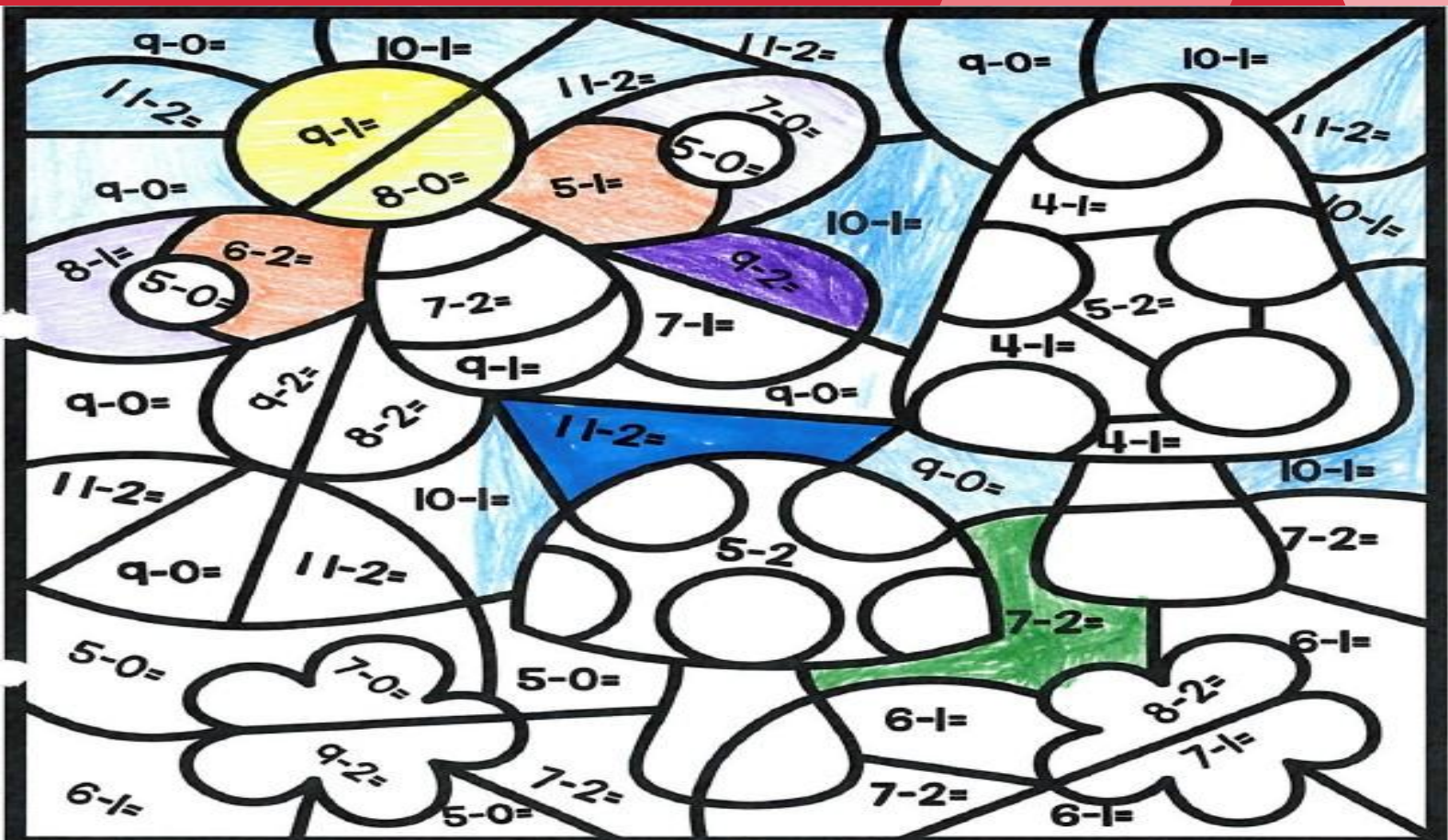


Numeracy Programme

2024/25



Red - 3

Orange - 4

Green - 5

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Executive Summary

Overview

As part of their Access & Participation Plan commitments to raise KS4 attainment in partner schools, the University of Kent ran a numeracy mentoring intervention with Year 7 pupils based on Catch Up's Numeracy support programme. 48 pupils from two schools took part in 1:1 sessions over the course of 8-10 weeks.

Project Aims

The numeracy programme was designed to increase students' maths abilities and confidence with the intention of influencing and increasing their future GCSE grades. This report aims to evaluate whether the programme has met its short-term aims:

- Increased participants' maths confidence and self-efficacy
- Improved participants' sense of accomplishment
- Improved attitudes towards maths (i.e. more enjoyment)
- Increased access to/support from role models

Data Collection Methods

Pre and Post Surveys

Participants completed a short attitudinal survey at the beginning of the programme and upon conclusion. This asked questions around their attitudes and behaviours towards numeracy and was conducted in a 1:1 environment with their mentor.

