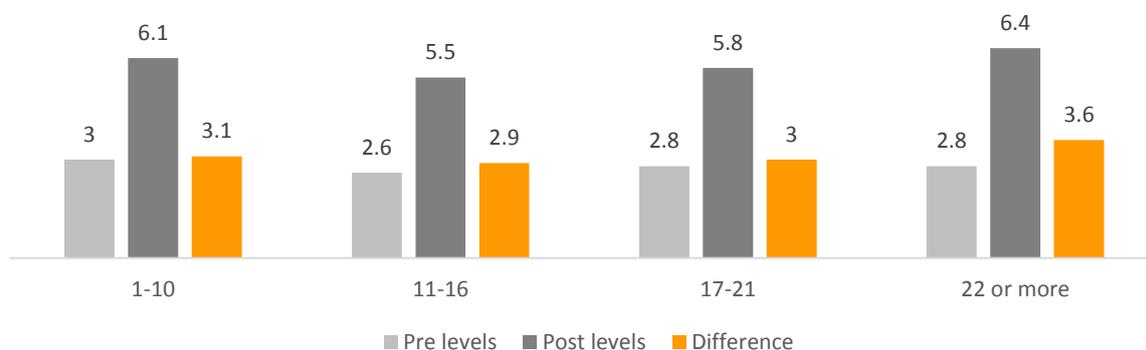
To explore how children’s reading skills have changed as a result of taking part in TutorMate, teachers were asked to assess children’s reading level based on the colour bands that reflect a book’s reading difficulty. Teachers assess what book band each child can read, which range from pink (level 1, least difficult books) to purple (level 9, most difficult books). Teachers were asked to assess their pupils twice during the school year and the average time between the assessments was eight months¹. We therefore analysed reading level data for **386** children who took part in at least one TutorMate session.

Analysis of reading levels from 386 children showed that, overall, children who took part in TutorMate increased on average by 3.2 reading levels (from 2.8 to 6.0). In addition to improved reading levels, we explored changes in the phonics score for 42 children for whom we had data on their phonics screening test between December/January and June². On average, children’s phonics scores increased by 9.3 points (from 27.4 to 36.7).

We also wanted to know whether children’s progress was more prominent for those who did more sessions with their tutor. To do this, we divided children into quartiles based on the number of sessions they took part in³. On average, children took part in 17 sessions.

The results show that there are differences in children’s progress based on the number of sessions they did (see Figure 1). Analysis of the average reading level improvement shows that those who participated in 22 or more sessions throughout the year saw higher increases in their reading level than those who participated in fewer than 22 sessions (see Figure 1). The data also show that the average reading level after taking part in TutorMate is higher for children who participated in 22 or more sessions than those who took part in fewer than 22 sessions, suggesting that they could read more difficult books after taking part in TutorMate.

Figure 1: Reading levels pre and post intervention.



¹ Children whose teachers only seemed to have completed one assessment were deleted from the data set

² Schools indicated phonics measures in December and some in January. Some indicated measures to have taken place in “Spring 1”, assumed to be roughly January time. Schools also provided end of year phonics scores, assumed to have been assessed in June.

³ Quartile 1: 1-10, quartile 2: 11-16, quartile 3: 17-21, quartile 4: 22 and above

Schools were also asked to share assessment data for all pupils taking part in TutorMate and their peers. Ten schools in total shared various assessments, of which six shared data on children's reading levels or phonics score, which allowed us to compare reading levels of children who took part in TutorMate (n = 80) with their peers who didn't (n = 156).

TutorMate targets children with low reading ability. We therefore also explored how those who started the intervention reading within the lowest two levels fare over the year compared with their peers who had similar levels to start off with but who didn't take part in TutorMate. Children who took part in TutorMate reading within the two lowest levels (n = 8, 12.3%) showed a statistically significant⁴ higher rate of progression in their reading compared with their peers who didn't take part (n = 30, 24.8%), with TutorMate children on average reading at level 5 and their peers reading at level 3.3 at the end of the year.

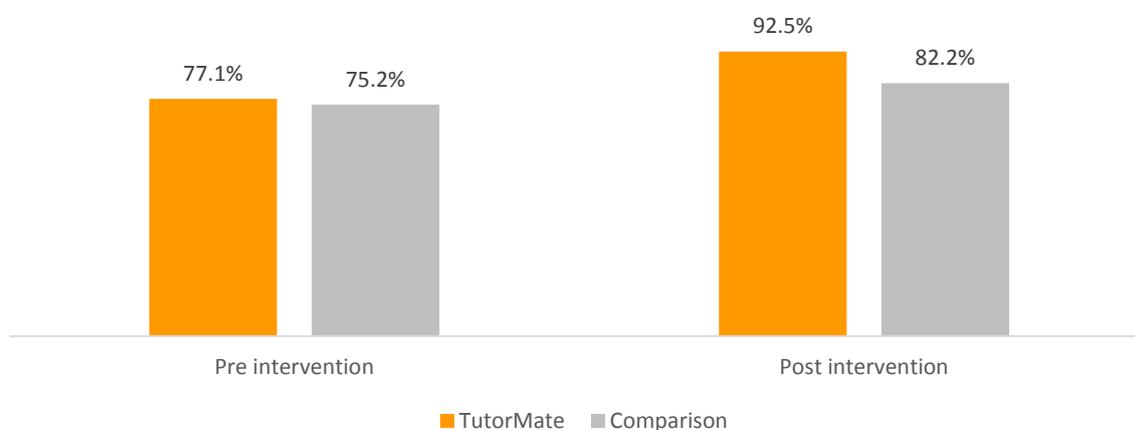
Reading attitudes and behaviour outcomes

We also surveyed children at the beginning and end of the year to see whether the intervention had changed their reading enjoyment, behaviours and attitudes.

We had pre- and post-attitudinal survey data for **248** children who were mainly in Year 1 (94.4%). 30.8% of them had taken part in TutorMate, while the remainder were children from the same class who hadn't taken part in the intervention. We used their data to compare any changes over time.

Figure 2 shows that TutorMate and comparison group children had very similar levels of reading enjoyment at the beginning of the year. However, at the end of the year, more TutorMate than comparison group children said that they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot. Overall, a fifth (19.9%) more children who took part in TutorMate said post intervention that they now enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot compared with before. More children in our comparison group who hadn't taken part in TutorMate also enjoyed reading at the post assessment, but the increase is half that we see in the TutorMate group (9.9%).

Figure 2: Enjoyment of reading over time for TutorMate and comparison children.



⁴ $t(36) = 2.281, p = 0.029$

Figure 3 looks at children’s perceptions of their reading skill over time. It shows that fewer children who took part in TutorMate initially felt that their reading skill was very good or good compared with children in the comparison group. However, at the end of the year, that dynamic had reversed, with more children who took part in TutorMate at the end of the year saying that they are very good or good readers compared with children in the comparison group.

Overall, a third (34.5%) more children who took part in TutorMate at the end of the year said that they are very good or good readers compared with before, while only half as many say the same in the comparison group (16.7%).

Figure 3: Self-perceptions of being a good reader over time for TutorMate and comparison children.

