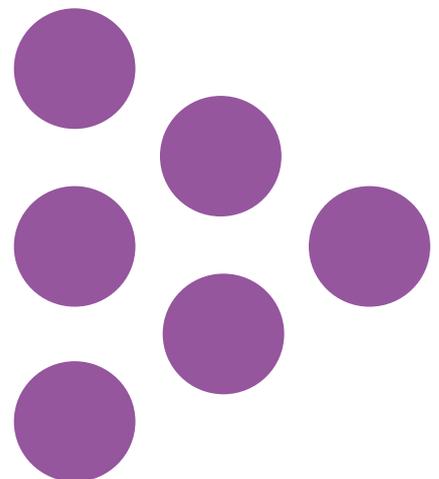

Report

Tutoring sustainability: Understanding the views of school leaders

National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)



Tutoring sustainability: Understanding the views of school leaders

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1 Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures resulted in significant disruption to children’s education and learning, with disadvantaged pupils most severely affected (EEF, 2022). Consequently, fewer children are now meeting the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics than before the pandemic and the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils has widened (Andrews, 2023; DfE, 2022; EEF, 2022a; Twist et al., 2022).

The National Tutoring Programme (NTP) was introduced in the 2020-21 academic year by the Department for Education (DfE) to provide subsidised tuition to support disadvantaged pupils and help close the attainment gap. It was also hoped that the NTP would result in a sustainable tutoring market from which schools could continue accessing tutors in the future to help disadvantaged pupils achieve their academic potential.

In 2022-23 the NTP was in its third year and offered the following three routes of support:

- **Tuition partners** (TP) offered subsidised tuition to schools from approved tuition partners.
- **Academic mentors** (AM) was originally designed to support the most disadvantaged schools but was open to all schools in 2022-23. Academic mentors are employed by the school and work full-time as in-house members of staff to provide support to pupils.
- **School-led tutoring** (SLT) was introduced in the 2021-22 academic year and allowed schools to fund locally sourced tutoring provision.

For the 2022-23 academic year, schools were allocated funding based on the number of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding. They could use this funding to subsidise a maximum of 60% of the total costs incurred from any of the three tutoring routes. This subsidy is set to reduce further in future years, so attention is turning to the long-term sustainability of the NTP and the future of tutoring more widely. At the time this research was undertaken¹, the subsidy was expected to decrease from 60% to 25% in the academic year 2023-24, so all views reported here are based on this assumption. However, it has subsequently been announced that the subsidy for the 2023-24 academic year will now be 50%. It is therefore possible that some of the views and percentages reported here may change because of this announcement, but the insights in this report still offer relevant information about the views of senior leaders and what is needed to ensure the long-term sustainability of tutoring.

The aims of this project were to gather the views of a nationally representative sample of senior leaders in England to understand:

- 1) The extent to which the NTP is offering additional value to schools and pupils.
- 2) The factors that influence the potential of tutoring to become a sustainable intervention that schools can use to improve attainment amongst disadvantaged pupils in the future, including senior leaders’ experiences of the NTP.

It is hoped that this evidence will help policy makers to make evidence-informed decisions about the future of tutoring and put measures in place to maximise its long-term chance of success.

¹ March 2023



Nearly two-thirds (65%) of the 52% of senior leaders currently using the NTP are planning to continue using it in the 2023-24 academic year.

Three-quarters (76%) of senior leaders currently using the NTP believe it is improving the attainment of disadvantaged pupils at their school, and that the NTP selection guidance is allowing them to prioritise pupils most in need of academic support (73%).



Almost all senior leaders (91%) currently using the NTP reported that it has allowed them to offer support to more disadvantaged pupils, and more than two thirds (68%) have been able to hire or use additional staff. But nearly half (47%) reported that their school only offers tutoring during normal lesson times.

Seven key things we learned about tutoring sustainability



Issues with NTP funding arrangements are the main reason schools are stopping delivery of the programme, but only 46% of senior leaders surveyed agreed that providing tutoring would be their top priority if more funding was available for supporting disadvantaged pupils.



The ability to source suitable tutors, administrative burden and time required to implement the NTP are barriers to sustainability, as they are reducing take up and/or causing drop-out from the programme.



More than half (61%) of all senior leaders surveyed think that other types of support are more effective than tutoring for improving attainment amongst disadvantaged pupils, including 42% of senior leaders planning to continue using the NTP next year.



Over half (58%) of all senior leaders surveyed do not think that tutoring is a long-term solution to closing the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils, including 46% of those planning to continue delivering the NTP, and opinions about the cost-effectiveness of tutoring are split.

2 Method

2.1 What did we do?

We used NFER’s Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey to gather the views of a nationally representative sample of senior leaders² from primary and secondary schools in England. This included senior leaders who are currently participating in the NTP, have previously participated in the NTP, and have never participated in the NTP. The survey took place between 10 and 15 March 2023.

2.2 Who took part?

A total of 439 senior leaders from primary (n = 270) and secondary (n = 169) schools participated in the survey. Based on this sample size, we can be 95% confident that the percentages quoted in this report are within ± 4.9 percentage points of the values we would obtain if we were to survey the entire population of school senior leaders in England (Hurd & Ullah, 2023).

Demographic information about the schools where survey respondents work indicated that there were good levels of representation across key school characteristics including school type, performance, and local authority type. However, the sample of secondary schools and the overall sample were not nationally representative of free school meal (FSM) eligibility. We therefore applied statistical weights to the responses to address this issue and ensure that the sample was more nationally representative of all schools (Hurd & Ullah, 2023).

2.3 How did we analyse the data?

Survey responses were analysed using descriptive statistics based on the type of question.

Single response questions were analysed by calculating the percentage of respondents who selected each response option. For some questions we asked senior leaders to rate their level of agreement (e.g., strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree) with a statement. Where appropriate we combined some of the responses (i.e., agree and strongly agree) to give an overall percentage of senior leaders who agreed or disagreed with a statement.

Multiple response questions related to the reasons for dropping out of, or never having participated in, the NTP. Participants were given a list of options and could select up to five responses for these questions. We analysed responses to these questions by calculating the percentage of participants who selected each option as one of their choices³.

Where relevant we also calculated a breakdown of responses according to NTP participation status and/or by NTP route⁴ for both single response and multiple response questions, so we could see how NTP participation status may have influenced responses.

This report provides key findings and insights from this survey before giving recommendations for policy actions to help address some of the challenges we have identified.

