

From [The Times](#)

April 18, 2009

One-on-one plus fun adds up to 'stunning' progress in maths

[Nicola Woolcock](#)

Children who struggle with basic maths are performing with distinction after taking part in a revolutionary project that will now be introduced across the country.

The programme — Numbers Count — has won government backing and funding after the outstanding results of a pilot study with six-year-olds.

Pupils falling behind in their second year of primary school were given personalised one-on-one lessons for half an hour a day, using board games, glove puppets and bouncy balls.

After only 12 weeks their maths age had improved by an average of a year and some had made two years' progress. About 30,000 children will benefit when the scheme is expanded across England from next year.

RELATED LINKS

- [CASE STUDY: Counting on the numbers](#)
- [Wacky Wednesdays can broaden pupils' horizons](#)

The programme exemplifies a growing belief in the potency of individually tailored learning, and early intervention, to improve basic skills.

Some of those it helped may have otherwise become the 25 per cent of children who start secondary school with poor maths. In addition, almost seven million adults can barely cope with basic maths, performing below the level expected of a nine-year-old.

During the pilot, which began last September, specially trained teachers worked with 800 children in schools across England as part of the Every Child Counts initiative.

They used techniques adapted to the personality of each child: a shy, quiet child would improve their numeracy with an adapted board game, or by interacting with a hand puppet who makes mistakes in counting and needs to be corrected.

Pupils with lots of energy were taken outside to count how many times they bounced a ball. Those who found it hard to write numbers were given paint and large pieces of paper to create giant, colourful digits.

The emphasis in every case was on making maths fun and exciting.

A study of the project by Edge Hill University in Lancashire found that many pupils made vast improvements in numeracy and became much more confident and outgoing in all lessons.

The programme was devised by the Every Child A Chance Trust, which was set up on the back of a similarly successful literacy project last year — Every Child A Reader.

The trust has been given £10 million, from businesses, charitable trusts and government, to spend on early intervention schemes.

Jean Gross, a former educational psychologist who is director of the trust, said the numeracy project had achieved “stunning results”.

She said: “These are children who have had two years of school and, in that time, some haven’t learnt to count beyond three. Some have not been brought up in homes where parents count with them or talk about numbers, others have speech, language or behaviour difficulties.

“Some — girls in particular — just have no confidence in their maths.”

“The course has changed the way children act in class. They are more confident, put up their hands and participate. These children go from the bottom to the top table in their class.”

Annabelle Birleanu, head teacher of St Paul’s Primary School in Southwark, South London, which joined the pilot, said: “The results have been excellent. One autistic child moved up a phenomenal amount and is proving to be a highly able mathematician.”

Some of the children in the scheme are going to Downing Street next Wednesday to meet Gordon Brown. Sarah McCarthy-Fry, the Schools Minister, said the scheme illustrated the “beauty of personalised learning” and would be expanded across England from September 2010.



HAVE YOUR SAY