

# Morphology First: Closing the Secondary Literacy Gap

A White Paper by Route Education

*Aligning literacy practice with DfE's Areas of Research Interest 2025*

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# Morphology First: Closing the Secondary Literacy Gap

## Executive Summary

*A framework for measurable, scalable literacy impact in secondary education.*

The debate around a proposed Year 8 reading assessment has brought a long-overlooked truth into sharp focus: secondary schools need to evidence literacy progress earlier, not just at GCSE. This moment highlights a structural weakness that has shaped the system for too long. Phonics has transformed early decoding. Disciplinary literacy is strengthening exam success. But KS3, the crucial bridge between the two, still lacks a coherent, sequenced strategy for building vocabulary and comprehension. Without it, too many pupils miss the chance to secure the word knowledge they need to thrive across subjects, and schools miss the opportunity to elevate outcomes for every learner.

This weakness is not abstract; it plays out in classrooms every day. Many pupils arrive in Year 7 able to decode print but without the vocabulary knowledge to access the breadth of the curriculum with confidence. Others keep pace but miss the opportunity to develop the generative strategies that accelerate comprehension and higher-order thinking. By KS4, both groups face the same barrier: disciplinary literacy assumes word knowledge that has not been systematically secured in KS3. This is not a reflection of weak practice in schools, but of a systemic omission in national curriculum design: a missing, coherent approach to word-level reading at KS3.

Morphology, the explicit teaching of roots, prefixes, and suffixes, is the missing link in the UK literacy journey. A substantial international evidence base demonstrates that morphological instruction accelerates vocabulary growth, improves reading comprehension, and strengthens writing accuracy (*Bowers, Kirby & Deacon, 2010; Carlisle, 2010; Nagy & Townsend, 2012*). The Education Endowment Foundation highlights morphology as a promising, cost-effective approach within its secondary literacy guidance (*EEF, 2019*), and Ofsted's English subject review (2022) emphasises the need for systematic word-level instruction beyond early phonics.

This paper sets out a UK-ready model, developed and piloted by Route Education but designed for sector-wide adoption. Across 31 Core Roots, pupils master over 250 high-utility words, supported by a dual-strand weekly model:

- **Session A (Word Study):** decoding, generative practice, and retrieval
- **Session B (Apply & Read):** applying roots in subject-linked texts, with integrated grammar and writing skills

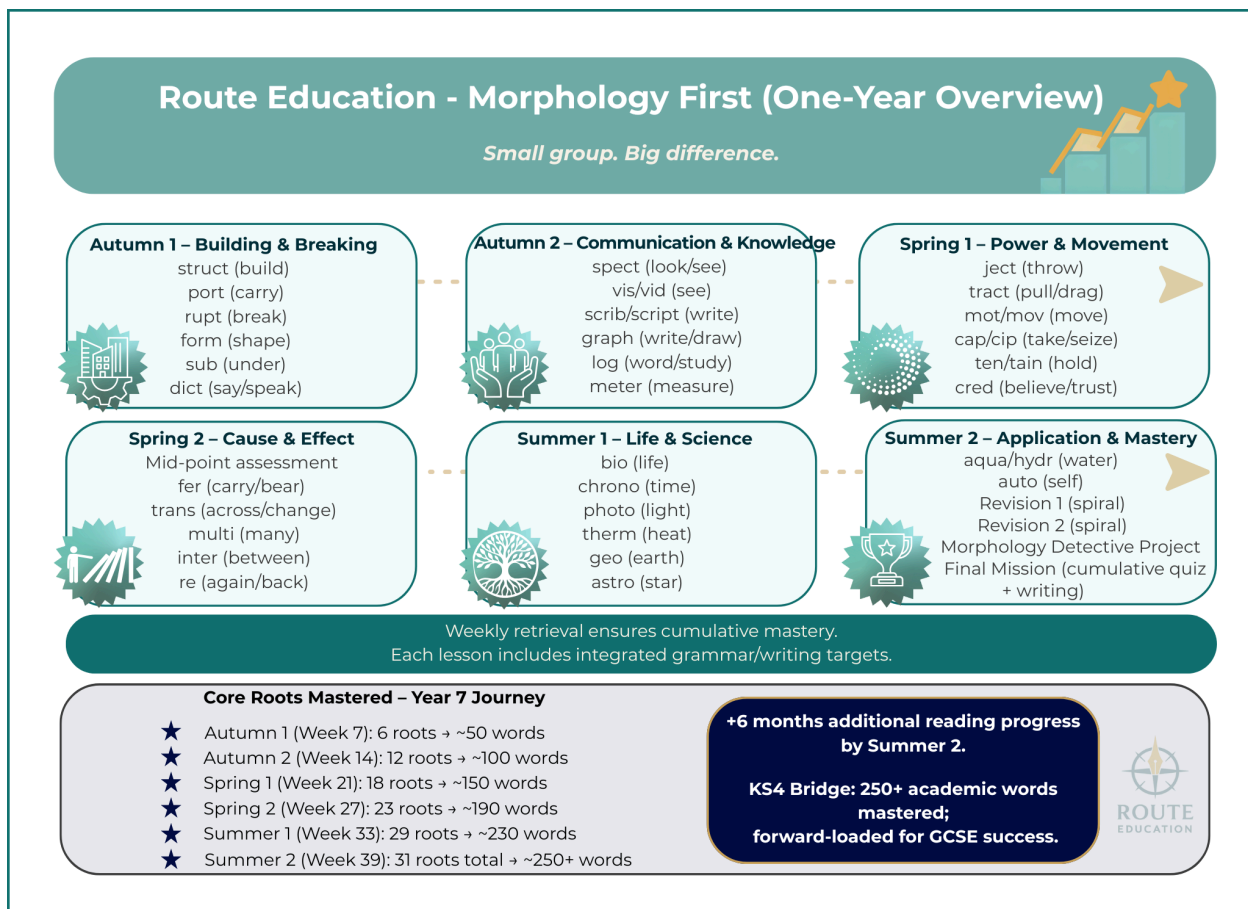
- **Spiral retrieval and assessment spine:** weekly quizzes, mid-year checkpoint, end-year evaluation

The model can be implemented as:

- A Year 7 literacy spine, embedded within English and cross-curricular teaching, and/ or
- A 12-week intensive intervention, targeting transition or catch-up cohorts.

This is not a resource pack but a framework for systematic, evaluable literacy progress. It directly addresses DfE's *Areas of Research Interest* (attainment, SEND inclusion, transitions, and pupil engagement) and echoes Ofsted's finding that secondary schools often lack a coherent approach to vocabulary development (*Ofsted, 2022*).

The gap is visible across the secondary system, the evidence is robust, and the need is urgent. Just as systematic phonics closed the early decoding gap, systematic morphology can close the secondary vocabulary gap, ensuring that every pupil can access the academic language of the curriculum.



**Figure 1.** Morphology First One Year Overview

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## Section 1. Why Morphology, Why Now

### The policy context

The proposed introduction of Year 8 reading assessments reflects a new urgency in government policy. Schools will be expected to evidence literacy progress at KS3 in a way they have not before. Without a clear strategy, the risk is that pupils with limited vocabulary and fragile comprehension skills will be exposed, unable to demonstrate the fluency and understanding expected by Year 8.

