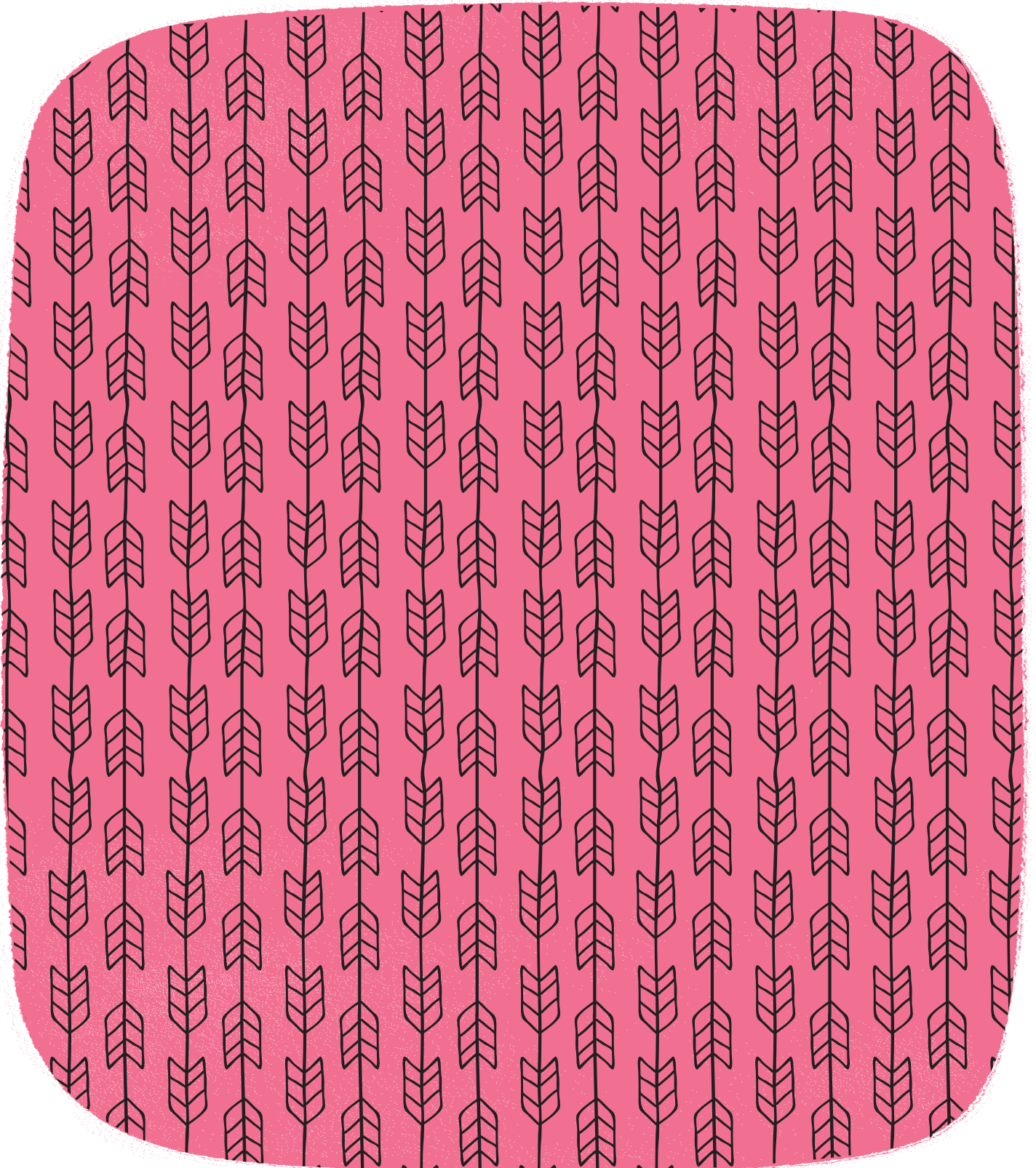




Case Study: Working with Schools

DOWNHAM MARKET ACADEMY, NORFOLK



“Exemplary service ensured that the programme not only ran with efficacy but also was a pleasure to take part in. As a school we felt supported.”