Catch Up Numeracy Tracker

As part of the Catch Up programme, participants were assessed at the start of the intervention. Their mentors then completed a weekly tracker to record what topics were covered in each session and which Catch Up level the participants had achieved. Catch Up levels are out of 12 or 6. These scores have been translated into percentages for ease of interpretation.

Staff Feedback

Outreach & Widening Participation (OWP) staff and student ambassadors were trained in delivering the Catch Up programme and gave their feedback via weekly notes on the Tracker, and interviews (staff) or a survey (ambassadors) once the programme was complete.

Summary of Key Findings

Survey results indicated that there were statistically significant ($P < 0.05$) positive changes in participants'

enjoyment of maths and how easy they found it, over the course of the programme. The surveys also showed that after the programme participants were more likely to 'spend time trying to work [an answer] out and get there in the end', showing that they were more willing to attempt a question and more confident in their abilities. Staff feedback corroborated these findings, and both staff and participants highlighted the 1:1 aspect of the programme as being a key influence. However, staff questioned whether this change was likely to be sustained once the programme ended.

The Catch Up programme, its assessment and tracking are designed to show progress and all but two students showed positive improvement in topics covered as part of the programme. The greatest average progress was made in the topics Estimation: Rounding (+59pp), Word Problems: Adding and Subtracting (+45pp) and Word Problems: Multiplying (+44pp).

Recommendations

- **Adopt the One-Hour Session Model:** It is recommended that both schools follow the hour-long format for each session, in order to give sufficient time to undertake the assessment, opportunities for learning and to embed knowledge by recapping what has previously been learned.
- **Review and Revise Parental Consent Procedures:** Parental consent procedures should be revisited in future ethics submissions, with consideration given to adopting an opt-out model. A significant number of students were excluded from the research due to unreturned consent forms, which may have resulted in a sample that is not fully representative of the wider student cohort.
- **Explore the Possibility of Additional Evaluation Methods:** If available, in school assessments could be used alongside the Catch Up tracker to measure progress, and the introduction of a comparator group would allow us to ascertain whether the statistically significant changes observed in the surveys were as a result of participation in the programme or other factors. The influence a mentor may have on the participants response to the survey questions when conducted 1:1 could also be explored further.
- **Ensure Content Aligns to In School Priorities:** Partnerships with each school should continue to be developed. For example, further communication could be sought to ascertain which topics would support in-class learning the most. Feedback could be requested from teaching staff on the participants' long term engagement with maths lessons and non-participant data will allow us to create a comparator group, thereby increasing our confidence in any impact observed.
- **Develop an Enhanced Theory of Change:** An Enhanced Theory of Change should be developed for the programme. This will allow us to reflect upon and refine the programme's goals, consider the mechanisms for change and better understand its impact.

1. Introduction

Alongside English, achievement in Mathematics is considered a vital element of educational success and a key determinant of future academic and career progression. Crawford (2014) found that attaining five GCSEs, including English and Maths, at grades A*-C (now 9-4) is a significant predictor of progression to Higher Education. For more disadvantaged students, these grades are more difficult to obtain compared to their less disadvantaged peers, more likely having joined secondary school with lower baseline numeracy skills (Department for Education: Key Stage 2 Attainment, 2025). Students in non-selective schools are also less likely to achieve these higher grades than pupils in selective and independent schools (Education Policy Institute, 2016).

This report examines the development and evaluation of a numeracy programme designed to address gaps in mathematical understanding and improve confidence in maths ability in Year 7 students. The University of Kent piloted the Catch-Up Numeracy programme in 2024/25. This programme utilised a 1:1 strategy with participants and mentors who were trained using specialist Catch-Up resources and aimed to create a supportive environment for students to improve their mathematics ability and self-efficacy.

The following report will provide the rationale for the design of the programme, methodology for assessing outcomes and present quantitative and qualitative findings, before concluding with recommendations for future iterations of the programme.

Context

Maths GCSE results have long been considered one of the key indicators of academic success in schools, alongside English. The Department for Education found that 97% of students who achieved grades 9-4 in English and Maths GCSEs were in sustained education, employment, or an apprenticeship when followed up a year later, compared to 81% of students who did not achieve these grades (Department for Education: Key Stage 4 Destination Measures, 2025). Findings demonstrate that high achievement is sustained from an early stage as students progress through school: those who were more likely to have a sustained destination were also more likely to have previously achieved highly at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 (Department for Education: Key Stage 4 Destination Measures, 2025). This demonstrates that students who do not achieve as highly can remain at this level unless interventions are implemented.

The benefits of GCSE attainment are evident in research. Longitudinal data assessing a range of developmental outcomes found that GCSE performance positively predicted educational achievement and university performance, as well as future income, wellbeing and occupational prestige (Starr et al., 2023). These findings suggest that subject attainment at school can impact not only short-term, academic success but can extend into the long-term and influence socio-economic, financial and psychological outcomes (ibid).