² For the Teacher Voice Omnibus survey, senior leaders are defined as any of the following roles: Headteacher, Multi-Academy Trust CEO or Executive Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher, Assistant Headteacher, Leading Practitioner, Qualified Teacher (QTS/QTLS) on the Upper Pay Range.

³ This means that the percentages do not sum to 100% for these questions.

⁴ We would like to thank the Sutton Trust for kindly allowing us to use one of their survey questions to enable us to do this.

3 Key Results

3.1 Nearly two-thirds (65%) of the 52% of senior leaders currently using the NTP are planning to continue using it in the 2023-24 academic year.

The majority of the senior leaders (70%) who participated in the survey reported that their school was currently (52%)⁵ or had previously participated (18%) in the NTP (Figure 1). This figure was similar across primary (69%) and secondary (70%) school leaders. Among those currently using the NTP (52%) we found that nearly two-thirds (65%) plan to continue using the NTP in the next academic year (2023-24). Meanwhile, 18% of senior leaders surveyed had already dropped out of the NTP, with a further 18% planning to stop delivering the NTP at the end of the current academic year. This means that among the 70% of senior leaders who reported that they were currently or had previously used the NTP, more than half (51%) are likely to have dropped out by the end of the current academic year⁶. We also found that senior leaders currently using the TP route of the NTP were slightly more likely to report that they plan to drop out of the programme in the next academic year (43%) compared with those using AM (35%) or SLT (34%).

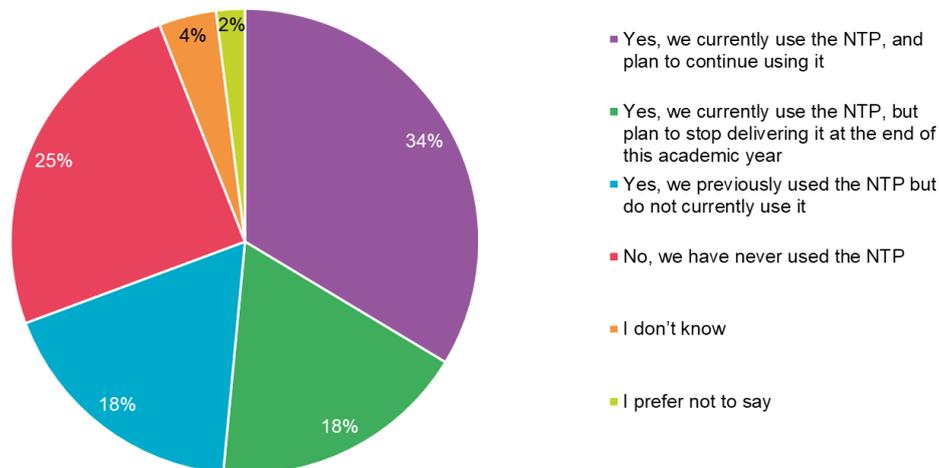


Figure 1: NTP participation status of the senior leaders who took part in the survey.

Source: NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey conducted in March 2023

⁵ We note that this percentage is lower than the DfE figure published in April 2023, which indicated that 65.7% of schools had participated in the NTP between September 2022 and January 2023 (DfE, 2023). Our sample of senior leaders was nationally representative of schools in England and included schools that are currently taking part, have previously taken part, and have never taken part in the NTP. In addition, our data captured NTP participation at a specific point in time, whereas the DfE figures look at cumulative participation over the school year.

⁶ Note that it is possible that the change in the NTP subsidy announced after this research was conducted may mean that more senior leaders choose to continue delivering the NTP next year.

3.2 Three-quarters (76%) of senior leaders currently using the NTP believe that it is improving the attainment of disadvantaged pupils at their school, and that the NTP selection guidance is allowing them to prioritise pupils most in need of academic support (73%).

Among senior leaders who reported that they are currently using the NTP, we found that 76% believe that the NTP is improving the attainment of disadvantaged pupils at their school (Figure 2). We also found that across all senior leaders surveyed, 59% believe the NTP is allowing schools to offer additional support to disadvantaged pupils, including 87% of senior leaders currently using the NTP (Figure 3). These results provide promising evidence that many senior leaders believe that the NTP is making a difference for disadvantaged pupils. However, senior leaders who had previously dropped out of the NTP or never participated in the programme were not as positive. Only 38% of senior leaders who had previously dropped out of the NTP (9% do not know) and 25% of those who have never used the NTP (34% do not know) believe that the NTP is allowing schools to offer additional support to disadvantaged pupils.

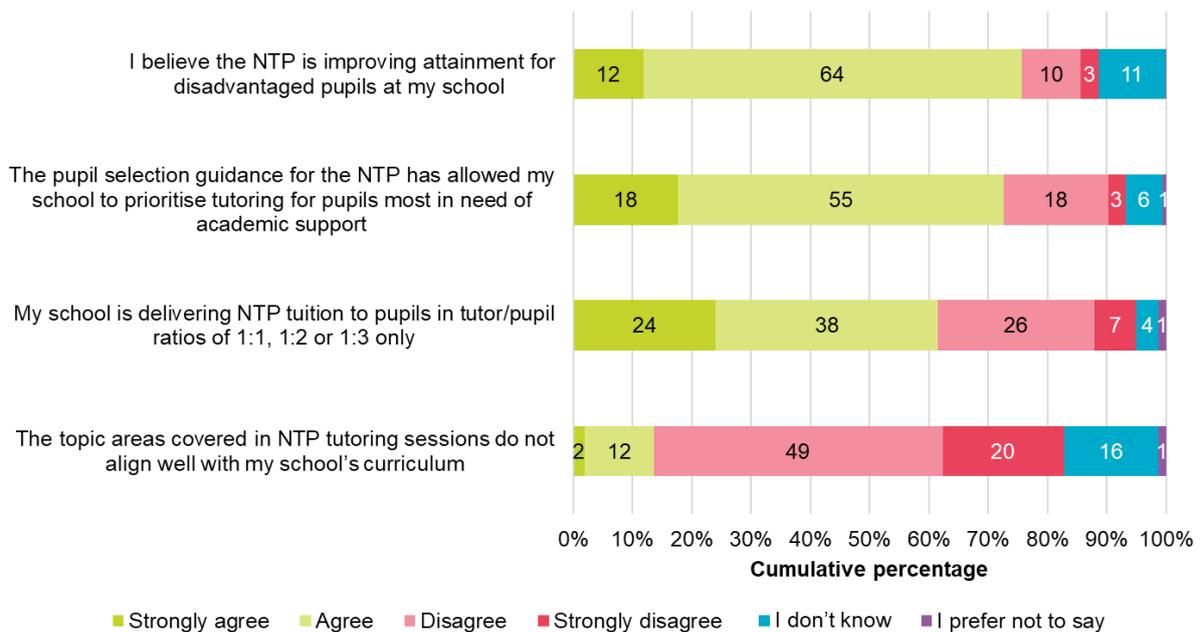


Figure 2: Views of senior leaders currently participating in the NTP about how they are implementing the NTP in their school and whether it is improving attainment.