NICK HEWITT

Director of Teaching and Learning, DMA

BACKGROUND

Downham Market Academy is described as a “large, friendly and positive community where learning is at the heart of all we do. We are passionately committed to our fantastic students who bring a diverse range of talents and experiences from a wide area of West Norfolk.” And we’ve really enjoyed working with them.

As a Cambridge-based tutoring agency, Downham Market Academy is outside our normal area, but with the significant impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on education and on individual students, a different approach was required this year.

Nick Hewitt, the Deputy Headteacher and Director of Teaching and Learning, approached Tutor Doctor directly, having been recommended to us by the Head Teacher of Chesterton Community College in Cambridge, Lucy Scott. Chesterton and DMA are part of the same Academic Federation – the Eastern Learning Alliance.

Nick had a budget to spend on tuition to help disadvantaged students accelerate their progress in the face of an incredibly challenging time with the Covid-19 pandemic. They wanted to use a local expert agency who could deliver the service they were after, as recommended by a respected colleague who had used Tutor Doctor’s services a number of times in the past.

This was to be a very ambitious programme aiming to provide online after-school tuition to a broad cohort of Year 11 students in Maths, English and Science.

“Tutor Doctor provide a genuinely outstanding service.”

NICK HEWITT

Director of Teaching and Learning, DMA



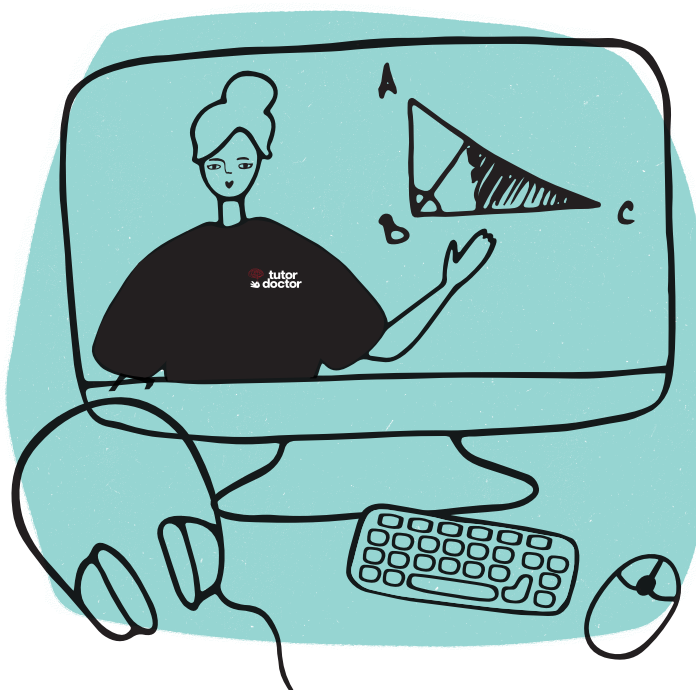
THE PROGRAMME

After briefing meetings with the school, we assigned a team of tutors to work with groups of 1-3 students after school at either 4pm or 5pm for an hour. We would have two sessions per subject per day, so 30 hours of tutoring each week.

Due to Covid-19 guidelines, and because Downham Market is located well outside of Cambridge where our current tutors are based, the programme was delivered online. We agreed to use the Bramble online tutoring platform for this programme which offers excellent safeguarding assurances, is a straightforward package to use, and one that we increasingly have been using at Tutor Doctor.

Ideally, we'd have used a platform everyone had used before. The school uses Microsoft Teams, but as the tutors are all external to the school, things would get complicated with the school, the students and the tutors in terms of the set up. Other mainstream platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet and Skype were not permitted by the school due to safeguarding concerns, so we were hopeful that Bramble would be a good solution. It's been used very successfully with other schools. The sessions would take place online at-home, with some students getting tuition in one subject and others for two or three subjects.