Disadvantaged status of a student in secondary school is generally determined by eligibility for free school meals, indicative of lower parental income, and/or whether they have been looked after by the local authority at some point during their lives. These factors have consistently been found to predict lower attainment. The gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students in GCSE English and Maths was the highest in 2023 since 2011 (Education Policy Institute, 2024). Although this gap narrowed slightly in 2024, it was still far higher than prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Education Policy Institute, 2025). This also impacts future destinations, with disadvantaged students less likely (83%) to enter sustained education, apprenticeships or employment following school than their more advantaged counterparts (94%) (Department for Education: Key Stage 4 Destination Measures, 2025).

Given that there is a higher proportion of disadvantaged students in non-selective schools, GCSE results according to institution type can tell us more about attainment discrepancies. Reports find that the percentage of GCSE grades 4 and above was 97.4% for selective schools: considerably higher than all state-funded schools (66.5%) (Ofqual, 2025). The disadvantage gap may also be higher for Kent specifically, with a high proportion of selective schools contributing to more substantial differences between advantaged and less advantaged students (Comprehensive Future, 2024).

When addressing mathematics specifically, a report from the Education Policy Institute, indicates that NRT (National Reference Test) data show “a statistically significant decline in mathematics performance” since before the COVID-19 pandemic (Hodge & Andrews, 2023). In contrast, outcomes in English have remained comparatively stable. This indicates that a focus on Maths is crucial to prevent further decline in student performance.

2. Programme Design

Programme Overview

The programme is designed to provide a series of 1:1 sessions between Year 7 students and Outreach & Widening Participation (OWP) staff or student ambassador mentors. Students are targeted based on attainment (having been identified by the school as testing a year behind others on average) and measures of disadvantage including eligibility for Free School Meals, IMD quintile and TUNDRA quintile. The University partnered with Catch Up, a numeracy and literacy specialist non-profit organisation. They provide support to the University by training staff to run the programme and providing specialist resources.

The programme was run in two schools, both with two cohorts of students. To be flexible to the needs of each school, the programme ran in slightly different formats in each location:

School A: Students took part in 30 minutes of numeracy-based games and activities each week for ten weeks.

School B: Students took part in one hour of numeracy-based games and activities each week for eight weeks.

Programme Aims

The short-term aims of the programme were as follows:

- Increased participants' maths confidence and self-efficacy
- Improved participants' sense of accomplishment
- Improved attitudes towards maths (i.e. more enjoyment)
- Increased access to/support from role models

3. Methodology

Research Design

The primary research objective of this project was to ascertain whether participation in the numeracy mentoring programme increased learners' numeracy attainment and confidence with maths. Participants won't sit their KS4 exams until the 2028/29 academic year, so this report will focus on whether the programme has met its short-term aims listed above. A mixed-methods approach was implemented, which incorporated three sources of data collection. The programme evaluation received a positive ethical opinion from the Central Research Ethics Advisory Group at the University of Kent.

Data Collection Methods

Pre and Post Surveys

Participants completed a short attitudinal survey at the beginning of the programme and upon conclusion. This survey asked questions around their attitudes and behaviours towards numeracy and was conducted in a 1:1 environment with their mentor.

The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was performed on the data using SPSS to compare the responses to the pre- and post- surveys and demonstrate any statistically significant changes. Due to the low numbers, we have not undertaken any statistical analysis to compare differences between the cohorts or schools.

Catch Up Numeracy Tracker

As part of the Catch Up programme, participants were assessed at the start of the intervention. Their mentors then completed a weekly tracker to record what topics were covered in each session and which Catch Up level the participants had achieved. Catch Up levels are out of 12 or 6 and scores have been translated into percentages for ease of interpretation.

Staff Feedback

Outreach & Widening Participation (OWP) staff and student ambassadors were trained in delivering the Catch Up programme and gave their feedback through weekly notes on the Tracker, and interviews (staff) or a survey (ambassadors) once the programme was complete.

4. Findings

Participant Demographics

Each of the four cohorts consisted of twelve students. However, the following data only relates to the 33 students who consented to take part in the research.

Demographic data of the research sample (33 students) is shown in figures 1-5. A high proportion of participants met Widening Participation criteria, likely reflecting the effectiveness of the targeting measures employed.

