

Efficacy Trial of the Rehearsal Room Writing Programme: *School Information Sheet*

We are inviting Year 5 teachers in state-maintained primary schools in England to participate in an efficacy trial of the Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC) Rehearsal Room Writing (RRW) learning programme.

Overview

The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) is collaborating with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to assess the impact of rehearsal room approaches to teaching Shakespeare on Year 5 pupil writing. Recent research by the National Literacy Trust (Clark, 2023) shows that children's enjoyment of writing is at its lowest level since 2010 and that nearly half (46%) of disadvantaged 11-year-olds in England left primary school in 2022 unable to write at the expected level. The trial will evaluate the impact on pupils' writing ability, alongside their enjoyment of writing, their belief in their writing ability, as well as the teachers' perception of their ability to teach writing. The RSC is recruiting 183 state-maintained primary schools in England to take part, and schools will be randomly assigned to either the trial intervention or control group.

Who is involved in running the project?

The RSC is a registered charity that creates world-class theatre and works with young people, teachers, artists, and adults in classrooms, on stages, online and in communities to bring Shakespeare's work to life. It reaches more than half a million young people and adults each year through transformative learning activity. The RSC has developed the Rehearsal Room Writing (RRW) programme and will support schools involved in the trial to deliver it. NFER is an independent provider of research insights in education and will be working in collaboration with the University of Exeter to evaluate the impact of the programme.

Who is funding this trial and why?

The EEF has commissioned an efficacy trial to understand the impact of the RRW programme on pupils. The funding for this programme and evaluation comes from the Department for Education's Accelerator Fund, which aims to expand the use of evidence-based programmes.

What does the programme involve?

The RSC's Rehearsal Room Writing programme provides teachers with a unique toolkit of drama-based materials and practices. Techniques drawn from the RSC's rehearsal rooms will be relocated to the classroom. Pupils study Shakespeare away from their desks and in character, forming a company of actors. Together, they create the world of a play. In using their creativity to produce the sights and sounds of Shakespeare's texts, pupils make imaginative and interpretive choices. These approaches are intended to stimulate pupil engagement in, and enjoyment of, classroom activities, including providing pupils with a powerful motivation to write. Teachers consistently report the positive impact of these techniques on reluctant writers and the RSC's recent major research project, [*Time to Act*](#), provided evidence of the impact on pupil language development and attitudes to learning.

How does the trial work?

This is a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) so schools will be randomly assigned to either an intervention or control group. Nominated teachers in schools assigned to the intervention group will receive 5 days of in-person, residential training at the RSC's rehearsal rooms in Stratford-upon-Avon and deliver a minimum of 20 hours of RRW sessions to their pupils in the 2025-26 academic year. Schools will be required to arrange release for the participating teachers to attend the in-person training for two consecutive days in both November 2025 and February 2026, and a final day in April 2026. Schools assigned to the control group will NOT receive the RRW programme and will serve as a comparison group for the schools/pupils receiving the programme.

Teachers in *both* intervention and control schools will be required to administer a short writing assessment and survey to the pupils in their class in Autumn 2025. These same pupils will complete another assessment and survey in Summer 2026, administered by NFER Test Administrators. All participating teachers will also be asked to complete an online survey before and after participating in the programme. Additionally, teachers allocated to the intervention group will be asked to record when the RRW sessions are delivered and to complete a short survey one year after programme completion.

Overall, schools will be asked to:

- Identify participating pupils and complete assessments
- Ensure staff attend training and deliver the programme as specified (intervention schools only)
- Facilitate NFER evaluation activities:
 - Short pupil surveys
 - Short teacher surveys
 - Session delivery logs (intervention schools only)
- Inform parents of school/pupil participation in the trial and communicate any parental withdrawals to NFER
- Provide pupil data e.g. pupil forename, surname, date of birth, Unique Pupil Number (UPN), Free School Meal (FSM) status
- Communicate with the delivery and evaluation teams throughout the trial

A small number of schools in the intervention group will also be invited to participate in some additional data collection activities, including an interview, observation and pupil focus group, but this is optional.

Who can take part?

To take part in the trial, your school must be:

- A state-maintained primary school in England with a Year 5 cohort in 2025/6
- Able to provide a qualified teacher who teaches at least two Year 5 English lessons per week and who has *not* previously participated in any RSC training
- **Not** participating in any of the following EEF writing trials in the 2025/2026 academic year: Pathways Literacy; Power of Reading; and Writing Roots
- Willing to be randomly assigned to either the intervention or control group and complete all evaluation activities

What are the benefits of participating?

