

Coaching

Impact on pupils	Impact on teachers	Strength of evidence
Promising	Mixed	Moderate

What is it?

Coaching is a structured form of professional learning that can support teachers to improve their practice through cycles of observation, feedback, modelling, and reflection.

Unlike supervision or appraisal, coaching is primarily developmental rather than evaluative, focusing on refining specific teaching goals within clear frameworks.

Effective coaching depends on the quality of the relationship: it relies on trust and collaboration, with teachers more likely to engage when the process is non-judgemental and supportive.

Instructional coaching, meanwhile, is a specific model where the focus is on precise elements of classroom practice. It involves detailed feedback and repeated rehearsal to help teachers refine techniques. Unlike evaluative approaches, the feedback remains formative, aimed at improvement rather than accountability.

Key findings:

Impact on teachers

Coaching is often associated with stronger teaching practice, greater confidence, and more secure professional judgement. Evidence suggests its impact is greatest when it combines clear goals, deliberate practice, and supportive relationships. From this body of research, several key findings emerge:

- **Improved strategy use:** Teachers who participate in coaching are more likely to embed effective practices such as modelling, scaffolding, and addressing misconceptions. Coaching can also increase teachers' instructional practice. These gains are linked to opportunities within coaching for observation, feedback, and repeated rehearsal, which can support teachers in transferring strategies into their day-to-day practice.
- **Greater self-efficacy and reflection:** Coaching can strengthen teachers' sense of professional confidence and their ability to reflect critically on practice. Teacher self-efficacy and specialised content knowledge can also be significantly enhanced in teaching for students with moderate learning difficulties. These effects are particularly evident when

coaching is relational, sustained over time, and focused on specific goals that matter to the teacher.

- **Support for early career teachers:** Coaching may be especially beneficial in the early stages of a teaching career. Evidence indicates that structured approaches to coaching can help beginning teachers develop key professional skills and start to build a sense of teacher identity. These outcomes appear particularly important as teachers navigate the transition into the profession, though the extent of impact is likely to vary depending on the design and context of the coaching provided.
- **Behaviour management:** Data-driven coaching and systematic performance feedback can improve teachers' and TAs' ability to implement evidence-based behaviour management strategies with high fidelity and can reduce student off task behaviours and physical aggression, resulting in higher academic engagement.
- **Conditions for success:** Coaching is most likely to bring about positive changes when it is well structured, adapted to teachers' individual needs, and provided by coaches who are both trusted and working within a consistent framework.

Impact on pupils

The evidence on pupil outcomes from coaching is promising but often limited. Research reports stronger gains when coaching is sustained, aligned with curriculum goals, and consistently applied across classrooms. It highlights several key findings:

- **Pupil Outcomes:** Coaching interventions show small but significant positive effects on student academic outcomes, with strongest gains seen in early childhood education for language and literacy. Targeted coaching in particular domains (literacy, behaviour management, maths and science) is found to be more effective, including for students with moderate learning difficulties.
- **Adaptive teaching:** Students with specific learning difficulties can achieve appropriate and dramatic growth where coaching focuses on planning for adaptive teaching.
- **Students with disabilities:** Where coaching focuses on specific aspects of provision for disabled students, it can lead to improved learning outcomes.
- **Instructional quality:** Larger student gains are reported to require substantial improvements in teaching quality.
- **Sustained Engagement:** A level of commitment to the process, combined with ongoing practice seem critical for translating teacher improvement into pupil outcomes.
- **Consistent models:** Programmes that include observation, modelling, feedback, and goal setting are associated with more reliable improvements in pupil outcomes.
- **Contextual Limitations:** Evidence shows weaker impact when coaching is short-term, disconnected from curriculum priorities, or when pupil outcomes are not adequately evaluated.
- **Slow progress:** Improvements in both behaviour and progress can be slow to manifest, which can lead to initial frustration in both teachers and students.

How effective is the approach?

Coaching seems to be one of the most consistently effective forms of professional learning for improving teaching practice. Reviews show that it can strengthen teaching quality, build confidence, and support more reflective practice, particularly when feedback cycles are regular and underpinned by clear models.

There is also evidence of impact on pupils, although this tends to be more modest and indirect. Reported gains are most often linked to the improvements in teaching that coaching supports, rather than to coaching alone. Effects are clearest in areas such as early literacy and language development, though findings vary across subjects and contexts.

The conditions in which coaching is introduced appear to make a difference. It seems to be most effective when delivered over time, embedded in school priorities, and built on trust between coach and teacher. By contrast, programmes that are short-term, generic, or poorly integrated, or those where pupil outcomes are narrowly measured, tend to show weaker impact.