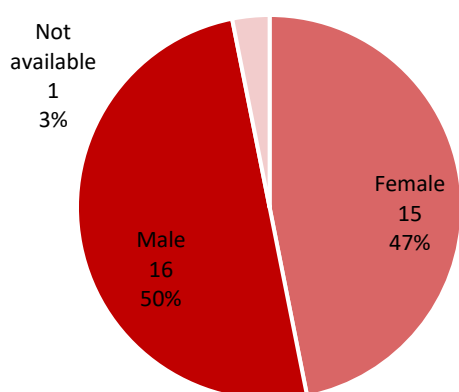


Fig. 1 Breakdown by sex of research cohort

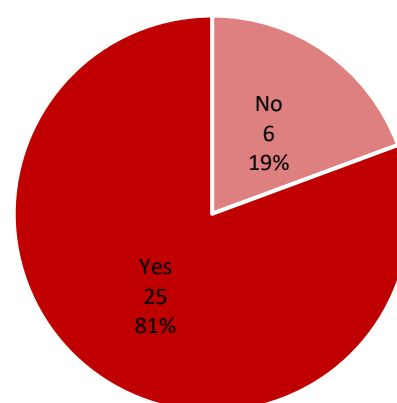


Fig. 2 Breakdown by FSM status of research cohort

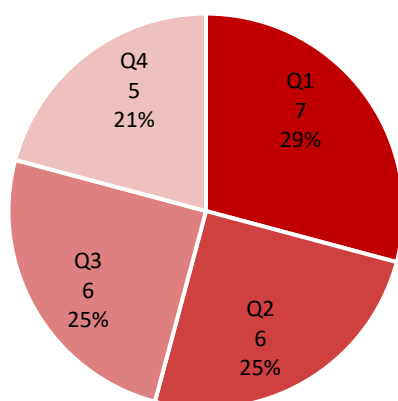


Fig. 3 Breakdown by TUNDRA MSOA Quintile of research cohort

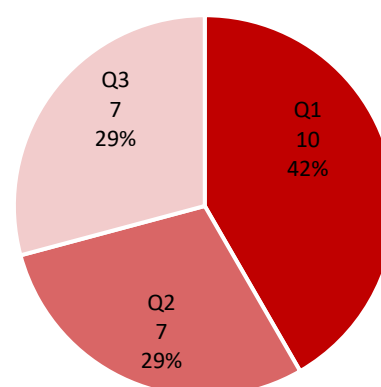


Fig 4. Breakdown by IMD Quintile of research cohort

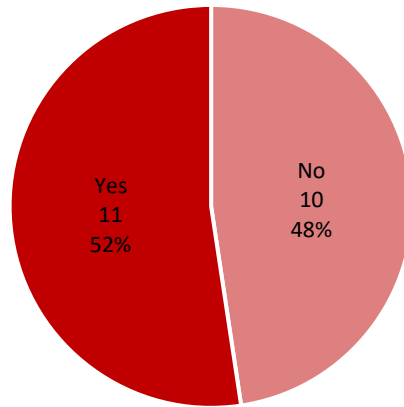


Fig. 5 Breakdown by First Generation HE status of research cohort

Pre and Post Surveys

Students more strongly agreed with each of the survey questions at the end of the programme than before (see figure 6). These positive changes were statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval for the questions on whether they enjoyed maths and how easy they found it. However, we cannot say that our intervention specifically caused these changes and there may have been other influencing factors, such as what was being covered during their regular maths lessons or position in the school year.

