

HFL Education's Making Fluent and Flexible Calculators Programme. Frequently Asked Questions



PRIOR TO SIGNING THE EOI

Do I have to pay for the programme?

If your school is chosen at the point of randomisation to deliver the MFFC programme, there will be a cost of £150, covering the training and all the resources to deliver the programme. The programme normally costs £450, so represents a significant reduction.


Who is the Making Fluent and Flexible Calculators programme for?

In this trial, the MFFC programme is for low prior attaining Year 7 students who are taught regularly as a group.

These groups of students typically have not mastered the basics, and gaps in foundational knowledge are impacting their ability to access and progress through the maths curriculum. This programme goes back to basics, and through explicit teaching and regular practice, fluency increases, and connections are made. This helps students to free cognitive space when tackling more complex problems and helps build self-confidence.

What is a Randomised Control Trial (RCT)?

The RCT is a type of experimental design where participants are randomly allocated to the treatment and control groups. Random assignment allows the evaluator to assume that there are no prior differences between the two groups that could affect the primary outcome, and any effect size is therefore due to the intervention received by the treatment group.

Random assignment is used to deal with the problem of selection bias, which occurs when the way in which participants are assigned to experimental groups biases the findings of the study. For example, if an evaluator allows schools to volunteer for the treatment group and fills the control group from the pool of schools that did not volunteer, any difference in the primary outcome could be due to pre-existing characteristics and motivation of the schools that volunteered. Schools that volunteered for the treatment group may have more effective teachers or engaged parents, and these features could mean the treatment schools improve at a faster rate than control schools with less effective teachers or less engaged parents. [\(taken from the Evaluation glossary | EEF\)](#) 

Am I eligible?

Within this cohort, schools must have a class(es) of students who are low prior attaining* who are taught regularly as a group

- are a state-funded school in England;
- will have a Y7 cohort in autumn 2025;
- within this cohort, schools must have students who are taught regularly as a group low prior attaining
- have not taken part in Making Fluent and Flexible programme delivered by HFL Education within the last 3 years.
- are not taking part in any of the EEF trials listed below:

CoachBright Charitable Trust: Peer-to-peer coaching.
NCETM: Specialist Knowledge for Teaching Mathematics.
Action tutoring: tutoring programme.

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What is meant by low prior attaining students?

Low prior attaining refers to students who have been identified by the schools as being lower attaining compared to their peers; schools identify these groups using usual school systems.

What is a low prior attaining maths teaching group?


A teaching group is a group of students who have maths lessons together regularly after the October half-term 2025. This may be a group of students allocated to a lower set if students are grouped by prior attainment or could be a group of identified students who have at least 3 maths lessons together either in addition to / or instead of being in a mixed attainment group.

Does it matter if the Y7 students are not set straight away when they start secondary school?

No, but to take part in the trial, Year 7 students need to be in a low prior attaining group from the start of the second half of the Autumn term after the October half-term break.

Who are the EEF?

The Education Endowment Foundation is an independent charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement. It does this by supporting schools, colleges, and nurseries to improve teaching and learning through better use of evidence.

(taken from EEF Grantee Guide | Education Endowment Foundation) 

Who's behind the programme?

The programme has been created by the maths team at HFL Education. This a team of nationally recognised maths teaching and learning specialists who work in both primary and secondary settings.

(see <https://www.hfleducation.org> for further information) 

How long will the programme last?

The programme lasts a minimum of 12 weeks.

'Treatment' schools will complete the HFL Education exit diagnostic assessments after 12 weeks of programme delivery. However, due to the extent of the material provided, schools can continue to deliver the programme beyond this point. Previous schools who have used the programme have recognised that continued development of a range of strategies and practice of these enables students to access the KS3 curriculum more easily.

What is the evidence that shows it might work?

