



# Investigating the impact of the Premier League Reading Stars programme on children's attainment

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## Premier League Reading Stars: impact on attainment

The evaluation of the Premier League Reading Stars (PLRS) programme in 2013 has established that the intervention is having a positive impact on the attainment of participating children in reading and writing:

*Three out of four children made at least six months' progress in just ten weeks. One child in three made a year's progress or more. The programme typically ran over ten weeks. During this time 63% of the pupils made up to a year's progress in reading (one or two sub-levels) and 11.5% made more than a year's progress (three or more sublevels). This is a wonderful achievement for young people whose reading skills were not improving prior to taking part in the intervention.*

The programme targets primarily children with low attainment and low engagement with reading and writing. Most participants are boys (80%), aged 7 to 15 in either primary (for the majority) or secondary schools. Additionally, the programme is offered to schools with a high number of children on free school meals (FSM). Used as a proxy to assess level of economic poverty, the FSM status enables the National Literacy Trust's programmes to target children from deprived backgrounds.

## The importance of working with children on free school meals

Various examples of research have demonstrated that children on FSM were performing less well than their peers in schools, and often showed negative attitudes to literacy which impede their academic and professional development.

For example, KS2 assessment data in 2013 showed that significantly fewer pupils who receive FSMs achieve the expected level aged 11 compared with pupils who do not receive FSMs (79% vs 91%). Similarly, our own research (Clark, 2014) has shown that children on FSMs don't just fall behind in terms of their reading skills but they are also less likely to enjoy reading and to read daily outside class.

Indeed, a 2014 study by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (SMCPC) found that disadvantaged children who start out as high-attainers are overtaken by their better-off peers at secondary school and were significantly less likely to attend elite universities<sup>1</sup>.

Because the National Literacy Trust aims to improve literacy for the purpose of more social mobility and improved social inclusion in the UK, reaching out to disadvantaged children in school and ensuring they benefit from our activities is a significant focus of our programmes. The National Literacy Trust is a member of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Progress Made by High-Attaining Children from Disadvantaged Backgrounds*, Institute for Fiscal Studies for SMCPC, 2014

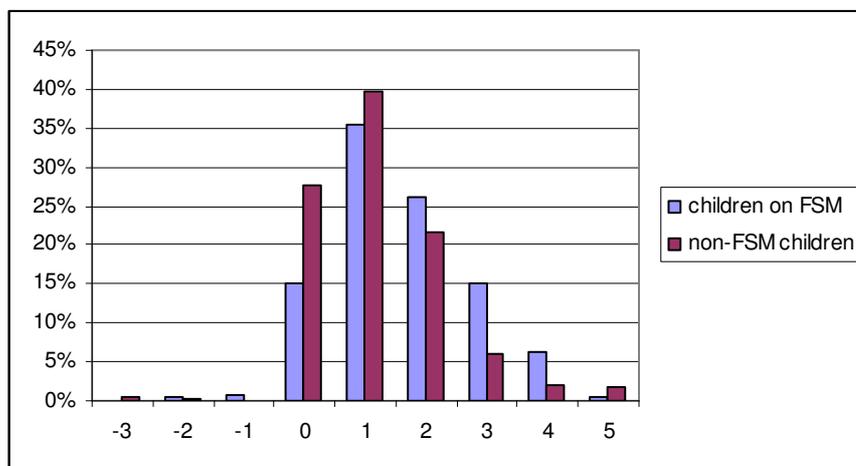
Fair Education Alliance, whose goal is among others: to reduce the gap in attainment between poorer pupils and their peers.

### Premier League Reading Stars and children on free school meals

In 2013, 35% of children taking part in the PLRS programme were on free school meals. The evaluation did not reveal a significant difference between FSM pupils and others in their attitudes pre- and post-project. It seems the activities had a high impact on reading for pleasure on all participating children (N = 920), regardless of age, gender, or social background as the number of children who enjoy reading “very much” **tripled** as a result of taking part in the programme. By the end of the programme 81% of pupils said they enjoy reading either “very much” or “quite a lot”, compared with only 38.4% at the beginning of the project.

However, a difference can be observed in the impact the project had on attainment<sup>2</sup>. While all children in the programme improved their reading sublevels, children on free school meals seem to have improved their attainment by twice as many sublevels as their peers (FSM = 1.8 average sublevels; non-FSMs = 0.9 average sublevels).

Most children progress by one sublevel, but a quarter of FSM children progress by two sublevels, and 20% improve by 3 or more sublevels. On the other hand, children who are not on FSM are more likely to progress by one sublevel, or to remain at the same level. The below graph shows the difference in progression between children on FSM and others: although non-FSM children are more numerous at the +1 sublevel mark, FSM children are better represented at the +2 and +3 sublevels mark.



The reasons for the particular success of PLRS on FSM children may be varied, and have not been fully explored yet. It is possible that these children respond particularly well to non-traditional teaching methods (visits to football clubs, online challenges, games and competitions to promote reading etc.) and benefit from extra attention from their teachers. They may also be particularly sensitive to the use of footballers as role-models<sup>3</sup>. Finally, it is equally possible that FSM children start off with lower attainment levels and are therefore able to improve more than their peers.

The evaluation of PLRS in 2014 will endeavour to look more closely at this phenomenon and its causes.

<sup>2</sup> Attainment data were available for: 237 pupils who receive FSMs; 455 pupils who do not receive FSMs

<sup>3</sup> *Reaching Out with Role Models: Role Models and Young People's Reading*, Christina Clark, Sarah Osborne, and George Dugdale for NLT, 2009