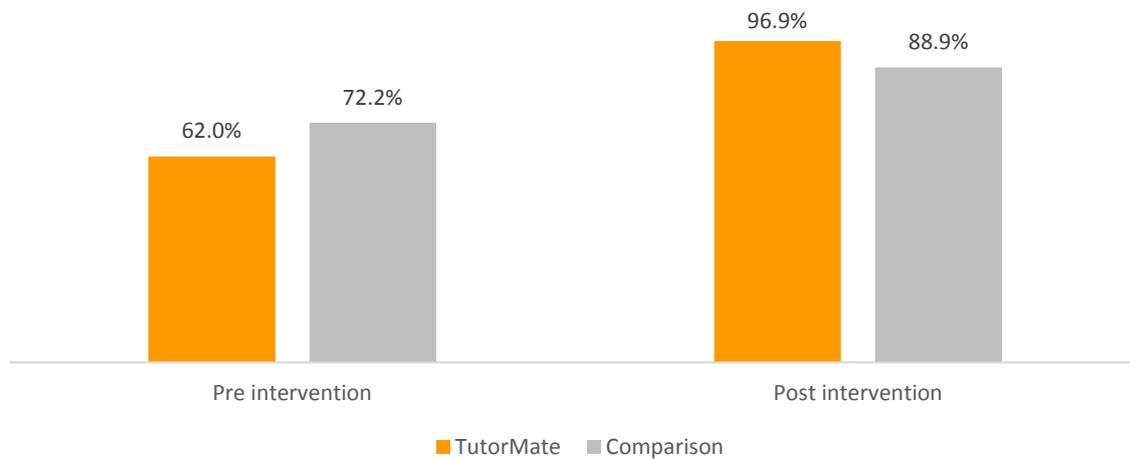
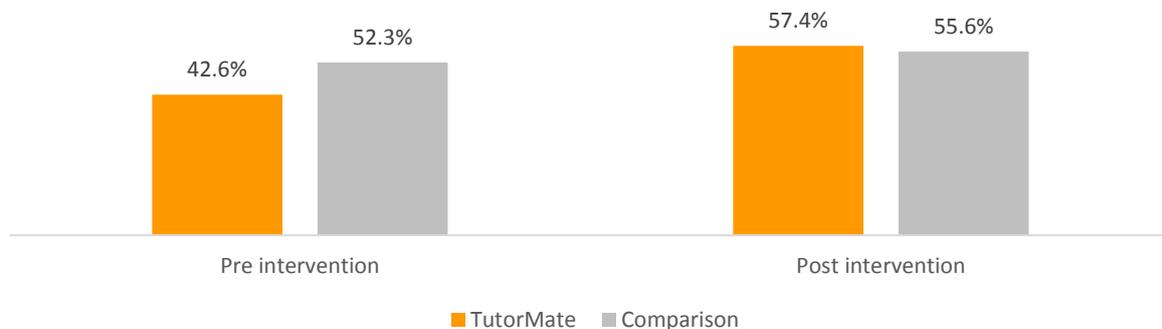


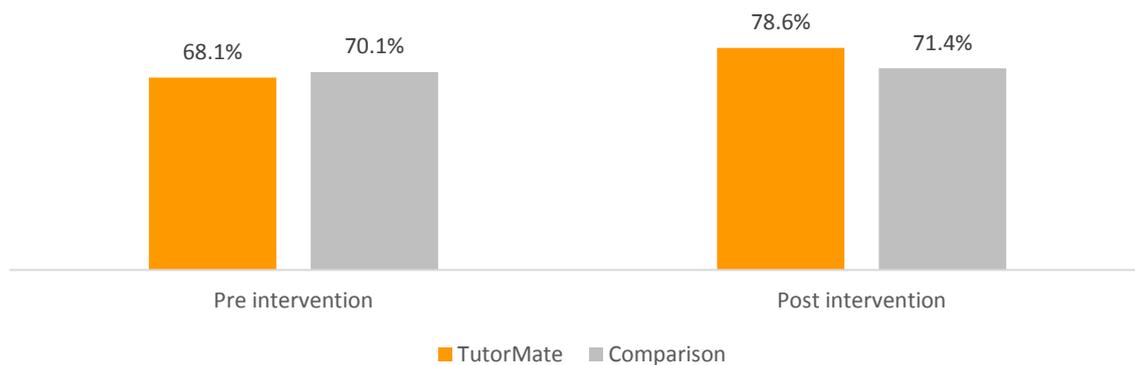
Figure 4 shows that taking part in TutorMate also had behavioural benefits. It shows that fewer children who took part in TutorMate at the beginning of the year said that they read daily compared with children in the comparison group. However, at the end of the year, TutorMate children had caught up with their peers in terms of daily reading levels.

Figure 4: Daily reading levels over time for TutorMate and comparison children.



As can be seen in Figure 5, when asked whether they agree or disagree that “reading is fun”, a similar percentage of TutorMate and comparison group children said at the beginning of the year that the statement “reading is fun” is true for them. While the percentage of comparison group children who said this remained stable over the year, more TutorMate children now say this at the end of the year. Overall, there was a 10% increase in the number of children who took part in TutorMate who at the end of the year believe that “reading is fun”.

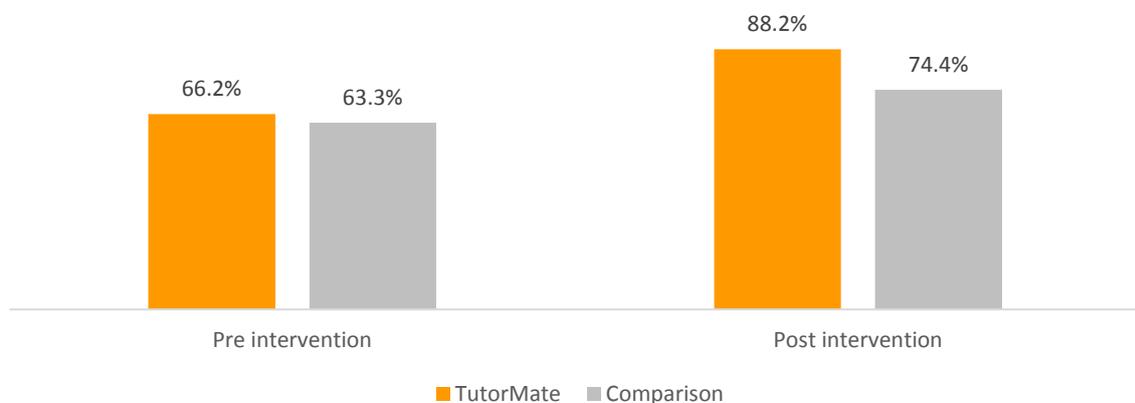
Figure 5: Percentage of children saying “reading is fun” is very true for them over time for TutorMate and comparison children.



Similarly, when asked whether they felt it is true for them that there are lots of things they want to read, a similar percentage of TutorMate and comparison group children said that this was very true for them at the beginning of the year (see Figure 6). At the end of the year, more children in both groups said this, but particularly children who took part in TutorMate.

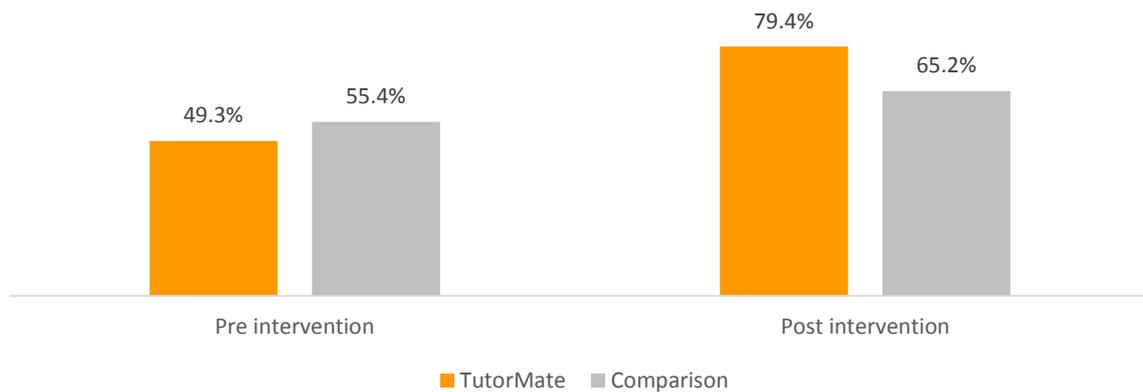
Overall, a fifth (22%) more children who took part in TutorMate at the end of the year said that there are lots of things they want to read, rising from 66.2% to 88.2%, while the increase in the comparison group was half this (11.1%), rising from 63.3% to 74.4%.