Source: NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey conducted in March 2023

Positively, we also found that nearly three-quarters of senior leaders currently participating in the NTP felt that the selection guidance for the NTP has allowed them to prioritise pupils for tutoring who are most in need of academic support (Figure 2). This was higher for TP (86%) and AM (84%) compared with SLT (71%).

In addition, nearly two-thirds of senior leaders (62%) reported that they are only delivering NTP tuition in the ideal ratios of 1:1, 1:2, or 1:3, indicating that pupils are getting support in small groups (Figure 2). However, there was quite a lot of variation by tutoring route. Of the senior leaders who reported using TP, 89% said they only delivered tutoring in these ratios, whereas this was 61% for SLT and only 42% for AM. This finding suggests that pupils who received tutoring via the AM route were more likely to receive support in larger groups compared with pupils who received support from the other two routes.

We also found that across all routes most senior leaders (69%) felt that the topic areas covered in tutoring sessions align well with the curriculum (Figure 2), though we note that 16% reported that they did not know. Collectively, these results indicate that the right pupils are receiving tutoring in small groups, and that the support they are receiving is generally felt to be relevant to their wider learning and leading to improved attainment.

I think that the NTP is allowing schools to provide additional support to disadvantaged pupils

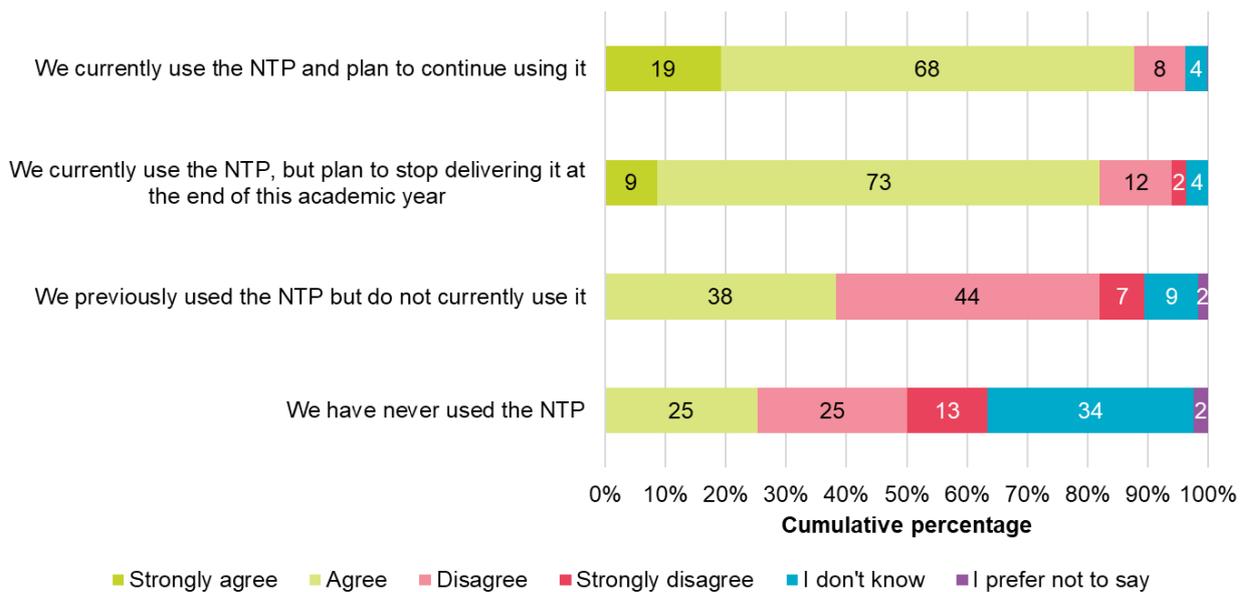


Figure 3: Views from all senior leaders surveyed about whether the NTP is allowing schools to offer additional support to disadvantaged pupils, broken down by NTP participation status.

Source: NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey conducted in March 2023

3.3 Almost all (91%) senior leaders currently using the NTP reported that it has allowed them to offer support to more disadvantaged pupils and more than two-thirds (68%) have been able to hire or use additional staff. But nearly half (47%) reported that their school only offers tutoring during normal lesson times.

Among senior leaders currently using the NTP, the vast majority (91%) reported that the NTP has allowed them to provide more disadvantaged pupils with individual or small group support (Figure 4). Similarly, 86% of this group agreed that the NTP had allowed them to provide more hours of individual or small group support to disadvantaged pupils who were already receiving this type of support.