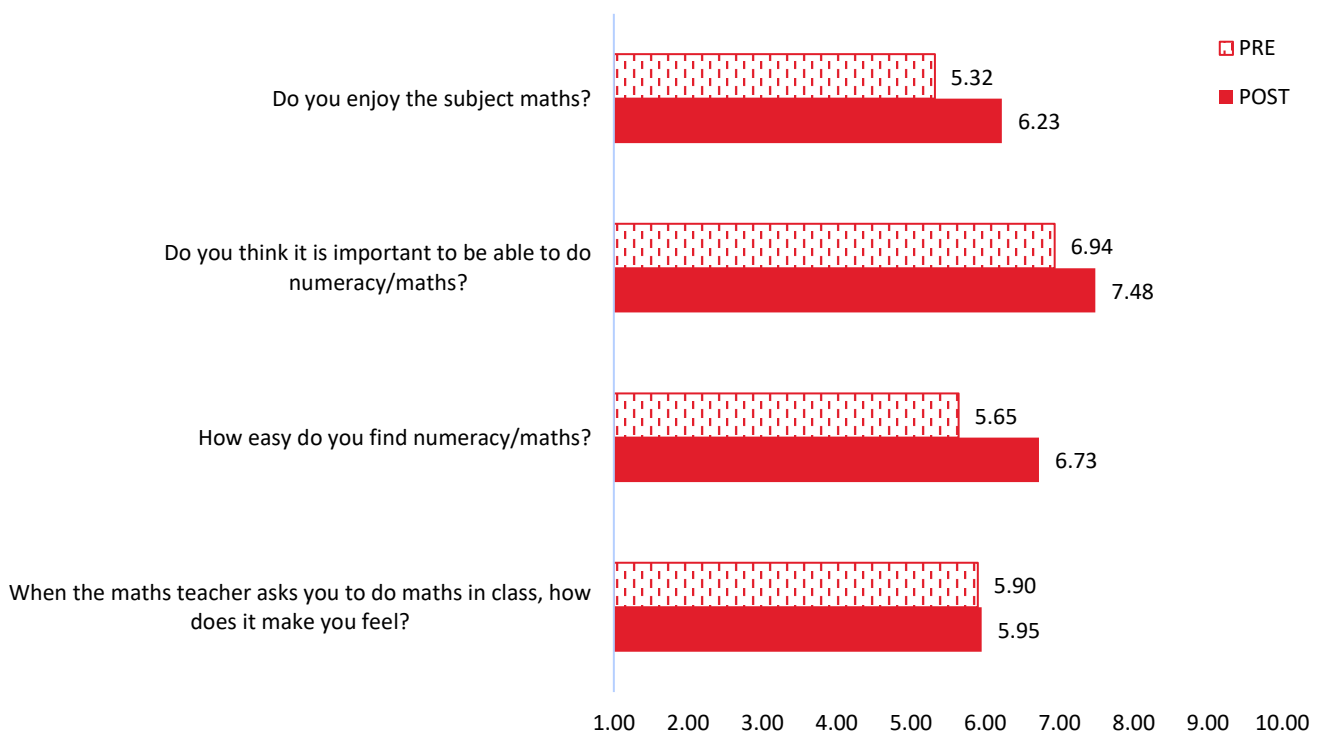


Fig. 6 Average response to each survey question, where 1= Strongly disagree and 10= Strongly agree

Students were asked 'If you don't understand a maths question straight away, how do you try to solve the question?'. The number of students that ticked each option is shown in Table 1. It is particularly positive that the number of students who said they would 'spend time trying to work it out and get there in the end'

and 'ask a friend for help' has increased. Responses have decreased for 'I won't even try' and 'I try once and give up'. This suggests that student's confidence in maths has increased.

	I won't even try	I try once and give up	I ask a friend for help	I wait for the teacher to tell me the answer	I try for a while	I spend time trying to work it out and get there in the end
PRE	3	6	14	9	15	13
POST	2	5	17	11	13	20
DIFFERENCE	-1	-1	+3	+2	-2	+7

Table 1. Number of students that chose each response when asked 'If you don't understand a maths question straight away, how do you try to solve the question?' Students could tick more than one option.

At the end of the programme, participants were also asked what they liked about the programme and whether there was anything that could be improved upon. Nine students said that they liked the 1:1 aspect of the programme, and four specifically mentioned their mentors. Although the students didn't specifically state that they considered the mentors to be a role model, it was clear that they had built positive relationships and that the 1:1 aspect of the programme was beneficial to them. The positive aspects of this model were that they could work on tasks together, it was 'calm' and that they were comfortable asking questions when necessary.

"You help me try and get the answers and help me remember what we've done. I don't normally get help in maths lessons so I just sit there and don't know what to do. I love 1:1".

Seven students said that they liked playing games, and another seven said that they enjoyed the programme or that it was fun. Students also articulated that they felt they were now 'better' at maths - "I'm now smarter and can solve questions quicker (sometimes)" - and that "it's actually helped me in maths lessons".

In terms of improvements, students said that they would like the programme to be longer, both the sessions themselves (where they were only 30 minutes long) and for the programme to be offered for an extended period, with one student asking if it could be run "until year 9 or year 11". The traditional Catch Up programme involves two 15-minute sessions each week for a whole academic year. However, due to staff capacity, and concerns surrounding removing students from lessons for a sustained period, the programme format was adapted. Students also said that they would like more topics covered "like dividing" or more subjects such as Geography and Science.

There were mixed opinions on being taken out of lessons to do the activities. Some students were happy to miss lessons they did not enjoy, but others were disappointed to be taken out of lessons that they liked.

Catch Up Numeracy Tracker

Students covered between one and eight sub-components as part of the programme with the most common sub-components covered being Hundreds, Tens and Ones (subtracting), Word Problems (adding and subtracting) and Estimation (rounding). Students from School A covered 1.3 sub-components on average, compared to School B who covered 3.6. Students from School B also covered more Phase 2 sub-components (Fractions & Decimals, Ordinal Numbers, Derived Facts, Remembered Facts (multiplying & dividing) and Hundreds, Tens and Ones (multiplying and dividing) than School A (Word Problems (multiplying)).

94% of students made progress in areas targeted during the sessions. The two students who did not make progress were already testing highly at the start of the programme, scoring level 12 (100%) in all but one sub-component assessed across Phases 1 and 2. If we convert the Catch Up levels into percentage scores, students progressed by an average 36pp. When we look at all topics covered, students from School A made more progress than School B (figure 7). However, this appears to be influenced by School B covering more Phase 2 topics, as if we control for this by looking at Phase 1 topics only the progress made by both schools is more similar, but with School B making slightly more progress (figure 8).