Figure 6: Percentage of children saying “there are lots of things I want to read” is very true for them over time for TutorMate and comparison children.



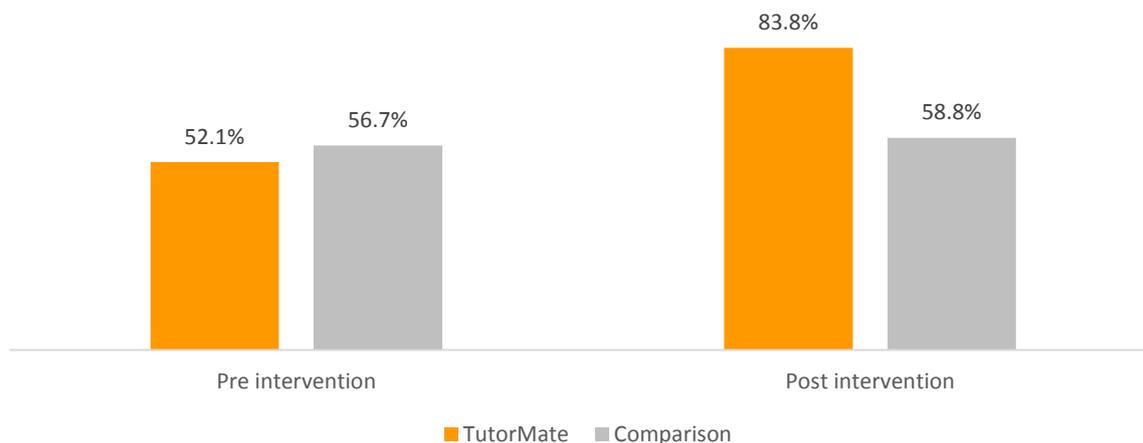
Only half of TutorMate children agreed with the statement that reading is easy at the beginning of the intervention, a percentage that was slightly lower than that of their peers who didn't take part in TutorMate (see Figure 7). However, at the end of the year, more TutorMate children said this than their peers, supporting findings made earlier in terms of their self-perceived skill rating (see Figure 3).

Figure 7: Percentage of children saying “reading is easy” is very true for them over time for TutorMate and comparison children.



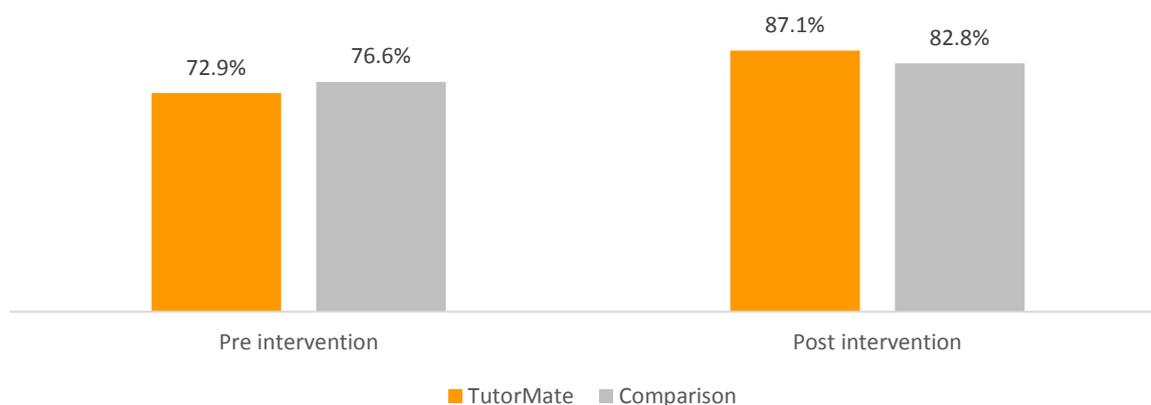
As can be seen in Figure 8, while the percentage of children in the comparison group who agree that learning new words is easy for them has remained stable over the course of the year, the percentage of TutorMate children who said this increased from 52.1% to 83.8% over the same period.

Figure 8: Percentage of children saying “it is easy for me to learn new words” is very true for them over time for TutorMate and comparison children.



Slightly fewer TutorMate children than their peers agreed at the beginning of the year that learning new words is fun (see Figure 9). At the end of the year, more TutorMate children than their peers said this.

Figure 9: Percentage of children saying “learning new words is fun” is very true for them over time for TutorMate and comparison children.



Of the children who took part in TutorMate, 86.2% said that they enjoyed the experience.

Focus on the reluctant reader

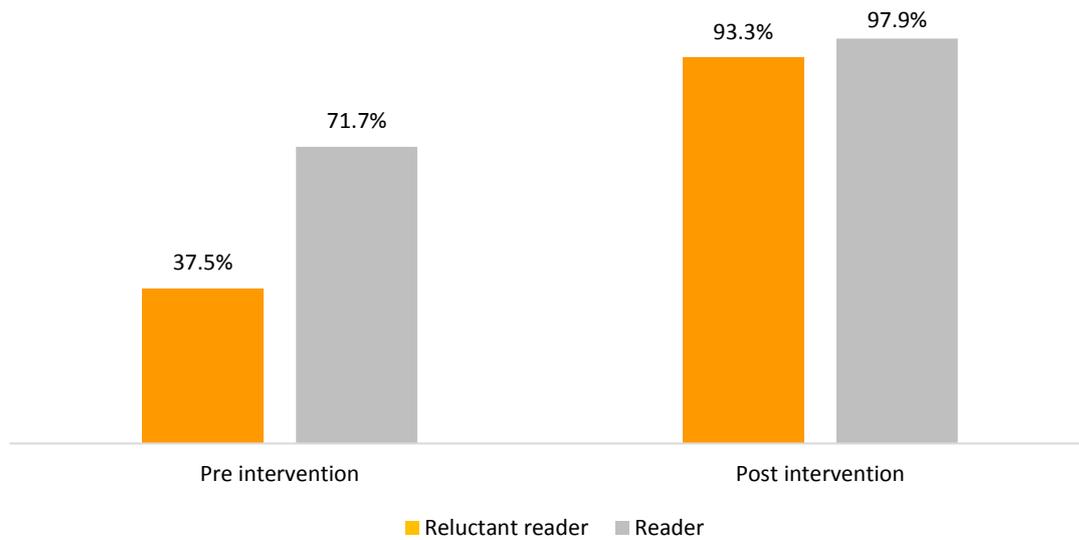
We were particularly interested in exploring the outcomes of TutorMate on one set of pupils: the reluctant readers. To this end, we categorised those who only enjoyed reading a bit or not at all before participating in TutorMate (n = 16) in this category. We then compared their journey to that of children who took part in TutorMate but who started the programme already enjoying reading either very much or quite a bit (n = 56).