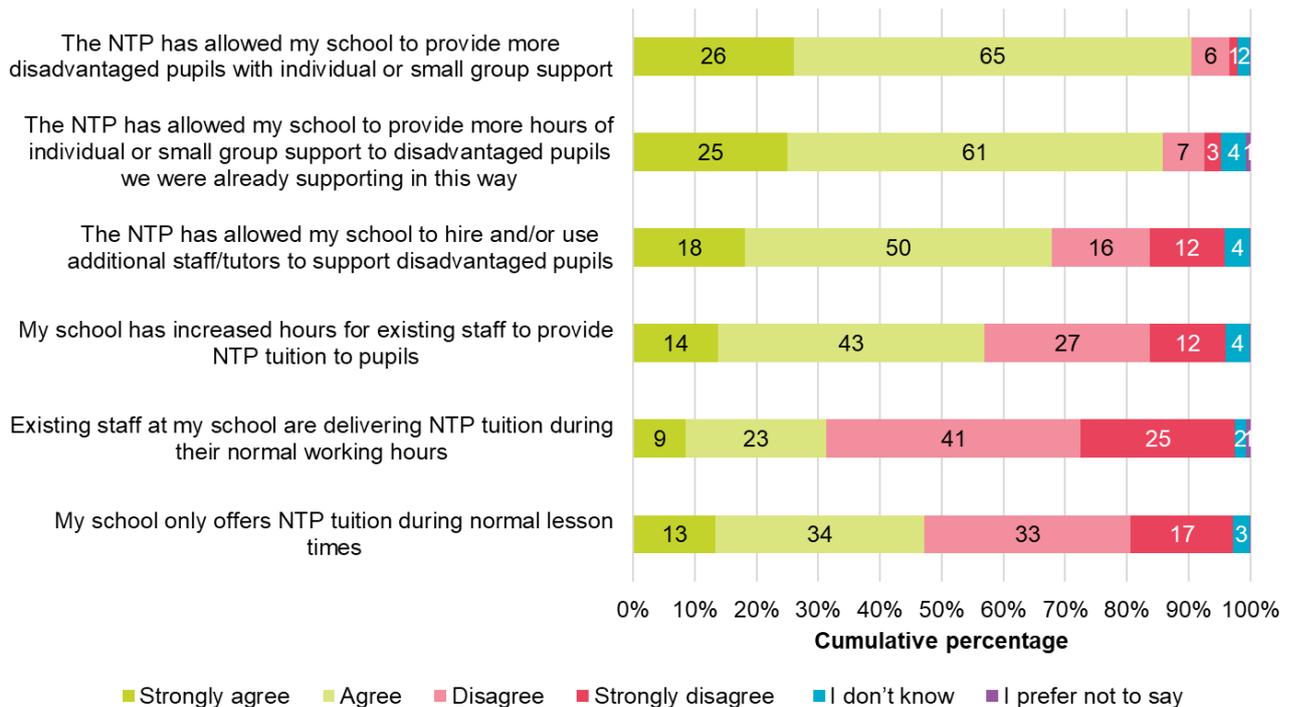


Figure 4: Views from senior leaders currently participating in the NTP about the additional support the programme is offering schools and pupils.

Source: NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey conducted in March 2023.

We also found evidence that the NTP has allowed schools to hire or use additional staff or tutors to support disadvantaged pupils (68%) or to increase the hours of their existing staff to provide NTP tuition (57%). However, around one third of senior leaders (32%) – and 35% of senior leaders using SLT - currently using the programme reported that existing staff at their school were delivering NTP tuition during their normal working hours. This may indicate that for these schools, the NTP is offering less additional benefit in terms of the types of support schools can offer, as to

deliver NTP tuition during their normal working hours, staff workload would need to be reduced elsewhere and/or their role would need to be redesignated to tutoring. However, this result needs to be interpreted carefully, especially for those using the AM route. As academic mentors are employed by the school and form part of their staff team, this may affect the way in which the question was interpreted by school leaders, with academic mentors potentially considered to be 'existing staff'. We also acknowledge that it is possible that part-time staff may have increased their hours and therefore be delivering tutoring within their normal but 'new' working hours.

Nearly half of senior leaders surveyed (47%) reported that they are only offering NTP tuition during normal lesson times, meaning that pupils will be missing other lessons to attend tutoring sessions and that the additional benefit the programme is offering is potentially reduced. Pupils receiving tuition through the AM route were slightly less likely (35%) to only be offered support during normal lesson times, but even for AM, a significant proportion of pupils are still missing lessons to attend tutoring sessions. Previous guidance from EEF (2022b) indicates that if pupils are taken out of regular lessons to attend tutoring, then the support offered needs to at a minimum compensate for the time missed. Missing lessons to attend tutoring could have a negative impact on pupils' wider learning experiences (e.g., if they always miss the same subject to attend) and/or influence their engagement with the tutoring session, if for example, pupils were missing a lesson they enjoy to attend tutoring sessions. However, we are also aware that schools are mitigating this issue by rotating the times of tutoring sessions to avoid pupils always missing the same lessons and avoiding scheduling tutoring sessions at the same time as a pupil's favourite lesson (NFER, 2022).

Primary schools were more likely to only be offering NTP tutoring during normal lesson times (51%) than secondary schools (24%). We cannot determine from our survey data why this is the case, but it may be to encourage attendance and/or engagement. It is also important to acknowledge that there will be various logistical factors that schools will need to consider when scheduling tutoring sessions. For example, younger pupils may be more likely to struggle with an extended school day and/or be more reliant on parents/carers having the flexibility to drop them off or pick them up at different times. In addition, scheduling tutoring lessons during breaktimes or outside of school hours may make pupils feel resentful about missing their free time, so reduce engagement. Running sessions during normal lesson times may therefore make it possible for more pupils to attend and engage with tutoring sessions.

3.4 Issues with NTP funding arrangements are the main reason schools are stopping delivery of the programme, but only 46% of senior leaders agree that providing tutoring would be their top priority if more funding was available for supporting disadvantaged pupils.

More than half (55%)⁷ of the senior leaders who reported that they had either dropped out of the NTP already or planned to drop out at the end of the current academic year, cited the reduced subsidy as one of the main reasons for their decision⁸. In addition, 37% noted that the annual funding arrangements for the NTP made it difficult for them to forward plan (see sidebar page 11). We also found that a lack of funding to top-up the subsidy was the joint second top reason for never having participated in the NTP (see sidebar on page 13). These results indicate that the funding arrangements for the NTP are having a significant impact on both the take-up of and drop-out from the programme and reducing its sustainability.

However, although funding appears to be key to NTP participation and the sustainability of tutoring, we also found evidence that senior leaders do not necessarily see providing tutoring to disadvantaged pupils as a top priority for their pupil premium funding. Of all the senior leaders surveyed, only 41%⁹ agreed that providing tutoring for disadvantaged pupils should be a top priority for pupil premium funding, while 46% felt that other priorities for pupil premium funding meant they could not use this money to provide tutoring (Figure 5).

We also found evidence of split opinions amongst senior leaders about priorities if more funding were made available for supporting disadvantaged pupils. Only 46% of senior leaders reported that providing tutoring would be their top priority if more funding was available for supporting disadvantaged pupils, while 40% said it would not be their top priority. This suggests that even if more funding was available to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, providing tutoring may not be the top priority for many senior leaders. This was particularly the case among senior leaders whose schools have already dropped out of the NTP - this group were least likely to agree that providing tutoring would be their top priority if more funding were available for supporting disadvantaged pupils.

⁷ Note that percentages do not sum to 100% as participants were able to select up to five responses to this question.