The programme has been run in both KS2 and KS3 classes. As part of the initial trials, data analysis undertaken by the HFL Education team indicated that on average, students in lower attaining KS3 classes made 10+ months of progress in their mental maths after following the programme. Feedback from secondary teachers identified that many students were on entry:

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- using their fingers to solve addition and subtraction calculations,
- highly dependent on using formal column methods (and using fingers to solve these).

On exit, teachers comment that students are using their base facts more and employing a wider variety of strategies. Students' understanding, confidence and oracy in maths had improved. Several schools have decided to implement the programme yearly with year 7 students to ensure that all students have a good grounding of foundational maths and mental maths calculation strategies.

Can the programme be delivered by a non-specialist maths teacher?

Yes. The programme is best delivered by a maths teacher in secondary schools; however, the resources have been designed and written so that it can be delivered by non-specialist maths teachers or non-qualified staff such as higher-level teaching assistants.

Through a combination of live webinars and self-guided online learning, staff can access all the training throughout the full programme delivery window to support successful delivery.

So if staffing changes the programme can continue and maths specialists at HFL Education will be able to support staff transition if needed.

How will this programme impact on the delivery of the maths curriculum?

This programme is designed to be delivered alongside the school's usual Year 7 curriculum. Sometime will be needed to teach and rehearse the strategies.

How much time will it take out of maths lessons?

On average, one or two 20-30 minute teaching inputs a fortnight are needed to teach the mental calculation strategies. In addition, 5-10 minutes of maths lessons at least three times a week will be needed to regularly practice the strategies taught. This may be whole-class rehearsal using fluency slides or independent practice using printed practice sheets. All teaching and practice resources are provided.

Can I complete the programme with more than one class of students?

Yes, you can complete the programme with as many low-prior attaining maths groups as you have. For example: if you have 6 maths sets across year 7 from set 1 to set 6 you may want to complete the programme with sets 5 and set 6.

If you are a larger school and organise the Year 7 cohort into two halves you may have two 'bottom' sets who you would like to complete the programme with or you might want to complete it with the lowest two sets in each half of the year group meaning 4 groups would take part.

Any staff members in your school who are delivering the programme will have access to the live and online training.

If more than one maths group are receiving the programme can all the staff access the training?

Yes, any staff members in your school who are delivering the programme will have access to the live and online training. So if you have multiple groups accessing the programme each group's teacher can attend, or if you have groups taught by more than one teacher across a week both teachers can attend.

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What if our priorities change? Can we stop/remove our school from the trial at any time?

To ensure the validity of this trial, it is important that each participating school delivers the intervention (if allocated to the treatment group) and facilitates the evaluation activities. Schools will be asked to sign a Consent Form that clearly outlines their commitment to the evaluation; school leaders must read this document carefully before signing to ensure they understand the project requirements.

If a school decides not to continue delivering the programme (if allocated to the treatment group), this will dilute the programme's effect and may mean we fail to confirm if and how well the programme works. This would disadvantage all schools and students who would benefit from the programme and similar approaches in the future. Schools will, therefore, be encouraged to continue delivering the programme for the specified period, where feasible.

If a situation arises whereby a school believes they can no longer continue to participate in the programme or the evaluation, the school must contact the delivery team at HFL Education. They will be on hand to support you with any delivery challenges you may face throughout the programme.

Can you guarantee that we will receive the programme?

Yes and No! As part of the EEF evaluation, you will have a 50% chance of being a school asked to implement the programme. If you are an implementation school, you get the programme.

If you are allocated to be a control school at the point of randomisation, you will not deliver the programme as part of the trial. However, you will receive a £500 thank you for being a control school and taking part in the evaluation process, and HFL Education will guarantee you a place on the programme in the future at a reduced cost of £300 (usual price £450).

Will it have an impact on our students?

From initial trials and data collected from schools that have already completed the programme, we strongly believe that the programme has an impact on students' mathematics. As part of the initial trials, the data collected and evaluated by HFL Education indicated on average, students in lower attaining KS3 classes made 10+ months of progress in their mental maths after following the programme. Feedback from secondary teachers identified that many students were on entry:

- using their fingers to solve addition and subtraction calculations,
- highly dependent on using formal column methods (and using fingers to solve these).