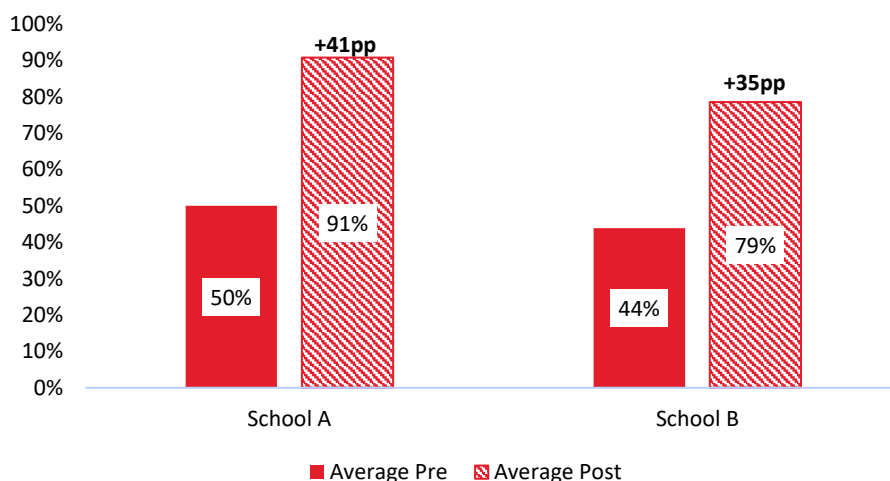


Fig. 7 Average scores from assessments before and after the numeracy programme for School A and School B (all topics)

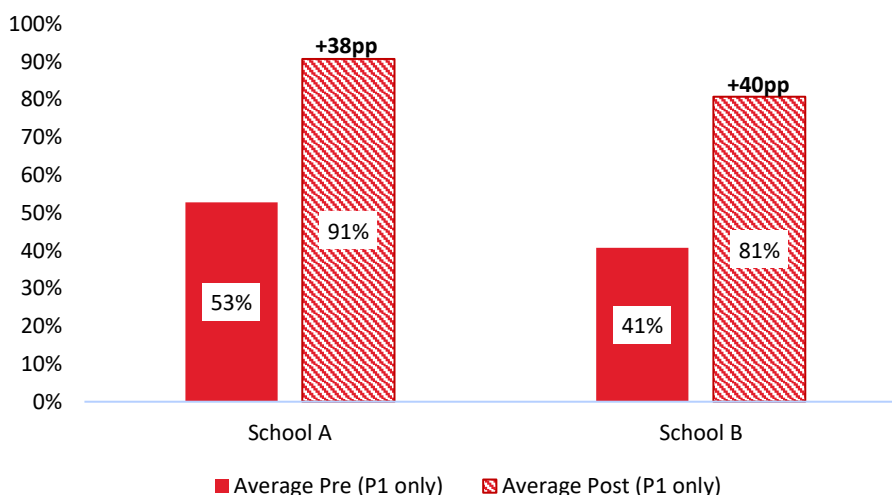


Fig. 8 Average scores from assessments before and after the numeracy programme for School A and School B (Phase 1

topics only)

Four or more students covered the following sub-components:

- Hundreds, Tens and Ones: Adding
- Hundreds, Tens and Ones: Subtracting
- Hundreds, Tens and Ones: Multiplying
- Hundreds, Tens and Ones: Dividing
- Estimation: Approximate Calculation
- Estimation: Rounding
- Word Problems: Adding and Subtracting
- Word Problems: Multiplying

By the end of the programme, students were achieving at least 79% (equivalent to a Catch Up level of 9.5 when scored out of 12) in each of these sub-components, with the greatest average progress made in Estimation: Rounding (+59pp), Word Problems : Adding and Subtracting (+45pp) and Word Problems : Multiplying (+44pp) (see figure 9).