⁸ We note that this percentage may change based on the recent announcement that the NTP subsidy for the 2023-24 academic year will now be 50% instead of 25%.

⁹ Combined percentage of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses.

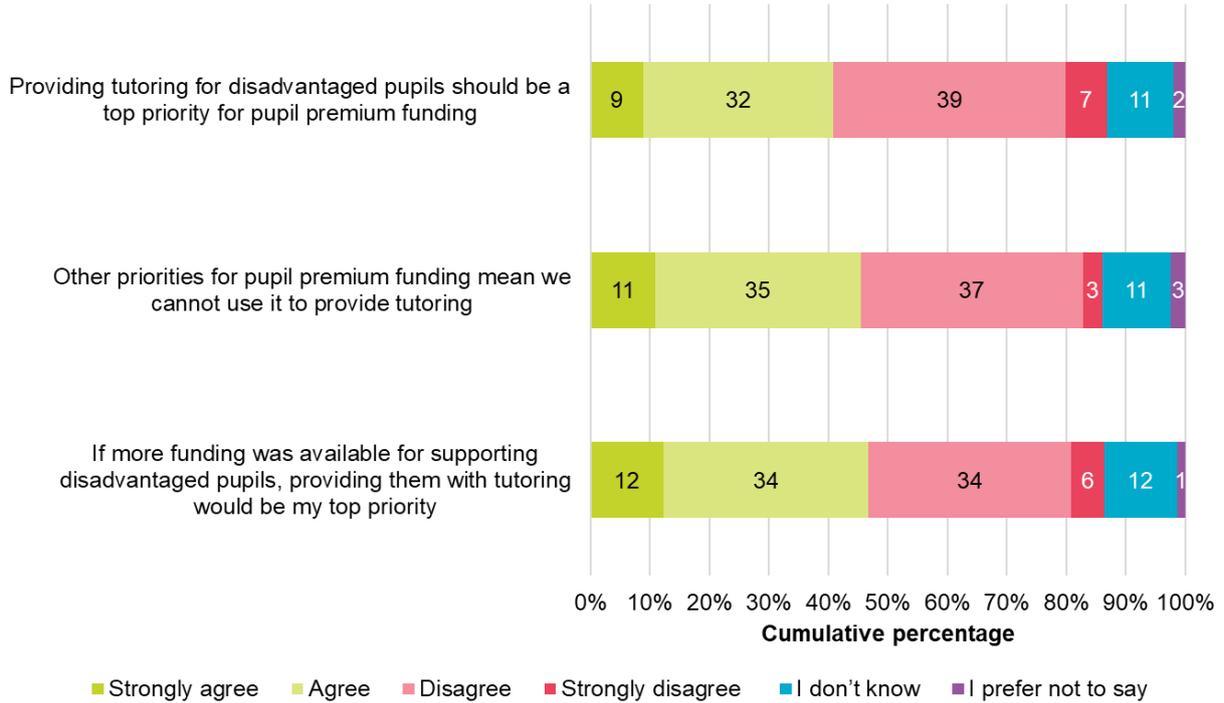


Figure 5: Views from all senior leaders surveyed about funding priorities and tutoring¹⁰.

Source: NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey conducted in March 2023

These results are consistent with recent findings from the Sutton Trust which used the same sample of participants¹¹. Their research asked senior leaders to rank their spending priorities for pupil premium funding and found that 28% of senior leaders felt that hiring additional teaching assistants was their main priority for pupil premium funding, while 22% reported that providing more one-to-one or small group tuition was their main priority (Sutton Trust, 2023). The mixed views about funding priorities reported here may reflect the challenging landscape around school budgets more generally, and the difficult decisions that senior leaders have to make about funding priorities in the context of their school’s individual circumstances.

¹⁰ Note that at the time these questions were asked the NTP subsidy was 60% and due to decrease to 25% in the academic year 2023-24.

¹¹ The Sutton Trust research cited here also used NFER’s Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey conducted in March 2023, so the sample of senior leaders in their research is the same as ours.

3.5 The ability to source suitable tutors, administrative burden and time required to implement the NTP are barriers to sustainability, as they are reducing take-up and/or causing drop-out from the programme.

The results described in the previous section show that NTP funding arrangements are key to sustainability, but we also found evidence of several other barriers to tutoring sustainability in our data.

Among the senior leaders who have already dropped out of the NTP or plan to drop out at the end of this academic year, 28% reported that difficulties sourcing suitable tutors was a key reason for this decision. In addition, only 36% of senior leaders planning to continue delivering the NTP next year felt confident that they will be able to continue to source suitable tutors in the future. This was a particular concern for senior leaders offering TP or AM where tutors are sourced externally, which suggests that the NTP has not yet facilitated the creation of a sustainable tutoring market from which schools can source suitable tutors in the future. Conducting further research to understand regional preparedness and the functioning of local tutoring markets may offer important insights into how targeted support could potentially be provided to help create a more sustainable tutoring market.

In addition, both the administrative burden required to access the funding (27%) and the reporting requirements (23%) appeared within the top five reasons senior leaders gave for having already dropped out or planning to drop out of the NTP (see sidebar). Similarly, the administrative burden required to access the funding (30%) appeared in the top five reasons for never having participated in the NTP, along with the time required to implement the programme being too high (25%) (see sidebar page 13). We note that senior leaders who have not participated in the NTP may have limited direct experience of the programme’s administrative requirements. However, it is possible that having explored potential participation in the NTP, they decided that the administrative burden was too high, and/or that the NTP has a reputation for having high administrative requirements which is putting them off participating.

We also explored perceptions of the administrative requirements of the NTP among all of the senior leaders surveyed. We found that half of all senior leaders (50%) who participated in the survey do

TOP 5 REASONS FOR DROPPING OUT OF THE NTP

The reduced subsidy (55%)

Annual funding arrangements for the NTP made it difficult to forward plan (35%)

Difficulties sourcing suitable tutors (28%)

Administrative burden required to access the funding was too high (27%)

Reporting requirements for the funding were too burdensome (23%)

not think that the time required to implement the NTP is reasonable and proportionate to the level of funding provided, and a further 20% do not know. Views differed based on NTP participation status. Among those who had previously dropped out of the NTP nearly two thirds (65%) did not feel the time required to implement the NTP was proportionate to the level of funding provided compared with 34% of senior leaders planning to continue delivering the NTP next year. Although we did not explore this here, it is also possible that senior leaders whose schools are eligible for higher levels of funding may have different views compared with senior leaders whose schools are eligible for less funding, as being eligible for more funding means that the benefit is potentially felt to be greater relative to the administrative burden.

