

Raising attainment of EYFS pupils through improving provision of Communication & Language and Literacy education

Overview

Our sub-regional partnership aims to address low achievement in a large number of schools of two key early learning goals: Communication & Language and Literacy. The improvement need is especially evident in our sub-region for disadvantaged children, SEND children and (usually) boys in these areas of learning. The project will improve attainment leading to increases in GLD (good level of development) year on year.

Achieving the expected level or above will impact significantly on success across the curriculum at KS1 and beyond where evidence shows gaps often become wider. Our programme will therefore make an effective contribution to life chances through improved social mobility.

There will be support for EYFS, Literacy & SENDCo leads to raise attainment via improved quality of teaching/early identification of need and engagement in a range of evidence based interventions. An additional strand for whole school leadership will deepen understanding of the formative role of early learning. Delivery includes both CPD & bespoke coaching/mentoring drawing on evidence bases. Delivery hubs across the sub-region will also develop professional learning networks to maximise dissemination of best practice and sustainability.

Our team of NLEs & SLEs, supplemented by experienced specialists will deliver the outcomes. We have constructed a programme which combines effective practice from the EY Toolkit, promising projects, and Communication Trust's 'what works' with the evidence of local projects which have resulted in removing barriers to learning, all resulting in gains to meet desired outcomes.

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

We consistently received feedback throughout the project from participating schools commending the level of organisation and project as well as positive ratings and evaluations of each CPD event and SLE visits. We kept outcomes for children at the heart of the project and this focus was a constant and consistent element for all participants, in all CPD events and school visits. This resulted in good engagement and participation from schools and was designed based on a number of key principles:

Involvement and 'buy in' of head teachers and senior leaders was secured early on and maintained via Heads briefings and SLE conversations as a part of each of the school visits. These events ensured leaders were kept informed and engaged in the project. It also ensured that roles and responsibilities of all parties were explicit, CPD schedules were shared, and leadership CPD enabled project outcomes to be measured in classroom provision and

teaching, to ensure effective leadership and implementation of EYFS improvements.

Project management information was shared at the outset, including timetables, data collection points, memorandum of understanding, etc. This was accessible via a members' area of our website and facilitated clear dissemination of practical information to participants and leaders.

Each participating school identified a named project lead who acted as the main point of contact which meant communication remained effective and consistent.

We recruited a team of SLEs that were led by the project manager and included representatives from all local authorities. Designated, highly skilled, SLE partners were allocated to each school to reinforce key training messages, problem solve, develop actions and co-reflect. This approach maintained clear support pathways and enabled strong relationships to be formed that meant project participants and SLEs were always considering what, how, when and why they could change or adapt their practice in light of new learning. Ongoing monitoring was ensured through SLE visits. The project evaluation reports:

"...a key area of success of this project is the SLE support. This support is delivered in the school setting and is designed to respond to the needs of the school, pupils and staff. The findings that 100% of respondents, reported some level of impact, with almost half reporting the highest level of value, is of significance. It is recommended that this model of support be recognised as an example of good practice with a ready transferability to other programmes."

We implemented an additional 'Aspiring EYFS SLE' programme in partnership with an NLE at a local nursery school, to support emerging candidates for a sub-regional pool of SLEs. This was completed by 8 teachers and resulted in a number of successful SLE applications during the lifespan of this project.

SSTEWS (sustained shared thinking and emotional well-being) audits at the beginning and end of the project enabled us to take a measure of the quality of adult interactions and elements of teaching communication and language. This measure was valued by participating schools and enabled a more rapid assessment of improvement which is useful in the absence of validated data. All schools showed an improvement in their final scores.

A matrix was created and shared with course delivery partners, SLEs and schools in order to highlight the crossover points between project outcomes and sections of the SSTEWS audit. SLEs who had not used SSTEWS scales previously were given training and shadowing opportunities. SLEs have now had more in depth experience in conducting and using SSTEWS audits and scales to build skills and quality of provision in the Early Years beyond the project.