On exit, teachers comment that students are using their base facts more and employing a wider variety of strategies. Students' understanding, confidence and oracy in maths had improved.

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How far in advance will we know the training dates?

The training will be available to book after the first round of randomisation in July 2025. We are running both the launch webinar and the half-day training sessions on a variety of dates and times to try to ensure that you can find a time that suits your school. In addition, all the training sessions are supported by online learning content if live sessions are missed.

Will we have to release staff for training?

Yes. There are two online live events that up to two members of staff will need to attend. The launch webinar is a two-hour event introducing the programme and the diagnostic assessments. We are offering three different dates and times for this event; one of which is after the school day. Therefore, if you choose this time, no release cover will be needed.

The training webinar is a half-day (3 hour) event that introduces all the teaching materials and also the online learning platform. We will also offer multiple dates for this session however due to the length of this training it will either be in the morning, or the afternoon.

In addition to the live online events, there is further training available via the online learning platform, this is also where all resources will be hosted. Staff will need time to be able to access the resources and the further training material.

Will we have to release staff to carry out assessments? *Schools who are implementing the programme*

Yes, there are number of assessments that need to be carried out while the programme is being delivered:

TREATMENT SCHOOLS

Oct/Nov 2025

Entry diagnostic assessments: these include a whole class assessment that is two one-minute assessments and a 1:1 assessment with 4-6 students. The 1:1 assessment takes approximately 20 minutes per student and does need to be completed by the member of staff who is going to deliver the programme.

March / April 2026

Exit diagnostic assessments: these include the same structure as the entry assessments - a whole class assessment that is two one-minute assessments and a 1:1 assessment with 4-6 students. The 1:1 assessment takes approximately 20 minutes per student and does need to be completed by the member of staff who is going to deliver the programme.

Summer term 2026

Evaluators assessment: GL online assessment, student attitudes questionnaire, fluency test (to be confirmed by KCL)

CONTROL SCHOOLS

Oct/Nov 2025

KCL evaluation team will use KS2 test data as a baseline, this will be collected using UPN.

Summer term 2026

KCL evaluators team are likely to use assessment: GL online assessment, student attitudes questionnaire, fluency test.

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AFTER SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

Do we need to notify parents?

Yes. Schools should inform parents of the trial using the Parent Information Sheet which will be provided by the delivery/evaluation team once accepted onto the project.

Can we change training dates?

No, however, there will be a variety of dates and times available, and all live training will be recorded and accessible via the online learning platform.

When will data be collected?

TREATMENT SCHOOLS

Oct / Nov 2025

HFL Education data: Entry diagnostic assessments: these include a whole class assessment that is two one-minute assessments and a 1:1 assessment with 4-6 students. The 1:1 assessment takes approximately 20 minutes per student and does need to be completed by the member of staff who is going to deliver the programme.

March / April 2026

HFL Education data: Exit diagnostic assessments: these include the same structure as the entry assessments - a whole class assessment that is two one-minute assessments and a 1:1 assessment with 4-6 students. The 1:1 assessment takes approximately 20 minutes per student and does need to be completed by the member of staff who is going to deliver the programme.

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How is the training delivered?

All training is conducted online, either through live webinars or self-guided learning via our online learning platform. While there is no face-to-face training within the programme, the online webinars are designed to be interactive and engaging. These sessions need to be attended, but don't worry – they will be offered on various dates and times to suit your schedule. Plus, all live training will be recorded and made accessible on the online learning platform, so you can revisit the material at your convenience.

Would it matter if the teacher delivering the programme changed part way through?

Ideally the same member of staff would deliver the programme from October 2025 to Easter 2026, however, we know schools are ever changing and if there is a change of staff for the target group of students, the programme can continue. The new member of staff will be given access to the online training resources and can contact the HFL Education team via email: fluentandflexible.eef@hfleducation.org  and support will be provided.