Taking part in TutorMate has had particular benefits for reluctant readers. Overall, reluctant readers started the intervention in a much worse position than their peers who enjoyed reading. However, at the end of the intervention, the initially reluctant readers had caught up with their peers in terms of their enjoyment of reading, their self-perception as readers and their reading frequency. Their attitudes towards reading also showed more dramatic improvements compared with their peers.

For example, at the end of the year, the initially reluctant readers had caught up with their peers in terms of their reading enjoyment, with 87.5% of the initially reluctant readers now enjoying reading compared with 93.9% of those who had already enjoyed reading at the beginning of the intervention.

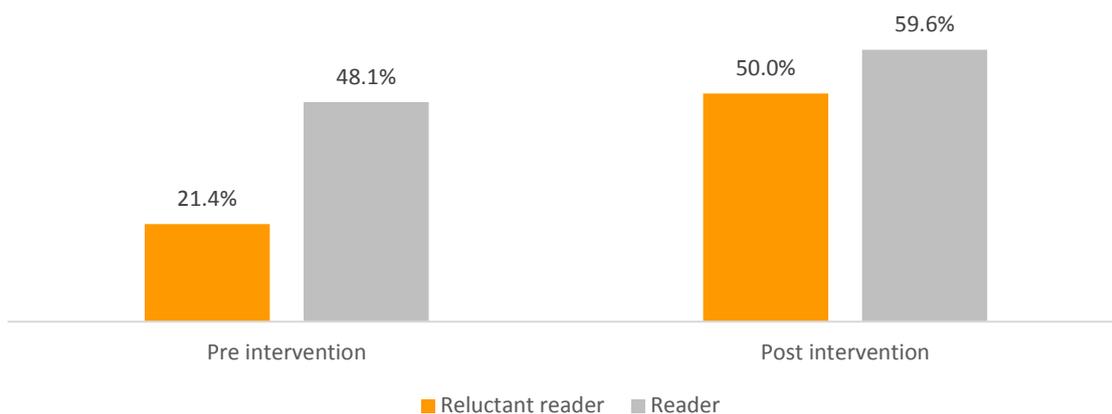
As can be seen in Figure 10, half as many reluctant readers also considered themselves to be good readers compared with those who started the programme already enjoying reading. Indeed, only 1 in 3 reluctant readers said at the beginning of the intervention that they were a good reader. However, at the end of the year, this figure had nearly tripled to 93%. Indeed, at the end of the year, the initially reluctant readers had caught up with their peers in terms of their self-perception as good readers.

Figure 10: Percentage of reluctant and non-reluctant readers taking part in TutorMate who see themselves as good readers before and after the intervention.



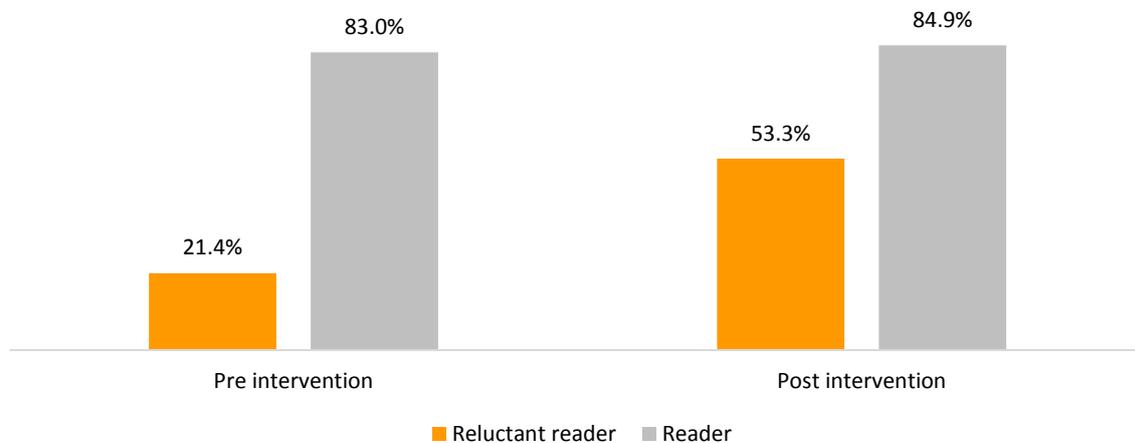
Half as many reluctant readers as their peers also said that they read daily outside class at the beginning of the year (21.4% vs 48.1%; see Figure 11). At the end of the year, this number had more than doubled to half (50.0%) of initially reluctant readers now saying that they read daily in their free time and they had started catching up their peers in terms of their daily reading level (59.6%).

Figure 11: Percentage of reluctant and non-reluctant readers taking part in TutorMate who read daily before and after the intervention.



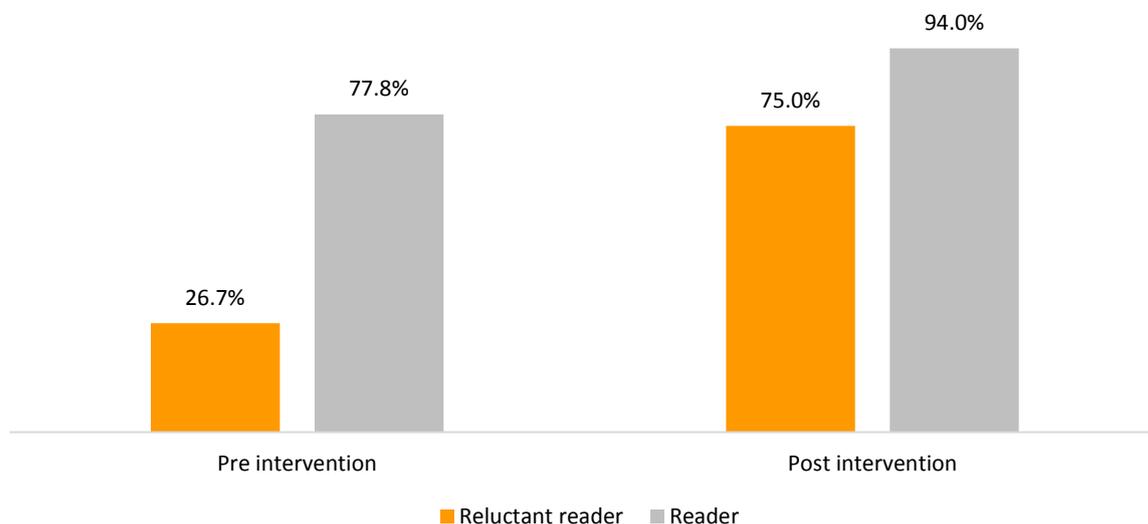
As Figure 12 shows, only 1 in 5 reluctant readers said before taking part in TutorMate that they think reading is fun. However, nearly two and a half times as many said this at the end of year (53.3%). By contrast, the number of their peers who said this had remained stable throughout the year.

Figure 12: Percentage of reluctant and non-reluctant readers taking part in TutorMate who agree that “reading is fun” before and after the intervention.