QA conversations were completed by experienced school leaders for all

schools in the project to QA SLEs and project delivery. An online questionnaire was sent to all participating schools to evaluate the programme at an individual school level. The responses from this were analysed by external evaluators

All CPD events had time built in for participants to review, reflect on and share how they implemented new learning plus time to update their action plans at the end of each CPD day. SLEs also had a standing meeting to identify key elements for next visits and to discuss enquiries relating to their role. This meant that all participants had dedicated times in each training day to plan change in order for it to become a regular element in their classroom teaching or learning environment. The evaluation reports that the project was "particularly successful and impactful in terms of staff and the participating schools gaining new knowledge and garnering support to translate that knowledge into practice both for their own roles and for the roles of others"

Each CPD element included reflective feedback and design meetings in response to themes and needs raised by participants. This was conducted by both CPD leads and by the Project Manager to ensure responsive project content that matched participant experience and comprehension.

Explicit GAP tasks between CPD events meant that schools knew exactly what was expected of them and had clear deadlines to complete tasks relating to the latest project element. This helped to maintain momentum and to facilitate achievable actions to support an ongoing improvement cycle.

Specific communication and language programme intervention training was chosen due to a strong evidence base and the recruitment a licensed tutor for the programme. The interventions were offered to all project school teachers and teaching assistants. This broadened school capacity to deliver to greater numbers of pupils as teams of adults were trained and able to immediately deliver specific language interventions.

Specific intervention resource packs were provided with the appropriate training, this ensured no barriers to delivery for participating schools existed. Feedback for having resources with training was extremely positive from participants and take up was high.

At approximately the half-way point of the project schools were rewarded/incentivised (receiving related materials in the form of two non-fiction CPD books) for their ongoing participation and commitment to the sharing of learning/impact materials from their own settings.

Final impact event days were organised so that each school presented their learning and impact findings in a carousel activity. This enabled participants to learn from a wider range of colleagues and to share lessons from successes, setbacks and ideas for future plans and sustainability. This element for cross fertilisation of ideas enabled teachers to disseminate innovative approaches to learning and teaching and feedback reported that outside of authority networking enabled high quality discussion and enquiry.

2. Lessons learned - What the project may do differently in the future

An interesting observation from a project management perspective is the project initiation points and the real time tensions faced by Teaching Schools to respond to grant funding notifications where projects are reliant upon recruitment of quality personnel and system leadership input. Our approach was to front-load the project management team in anticipation of a successful funding outcome. Our project manager initiated the project action plan rapidly, this in part mitigated the challenge of project launch, however the issue of system leader recruitment was more challenging due to the large numbers of SLE involved and the inability for their employing schools to take a similar risk and front load their capacity to be released. Good learning for future projects would be to include project development and recruitment stages prior to project implementation, however this must also be reflected within funders application guidelines and approval processes.

The memorandum of trust document mentioned was a key document, created with support of a National Research School, which set out expectations of all parties of the project. It outlined a data sharing agreement and also detailed who was responsible for each activity at each point. The MOU was distributed at project launch to ensure that clarity of expectation was mutually agreed through the signing of this document. An improvement would be to have the MOU signed by schools on agreement to participate at application stage to ensure all schools are clear from the start.

Collecting data from schools was a challenge throughout the project due to variations in the way schools collect and interpret school level data to monitor progression. The wide variety in which schools represent their Reception class data, track progression and even define a 'good level of development'. Different levels of understanding and interpretation of data and expected levels of pupil progression were a barrier for some schools to sending accurate data for children who were on track for expected levels of development. A later addition to this project was provision of tested tracking tools for schools to adopt should they wish, alongside SLE support to upskill in assessment practice, had this difficulty been better anticipated this would have been incorporated from the start. Although impossible for this project, we would always design similar projects with a focus upon timelines of delivery and review to be in line with academic years and final data collection points/publication of validated data. This will support accurate, reliable and conclusive impact measures for projects and therefore demonstrate success or otherwise more conclusively.

