

Raising the Attainment and Outcomes of EAL pupils through Strategic School Improvement

Overview

The lead academy trust working with the Local Authority as a strategic partner, aimed to improve the outcomes and reduce the attainment gap for EAL pupils, in turn creating better educational opportunities and preparing children for the next phase of their education. There was a thorough analysis of the need and the most vulnerable schools were identified as requiring intensive support. These schools were identified because they had high proportions of EAL and low attainment on the combined measure. (2016 published data) Progress also lay below national. All participating schools were in the local Opportunity Area, and EAL outcomes were a priority. The project addressed the regional priority of Primary Reading and Writing.

The programmes used a tailored support approach to strategic school improvement:

- Leadership Development, including supported evaluation and identification of priorities.
- Improved quality of teaching and learning through high quality CPD and the use of evidence to inform practice.
- Improving the use of Teaching Assistants by developing a workforce of specialist teaching assistants and improving the quality of support in classrooms.

The project was sustainable, a change in approach to CPD, through programmes over time, and on-going support through the development of a professional learning community.

The programme recognised three types of vulnerable EAL learner – New Arrivals; those with basic social competence; and advanced bilingual learners – and aimed to improve the outcomes to ensure pupils met their academic potential.

The outcomes the project wanted to achieve: precise evaluation and planning by leaders, a highly skilled workforce informed by research and evidence, better support for vulnerable pupils in classrooms, greater access to a wide and broad curriculum for INA children, greater acquisition of cognitive and academic language and deepening of it for advanced bilingual learners – all resulting in improved outcomes for children at Key Stage 1 and 2 in both reading and writing.

Good practice to share with others interested in running school improvement projects to ensure projects deliver the intended outcome.

- Attending the EEF Effective Implementation' training session in the early days of the project was crucial to ensuring the project's success. The implementation guidance and model were used throughout the

programme as the EEF Effective School Improvement cycle. The key learning was that implementation needed to be a process not an event.

- The programme director monitored each stage of the implementation and wherever possible planned activity in sequential steps with refinement and redesign if needed. An example of this was the approach taken to the development of a professional learning community. It was intended to have this fully established by the mid-point of the programme, however time and other delivery activity meant that school leaders were unable to commit to releasing staff. By exploring the barriers and redesigning the implementation the timescales and approach were changed, which will enable the PLC to be stronger and support the sustainability of the project for future years.
- As the programme drew to an end, there has been a substantial piece of learning in terms of the best practice for EAL learners in schools. This practice has been underpinned by research, theory and the knowledge of what works taken from successful schools. The key ingredients in ensuring the best possible outcomes for EAL learners are; a positive climate that embraces the diversity and differences of EAL learners, a systematic approach to school admission and induction, precise systems for accurately assessing EAL pupils, consistent application of the key teaching and learning strategies and high expectations of all pupils regardless of the labels attached to them.
- Where teaching and learning for EAL pupils is most effective is when pupils are given scaffolds and language structures that enable them to access an age appropriate curriculum and the schools have focused on quality first teaching rather than additional intervention that is not applied across the curriculum.
- Lessons learned in school improvement include the use of quality audit and evaluation materials so that there is an accurate baseline of existing provision, this also means that the improvement plan that is developed is precise in its actions and that milestones set are realistic and achievable.
- Frequent monitoring and evaluation of that plan means that change can be made where needed but also that additional time can be allocated or given to ensure that the change that has been implemented has time to take effect. Implementation has been particularly successful where open and transparent relationships are developed. It is important to recognise the power of effective relationships and partnership within the school improvement model.

What the project may do differently in the future

- If this programme were to run again, the project would it more time at the early stages for developing effective relationships, meeting the participating schools on an individual basis and ensuring that they fully understood the commitment and response required of them.
- The lead academy trust and TSA were fully prepared to begin delivery yet were often held up by some of the participating schools who may have misunderstood the commitment required of them when agreeing to participate. This did not affect overall programme delivery but meant that in the early stages, the trust were awaiting school information and response. As it took some time to build relationships with schools it meant that the greatest demand for school-to-school support was in the final term of the programme meaning that there was a high demand for capacity. Fortunately, because of the nature of the EAL champion programme and the leadership development days, the project had been able to accredit more SLEs and so did have the capacity to respond.

Sustainability measures taken by projects to ensure improvement are sustained beyond the funding period.

- Through the EAL Champions and EAL Specialist TAs programme over 70 participants have been trained and accredited. These participants have developed partnerships and professional connections during their time on the programme. A formal approach to networking is planned for the academic year 2019/20 through a series of seminar events. The seminar events will include regional and national updates, a briefing from the CPD team, a keynote from a leading practitioner or school leader followed by a selection of workshops led by local and regional schools who will be sharing best practice. There is also evidence that informal partnership working is in place because of the relationships developed during attendance at the many CPD events.
- The Programme Director has also worked to establish a Strategic group '[local area] EAL Steering Group' which is comprised of headteacher colleagues and partners from within the Local Authority. This forms part of the work of the local Education Partnership, the system led development group for the local area. The EAL steering group is developing an overall strategy and system diagram which will support the co-ordination of CPD and the range of support and services available to schools. The group seeks to maintain and raise the profile of the needs of EAL pupils from those who are newly arrived pupils to advanced bilingual learners, in turn this focus on improving outcomes of EAL pupils will contribute to raised attainment and aspiration.
- The Programme Director has also successfully engaged with the local Literacy Partnership which is committed to raising outcomes for all pupils but in particular those pupils who may be vulnerable and/or

disadvantaged. The EAL and Literacy strategies are closely linked so that there is one clear strategy for the local area. The initial stages of work of the Literacy Strategy has been funded through Opportunity Area funding streams; by marrying these two strands together there is a higher profile within the system and a greater commitment from school leaders. Monitoring evidence shows that there had been a lasting impact within schools with improvements in leadership behaviours and processes. Schools are carrying out evaluation and audit of their provision and using the EEF School Improvement cycle to continue to develop and plan for improvement. The presentations by participants show that they are using an evidence and research base to inform their choices for their EAL strategy and approach to teaching and learning. There has been a culture change and aspirations are raised for EAL pupils, this is change that will have lasting impact on both attainment outcomes and community attitudes.