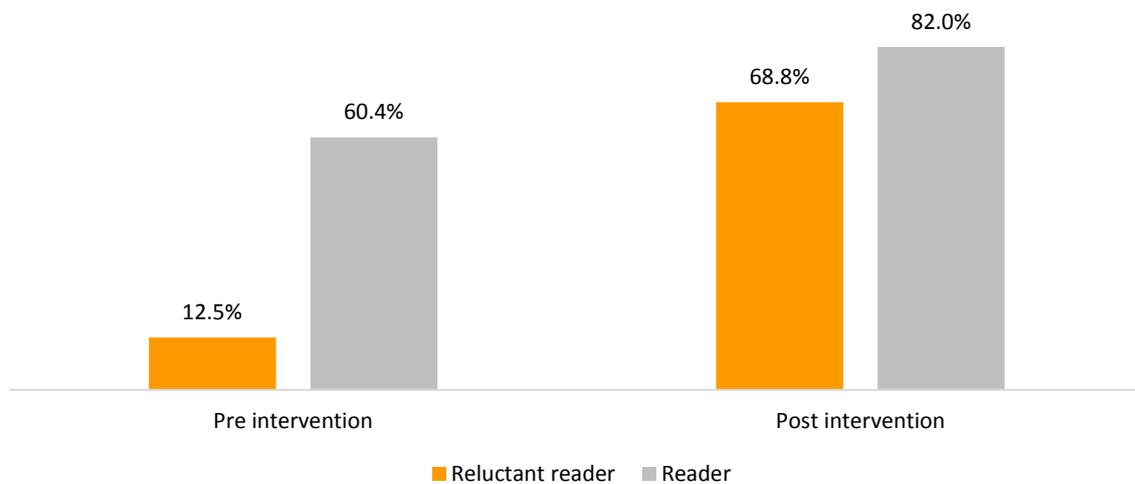
Similarly, only 1 in 4 reluctant readers agreed before taking part in TutorMate that there were lots of things they wanted to read (see Figure 13). This figure nearly tripled to 3 in 4 who said this at the end of the year. Agreement with this statement also increased over time for their peers who already started in TutorMate enjoying reading. However, the rate of increase was much smaller for this group (21% compared with 181% for reluctant readers).

Figure 13: Percentage of reluctant and non-reluctant readers taking part in TutorMate who agree that “there are lots of things I want to read” before and after the intervention.



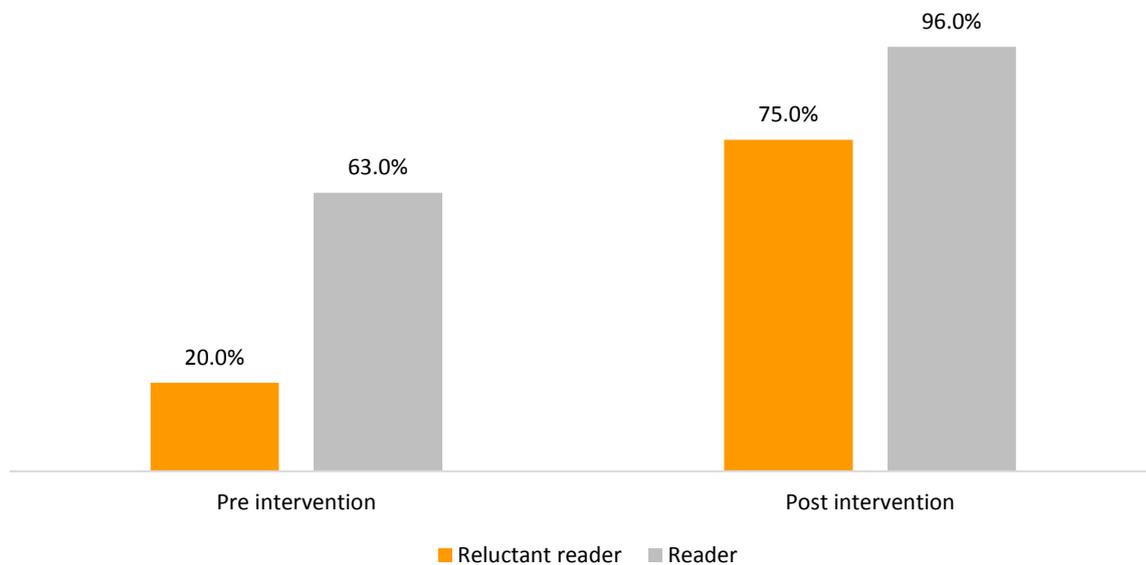
TutorMate appeared to have a particular benefit in terms of children’s self-perceived reading skill, with nearly five times as many children who started off the intervention as reluctant readers saying that they now find reading easy at the end of the year (increasing from 12.5% at the beginning of the intervention to 68.8% at the end – see Figure 14).

Figure 14: Percentage of reluctant and non-reluctant readers taking part in TutorMate who find that “reading is easy” before and after the intervention.



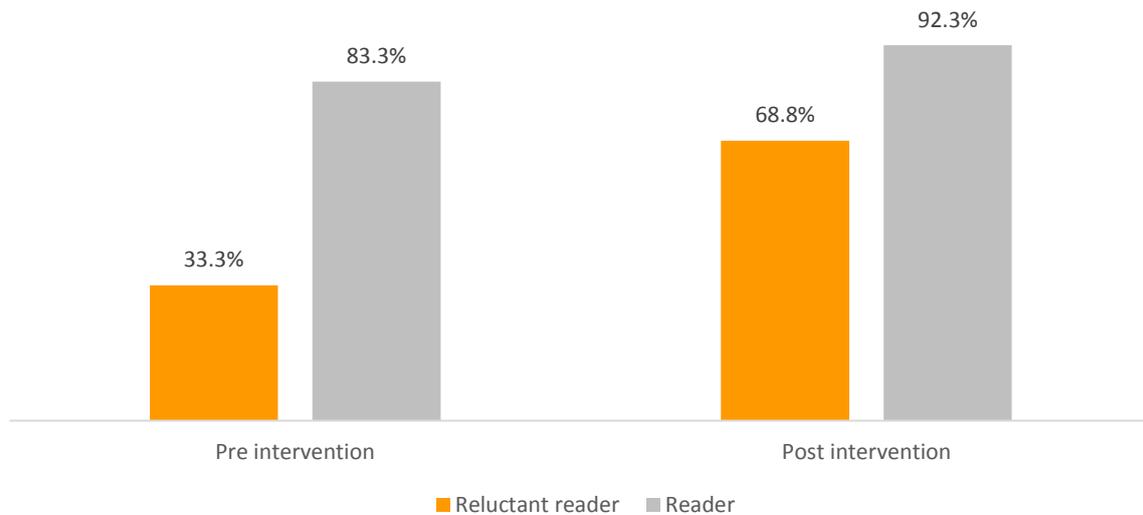
As Figure 15 shows, 1 in 5 reluctant readers agreed with the statement that they find it easy to learn new words before taking part in TutorMate. This figure had nearly tripled to 3 in 4 at the end of the year, an increase of 275%. By contrast, although their peers who took part in TutorMate already enjoying reading, they showed an increase in agreement with this statement that was much lower (52.4%).

Figure 15: Percentage of reluctant and non-reluctant readers taking part in TutorMate who agree that “I find it easy to learn new words” before and after the intervention.



The number of reluctant readers who agree with the statement that learning new words is fun doubled over the course of the intervention, increasing from 33.3% to 68.8% (see Figure 16). By contrast, the increase in agreement in their peers who had started TutorMate already enjoying reading is much more subdued, rising from 83.3% to 92.3%.

Figure 16: Percentage of reluctant and non-reluctant readers taking part in TutorMate who agree that “learning new words is fun” before and after the intervention.



Those who started the intervention not enjoying reading enjoyed taking part more so than those who already enjoyed reading at the start of the programme (92.9% vs. 83.7%).

Exploring gender

We also explored whether the intervention supported boys better than girls (or vice versa). However, there was no difference in how boys and girls taking part in TutorMate experienced the intervention and they didn't reap any differing benefits.

