



Cost

£££££

Evidence strength



Impact (months)

+4

Effect size

0.28

What is it?

Small group tuition is defined as one teacher, trained teaching assistant or tutor working with two to five pupils together in a group. This arrangement enables the teaching to focus exclusively on a small number of learners, usually in a separate classroom or working area. Intensive tuition in small groups is often provided to support lower attaining learners or those who are falling behind, but it can also be used as a more general strategy to ensure effective progress, or to teach challenging topics or skills.

Key Findings

1. Small group tuition has an average impact of four months' additional progress over the course of a year.
2. Small group tuition is most likely to be effective if it is targeted at pupils' specific needs. Diagnostic assessment can be used to assess the best way to target support.
3. One to one tuition and small group tuition are both effective interventions. However, the cost effectiveness of teaching in small groups indicates that greater use of this approach may be worthwhile.
4. Providing training to the staff that deliver small group support is likely to increase impact.
5. Additional small group support can be effectively targeted at pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, and should be considered as part of a school's pupil premium strategy.

How effective is the approach?

The average impact of the small group tuition is four additional months' progress, on average, over the course of a year.

Evidence shows that small group tuition is effective and, as a rule of thumb, the smaller the group the better. Some studies suggest that greater feedback from the teacher, more sustained the engagement in smaller groups, or work which is more closely matched to learners' needs explains this impact. Once group size increases above six or seven there is a noticeable reduction in effectiveness.

Although the rule "the smaller the better" there is some variability in impact within the existing evidence. For example, in reading, small group teaching can sometimes be more effective than either one to one or paired tuition. It may be that in these cases reading practice can be efficiently organised so that all the pupils stay fully engaged as each take their turn, such as in Guided Reading.

The variability in findings suggests two things. First, the quality of the teaching in small groups may be as, or more important than, the precise group size (there is evidence of the benefits of staff professional development on pupil outcomes). Second, it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of different arrangements, as the specific subject matter being taught and composition of the groups may influence outcomes.

Given the uncertainty and the lower cost, small group tuition may be a sensible approach to trial before considering to one to one tuition.

Evidence of small group tuition in the Arab world is still inconclusive, however, studies that have taken place have shown promising results on students' social and academic skills. Studies in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Jordan, and Oman reported that this arrangement provides students with opportunities to interact and be more engaged in their learning. A study of small group tuition in Saudi Arabia found significant improvements to students' Arabic reading comprehension skills in addition to their interaction and cooperative learning.

However, researchers have recommended teachers to be more prepared and trained in applying small group tuition in the classroom. Furthermore, textbooks and curricula in some contexts are considered as potential barriers. That is why in some contexts (i.e, Saudi Arabia), textbooks and curricula were recently developed according to modern strategies to facilitate teachers' work in following students' progress, detect their individual needs, and choose appropriate strategies that could be more suitable to the development of their learning.

To date, research on small group tuition is limited in this region despite the few reported benefits particularly to the development of the Arabic language. More research is needed in this area, including using sample of students and teachers from various course subjects and from different contexts in the Arab world. Additionally, inductive approaches are also needed to collect in-depth information about students perceptions and feelings about working in small groups.

Behind the average

Impact tends to be greater in primary schools (+4 months) than secondary schools, which has fewer studies overall and a lower impact (+2 months).

Most of the research on small group tuition has been conducted on reading and there is a greater impact, on average (+ 4 months). The studies in mathematics show a slightly smaller positive impact (+ 3 months).

Frequent sessions, three times a week or so, lasting up to an hour over about 10 weeks typically show the greatest impact.

Low attaining pupils particularly benefit from small group tuition.

Closing the disadvantage gap

Studies in England have shown that disadvantaged pupils typically receive additional benefits from small group tuition.

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.

How could you implement in your setting?

Small group tuition has an impact by providing additional support that is targeted at pupil needs. The reduction in the ratio of pupils to teacher compared to a regular classroom setting also allows for closer interaction between educators and pupils. When implementing small group tuition, schools should consider how to ensure that these active ingredients have a positive impact through:

- Accurately identifying the pupils that require additional support.
- Understanding the learning gaps of the pupils that receive small group tuition and using this knowledge to select curriculum content appropriately.

- Ensuring teachers are well-prepared for having high quality interactions with pupils, such as delivering well-planned feedback.
- Ensuring that small group tuition is well-linked to classroom content.

Small group tuition may be delivered by teachers, trained teaching assistants, academic mentors or tutors. Interventions are typically delivered over an extended period, often over the course several weeks or terms, to a small group of between two to five pupils.

When introducing new approaches, schools should consider implementation. For more information see [Putting Evidence to Work - A School's Guide to Implementation](#).

What does it cost?

The average cost of small group tuition is low. The costs to schools are largely based on additional salary costs and learning resources, the majority of which are recurring costs. Through the National Tutoring Programme Year 1 (2020-21), schools could purchase subsidised in person or online tutoring sessions for 1:3 or 1:2 groups in 15hr blocks for an average cost of £70-£100 per pupil, with lower costs for higher pupil-tutor ratios and online delivery.

When delivering teacher or TA-led small group tuition, implementation is likely to require a large amount of staff time compared with whole class approaches. Given the lower costs, small group tuition may be a sensible approach to trial before considering one to one tuition. See [one to one tuition](#).

Alongside time and cost, school leaders should consider using providers with a track record of effectiveness. To increase the impact of small group approaches, school leaders should consider professional development for teachers, TAs, and tutors to support high-quality tutoring practices.

How secure is the evidence?

The security of the evidence around small group tuition is rated as moderate. 62 studies were identified that met the inclusion criteria of the Toolkit. The topic lost an additional padlock because a large percentage of the studies were not independently evaluated:

- Evaluations conducted by organisations connected with the approach – for example, commercial providers, typically have larger impacts, which may influence the overall impact of the strand.

As with any evidence review, the Toolkit summarises the average impact of approaches when researched in academic studies. It is important to consider your context and apply your professional judgement when implementing an approach in your setting.