Coaching is a high-potential approach. Its value lies in designs that are both sustained and well structured, balancing the relational trust that enables teachers to engage fully with the clear frameworks that keep improvement focused.

How to implement it well

Coaching is reported to be most effective when supported by clear routines, skilled facilitation, and a culture of trust. Success depends not only on the model itself but also on the behaviours and relationships that shape how it is delivered.

Behaviours

The quality of coaching depends heavily on how coaches and teachers interact. The following behaviours help build trust, engagement, and meaningful professional learning:

- **Build trust:** Teachers are more open to reflection and feedback when they feel safe to share challenges and test new strategies. Allowing teachers choice and autonomy can increase trust, motivation and engagement.
- **Use purposeful dialogue:** Active listening and thoughtful questioning can help teachers think deeply and develop professional judgement.
- **Provide timely feedback:** Specific feedback, delivered soon after observation, can support practical improvements more effectively than vague comments.
- **Encourage deliberate practice:** Repeated opportunities to practise, refine, and revisit strategies can help new approaches embed over time.
- **Anchor in evidence:** Drawing on data or pupil work can ground coaching goals in classroom impact and make progress visible.

Contextual factors

Research suggests that coaching is most effective when the wider school environment supports it. Several conditions influence whether it is sustained and embedded over time:

- **Protect time:** Regular space during the school day for observation and feedback is essential. When coaching is squeezed around other tasks, its impact tends to drop.
- **Align with priorities:** Coaching appears more powerful when clearly connected to curriculum aims or improvement plans. If it feels disconnected, staff may not value it.
- **Select credible coaches:** Teachers engage more when coaches are respected, skilled, and understand the local context. Both relational trust and expertise matter.
- **Account for staff and context:** Factors such as teachers' prior experience, workload, or working in high-poverty schools can affect engagement and outcomes.
- **Acknowledge wider influences:** Organisational culture, visible support from leaders, resourcing, and national policy contexts can all shape whether coaching is sustained and equitable.

Structured but flexible

Evidence indicates that coaching is more effective when it follows a clear structure while allowing flexibility to meet different needs. The strongest designs balance consistency with adaptability.

Key strategies include:

- **Use repeatable cycles:** Approaches such as plan–observe–feedback–refine can help teachers build momentum and make incremental improvements.
- **Apply shared tools:** Templates, rubrics, or feedback guides can support consistent quality and keep the focus on priority areas.
- **Allow contextual tailoring:** Flexibility to adapt across phases, subjects, or teacher needs can help maintain relevance without losing structure.
- **Embed in routines:** Coaching appears more powerful when integrated into planning time or team meetings, rather than treated as an add-on.
- **Offer delivery options:** Face-to-face, digital, and blended coaching can all be effective, provided core principles of feedback and sustained practice remain in place.

Barriers to effective implementation

Even with strong evidence, coaching can fall short if common risks are not addressed. These challenges often reflect deeper structural or strategic issues:

- **Teacher discomfort:** Teachers may experience feelings of risk or discomfort when coaching requires them to 'unlearn' established methodologies. They can also experience high initial levels of stress and cognitive load when attempting to integrate complex practices into their daily routines.

- **Unclear purpose:** Without a clear rationale or link to teaching improvement, coaching can lose focus and deliver minimal impact.
- **Competing initiatives:** If not aligned with broader professional learning strategy, coaching risks being sidelined as “just another programme.”
- **Capacity gaps:** Over-reliance on external coaches or lack of structured support for internal ones, can undermine sustainability and quality.
- **Unequal access:** Coaching is sometimes limited to new teachers or specific projects, leaving experienced staff excluded and reducing whole-school impact.
- **Scaling difficulties:** Expanding coaching across multiple settings can dilute quality and weaken the key ingredients of practice, feedback, and individualisation.

Other considerations

Several additional factors can influence how coaching is perceived and sustained:

- **Design choices:** Whether coaching is voluntary, time-bound, or linked to review processes affects engagement. Clear goals and structures can help maintain focus.
- **Digital delivery:** Online or video-based coaching can improve access, but its effectiveness depends on trust, dialogue, and consistent routines.
- **Separation from appraisal:** Linking coaching too closely to performance management risks undermining openness and becoming more about compliance. Emphasising its developmental purpose can help protect trust.
- **Scaling and sustainability:** Small-scale pilots and gradual rollout allow refinement and capacity building before wider adoption.
- **Coach perspectives:** Supporting coaches’ workload, role clarity, and development can strengthen overall implementation.

Summary

The research suggests that coaching is one of the most consistently supported approaches to professional learning. It strengthens teaching practice and builds confidence, particularly when it is sustained, structured, and embedded in school culture. While evidence on pupil outcomes is less direct, gains often follow improvements in teaching quality.