Teacher perspectives

Teachers from schools participating in the pilot were asked to complete a post-intervention survey to gather information about changes in children from the perspective of a professional adult practitioner. The survey included questions relating to reading enjoyment, behaviour and confidence, information about context (e.g. timetabling) and ease of implementation.

Twelve surveys were received from staff at eight schools taking part in the intervention: seven were from teachers who were the main contacts for the programme at their school, and five were from teachers with partial involvement.

To establish some context for the benefits of the programme on the schools concerned, teachers were asked about the most significant literacy challenge they faced. Half of the responses referenced specific aspects of reading such as vocabulary, decoding, comprehension and fluency (for example, “a combination of fluency and comprehension” – Teacher, London). Three teachers cited a high number of children learning English as an additional language, one the promotion of reading for pleasure, and one a lack of resources and parental support (“access to reading materials and reading at home” – Teacher, Bradford).

Some of these themes emerged in later responses relating to the outcomes of TutorMate, in particular reading comprehension, suggesting that the programme offered opportunities for schools to address the literacy issues most relevant to the children they work with.

Teachers' perception of benefits of TutorMate on participating pupils

All teachers (12/12) believed that the TutorMate programme had been beneficial for participating pupils, with one third (4/12 or 33.3%) feeling it had been 'very beneficial' and two-thirds (8/12 or 66.7%) 'quite beneficial'. None felt that TutorMate had not had any benefit for participating pupils.

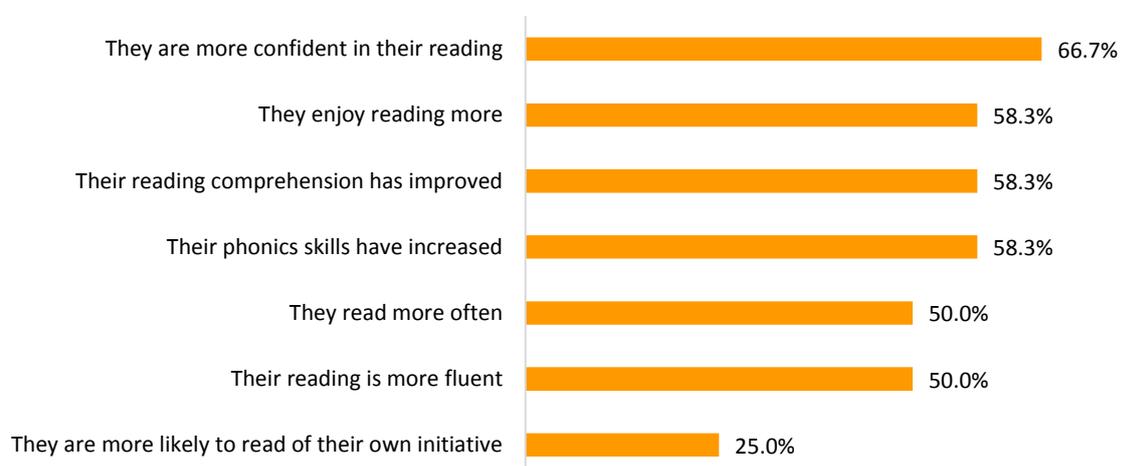
Positive comments suggested that children found involvement in the programme fun, and particular pupils had benefited:

It's very good for the quiet children who won't read with an adult in class.

(Teacher, Bradford)

Teachers noticed a number of changes in reading skills, attitudes and behaviours in pupils participating in TutorMate (see Figure 17). They were most likely to say they had noticed increased confidence in participating pupils, and almost 3 in 5 teachers noticed increased reading enjoyment and improved comprehension and phonics skills in participating pupils. Half noticed improvements in children's reading frequency and fluency, and one quarter said that children now had increased intrinsic motivation to read.

Figure 17: Teachers' perception of changes among pupils now that they have taken part in the programme.



In terms of reading skill, we asked teachers if they felt pupils taking part in TutorMate had progressed in reading compared with their expected level of progress. Three quarters (9/12 or 75%) felt that children had made their expected level of progress, and one quarter (3/12 or 25%) thought they'd made more than the expected level of progress. No teacher felt that pupils had made no progress in their reading level, or less than their expected level.

Teachers were further asked to consider the progress made by pupils taking part compared with other children who had started the school year at the same reading level. While one-third (4/12 or 33.3%) felt participating pupils had more progress than their peers, two-thirds (8/12 or 66.7%) felt they had made about the same progress.

This would appear to indicate that some children had more to benefit from participation in the programme than others. Indeed, when asked about the outcomes of the programme on individual children, it is clear that some children made significant progress:

K. has flown through the book bands this year. She is a very confident reader now and keen to show how good she is. Her comprehension has almost kept up with her ability so we have been able to move her up slowly. In the last few weeks we have moved her up two book bands as she is just so fluent now.

(Teacher, Bradford)

One child was EAL and began the year at the lowest reading level. By the end of the year she had completed all 30 levels of reading and is now able to move on to the Year 3 reading project.

(Teacher, London)

Other teachers noted that less confident children had benefited in particular from the programme:

Children who lacked confidence. Children who were shy to speak.

(Teacher, Bradford)

Ease of implementation

Most teachers (7/12) said it had been 'very easy' to run the TutorMate programme in their school, with the remaining five saying it had been 'fairly easy'. As with any new intervention, there was a learning curve, with one teacher commenting: "It took a while to understand exactly how it was going to work and what would be best for our class." Another said: "... after a few weeks it was running very smoothly in the background".

Teacher satisfaction with the programme was high, with more than 9 in 10 teachers (91.7%) saying they were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the programme overall. Only one teacher said they felt 'neutral' about their experience.

Some technical issues meant that some sessions did not run or class was interrupted.

(Teacher, Bradford)

The majority of teachers (8/11 or 88.3%) said they would be interested in having the TutorMate programme in their classroom again next year, although several made the point that such a decision would not be theirs to make, and further that it "would be useful if all technical issues were addressed beforehand" (Teacher, Bradford). One teacher made the point that the convenience of the programme, and its lack of demands on staff time, made it particularly helpful given the demands of the curriculum:

The day is already packed full and finding time and staff for interventions is difficult. If this is already running then it's one less thing to worry about.

(Teacher, Bradford)

As noted earlier, the TutorMate programme involves remote volunteers supporting children's reading via technology (i.e. using a laptop and headphones to share reading sessions). Most teachers reported a very positive experience of working with their volunteers, with one quarter (3/12 or 25%) rating it 'excellent', two-thirds (8/12 or 67%) rating it 'good' and one respondent 'average'. Positive comments about the experience included:

They made a great effort to ensure the children felt special and most importantly for some children it was the only time they were listened to and encouraged in a one to one reading experience consistently. The staff at Visa built very positive relationships with the children and left a lasting impact.

(Teacher, London)

One teacher noted that there were not always enough volunteers to allow all children to take part:

Some tutors were very keen and emailed frequently. Some did not do the programme, which meant that some children could not take part despite signing the consent form.

Three quarters (9/12 or 75%) of teachers said their children had received an end-of-year visit from their TutorMate volunteer, with the remaining (3/12 or 25%) yet to receive a visit. The number of responses did not allow for a useful comparison between the two groups.

Volunteer views

TutorMate is dependent on trained volunteers who support children with regular remote reading mentoring sessions. A post-intervention volunteer survey was administered to explore their experience of online volunteer tutoring, including their perception of the outcomes of the programme on children and on themselves.