Together these results indicate that not only are the administrative requirements causing schools to drop out from the NTP, but they are also a significant deterrent to schools taking part in the NTP the first place. In addition, school leaders have significant concerns about their ability to source suitable tutors. This suggests that the NTP has not yet created a sustainable tutoring market from which schools can access tutors, which is likely to be a barrier to schools continuing to provide tutoring to disadvantaged pupils in the future.

3.6 More than half of all senior leaders surveyed (61%) believe that other types of support are more effective than tutoring for improving attainment amongst disadvantaged pupils, including 42% of senior leaders planning to continue using the NTP next year.

We found that more than half of all senior leaders surveyed (61%)¹² think that other types of support are more effective than tutoring for improving attainment amongst disadvantaged pupils. Although this view was most prevalent among senior leaders who have never participated in the NTP (78%), there was still a sizeable proportion of senior leaders (42%) who are currently using the NTP and plan to continue using it who share this view (Figure 6). These results may help explain why significant proportions of senior leaders would not prioritise tutoring even if more funding was available for supporting disadvantaged pupils (see Section 3.4).

Among the senior leaders who reported that they have never participated in the NTP, we found that wanting to provide tutoring to disadvantaged pupils but not through the NTP (38%)¹³ and preferring to offer a different type of support to disadvantaged pupils instead of tutoring (34%) were the most common reasons for non-participation, along with lack of funding to top-up the subsidy (see sidebar).

Other evidence is already available on how schools use their pupil premium funding (Sutton Trust, 2023), but further research is needed to properly understand why senior leaders believe other types of support are more effective than tutoring – including whether their reservations relate to the NTP specifically or to all types of tutoring. Previous reviews (EEF, 2021a, 2021b) suggest that both small group and one-to-one tutoring have a reasonably strong evidence base and can result in improved attainment for both primary and secondary school aged pupils (although there is also evidence that tutoring efficacy may differ by age and subject) (EEF, 2023).

Meanwhile, recent data from the Sutton Trust (2023) indicates that senior leaders primarily make decisions about how to use

¹² Combined percentage of ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ responses.

¹³ Note that percentages do not sum to 100% as participants were able to select up to five responses.

TOP 5 REASONS FOR NEVER HAVING PARTICIPATED IN THE NTP

Wanting to providing tutoring to disadvantaged pupils but not through the NTP (38%)

Preferring to offer a different type of support (i.e., not tutoring) to disadvantaged pupils (34%)

Lack of funding to top-up the subsidy (34%)

Administrative burden required to access the funding was too high (30%)

The time required to implement the programme was too high (25%)

their pupil premium funding based on past experience of what works. Understanding the relative costs and benefits of the different types of support and approaches available would help senior leaders to make evidence-informed decisions about how best to use their scarce resources. In addition, there is an urgent need to properly investigate the most effective ways of implementing tutoring, the extent to which these approaches are currently being used, and whether there is scope to further increase the impact of tutoring in practice.

I think that other types of support are more effective than tutoring for improving attainment among disadvantaged pupils

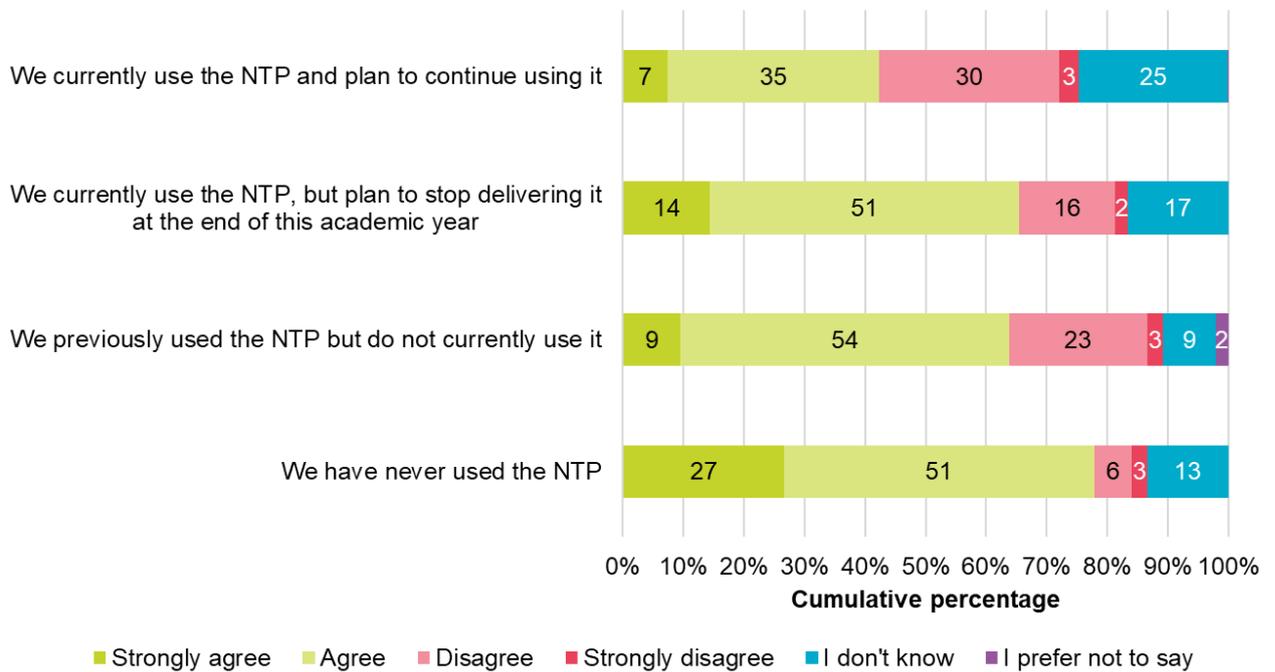


Figure 6: Senior leaders views about whether other types of support are more effective than tutoring broken down by NTP participation status.

Source: NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey conducted in March 2023

3.7 Over half (58%) of all senior leaders surveyed do not think that tutoring is a long-term solution to closing the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils, including 46% of those planning to continue delivering the NTP, and opinions about the cost-effectiveness of tutoring are split.

