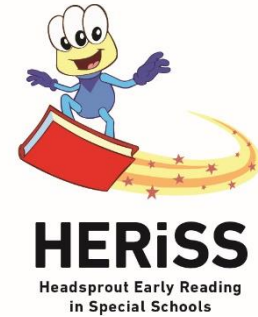


Headsprout Early Reading in Special Schools (HERiSS)

The [HERiSS project](#) will evaluate the effects of a computer-based early reading programme on reading skills for children with special educational needs and disabilities in special schools. The project is funded by the [Educational Endowment Foundation \(EEF\)](#), in their first round of funding specific to children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. This is the first special school project funded by EEF, and quite possibly the first large-scale RCT conducted in special schools in the UK.



Many children with SEND struggle to learn to read, and the considerable attainment gap in reading for children with SEND increases across the key stages. Developing and robustly evaluating potentially beneficial interventions is a hugely important step in helping to address some of these challenges and build resources and capacity within schools to help improve reading outcomes.

What is Headsprout Early Reading?

Headsprout Early Reading is a computer-based programme that focuses on building fluency in essential early reading skills (such as decoding and blending) through providing explicit phonics instruction and giving children lots of opportunities to practice, until skills become fluent.

Has Headsprout Early Reading been used in special schools?

The delivery team at Bangor University have been leading pilot work exploring how the programme can be used in mainstream and special schools for a number of years. Through this work, they have developed additional training and implementation support models, and have conducted and published pilot work investigating the use of the programme in various settings. Two previous pilot RCTs of Headsprout in a small number of special schools have laid the foundations for this larger efficacy trial. These two pilot RCTs reported positive impacts on reading skills, but these studies are small and a larger trial is required. This trial will test whether Headsprout Early Reading leads to improved reading outcomes for children with SEND in special schools.

What will the project look like?

Headsprout Early Reading focuses on building fluency in essential early reading skills (such as decoding and blending) through providing explicit phonics instruction and giving children lots of opportunities to practice, until skills become fluent.



3 times a week, pupils work through activities in a computer programme which adapts instruction in response to their answers. There are 80 lessons and, depending on individual children and their needs, sessions typically take between 10 and 30 minutes.



Additional one-to-one fluency exercises are also delivered to some pupils in addition to the computer-based instruction.



Bangor University will conduct an initial day of training with 3 staff per school.

Ongoing implementation support will be provided by the Bangor team via a combination of school visits and telephone support.

An implementation support manual for using HER with students with SEND will also be provided to further support high quality implementation.

Participating schools will be randomly selected either to deliver Headsprout with up to 15 pupils, or to carry on with their usual literacy activities. The reading skills of all participating pupils will be measured before and after the intervention (in the summer term of 2020, and the summer term of 2021).

Schools randomly allocated to deliver Headsprout will receive a licence for the programme, training, and ongoing implementation support during the project. These schools will pay a £200 contribution towards the cost of the training and support.

Schools randomly allocated to continue with their usual literacy activities will receive £1000 for their participation in the project.

To discuss the project further, please contact Emily Roberts-Tyler

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