By participating in the trial, all schools will not only help understand the impact of the RRW programme on Year 5 pupil writing skills but also contribute to the education evidence base that informs efforts to improve outcomes for all children. The evaluation report will be publicly accessible on the EEF website upon project completion. All participating schools will also receive the results of the writing assessments that the pupils complete at the end of the trial.

Intervention schools will receive subsidised CPD training for one Year 5 teacher, delivered by the RSC's experienced learning practitioners in Stratford-upon-Avon. The programme cost includes travel, accommodation, hospitality and two trips to see RSC productions. Schools will be asked to contribute £200 per teacher towards the cost of this training but will be able to claim back travel costs and up to £200 per day for cover costs.

At the end of the research period and following the completion of evaluation activities, control schools will receive a £500 payment as a thank you for contributing to the trial.

Are there any costs involved?

Intervention schools will be asked to pay £200 per teacher towards the cost of the training.

How will data be used?

As part of the project, the RSC will be collecting data on the schools involved, including URN numbers and contact details of participating staff. The RSC will use the information supplied by schools for the delivery of RSC training to participating teachers. The information collected by the RSC will be shared with NFER for the purposes of the evaluation. NFER's evaluation team will also collect data for participating pupils, including pupil forename, surname, DOB, UPN and FSM status.

Pupils will be asked to undertake a short writing assessment and survey in Autumn 2025 and again in Summer 2026. The responses will be collected and marked by NFER. Pupils' writing responses will be scanned into the No More Marking (NMM) platform to use Comparative Judgement to mark the writing task. For the purposes of research and archiving, the responses will be linked with information about the pupils from the National Pupil Database (NPD) and shared with the RSC, the Department for Education, the EEF, the EEF's archive manager, the Office for National Statistics and potentially other research teams. Further matching to NPD and other administrative data may take place during subsequent research. Your pupils' data will be treated with the strictest confidence, in line with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the UK General Data Protection Act (the UK GDPR). Your school, staff and the children you look after will not be identified in any report arising from the research. We expect that your pupils will enjoy their involvement in the project, and they will be free to withdraw at any time. If parents prefer their child NOT to take part in any project testing, or their data not to be processed as above, please inform NFER at RRW-trial@nfer.ac.uk. If you would like more information about this project, please contact the RSC research team at research@rsc.org.uk.

For further information about the data being collected and how it will be used, please see:

[RSC Privacy Notice](#)

[NFER Privacy Notices](#)

[EEF Privacy Notice](#)

I'm interested – what should I do next?

To indicate your interest, please [complete the Expression of Interest form](#). This does *not* require any commitment and can be submitted by any staff member at your school. Once submitted, the RSC team will be in contact to discuss any questions you might have and to check your eligibility for the programme. If your school is eligible, the RSC will send the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for your Headteacher to sign.

Who should I contact for more information?

For further information about the RRW programme, please contact Lynsey McCulloch or Matthew Collins at research@rsc.org.uk.

For further information about the evaluation please contact NFER at RRW-trial@nfer.ac.uk.

What is the timeline for this project?

February- May 2025	The trial invites expressions of interest, the RSC will contact interested schools to discuss next steps Headteacher or Senior Leader to sign-up to the trial via the MoU and provide a key contact
June – July 2025	All recruited schools to provide participating teacher and pupil data to NFER via secure portal
September 2025	All recruited schools complete baseline activities which consist of a teacher survey, pupil survey and pupil assessment
October 2025	All schools notified of their allocation to control or intervention (RRW) group
November 2025, February and April 2026	Intervention teachers attend CPD training in Stratford-upon-Avon
November 2025 – June 2026	Intervention schools deliver sessions with Year 5 pupils Control schools continue teaching English/literacy lessons as usual NFER will visit a small number of case study schools to carry out lesson observations, teacher interviews and focus groups
July 2026	All schools undertake endpoint activities including a teacher survey, pupil survey and pupil assessment All intervention schools to submit a record of RRW programme sessions delivered
September 2026	Assessment results returned to schools Control schools receive thank you payments
June 2027	Final report for the main study published Teachers invited to complete a longitudinal teacher survey
May 2028	Longitudinal analysis published