At the same time, the Department for Education's *Areas of Research Interest (2025)* highlights four priorities that align directly with a Morphology First approach: improving attainment, supporting SEND inclusion, strengthening transition to secondary, and building school belonging and engagement. A coherent word-level strategy speaks to all four.

### The research evidence

- **Vocabulary and comprehension:** The EEF's secondary literacy guidance identifies explicit vocabulary instruction and reading comprehension strategies as highly cost-effective approaches with strong evidence of impact, providing a clear policy foundation for Morphology First instruction.
- **Morphological instruction:** Systematic reviews (*Bowers, Kirby & Deacon, 2010; Carlisle, 2010*) consistently show gains in vocabulary knowledge, decoding of unfamiliar words, comprehension, and spelling accuracy.
- **Equity:** Evidence suggests disadvantaged and SEND learners benefit disproportionately, since morphological awareness reduces reliance on prior vocabulary exposure, which is uneven by socioeconomic status (*Goodwin & Ahn, 2013; Kirby et al., 2012*).
- **International evidence:** International research confirms that morphological awareness is a transferable skill across languages, supporting long-term literacy growth (*Kuo & Anderson, 2006; Deacon et al., 2014*).

### The classroom reality

Secondary teachers consistently report the same challenge: Year 7 pupils who can "read aloud" but stumble on words like *jurisdiction, photosynthesis, or chronology*. These are not fringe terms but the everyday vocabulary of KS3 and KS4 curricula. Without systematic instruction, these gaps compound through KS3, leaving pupils unable to access GCSE texts. Ofsted likewise notes that without explicit teaching of word-level strategies, many pupils remain unable to access subject-specific vocabulary across the curriculum (*Ofsted, 2022*).

## The opportunity

Morphology offers a systematic way to bridge the gap:

- From **phonics**, which secures sound–letter correspondences in KS1/2,
- To **disciplinary literacy**, which assumes access to complex subject vocabulary at KS4.

By explicitly teaching roots and affixes, schools can give pupils a generative toolkit. Once they master *struct* (build), they can approach *infrastructure*, *restructure*, or *destruction* with confidence. Once they learn *dict* (say/speak), *predict*, *verdict*, and *jurisdiction* become more transparent.

This approach is scalable within existing staffing, low-cost compared with other interventions, and directly aligned with the KS3 curriculum and GCSE progression. It complements both English teaching and phonics by providing the missing scaffold at KS3, enabling pupils to thrive and progress into KS4.

## Section 2. The Model

### Core design

The *Morphology First* model provides a fully sequenced Year 7 spine of 31 Core Roots, grouped into six half-term themes. This spine unlocks approximately 250 high-utility Tier 2 and Tier 3 words encountered across English, science, history, geography, and maths.

It rests on four defining features:

- Two-strand weekly structure – *Session A (Word Study)*: decoding a new root, generating word families, and practising analysis. *Session B (Apply & Read)*: applying the root in authentic subject texts, with integrated grammar and writing instruction.
- Spiral retrieval – systematic weekly review of prior roots, half-termly consolidation of six roots, and cumulative projects to ensure durable retention.
- Embedded writing strand – every Apply & Read lesson introduces a linked grammar or sentence focus (e.g. cohesion, variety), building writing accuracy alongside vocabulary fluency.
- Assessment spine – baseline diagnostic of reading and writing; ongoing retrieval quizzes; mid-year and end-of-year checkpoints using validated reading and writing assessments.

## Delivery modes

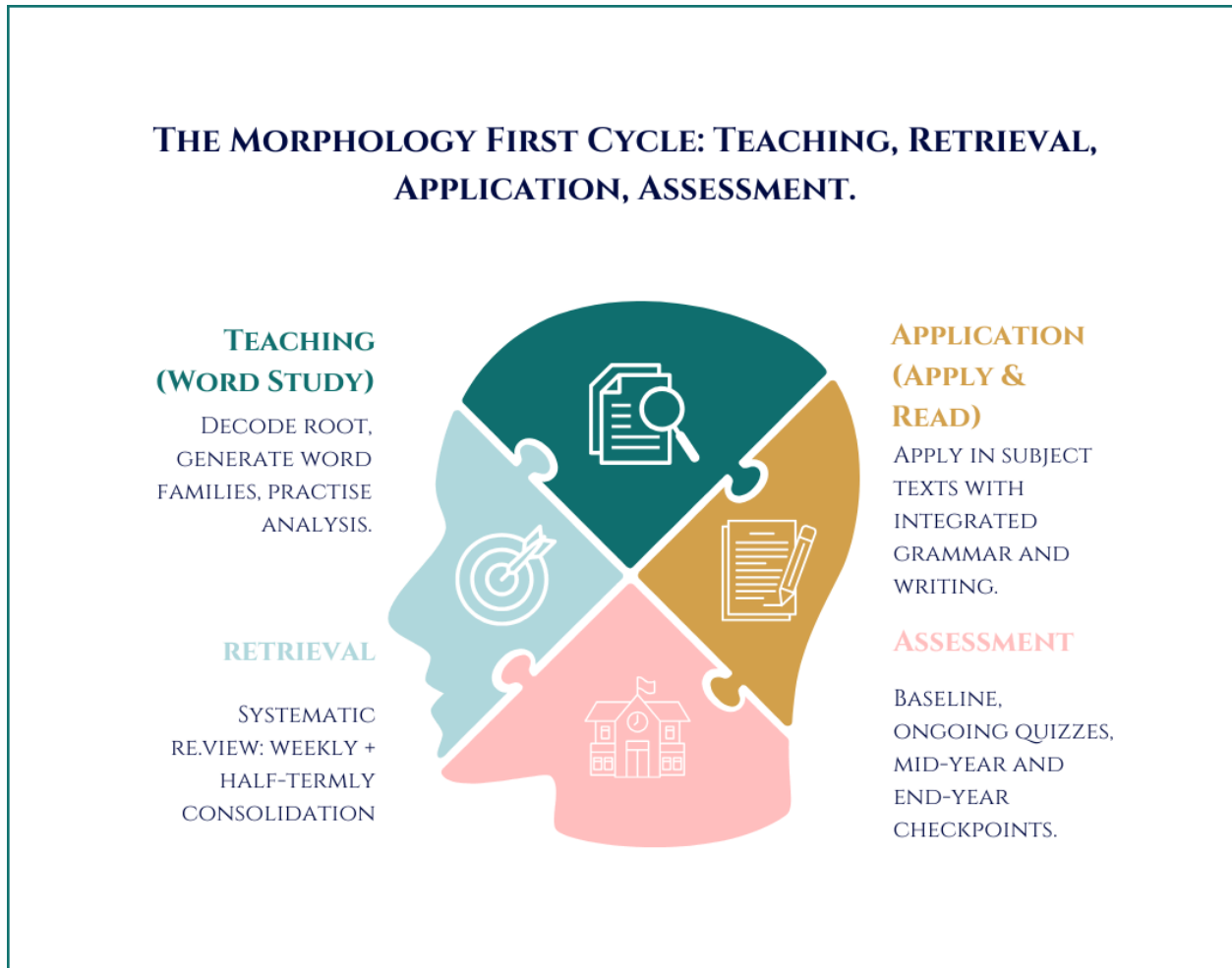
The model is designed for flexible adoption:

- *Year 7 Literacy Spine* – a whole-year framework embedded within English, co-designed with schools to fit local timetables and staffing.
- *12-week Intensive Intervention* – a condensed programme for transition or catch-up cohorts, delivered online or in-school. Provides rapid impact while schools build long-term in-house capacity.