The volunteer survey received **75** responses. Nearly three quarters (72.0%) were from women and just over one quarter (26.7%) were from men. Most (32.0%) were aged 36 to 45; 30.7% were 26 to 35; 22.7% were 46 to 55; 8% were 55 to 64; and 6.7% were 18 to 25.

More than half the volunteers (56.8%) responding to the survey had taken part in 16 or more 'productive sessions' (15 minutes or more of quality talk time) with their pupil, one-third (36.5%) between 11 and 15, and 5.4% took part in 6 to 10 sessions. Only one volunteer said they'd had fewer than five productive sessions.

All (**100%**) of the volunteers responding to the survey believed their volunteering had made a positive difference to the child or children they worked with. Respondents shared a number of examples of this:

I tutored two [children]. L graduated the programme in less than 3 months and J became more confident in reading out loud,

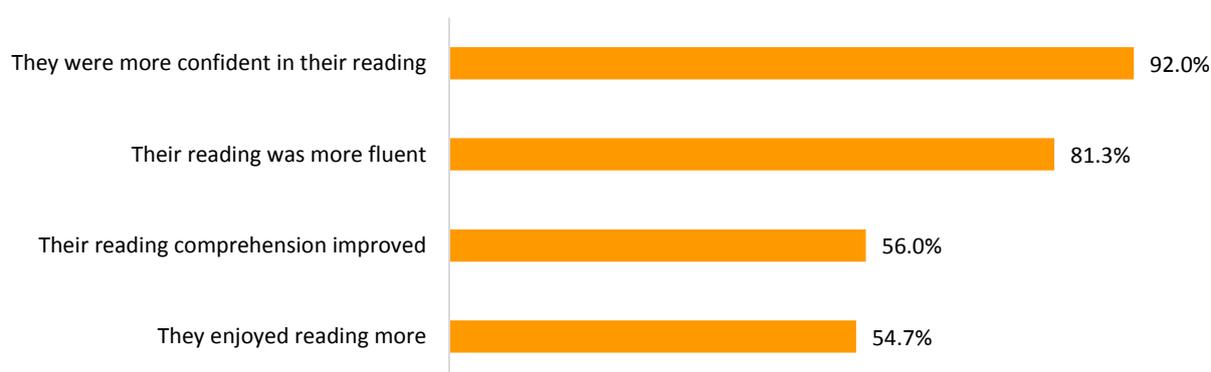
I saw a vast improvement in his reading. By the end of the term he had gone up by at least 3 reading levels.

I can not only see a significant improvement in my student's reading abilities but also a ...rise in confidence. My student started to enjoy reading and moved up almost 4 reading levels, which, to me, is exceptional and I couldn't be more satisfied with this result. Without TutorMate I don't believe this could have been possible.

As with teachers, volunteers were also asked to comment on any changes in children's reading skills, attitudes and behaviours (see Figure 18). As with teachers, volunteers were most likely to notice that children were more confident in their reading, with 9 in 10 (92%) of respondents finding this. However, volunteers were much more likely than teachers to feel children's reading was more fluent (4 in 5 believed so, compared with just half of teachers). They were less likely to say they'd noticed improvements in children's reading comprehension and enjoyment, with just over half saying this (56.0% and 54.7% respectively) compared with 7 in 12 teachers.

These different perceptions may reflect the different amounts of time that teachers and volunteers spent with children, and the focus of that time.

Figure 18: Volunteers' perception of changes among pupils now that they have taken part in the programme.



Almost all (98.7%) the volunteers rated their volunteering experience as 'excellent' (50.7%) or 'good' (48.0%), with only one respondent rating it 'average'. Around half of volunteers (37) were keen to comment further, with most comments extremely positive (see Figure 19).

Most comments focused on the visible impact they observed in their reading partner:

It was great to see the improvements week by week. Seeing the impact at the end of term was a fantastic experience.

It was great to work with a single child throughout the year and watch their reading level go up and hear their confidence improve.

Figure 19: Word cloud of volunteers' comments of their experience with TutorMate.



Others mentioned how much they had also enjoyed themselves:

Found the experience very rewarding and from the progress my student made over the year in terms of her increased reading confidence, really worthwhile. And it was fun!

I found it very rewarding, and the child I tutored was very engaged. The IT system worked well and made it very easy to tutor from my desk. The sessions are also a pleasant break from work and provide "escapism"!

Many reflected how well the programme addressed the difficulty of fitting meaningful volunteering time into a busy working week:

From a company CSR perspective this is a very convenient way to fit time in giving back to communities ...not all children may have the support at home, [so] delivering reading sessions remotely is a perfectly sensible way of reaching children on a one-to-one basis. It's so rewarding ...seeing the individual child you read with develop over the time you're reading together.

It's amazing to find a programme like this that is so understanding of work hours. Signing up as an individual I don't have an official charity hours programme with my company, but I can still be involved in TutorMate easily around work hours.

While some volunteers were impressed with all aspects of the programme:

I found the whole process from screening, online training, support, and most of all coaching the pupil absolutely amazing.

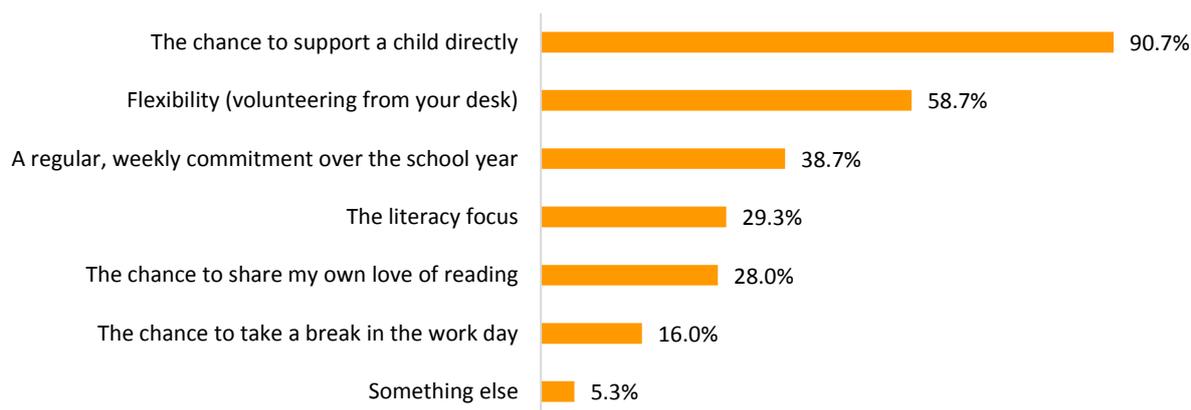
A minority of comments expressed concerns around the pupils they had been matched with, or behaviour management:

Generally felt the programme worked well, found it easy to navigate but sometimes felt the child was not engaged and I did not know the best to help the situation.

I found that my reading partner was sometimes tired by the afternoon. As a result it could be tricky to gauge how much to stick to the programme. Having said that, the majority of the calls were productive. However, a bit of guidance, or expectation setting on that point, might have been useful.

When asked about what they valued about participating in TutorMate, 9 in 10 volunteers said it had been the chance to support a child directly (see Figure 20). Three in 5 valued the flexibility, and 2 in 5 the regular commitment. The literacy and reading focus was valued by fewer volunteers, with around 3 in 10 saying these were important aspects for them. While some volunteers appreciated the chance to take a break in the work day, respondents were least likely to say they valued this aspect of the programme.

Figure 20: Which (if any) of the following did you value about participating in TutorMate?