One significant learning point during this large-scale project was the retention of the SLE personnel. We found that some of those initially recruited were forced to withdraw due to capacity issues, and this reoccurred throughout the project. This meant reduced capacity to deliver in school support sessions. This issue was mitigated in our case by the project manager becoming more operational and taking additional schools onto her caseload. A couple of other SLEs were able to similarly add more capacity to the project.

In our planning we recruited enough SLEs to ensure that each SLE had no

more than 3 schools to support. In future projects we would prefer to set that maximum at 2 schools or reduce the scope of the project. We would also consider building in at the beginning, to meet with the SLE home schools in order to outline project demands which may have limited the number of SLEs leaving.

A barrier reported by some teachers was staff movement within a school, regardless of project involvement. In future we may plan to create an agreement between head teachers and the project for schools to agree, where ever possible, to keep staff involved in the project in the EYFS so that they would be a consistent presence and to ensure the schools ability to implement all of the learning as the project progresses over time, especially relevant when a project goes over one academic year. A key piece of learning was that continuity of participants at school level is a key component to how successful project was embedded. As the project lead in each school was a vital agent for change, we would consider additional support for leaders in their role in cascading information and disseminating good practice.

Feedback from participants were varied in respect of the usefulness of cluster meetings as part of our delivery model. As this project was large in scale and geographically spread, the most effective groups were based in authorities with the smallest number of schools in the project. CPD also contained some elements of schools working together from the same LA which may have been considered a duplication of learning when cluster groups got together. In future projects we would consider the frequency of cluster meetings in light of how much schools from the same LA worked together in CPD events. As clusters were all based in participating schools, we would also consider how impactful school visits would be to develop learning throughout any future project as an additional opportunity.

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

In considering long-term sustainability we have looked at both sustaining participating schools' improvement, and schools not involved in the funded project for wider reach.

Relating to participating schools:

We noted a possible barrier to success as a number of participating schools had higher instances of staff turnover and/or internal movement of staff. To address this, and to maximise sustainability we have put into place:

- Catch up CPD programmes to ensure accessibility for new staff to receive key learning messages.
- A members' website area for schools which contains all project news and CPD information to support seamless participation. This was expanded to include copies of all training materials and learning resources so that schools can use it to re visit, support and cascade learning to the wider staff team in their own time.

- Included in this section are a range of diagnostic audits and we will maintain this website so that schools can access these tools to measure development and progress in future years.

Further expansion of the website members' area enabled each school to provide evidence of their use of the taught strategies and ideas in implementing teaching and learning, and also environmental improvements, in their settings. These show a qualitative record of positive changes made in response to project learning and enables the sharing of these interesting resources with all schools involved enabling high quality conversations and networking to take place. This is key for sustainability as it facilitates professional learning communities to form and settings to develop sustained changes independently and to have influence over other teachers and practice. School final impact presentations were also uploaded to this web site so that all participants involved in the project could see individual school responses to their learning and to report on impact. This was recorded as incredibly valuable to participating schools and provided inspiration and motivation for positive change.

Short films have been created and are available to project schools. These capture impact from final CPD events via testimonials given by teachers and leaders directly involved in the project. These have been supplemented with additional clips made available to schools which demonstrate key strategies and modelled teaching relating to the most impactful areas of the project. Again these will be available to participating schools on an ongoing basis and will facilitate internal upskilling and training of new staff, supporting long term consistency in high quality teaching, and embedding the project's principles.

With regard wider sharing of project impact and lessons learned we are involved in:

- An external review of this project has been undertaken by a University and this report will be made available and communicated widely.
- Disseminating lessons learned via system leader networks facilitated by Teaching Schools in the sub-region and by the Teaching School Council.
- Planning conference events targeted at schools not included in the project cohorts. These accessible and affordable events will take place Autumn/Spring 2019/20 and are aimed to share key learning outcomes to facilitate engagement in resulting research based CPD and development projects used within this project.

We plan to further develop the online resources used for this project to create a learning library and toolkit of CPD materials to be used independently.