## Year at a glance

- Autumn 1: Building & Breaking
- Autumn 2: Communication & Knowledge
- Spring 1: Power & Movement
- Spring 2: Cause & Effect
- Summer 1: Life & Science
- Summer 2: Application & Mastery

By Summer 2, pupils have secured all 31 Core Roots. Spiral retrieval ensures durable retention, while subject Enrichment Roots can extend coverage to hundreds more academic words.



**Figure 2.** *The Morphology First Cycle*

### Distinctive features

Unlike generic vocabulary initiatives, *Morphology First* offers:

- Sequenced and evaluable design – a mapped Year 7 spine with fidelity tools and measurable outcomes, aligned to the new Year 8 reading assessments.
- Cross-curricular reach – Core Roots are taught in English and reinforced across subjects, with scope to extend impact through subject-specific *Enrichment Roots* (see Section 5).
- Dual-purpose impact – accelerates vocabulary growth and strengthens writing accuracy, addressing both literacy progress and wider subject performance.
- Scalable adaptability – a consistent root sequence, with scope for local text choices and flexible delivery models, ensuring it works across diverse school

contexts.

The Year 7 spine secures Core Roots through English lessons, reinforced across the curriculum through staff training in precise vocabulary teaching. Schools wishing to extend this impact can introduce subject-specific *Enrichment Roots*, multiplying vocabulary gains and strengthening the bridge into KS4 disciplinary literacy (see Section 5).

**Route Education** supports schools through co-development, CPD and coaching, and targeted intervention (see Appendix D for partnership options).

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## Section 3. Implementation and Fidelity

### Implementation principles

For Morphology First instruction to succeed at scale, it must be:

- **Structured** – a clear sequence of roots and affixes ensures systematic coverage.
- **Consistent** – two sessions per week, with sufficient dosage to secure retention.
- **Adaptable within structure** – flexible enough to fit local timetables, staffing, and pupil need, while preserving the core sequence.
- **Evaluable** – assessment points allow leaders to evidence progress and impact.

### Delivery framework

The model can be adopted in two forms:

- **Curriculum spine** – a year-long programme positioned in Year 7, integrated with English teaching and reinforced across subjects.
- **Targeted intervention** – a 12-week module for pupils identified at transition with low reading ages, delivered in-school or online, alongside core provision.

Both routes use the same design principle:

- **Session A** (*Word Study*) introduces and practises the root.
- **Session B** (*Apply & Read*) is also delivered within English lessons, applying the root in authentic subject-linked texts. Other curriculum areas reinforce the same roots incidentally, through precise vocabulary teaching supported by staff training.

This shared framework reduces workload by providing ready-made retrieval routines, lesson skeletons, and consistent expectations.

## Fidelity in practice

Four elements are critical:

- **Sequence adherence** – following the planned order of 31 roots.
- **Dosage** – maintaining two sessions per week with retrieval embedded.
- **Retrieval log** – tracking weekly quizzes and revision for long-term retention.
- **Instructional quality** – explicit modelling, generative practice, and writing application.

Leaders can monitor fidelity through a light-touch framework: weekly coverage checks, observation look-fors, and retrieval/assessment logs.

## Adaptable components

While fidelity to sequence and structure is essential, schools can adapt:

- Choice of texts (narrative, informational, subject extracts).
- Lesson exemplars and applications.
- Mode of delivery (English-led, literacy-led, or online intervention).
- Assessment tools – any validated system is suitable, provided it is applied consistently baseline–mid–end.

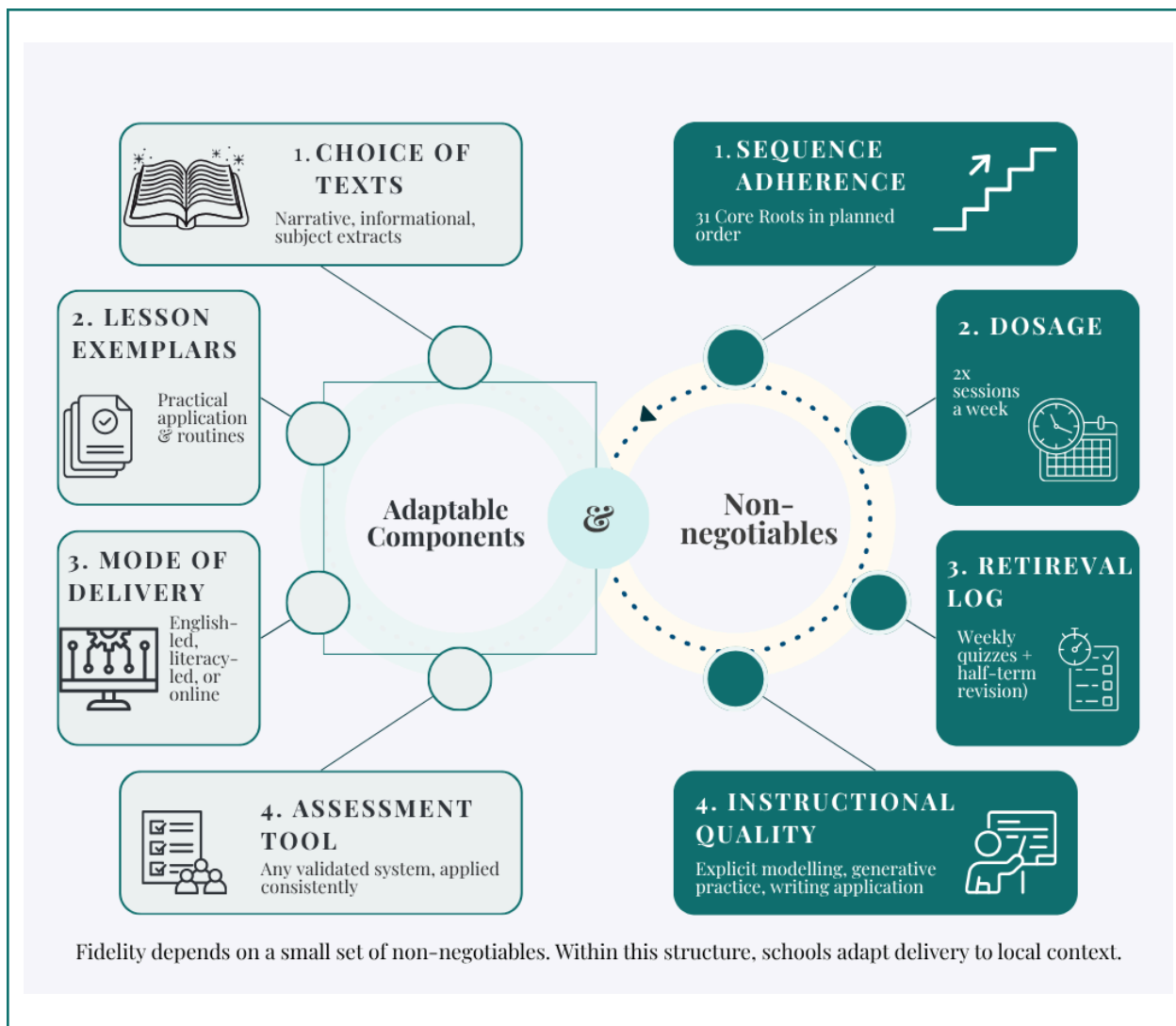
## Scalability

The model is scalable at year, school or trust level because it is:

- **High-impact at low cost** – core inputs are teacher time, text extracts, and retrieval routines.
- **Flexible** – effective for whole cohorts or targeted groups.
- **Measurable** – impact tracked through standard school data tools (reading ages, writing samples).

## Summary

Fragmented literacy interventions often fail to scale because they lack consistency or drift when adapted. Morphology First provides the fidelity lever: a sequenced spine of roots, consistent dosage, and cumulative retrieval cycles, combined with structured flexibility in texts and delivery. The impact is a model that is both measurable and scalable—driving gains in attainment, SEND inclusion, transition, and pupil engagement, while aligning directly with national system priorities.



**Figure 3.** Fidelity Model

## Section 4. Evaluation Plan

### Purpose

The evaluation plan is integral to the Morphology First model. Its design ensures schools can track literacy progress in a way that is reliable, proportionate, and replicable, while generating evidence aligned with forthcoming Year 8 reading assessments.

### Evaluation framework

Evaluation operates at three levels:

- **Learner progress** – measurable gains in reading, vocabulary, and writing accuracy.
- **Implementation fidelity** – delivery of the model as intended (sequence, dosage, retrieval).
- **Sustainability and scalability** – adaptability across different contexts without loss of impact.

### Core measures

- **Reading attainment** – progress from baseline to mid-year and end-year, using schools' existing validated assessments.
  - *Target: equivalent to at least +6 months' additional progress in Year 7.*
- **Vocabulary knowledge** – retrieval quiz data tracking mastery of Core Roots and word families.
  - *Target: ≥80% cumulative accuracy by end of year.*
- **Writing accuracy and fluency** – diagnostic writing samples at baseline, mid-point, and end-point, assessed against a rubric covering sentence accuracy, cohesion, and correct use of morphology-derived vocabulary.
- **Engagement** – attendance rates for sessions and brief teacher engagement ratings.

### Data cadence

- **Baseline (September):** reading, writing, retrieval overview.
- **Mid-year (Feb):** repeat reading, extended writing, cumulative retrieval.
- **End-year (June/July):** reading, diagnostic writing, cumulative retrieval, pupil survey.

### Fidelity monitoring

Evaluation is grounded in the fidelity principles outlined in Section 3. Schools apply light-touch monitoring to confirm sequence adherence, dosage, retrieval practice, and instructional quality. This ensures outcome data reflects genuine implementation, not variation in delivery.

### Methods of analysis

- **Within-group progress:** baseline → checkpoint → end-year gains.
- **Between-group comparisons:** outcomes compared with parallel groups where feasible, with scope for randomisation in later trials.
- **Equity lens:** outcomes disaggregated by Pupil Premium, SEND, and EAL status to test for differential impact.

## Considerations and mitigations

- **Cohort size:** smaller schools may produce less stable averages → use percentage mastery data as a secondary indicator.
- **Assessment variation:** schools may employ different validated tools → focus on relative progress against each school's baseline.
- **Staff capacity:** fidelity risks from workload → mitigated through provision of lesson skeletons, retrieval routines, and optional intensive intervention plans.

## Evaluation readiness

The model is structured to provide both immediate value to schools and future evaluability at system level. Partner schools benefit from:

- An evaluation-ready framework that evidences literacy impact.
- Structured assessment cadence and fidelity monitoring that reduce workload while generating defensible data.
- Consultancy support in embedding Morphology First instruction and interpreting outcomes.

This dual focus, helping schools demonstrate measurable literacy gains now, while building the evidence base for system reform, positions Morphology First instruction as a practical solution to a pressing national challenge.

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## Section 5. Cross-Curricular and KS4 Bridge

### Why cross-curricular matters

Morphology First instruction is not an “English department intervention.” It is a curriculum-wide literacy strategy, anchored in English but amplified across subjects. The English department secures a sequenced spine of 31 Core Roots in Year 7, giving pupils generative knowledge of around 250 high-utility Tier 2 and Tier 3 words. Other subjects then reinforce this spine in context and extend it by introducing discipline-specific *Enrichment Roots* (e.g. *arch* in history, *quad* in maths).

This approach creates a systemic literacy thread: pupils encounter the same morphological principles across English, and all other subjects. Instead of fragmented word lists, they gain repeated, structured exposure to hundreds of academic words taught through a common framework.

The figures below contrast the current reality of fragmented vocabulary growth with the systemic coherence of a Morphology First spine, illustrating both the risks of inaction and the gains of curriculum-wide adoption.



**Figure 4.** *Limited growth without systematic morphology*

Without explicit teaching of roots, pupils' vocabulary remains narrow, morphological awareness is weak, and access to Tier 2/3 words is restricted. Vocabulary growth is fragmented across subjects, and attainment gaps widen.



### **Figure 5. Morphology First curriculum spine**

Explicit teaching of 31 Core Roots in English, reinforced through subject enrichment, creates a generative literacy spine. Pupils gain access to 250+ high-utility academic words, supporting comprehension, cross-curricular access, and readiness for KS4.

How embedding works

- English delivers the two-session weekly spine, teaching and applying Core Roots.
- Subjects reinforce these roots within their own curriculum (e.g. *therm* in science, *geo* in geography, *dict* in history). Additional Enrichment Roots identified and taught in the same manner.
- Subject leads identify authentic vocabulary from schemes of work, ensuring morphology amplifies curriculum intent rather than displacing it.
- Retrieval embeds durability: pupils repeatedly encounter root families across contexts, strengthening comprehension and transfer strategies.

### **Illustration: Autumn 1 – Building & Breaking**

In the opening unit, six Core Roots (struct, port, rupt, form, sub, dict) are introduced in English and reinforced across subjects:

- **English:** struct in narrative structure; form in text transformation.
- **Science:** rupt in volcanic eruption; sub in substances and subatomic particles.
- **History:** dict in edicts and dictatorship; struct in Roman infrastructure.
- **Geography:** port in transport and export systems.
- **Maths:** form in formulae and transformations; sub in substitution.
- **Citizenship/PSHE:** dict in verdicts and justice; rupt in corruption.
- **Design & Technology:** struct in structural design.