The programme would last 9 weeks, starting in mid-January and run through to Easter. The plan was to help steer the students with their revision, with topic plans provided by the Heads of Department for Maths, English and Science. Clear briefing sessions were provided to the tutors by the Heads of Department ahead of the programme start and things evolved over time, particularly for Maths where we ended up doing a good deal of past paper practice with the groups as we got closer to the end of the programme.



KEY LEARNINGS

Operationally this was a challenging programme for both sides. Multiple sessions and multiple students, some of whom were not overly enthusiastic about these additional lessons after school. Additionally, with this happening away from school, there were not the usual opportunities for the teaching team to encourage attendance and participation or to resolve any technical glitches that occurred.

While we encountered some technical challenges – for example connectivity – and students went through a learning curve with a new platform, we worked through these challenges and key learnings from this experience will be reviewed for future programmes with the school.

“From first meeting the science tuition team I was confident that they could meet our student’s needs and would support our directions on what needed to be learned each week.”

ROSE CORNELIUS

Assistant Head & Head of Science, DMA

MATHS	Monday	4pm	Mary C	Scott L	Lucy P	1
	Monday	5pm	Ben H	Josh H	Maddie K	0
	Tuesday	4pm	Lewis B	Leah C	Ryan S	3
	Tuesday	5pm	Jack N	Hannah P	Jay W	2
	Wednesday	4pm	Matt R	Jessie K	Will J	1
	Wednesday	5pm	Megan C	Evan S	Amy C	3
	Thursday	4pm	Sariya S	Abi S	Ben T	1
	Thursday	5pm	Dylan W	Adam W		0
	Friday	4pm	Ernie B	Maria P	Holly N	2
	Friday	5pm	Jake D	Shawn T	Molly S	0

We worked with the school on a central “Master Spreadsheet” – an online document which all the tutors could access, as could all the staff at school, so we could track attendance. We also learned that some students were just not going to engage, no matter what we did, so the cohort of children changed over time.

Unfortunately, some of the students who the school felt would most benefit from the extra help were those who would not participate, and so new students joined and took full advantage of the help being made available to them.

We had an exceptionally strong team of tutors on this programme. By having it online, it enabled us to select a super team of tutors who did not have the usual logistical restrictions of traffic and timetabling that can limit our choices when we assign a team.

LOOKING FORWARD

At our review meeting after the programme had finished, the school confirmed that they would definitely want to run this programme again with Tutor Doctor. Technology glitches aside, the programme was a big success.

In this COVID year, what was a real shame was how difficult it would be to measure the specific impact of the tutoring on the student's grades. What the school did observe, despite the lockdown challenges at the time, was **how the engagement of the students and parents hugely improved as a result of the programme**. Mr Hewitt explained that the tutoring had a big impact on how the students and their parents viewed the school, seeing how they were going the extra mile for them.

Unfortunately, Covid-19 also prevented us from meeting the students up front, before things got started - this is something that has really helped previously. Online sessions are likely to be a solution again - there are many benefits in terms of the work itself and the practicalities of supporting more students with the best tutors. However, we will need to go about things slightly differently with regards to software and hardware for the students. Another key consideration is running the sessions at school to mitigate connectivity and home distraction challenges.

What is always a huge challenge is finding ways to maximise the impact of these programmes: trying to reach as many students as possible to make best use of the available budget. With the visibility offered by the online tools in place and the frequency and detail of the communications between Tutor Doctor and the school, the team at Downham Market Academy were able to make those tough calls along the way on changing students and reorganising groups. While some difficult decisions had to be made - with the right information, the team felt confident they were taking the best approach for all concerned. Having the sessions at home was a factor in student compliance here.

Mr Hewitt and his team were superb to work with and we look forward to working with them again in future.