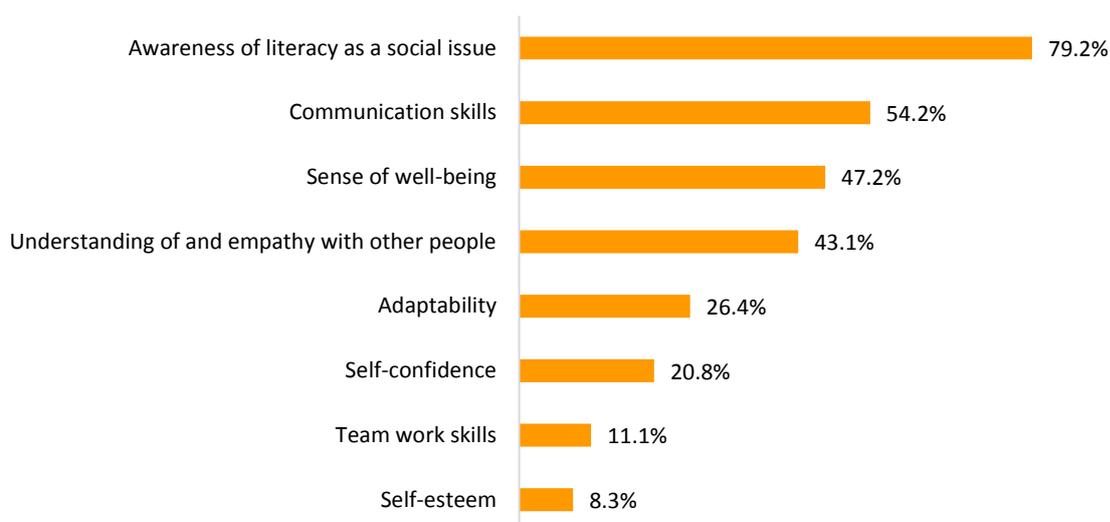


One respondent commented:

It was beneficial to take the time during the working day to help a child and reflect on what is important in life/what a privilege even the simple things in life are that we sometimes take for granted.

Alongside benefits for pupils, volunteers also felt their involvement with TutorMate had improved them personally. Four in 5 said their awareness of literacy as a social issue had increased, and more than half believed they had better communication skills as a result of taking part in the programme (see Figure 21). Almost half of volunteers reported an increased sense of well-being, and 2 in 5 better understanding of other people.

Figure 21: To what degree has volunteering improved your...



A common test of the success of a volunteering experience is whether the volunteer would recommend the opportunity to a friend. 100% of TutorMate volunteers said they would do so, and several added comments to indicate that this had happened already:

Absolutely! I'm hoping to get more of my colleagues involved for next term and I have told friends and family about the programme.

When I present to new colleagues each month, I always mention that I volunteer for TutorMate and the reaction is always incredibly positive. I hope it's inspired other colleagues to participate next year.

I have already volunteered with our co-ordinator to recruit more tutors if we needed to get more people to support as I'm convinced people would enjoy it as much as I have!

One test of the volunteer experience is whether volunteers intend to continue volunteering in the future. The majority (61.3%) of respondents said it was 'very likely' they would be tutoring again in the new school year, with a further 1 in 5 (20%) saying it was 'somewhat likely'. Comments included:

Looking forward to tutoring again and sharing the positive experience with other companies who wish to get involved.

I've already signed up!

Can't wait!

I think it is a wonderful initiative to be involved with. I hope it continues and becomes even more widespread. The children really benefit from this and I also think the adults benefit too as they get to be involved in something worthwhile. It seems like a big deal to commit to a whole year but 30 minutes a week is nothing and most people can find that amount of time a week to help enrich a child's life.

I found the experience very rewarding and a lovely way to spend half an hour in my day almost every week!

I found it very rewarding; it's a fantastic opportunity to help a struggling child improve their life.

Conclusion

The National Literacy Trust recognises the importance of technology as a tool for teaching literacy skills, and we were interested to conduct this evaluation of the benefits of the innovative TutorMate online volunteer tutoring programme in nine schools across Bradford and London. Findings from surveys and assessments of 386 Year 1 pupils, 12 teachers and 75 volunteers suggested a variety of positive outcomes for participants, particularly children who began the programme with the lowest levels of reading enjoyment.

It is important that conceptualisations of reading focus not only on skills, but also on the affective and behavioural processes that help develop and sustain the cognitive processes associated with reading (Clark and Teravainen, 2017). In this sense, it is important to recognise the value of positive changes in children's reading attitudes and behaviours found over the course of the TutorMate programme.

Notably, pupils taking part in TutorMate ended the programme with higher levels of reading engagement compared with their peers who had not. Indeed, the rate at which their reading enjoyment levels increased over the course of the intervention was double that of their non-participating classmates, and they ended the programme more likely to agree with the statements "reading is fun" and "there are lots of things I want to read" than their peers. This clearly demonstrates the value of the programme for developing and sustaining positive attitudes towards reading. Children participating in TutorMate also showed significant increases in reading confidence over the course of the intervention. While only 3 in 5 (62.0%) believed themselves to be good readers before taking part, almost all (96.9%) believed this at the end of the intervention. Furthermore, the study found a positive increase in reading behaviour in participating children, who ended the programme equally as likely to read every day.

It is particularly heartening to see that the group of children who began the programme with the poorest reading engagement caught up with their peers' levels of reading enjoyment and self-perception, and that they were twice as likely to read every day having completed the intervention. This group of children also showed a dramatic increase in their enthusiasm for reading with the percentage agreeing with "there are lots of things I want to read" rising from 26.7% before taking part to 75.0% after taking part in TutorMate.

Similarly, children who started TutorMate within the two lowest levels read at a higher level at the end of the intervention than their peers who started off with a similar reading level but who didn't take part in TutorMate. Numbers in the reading sample were small and the reading assessment was limited in what it would tell us about children's skill. Future evaluations of this intervention might therefore consider the use of standardised reading tests rather than

book levels to facilitate a more in-depth measure of changes in skills over the course of the programme.

Confirming findings from children's surveys, teachers and volunteers believed that increased reading confidence was one of the key benefits for children taking part in TutorMate. In addition, with busy classrooms and workplaces, the programme provided a convenient and helpful way of facilitating a reading programme with minimal demands on staff time. Volunteers, in particular, valued the opportunity to support a child directly, but with the flexibility of being able to do so from their desk, and they enjoyed being able to see pupils' progression in reading from week to week. Alongside the benefits for children, many felt they had gained personally from involvement with TutorMate, reporting better awareness of literacy as a social issue and increased communication skills. The fact that 100% would recommend the volunteering opportunity to a friend indicates that taking part was a positive experience for all concerned.

Appendix 1 – Evaluation methodology

The outcomes of TutorMate were evaluated using the following methods:

- Pre- and post-intervention reading skills were based on information on pupils' book band/level progress, as well as information on the number of sessions per child. Schools provided information on children's reading, using levels based on UK banding, to allow a comparison between intervention children and their peers.
- Pre- and post-intervention child attitudinal surveys measured any changes in reading enjoyment, behaviour and confidence. Simple surveys, reflecting the age of the children involved, were administered by teachers across whole classes to allow comparison between intervention children and their peers.
- Post-intervention teacher questionnaires established teacher and teaching assistants' perspectives on changes in children's reading enjoyment, behaviour and confidence, and gathered information about context (e.g. timetabling) and ease of implementation.
- Post-intervention volunteer surveys explored their experience of online volunteer tutoring, including their perception of the benefits of the programme on children and on themselves.

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We are a national charity dedicated to raising literacy levels in the UK. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy. We run projects in the poorest communities, campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians and parents, and support schools.

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