Across the timetable, these six roots appear in multiple contexts, giving pupils repeated, authentic encounters with word families. This creates a systemic literacy thread across subjects, embedding durable knowledge and ensuring vocabulary growth is both equitable and curriculum-aligned. (*Carlisle (2000) or Nunes & Bryant (2006)*).

A full half-term worked example is included in Appendix A, demonstrating how Core and Enrichment Roots map across subjects.

### **The KS4 Bridge**

By the end of Year 7, pupils have mastered the Core Roots and a growing bank of Enrichment Roots. This provides direct leverage into GCSE success:

- **English Language:** analytical vocabulary (structure, evidence, credibility); rhetorical terms (persuade, predict, verdict).
- **English Literature:** abstract nouns (corruption, disruption, transformation).
- **Science:** technical vocabulary (photosynthesis, thermal, antibiotic).
- **History:** disciplinary concepts (dictatorship, jurisdiction, chronology).
- **Geography:** subject lexis (geology, infrastructure, subsoil).
- **Maths:** technical terms (geometry, perimeter, multiplication).

This is both an attainment strategy and an equity strategy. Disadvantaged and SEND learners, least likely to acquire Tier 2/3 vocabulary incidentally, gain transparent access to the academic language that underpins KS3 and KS4 success.

Evidence and equity framing

- **Research base:** Morphological instruction accelerates vocabulary growth and comprehension (*Nagy & Townsend, 2012; Bowers et al., 2010; Carlisle, 2000*).
- **Inspection alignment:** Ofsted's English Review (2023) highlights the absence of systematic vocabulary teaching in secondary schools. Morphology First instruction directly addresses this gap.
- **Equity impact:** By providing a generative toolkit, pupils are less reliant on prior language exposure, which is uneven across socioeconomic groups (*DfE, 2025; Nagy & Townsend, 2012*).

## Summary

Literacy support often remains an “add-on,” creating fragmentation and leaving subject vocabulary inconsistent and difficult to access, particularly for disadvantaged learners. Morphology First provides the lever: embedding word roots as a curriculum spine that makes academic language explicit across subjects and equips pupils with transferable decoding strategies. The impact is inspection-ready coherence, equity of access, and a forward-loaded vocabulary base that prepares learners for KS4 success.

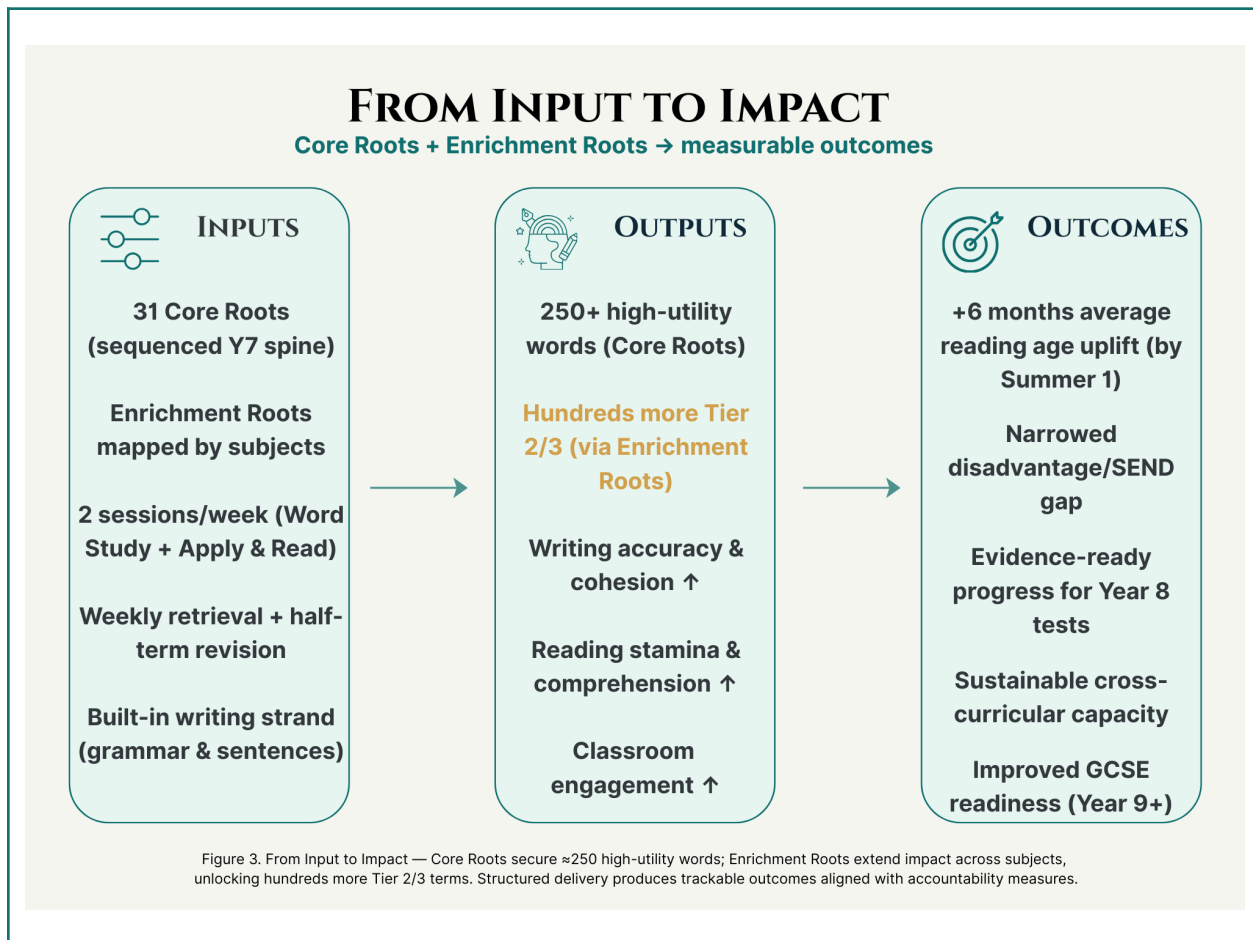
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## Section 6. Impact through Partnership

### Why adaptation matters

For literacy interventions to succeed, they must be both structured enough to guarantee outcomes and flexible enough to embed locally. Schools differ in timetables, staffing, and learner profiles. A Morphology First approach therefore combines fidelity features that make progress measurable with scalability levers that allow schools to align delivery with their own priorities. This balance ensures the

model is not only implementable in classrooms but also accountable within national policy frameworks, including the forthcoming Year 8 reading assessments.



**Figure 6.** *From Input to Impact* - Core Roots provide a secure literacy spine of ≈250 high-utility words; Enrichment Roots extend this impact across the curriculum, unlocking hundreds more Tier 2 and Tier 3 terms.