Despite the positive indications that the NTP is felt to be offering additional benefits to schools and pupils among those currently participating in the programme (see Sections 3.2 & 3.3), over half of all senior leaders surveyed (58%) do not think that tutoring is a long-term solution for supporting disadvantaged pupils and closing the attainment gap. These views appeared to be strongly related to NTP participation status (i.e., those who have never participated more strongly agreed with this), but even among those planning to continue delivering tutoring to disadvantaged pupils, 46% did not see tutoring as a sustainable solution for supporting disadvantaged pupils and closing the attainment gap (Figure 7).

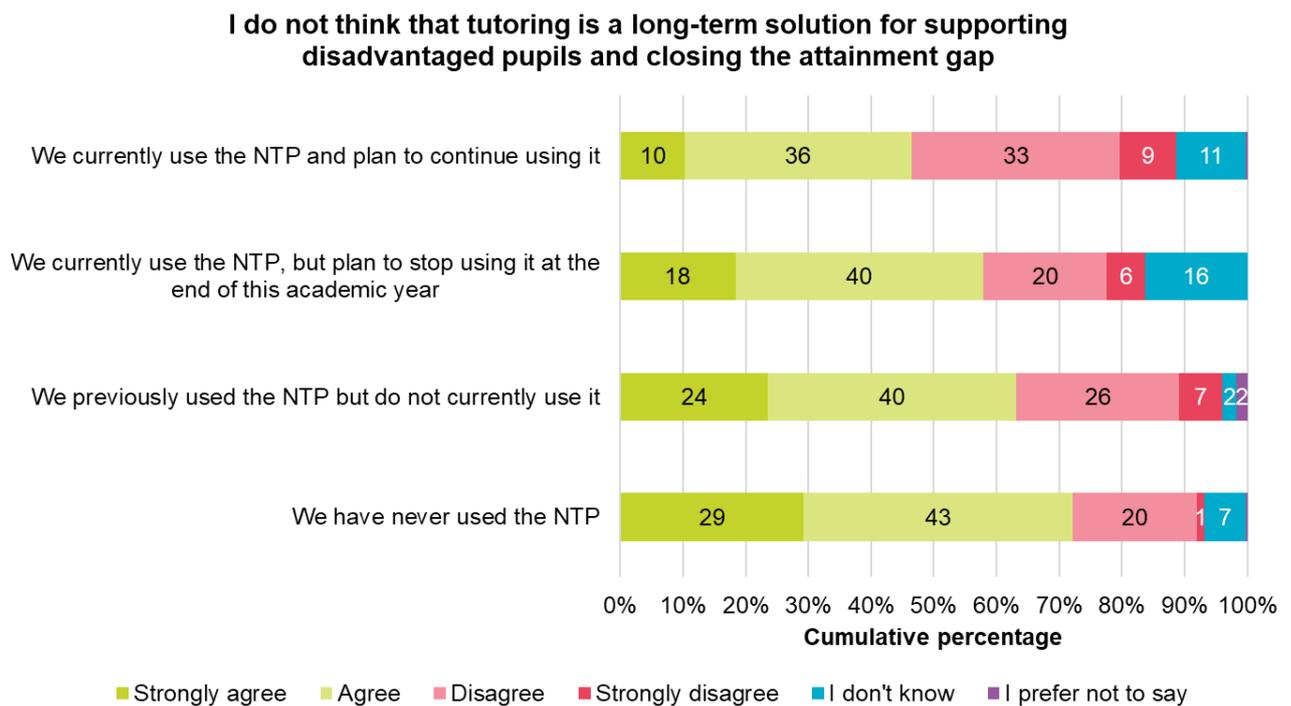


Figure 7: Senior leaders views about whether tutoring is a long-term solution to closing the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils, broken down by NTP participation status.

Source: NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey conducted in March 2023.

Across our survey data we found evidence of a number of potential barriers to indicate why this may be the case. Firstly, we have seen that funding is key to NTP participation (see Section 3.4). Only 9% of senior leaders currently using the NTP reported that they could continue delivering the same amount of tutoring to disadvantaged pupils when the NTP subsidy decreases to zero. This indicates that the reducing subsidies are likely to continue to deter schools from providing NTP

tuition to pupils and potentially that the subsidies have reduced too rapidly for tutoring to have become embedded in schools¹⁴.

Secondly, it is likely that perceptions about the effectiveness of tutoring (i.e., to what extent it is felt to lead to improved attainment) will influence its sustainability. We saw in Section 3.6 that a significant proportion of senior leaders do not believe that tutoring is the most effective way of improving attainment amongst disadvantaged pupils – and less than half of leaders (41%) consider tutoring to be a top priority for their pupil premium spend. We also found very mixed views about the about the cost-effectiveness of tutoring among our survey respondents. Across all the senior leaders who participated in the survey, we found similar proportions of senior leaders who think tutoring is a cost-effective way of improving attainment for disadvantaged pupils (42%) compared with those that do not (45%). Again, these views appeared to be strongly related to NTP participation status. Among those planning to continue delivering the NTP 55% believe tutoring is a cost-effective way of improving attainment, compared with 26% of senior leaders who have never delivered the NTP. These views could be related to limited information about the actual or potential effectiveness of tutoring, a lack of evidence on the most effective ways to implement tutoring (as noted in Section 3.6 above), or reflect views related specifically to experiences of the NTP rather than views about tutoring more broadly.

In summary, although the majority of all the senior leaders we surveyed (59%) believe that the NTP is allowing schools to provide additional support to disadvantaged pupils (see Figure 3), including 87% of those currently using the NTP - and 76% of those currently using the NTP believe it is improving the attainment of disadvantaged pupils - many (58%) are not yet convinced that tutoring is a long-term solution to closing the attainment gap. There are therefore still significant barriers to overcome if tutoring is to become embedded in schools as a method of improving attainment for disadvantaged pupils.

¹⁴ Note that it remains to be seen if the recent announcement that the NTP subsidy for 2023-24 will reduce more slowly than initially planned (to 50% rather than 25%) will make a difference to take up of the programme going forwards.

4 Conclusions

We found that among senior leaders currently using the NTP there are positive views about the programme, and a significant minority see tutoring as a long-term solution to supporting disadvantaged pupils and closing the attainment gap. However, from our sample as a whole (including senior leaders from schools that are currently using, have previously used, and have never used the NTP) more than half do not see tutoring as a long-term solution to closing the attainment gap. Four key conclusions from this project are described in turn below.