Key takeaways for leaders of professional learning include:

- **Improves teaching practice:** Coaching can help embed high-impact strategies and support reflective thinking linked to clear goals.
- **Accelerates early career growth:** Evidence shows benefits for teachers in the first years of practice.
- **Indirect pupil gains:** Improvements in pupil outcomes often follow improvements in teaching. Stronger explanations, feedback, and routines often translate into improved learning outcomes.
- **Strategic investment:** Coaching is reported to work best when implemented as a long-term planned approach.

- **Relies on skilled coaches:** Credibility, training, and ongoing support for coaches seem central to sustaining quality.

Taken together, the evidence positions coaching as a high-potential tool for teacher learning. Its value lies not in a single model or delivery mode, but in consistent design choices that link trust, structure, and feedback to meaningful professional growth.

When citing this strand, please use the following reference:

National Institute of Teaching (2026). NIoT Evidence Toolkit: Coaching

References

	Review	Years of research	Focus	# studies	Countries	Impact on pupils	Impact on teachers	Reporting quality
1	Bond. M. (2023). Mentoring and Coaching of Teachers: Thematic Synthesis	2005–2021	ITE & CPD	3	Multiple countries	Positive	Mixed	High
2	Ennis et al. (2020). The Impact of Coaching on Teacher-Delivered Behavior-Specific Praise in Pre-K–12 Settings: A Systematic Review	2000–2018	ITE & CPD	45	Multiple countries (including Canada, New Zealand, USA)	Positive	Positive	High
3	Fallon et al. (2017). Direct Training to Improve Educators’ Treatment Integrity: A Systematic Review of Single-Case Design Studies	2000–2013	ITE & CPD	15	USA	Not reported	Positive	Excellent
4	Gander & Dann (2023). Using bug-in-ear technology as a coaching technique: a scoping review	2000–2021	ITE & CPD	20	Multiple countries (including USA, Australia, Netherlands)	Mixed	Positive	High
5	Klawiter & Sheng (2019). Efficacy of Professional Development With Individualized Coaching to Enhance Educator Knowledge and Practice of Emergent Literacy Skills	1997–2018	CPD only	9	Canada & USA	Not reported	Positive	Medium
6	Kraft et al. (2018) The Effect of Teacher Coaching on Instruction and Achievement: A meta-analysis of the causal evidence	1995–2017	CPD only	60	Canada, Chile, USA	Positive	Positive	Medium
7	Labrot et al. (2024). School-based consultation and coaching for promoting teachers’ generalized outcomes: A meta-analysis	1980–2020	CPD only	17	USA	Not reported	Positive	Excellent

8	McLeod et al. (2024) A Review of the Literature: Distance Coaching in Early Childhood Settings	2010–2020	CPD only	27	USA, Georgia	Not reported	Mixed	High
9	Sims et al. (2021) What are the Characteristics of Effective Teacher Professional Development? A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis	2002–2020	CPD only	119 (104 in meta-analysis)	Australia, Canada, Italy, Netherlands, UK, USA	Positive	Mixed	Excellent
10	Yang et al. (2022) Coaching early childhood teachers: A systematic review of its effects on teacher instruction and child development	2000–2020	CPD only	33	Canada, Chile, USA	Positive	Mixed	High
11	Monahan et al. (2025). Supporting children with dyslexia in primary school settings through effective professional development of teachers and classroom assistants: An international scoping review	2000-2023	CPD only	29	Multiple countries	Mixed	Mixed	High
12	Xie & Lin (2025). Are dialogic teaching-and-learning programs effective in pre-primary and primary schools? A meta-analysis. Teaching and Teacher Education.	1982-2023	CPD only	32	Multiple countries	Positive	Mixed	High
13	Reddy et al. (2025). Instructional coaching to support students with reading difficulties: A review of implementation components, methodology, and outcomes.	2000-2023	CPD only	30	Multiple countries	Positive	Mixed	High
14	Fry et al. (2025) Professional learning interventions for inquiry-based pedagogies in primary classrooms: A scoping review (2012–2022)	2012-2022	CPD only	22	Multiple countries	Positive	Mixed	Medium

15	Sepulveda-Vallejos et al. (2025) Integrating evidence-based practices in preschool educators: A scoping review from 2004 and 2023	2004-2023	CPD only	21	Multiple countries	Positive	Mixed	Medium
16	Rakap et al. (2025) Evaluating practice-based coaching as an evidence-based practice in early childhood Education: a systematic review and meta-analysis	2000-2024	ITE & CPD	19	Multiple countries	Positive	Positive	High

Review citations

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