### Fidelity features (non-negotiables)

Certain elements remain fixed across all contexts. These are what make the programme robust, evaluable, and capable of securing durable vocabulary gains (EEF, 2019; Goodwin & Ahn, 2013):

- **Sequenced spine** – 31 Core Roots, unlocking ≈250 high-utility academic words.
- **Dosage** – two weekly sessions: *Word Study* and *Apply & Read*.
- **Retrieval cycles** – weekly quizzes and half-termly consolidation.
- **Integration with writing** – linked grammar and sentence construction each week.

## Scalability levers (adaptable components)

Other aspects are deliberately flexible, allowing local ownership without diluting impact:

- **Curriculum integration** – schools embed target vocabulary into their own chosen texts and subject extracts.
- **Transferable task bank** – exemplar activities can be tailored by subject, cohort, or phase.
- **Multiple deployment routes** – English, literacy catch-up, or targeted intervention blocks.
- **Interoperability with data systems** – compatible with existing assessments (e.g. STAR, NGRT, GL, PiRA).

## Partnership in practice

Co-design means schools are partners, not recipients. This involves:

- **Joint planning workshops** – aligning the literacy spine with local schemes of work.
- **Professional development** – building staff expertise in morphology and retrieval.
- **Ongoing coaching and peer observation** – ensuring consistency and continuous improvement.

## Strategic benefits

- **Efficiency** – reduces planning load through a sequenced literacy spine and ready-to-use retrieval tools.
- **Relevance** – applications reflect local demographics, interests, and curriculum priorities.
- **Longevity** – builds staff capacity so gains outlast programme funding.
- **Accountability fit** – outcomes align with DfE system priorities and Year 8 literacy benchmarks.
- **Value for investment** – low-cost core inputs (teacher time + sequenced spine) yield measurable returns in attainment, curriculum access, and readiness for inspection.

## Summary

Impact through partnership delivers a literacy model that is rigorous where it counts and flexible where it matters. By combining fidelity with co-design, schools achieve

systematic, trackable literacy improvement while retaining professional ownership, securing both immediate attainment gains and long-term institutional capacity.

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## Section 7. Why inclusion matters

### The system challenge

Literacy is the gateway to curriculum access, yet pupils with SEND and disadvantaged backgrounds face disproportionate barriers when vocabulary is opaque or inconsistently taught. The result is systemic: widening attainment gaps, increased AP referrals, and rising accountability risks. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (2025) describes England’s SEND system as being in “crisis,” with spiralling costs, unsustainable specialist placements, and escalating pressure on local authority budgets. In this context, a literacy model that reduces disadvantage while remaining viable in mainstream settings is not an enhancement; it is a necessity.

### Why Morphology First drives inclusion

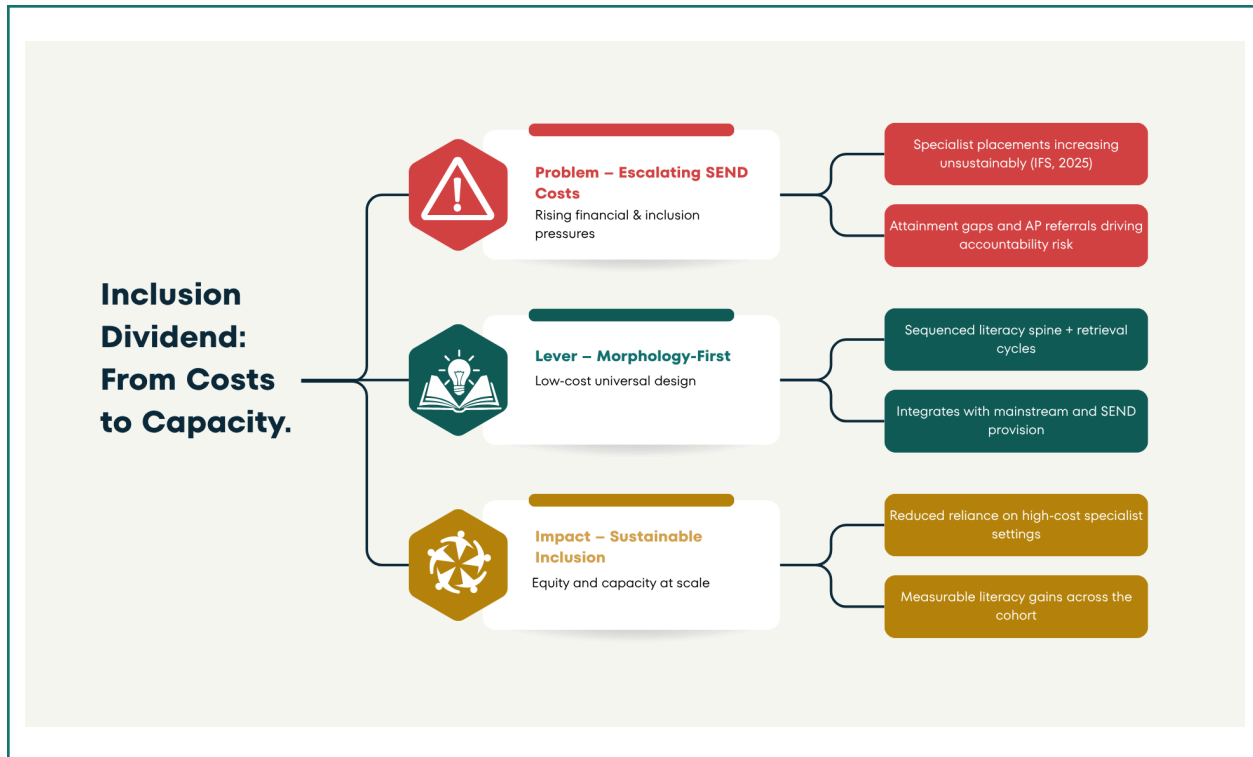
Morphology First instruction is a universal design principle, not a bolt-on. It benefits all learners while delivering particular gains for those with SEND and disadvantaged backgrounds:

- **Transparency** – explicit teaching of roots, prefixes, and suffixes makes word meaning visible, reducing inequity from prior exposure (*Nagy & Townsend, 2012*).
- **Structured design** – predictable weekly cycles provide security for learners requiring repetition and overlearning (*EEF, 2019*).
- **Generative power** – mastery of one root unlocks multiple unfamiliar words across subjects, reducing reliance on rote memorisation (*Goodwin & Ahn, 2013*).
- **Equity uplift** – evidence shows disproportionate benefit for learners with SEND and disadvantaged groups, directly addressing gaps that compound through KS3.

### Accessibility in practice

To ensure full inclusion, schools can adapt delivery through:

- **Accessibility features** – scaffolds, modelling, and readability-sensitive texts.
- **Flexible deployment** – Morphology First can sit within mainstream English, catch-up programmes, or targeted SEND support.



**Figure 7.** Inclusion dividend

## Summary

Escalating SEND costs and widening attainment gaps represent a structural risk for schools and local authorities (IFS, 2025). Morphology First provides a low-cost, universal design lever: a sequenced literacy spine, retrieval cycles, and flexible deployment across mainstream and targeted settings. The impact is sustainable inclusion, reduced reliance on high-cost placements, measurable literacy gains across the cohort, and strengthened alignment with national accountability metrics.