Most senior leaders currently using the NTP believe it has allowed their school to provide additional support to disadvantaged pupils and is improving attainment.

Senior leaders currently using the NTP reported that the programme has allowed them to provide more hours of tutoring to disadvantaged pupils (86%) or provide more disadvantaged pupils with individual or small group support (91%), and the majority (76%) felt that the NTP had improved attainment for disadvantaged pupils at their school. However, only 34% of all the senior leaders we surveyed are currently using the NTP and plan to continue using it in the next academic year and the level of funding appears to be a key issue. With the recent announcement that the NTP subsidy will now be 50% as opposed to 25% in the next academic year (2023-24) it is possible that funding will present less of a barrier to participation in the short term and that more schools will be able to continue delivering the NTP next year.

Many school leaders are not convinced that tutoring is the best way of improving attainment among disadvantaged pupils.

One of the aims of the NTP was to help close the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils. However, we found that even among senior leaders planning to continue delivering the NTP in the next academic year, a sizable proportion (42%) do not believe that tutoring is the most effective method of improving attainment amongst disadvantaged pupils. This suggests that senior leaders are not yet convinced that tutoring is the best approach to use with these pupils. We cannot ascertain from our data why this is the case. It may be that senior leaders feel that there are alternative types of support that better meet the needs of these pupils, or it may reflect the lack of evidence currently available on the most effective approaches to implementing tutoring in schools. We also need to acknowledge that the term ‘tutoring’ is quite broad and can mean different things to different people. This may be particularly relevant here as our survey included questions about ‘tutoring’ as well as about the NTP as a specific tutoring model. It is therefore possible that survey respondents have conflated the two and that the views reported here relate specifically to the NTP rather than to tutoring more broadly.

Undertaking further research to understand how to optimise elements of the design and implementation of tutoring would allow best practice to be identified and shared among schools. However, it is also important to understand the full range of different types of support available to disadvantaged pupils as well as their relative efficacy and cost. This information could then be used to inform best practice and ensure that all disadvantaged pupils can be offered the right support to help them achieve their potential. For example, it may be that tutoring will only benefit attainment if a pupil is ready to receive it, therefore schools may feel that they need to prioritise another type of support first. Tutoring may form part of a pathway of support which ultimately leads to broader improvements in outcomes.

Tutoring is not yet embedded within schools as a method of supporting disadvantaged pupils and sustainable funding is likely to be key to ensuring this happens.

For tutoring to be a sustainable way of supporting disadvantaged pupils, schools need to believe that tutoring is an effective approach and be able to resource and fund it long-term. We found most senior leaders (59%) believe that the NTP is allowing schools to provide additional support to disadvantaged pupils. Despite this, over half of senior leaders surveyed (58%) do not see tutoring as a long-term solution to closing the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils, including 46% of senior leaders who are planning to continue using the NTP in the next academic year.

Based on our results it is likely that concerns about funding, within the context of schools having to make budget cuts in other areas including to teaching staff (see Sutton Trust, 2023), are having a substantial impact on tutoring sustainability. The NTP began by offering significant subsidies to schools to deliver tutoring. However, these subsidies have decreased in subsequent years and senior leaders also reported the annual funding arrangements for the NTP have made it difficult for them to forward plan. This has led to significant numbers of schools dropping out of the NTP too quickly for tutoring to become embedded. Whether the revised subsidy of 50% as opposed to 25% for 2023-24 will result in more schools continuing to use the NTP than our survey data suggests remains to be seen.

In addition, we found split views about the cost-effectiveness of tutoring which appeared to be strongly linked to NTP participation status. Among senior leaders who are planning to continue using the programme, only 55% believe tutoring is a cost-effective way of improving attainment. Perceptions about cost-effectiveness are likely to affect the extent to which senior leaders believe that tutoring is the most effective approach for improving attainment amongst disadvantaged pupils. If the Government's goal is still to create long-term, sustainable changes to practice, then sufficient time and resource needs to be allocated for these changes to take place.

School leaders have significant concerns about sourcing suitable tutors, indicating that the NTP has not yet facilitated the creation of a sustainable tutoring market.

One of the goals of the NTP was to create a sustainable tutoring market from which schools can source suitable tutors in the future. Evidence from our survey indicates that only just over a third of senior leaders currently participating in the NTP (36%) are confident that they will be able to continue sourcing suitable tutors. In addition, difficulties sourcing suitable tutors was a key reason senior leaders gave for dropping out of the NTP, especially for schools using AM. These results suggest that the NTP has not yet resulted in the creation of a sustainable tutoring market from which schools can source suitable tutors, which is likely to hinder schools' ability to use tutoring as a tool for supporting disadvantaged pupils long-term.

5 Recommendations

This report offers insights into the views of school senior leaders about the sustainability of tutoring as an approach to improving the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

Based on the results described in this report, we have outlined a series of recommendations that will help tutoring to be a more sustainable approach for schools to use either as a stand-alone intervention or potentially as part of a pathway to closing the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils. These recommendations are primarily for government, but there may be a range of other organisations who could support the recommendations related to building and disseminating the evidence base.

5.1 Explore how additional financial support could be made available to schools over a longer period, to allow tutoring to become embedded in schools.

5.2 Provide schools with more notice about funding arrangements for new programmes to allow them to forward plan.

5.3 Review and reduce the administrative requirements to access, implement and report upon NTP funding and that of other future programmes.

5.4 Work with schools and tutoring organisations to understand their requirements for tutors and consider how best to recruit and retain tutors as part of a wider school workforce strategy.

5.5 Increase the visibility of evidence relating to the effective implementation and efficacy of tutoring and update this as new data emerges to ensure that school leaders can make informed decisions based on accurate and up-to-date information.

5.6 Undertake further research to understand how tutoring can best complement the other types of support disadvantaged pupils may need, to help create a sustainable pathway to closing the attainment gap.

5.7 Undertake further research to investigate which aspects of tutoring and its implementation can be optimised to improve attainment outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, so that best practice can be shared among schools. This includes understanding:

- How best to select pupils and tutors
- How to optimise the implementation of tutoring including session duration, number of sessions per week, group size, and mode of delivery
- When and how to schedule tutoring sessions to maximise the impact on children’s learning, and how this may vary by subject and age
- How to best to ensure that the content of tutoring sessions is aligned with the school curriculum and pupils’ needs, and when this is most important
- How to maximise attendance at tutoring sessions.

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