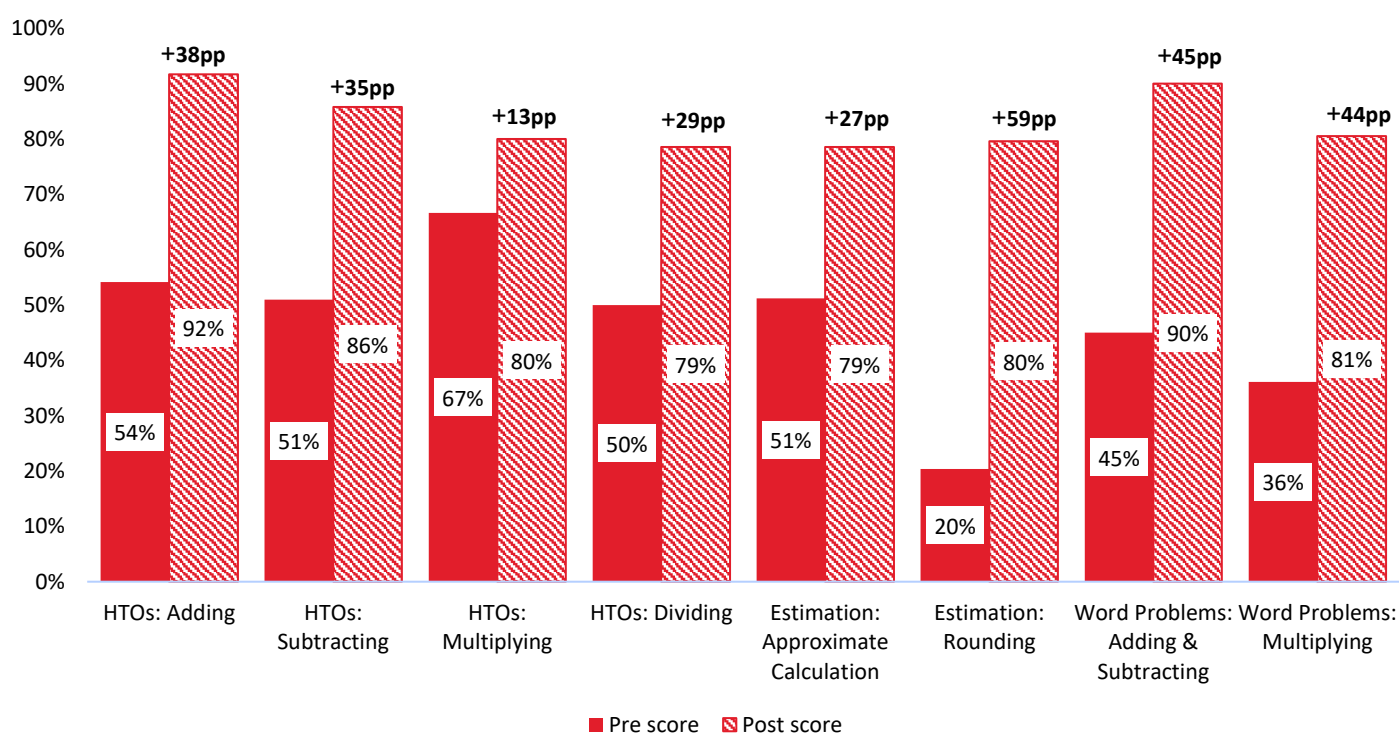


Fig. 9 Average scores from assessments before and after the numeracy programme for each sub-component covered by four or more students.

Staff Feedback

Catch Up programme and format of sessions

Mentors had a range of previous experience with numeracy teaching, including mentors who had previously been a primary Teaching Assistant or a former Maths and English tutor, alongside those that were confident in maths but hadn't had experience designing activities themselves. The Catch Up programme supplied resources and mentors initially expressed apprehension regarding whether the level of the resources was appropriate for the target audience of our programme. The primary concern was that

students may perceive the resources as “primary level” or “patronising”, however, with further experience of the programme mentors were able to adapt resources to make them suitable and relevant to learners.

The mentors (particularly those with less experience) also suggested that they would have benefited from further training to expand their pedagogical skills – “we maybe weren’t prepared for how to react when a young person doesn’t...that way of working maybe isn’t best for them”. Student Ambassador mentors completed the Catch Up training alongside an “insightful” training session from Outreach staff who “showed how they have tailored it to schools”.

For the first cohort of students the testing was arduous as it had taken a significant time to get through the test protocols which delayed students moving onto numeracy content. As a result, staff identified common themes that the participants struggled with and so were able to reduce the testing for cohort two by focusing on those common areas. However, some mentors, particularly those with more experience teaching numeracy, found the programme format challenging at times, “because it didn’t necessarily align with where I would have naturally gone with the students” and “having such a strict way that you want things to be done doesn’t always work in reality, with young people”.

Staff shared some reservations about reliance on the Catch Up assessments as a sole means of measuring progress. Some staff noted that, the trackers are primarily designed to demonstrate progress. They also felt that some of the levels did not necessarily correspond with levels of difficulty – for example, in multiplication level 8 was the eight times table, level 9 was the nine times table and level 10 was the ten times table, despite the ten times table being much easier. Catch Up recommends that alongside the specific programme assessments, in school assessments are also used to measure progress. Due to logistical complications, this data was not collected within the programme. Future iterations of the programme would benefit from collecting this data to make comparisons to observed in school progress. This may also provide insight into the accuracy of the progress trackers.

However, mentors did say that having tactile resources, such as the assessment booklets was a positive “because it doesn’t feel like tests” and the participants could visibly see their progress. It also helped to ease the transition from primary level maths (where you might have physical resources) to secondary “where they’re just expected to do it on paper”.

Regarding the difference in format between the two schools, one mentor said, “the half hour one was just not possible”. They recognised that “it might be useful if we build in more recap time in each session going forward”, which would be more achievable in the one hour format.

“I think the students who really needed it would benefit with more time. Assessment took time and then there did not seem like much time to support them where they lacked”.

One mentor said that it would be useful to get information from the school on what topics they should cover to support the in-class learning “they could be like, ‘This year we really want them to nail their times tables,’ and that, if we had information from the teachers where feedback stated; ‘Please focus on this and this, because that is really going to help them in lessons’, that would be amazing”, or if the participants themselves could choose a topic that they were struggling with. Several mentors mentioned that they

thought times tables was a “really important” topic that should be covered.