## Section 8. Policy Alignment

### Accountability fit

The government’s plan for Year 8 reading assessments signals a shift: schools must demonstrate measurable progress in word-level literacy, not just exam outcomes. Morphology First equips schools to meet this requirement directly. Weekly retrieval and end-of-year diagnostics generate data aligned with the assessment framework, while Ofsted’s critique of “generic literacy strategies” is answered through a sequenced, systematic model that bridges decoding and comprehension.

## Alignment with national research priorities

DfE's Areas of Research Interest (2025) identify attainment, SEND inclusion, transitions, and engagement as critical priorities. Morphology First maps onto each: accelerating vocabulary acquisition, reducing barriers for SEND pupils, providing continuity after phonics, and building learner confidence through inquiry-based word learning. The Education Endowment Foundation (2019) and National Literacy Trust (2024–25) reinforce the same themes, explicit vocabulary instruction, retrieval practice, and strategies to re-engage secondary pupils with reading. Morphology First operationalises these recommendations into a coherent, scalable model.

## System sustainability

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (2025) warns that the SEND system is financially unsustainable, with spiralling specialist costs and mounting pressure on local authority budgets. By embedding inclusive literacy teaching in Year 7, Morphology First reduces reliance on high-cost placements and AP referrals, offering a financially viable route to sustainable inclusion.

## Summary

Morphology First is not simply an educational innovation but a policy-ready solution. It prepares schools for Year 8 assessments, answers Ofsted's concerns, operationalises DfE and EEF priorities, and offers a financially sustainable response to the SEND crisis.

## Policy Alignment Matrix: Morphology First as a System Solution

Policy / Report	Identified Gap / Challenge	Morphology First Response	System Impact
DfE – Year 8 Reading Tests (proposal)	Schools must evidence progress in word-level reading, not just exam results.	Weekly retrieval + end-of-year diagnostics mapped to test framework.	Compliance-ready data, accountability evidence at KS3.
DfE – Areas of Research Interest (2025)	Priorities include attainment, SEND inclusion, transitions, belonging.	Sequenced roots accelerate vocabulary; continuity after phonics;	Direct alignment with Opportunity Mission priorities.

		confidence via inquiry-based learning.	
Ofsted – Secondary English Review (2023)	Over-reliance on generic literacy strategies; weak vocabulary teaching; decoding/comprehension gap.	Systematic, generative word study bridging decoding and comprehension.	Stronger subject access; inspection-ready curriculum coherence.
EEF – Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools (2019)	Need for disciplinary literacy, explicit vocabulary teaching, structured practice.	Morphology First operationalises all three through word roots + retrieval cycles.	Evidence-based model scalable across KS3 and KS4.
National Literacy Trust (2024–25)	Declining reading frequency and comprehension stamina, especially in disadvantaged groups.	Rapid vocabulary toolkit builds confidence and independence.	Improved engagement and belonging, reduced disadvantage gap.
Institute for Fiscal Studies – SEND Crisis (2025)	Spiralling specialist costs, rising placements, unsustainable LA budgets.	Mainstream-deliverable literacy model with disproportionate benefits for SEND pupils.	Reduced reliance on specialist/AP provision; sustainable system savings.

**Figure 8.** Policy Matrix

## Section 9. Next Steps for Schools and Systems

### The opportunity

The introduction of Year 8 reading assessments creates an immediate need for a systematic KS3 literacy spine. Morphology First provides the bridge between early phonics and secondary disciplinary literacy. The question is no longer whether to act, but how schools and systems collaborate to implement and evaluate at scale.

### Partnership pathways

- **Schools and MATs** – Commission early adoption of the Year 7 Morphology Spine or the 12-week intensive intervention. These commissioned pilots are co-designed with local context in mind, supported by fidelity tools and robust assessment points. Early adopters gain measurable literacy outcomes, workload efficiencies, and insight into implementation, while contributing to a national evidence base that strengthens policy influence.
- **Local Authorities and Regional Partnerships** – Embed Morphology First within transition and catch-up strategies, particularly in areas of high disadvantage, reducing reliance on costly specialist provision.
- **National bodies (DfE, EEF, NLT)** – Engage with Morphology First as a scalable, evaluable model for secondary literacy. Route Education will share anonymised data and align with external evaluation frameworks to support system-wide learning.

### Value for investment

Early partners secure structured literacy gains at a fraction of the cost of escalating SEND or AP provision. Commissioned pilots provide immediate impact in classrooms and long-term system benefit through shared evaluation.

### Contact

For further information, pilot enquiries, or collaboration on evaluation, please contact:

#### Route Education

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**Morphology First offers not just a literacy intervention, but a sustainable spine for the secondary system.**

## Appendices: Evidence of Readiness

The following materials provide supplementary evidence that Morphology First is both research-based and implementation-ready. They illustrate the structured spine, scalable intervention formats, lesson feasibility, and commissioning pathways available to partners.

## Appendix A. Programme Spine. (Illustrative Extract)

The following table presents an executive overview of Autumn 1 in the Year 7 Morphology Spine. It illustrates how six core roots plus a revision week combine to deliver structured vocabulary growth, curriculum links, and measurable assessment points.

This extract is provided to demonstrate the model's depth and coherence. The full sequenced annual spine is available to commissioning partners.

EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW		AUTUMN 1		
ROOT	EXAMPLE WORDS	CROSS-CURRICULAR LINK	RETRIEVAL/ ASSESSMENT	KS4 READINESS/ BENEFIT
STRUCT	construct, infrastructure	DT (structures), history (empires)	Baseline + quiz	Builds understanding of text structure; supports extended writing coherence
PORT	transport, export	Geography (trade routes), business	Low-stakes quiz	Strengthens report writing & evidence use in GCSE Language
RUPT	erupt, disrupt, corrupt	Science (volcanoes), PSHE	Quiz + news-style paragraph	Enhances analysis of conflict/disruption themes in GCSE Literature
FORM	reform, transform	Science (metamorphosis), history (Reformation)	Quiz + writing task	Prepares pupils for "inform/transform" writing & historical context analysis
SUB	subject, submarine	Science (subatomic), English	Quiz + comprehension task	Secures subject terminology and sentence subordination for analytical writing
DICT	predict, verdict	History (dictators), English	Quiz + persuasive speech	Builds rhetorical devices for GCSE persuasive/transactional writing

*By the end of Autumn 1, pupils will:*

- Master six high-utility roots, unlocking ~50 academic words.
- Secure three core writing skills (commas, sentence openers, clauses).
- Retrieve prior knowledge weekly, strengthening retention.

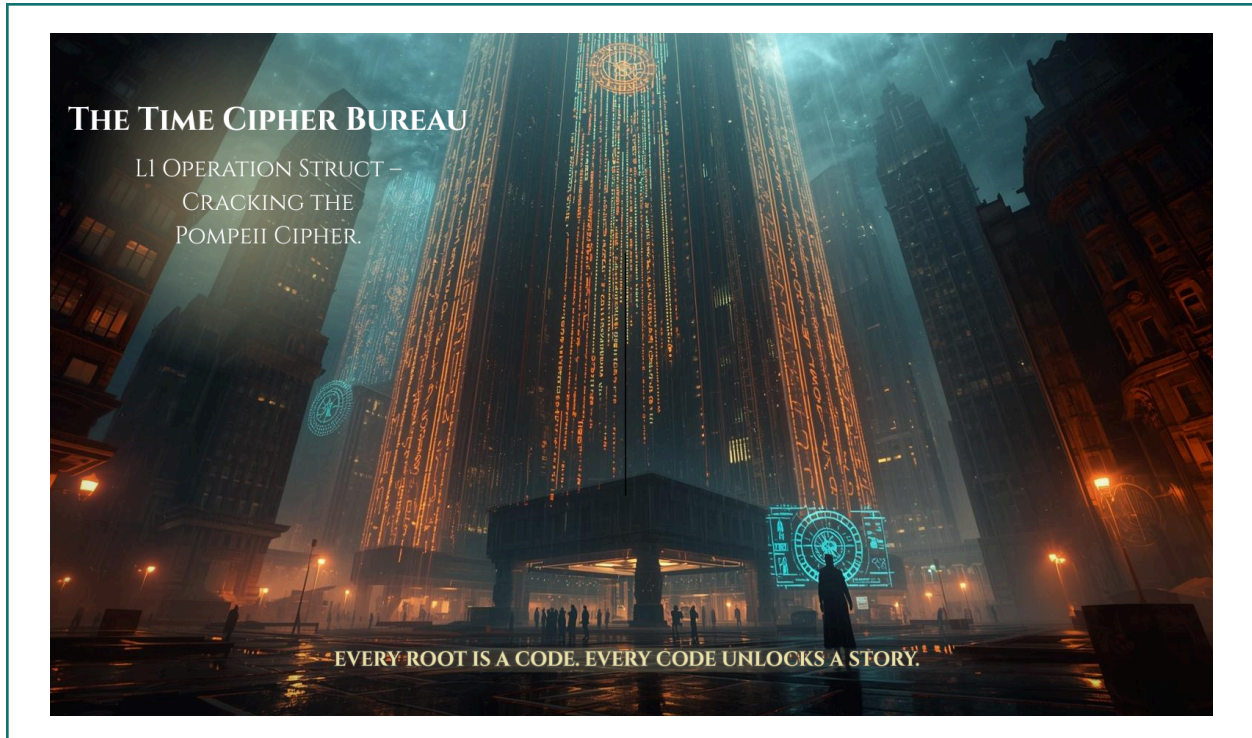
- Show measurable progress in reading age, writing samples, and retrieval quizzes.
- Gain vocabulary aligned to GCSE Tier 2/3 demands across English, history, science, and geography.

### Worked example: Half-term cross-curricular map

This example illustrates how a half-term theme ('Building & Breaking') can be mapped across subjects. Each Core Root is secured in English and reinforced through authentic applications in other subjects. Enrichment Roots extend subject-specific vocabulary, all taught through the same Morphology First principles.

HALF-TERM CROSS-CURRICULAR MAP			AUTUMN 1
ROOT	TYPE	SUBJECT	APPLICATION EXAMPLE
STRUCT (BUILD)	Core	English history DT	Analyse "text structure" in narratives. Roman infrastructure and empire-building. Structural strength in design.
PORT (CARRY)	Core	Geography, English, Economics/Business	Transport and trade routes; report writing; import/export in global markets.
RUPT (BREAK)	Core	science PSHE English	Volcanic eruption. Corruption in politics. Disruption in plot development.
FORM (SHAPE)	Core	English, maths, science, art	Transforming text forms; algebraic formulae; artistic form and proportion.
SUB (UNDER)	Core	Science, maths, geography	Subatomic particles; substitution in algebra; subsoil and subterranean features.
DICT (SPEAK/ SAY)	Core	citizenship English history	Jury verdicts and justice. Speech writing and persuasive devices. Dictatorship in Roman/20thC studies.
ARCH (RULE)	Enrichment	history	Medieval monarchs and feudal hierarchy; "anarchy" during succession crises.
QUAD (FOUR)	Enrichment	maths, PE	Quadrilaterals and quadrants in geometry; quadratic expressions. Quad muscles

## Appendix B. Sample lesson from 12 Week Intensive Intervention Programme - WORD ROOTS



**Figure B1.** Mission Briefing Visual – Operation Struct (12 week Intervention programme, Word Roots). This immersive opening slide introduces recruits to their first cipher, establishing the narrative frame for morphology instruction.

### Lesson 1 Overview

#### Mission Context

Recruits enter *The Time Cipher Bureau*, a clandestine agency that travels through history to decode hidden knowledge. Their first mission takes them to Pompeii, where the ruins conceal their first cipher: the Latin root **struct** (“to build”).

#### Lesson Title

Operation Struct – Cracking the Pompeii Cipher

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, recruits will:

- Decode the root **struct** and generate high-value word families (construct, restructure, destruction).

- Analyse how morphology unlocks meaning in both literary and non-fiction texts.
- Apply new vocabulary in a short mission report, using words precisely in context.

### **Lesson Sequence (60 mins)**

#### **1. Mission Briefing (Do Now – 5 mins)**

- Cipher Warm-Up: spot words that contain the *struct* code.
- Establish prior knowledge and set baseline.

#### **2. Cipher Unlocked (Teach – 10 mins)**

- Introduce root + affixes.
- “Cipher Tree” visual: *struct* as trunk, branches show word families.

#### **3. Code-Breaking Drill (Try Together – 15 mins)**

- Collaborative word-building using prefixes/suffixes.
- Teacher probes: “*What changes when we add re-? What does constructive imply?*”

#### **4. Time-Shift Field Report (Read in Context – 10 mins)**

- Extract A (fiction): time-slip into Pompeii as ash falls.
- Extract B (non-fiction): archaeologist notes on reconstructing ruins.
- Pupils highlight and decode *struct* words, comparing literary and informational use.

**5. Mission Application (Apply Independently – 15 mins)**

- Pupils write a mission report (3–4 sentences) describing what was built or destroyed in Pompeii.
- Must integrate at least three *struct* words.

**6. Cipher Check (Review – 5 mins)**

- Flash-recap quiz + self-rating: “*Can I now crack the struct code?*”

**Assessment & Progression**

- Progress evidenced through warm-up baseline, word-building drill, reading analysis, and writing task.
- Retrieval quiz confirms immediate retention.
- Lesson 2 begins with timed cipher recall of *struct* before extending into structured writing.

## Appendix C

### References List

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## Appendix D. Partnership Pathways

Route Education offers commissioned pathways for schools, trusts, and local authorities to implement Morphology First with measurable impact:

- **Co-Development & Consultancy** – Partner with leadership teams to design Morphology First curricula aligned with national research and accountability frameworks.
- **Professional Development & Coaching** – CPD and sustained coaching to build staff expertise in morphology, retrieval, and curriculum embedding.
- **Targeted Intervention** – A 12-week intensive online programme for KS3 learners, closing word-level reading gaps and preparing pupils for GCSE success.

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