“The individual should have more control of their learning as it is there for them at the end of the day so they should say what they struggle with and want to practise”.

Working with the participants

Mentors observed that the participants were more engaged when playing games but also recognised that it could be detrimental to the programme’s aims to take the participants out of a lesson that they liked (for example PE) – “Even if it’s more fun than a normal maths lesson, they’re just not going to engage with that”. OWP staff worked with the schools to try and ensure that the students did not consistently miss the same lessons, but this can be difficult to balance.

Mentors identified that the students had a range of confidence and abilities at the start of the programme but did feel that most students' confidence had improved. The students told them that this confidence extended to the classroom, where they felt they could “give something a go”. Staff also described that the programme helped to 'reduce the fear of maths' and helped participants understand its relevance outside of the classroom.

“The students I spoke to during the evaluation survey told me that they are more confident in answering questions in class.”

As with the students, the staff identified the 1:1 aspect of the programme where the students had focussed, positive attention, as being an important reason behind the boost in confidence and enjoyment that was observed when analysing the survey responses. However, we have not explored the impact that conducting these surveys 1:1 with their mentor and the influence of this relationship may have had on responses. Mentors did note that the praise the students received during the sessions and seeing everything they had accomplished made a difference to them.

“I also think that that worked really well for the students who were, perhaps, a little more anxious, I think, working one-to-one with someone they grew to trust. Like, one student in particular, I could see her confidence grow so much throughout quite a short period of time, really.”

Throughout the programme, staff were able to identify areas the participants found challenging and provide individualised, targeted support. They planned for subsequent sessions and were able to recap or re-enforce learning at the end of session. However, staff were unsure how long-lasting the impacts may be once the students return to their regular lessons, or “whether the attitude we saw, working one-to-one, was the same attitude that a school teacher would have seen” although “for some there was real embedded learning that occurred”. In future iterations of the programme, it is recommended that this be explored as part of the evaluation methodology.

4. Evaluation Limitations

Opt-In Consent Procedures

Consent to be involved in the research and evaluation activities was sought from both the participants and their parents/guardians. Despite thorough and rigorous follow-up by the schools, consent forms for 14 of the 48 students were not returned, resulting in the exclusion of these participants from the research cohort. Therefore, while the findings were largely positive, it should be acknowledged that the perspectives and experiences of almost a third of participants are not represented.

Student Targeting

Students were targeted by the schools as being at least one year behind their expected numeracy levels. Despite this, according to our assessments, two students in the second cohort were performing above the expected levels. It is unknown as to why this is the case. It may be that there is inaccuracy between content taught in the Catch Up programme and what they are struggling with in class. Or it may be that they made significant progress in school after being identified for the programme. Or that performance varied dependent on the assessment metrics and environment. Further exploration as to why this is the case may be required in the future.

Catch Up Numeracy Tracker

The Catch Up Numeracy Tracker is designed to demonstrate progress across all topics and sub-components (10 topics and 26 sub-components at Phase 1, and 5 topics and 13 sub-components at Phase 2) over the duration of one academic year. However, as the University ran a smaller, more focussed programme the tracker's calculations (such as averages) required adjustment to ensure they accurately reflected the topics covered. In addition, staff felt that the Catch Up levels (scored out of 6 or 12) were not easily interpretable by school staff, and therefore these have been converted into percentage scores for the purposes of this evaluation.

5. Recommendations

- **Adopt the One-Hour Session Model:** It is recommended that both schools follow the hour-long format for each session, in order to give sufficient time to undertake the assessment, opportunities for learning and to embed knowledge by recapping what has previously been learned.
- **Review and Revise Parental Consent Procedures:** Parental consent procedures should be revisited in future ethics submissions, with consideration given to adopting an opt-out model. A significant number of students were excluded from the research due to unreturned consent forms, which may have resulted in a sample that is not fully representative of the wider student cohort.

- **Explore the possibility of additional evaluation methods:** If available, in school assessments could be used alongside the Catch Up tracker to measure progress, and the introduction of a comparator group would allow us to ascertain whether the statistically significant changes observed in the surveys were as a result of participation in the programme or other factors. The influence a mentor may have on the participants response to the survey questions when conducted 1:1 could also be explored further.
- **Ensure content aligns to in school priorities:** Partnerships with each school should continue to be developed. For example, further communication could be sought to ascertain which topics would support in-class learning the most. Feedback could be requested from teaching staff on the participants' long term engagement with maths lessons and non-participant data will allow us to create a comparator group, thereby increasing our confidence in any impact observed.
- **Develop an Enhanced Theory of Change:** An Enhanced Theory of Change should be developed for the programme. This will allow us to reflect upon and refine the programme's goals, consider the mechanisms for change and better understand its impact.

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