

Diminishing the difference in literacy attainment for disadvantaged children in client primary and secondary schools to increase progression to post 16 study programmes

Overview

This project aimed to diminish the differences in literacy attainment across 13 schools. Attainment in literacy of disadvantaged children in these client schools was persistently lagging behind that of non-disadvantaged, perpetuating differences that impacts on social mobility and limits opportunities for access to Key Stage 5 education.

This project aimed to be delivered over 5 terms and used baseline data on differences in literacy attainment between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children to implement and evaluate intervention in a cross phase improvement strategy to address the complex issues at the heart of the difference. Literacy levels were negatively impacted by poor attendance and low levels of parental engagement, as well as poor quality and capacity in school leadership and governance. The strategy encompassed interventions to drive improvement in literacy leadership and culture, pedagogy, and parental engagement for children in years 1, 5 and 10 to diminish the difference in the year before statutory assessment and to enable disadvantaged children to progress to post-16 study.

The project deployed 26 SLEs in 13 schools to coach 13 Headteachers, 30 teachers, 15 TAs and 13 SENCO specialists. The project developed 13 Literacy practitioners and led on whole staff literacy training to achieve challenging targets to diminish differences. Using evidence-based approaches, the practitioners worked with staff in delivering CPD programmes for teachers, Teaching Assistants, leaders and governors, worked with SENCO staff to implement whole-school screening and analysis and supported school initiatives to engage parents in literacy. The coaching included joint practice in maintaining a professional development log. They reported to the Project Monitoring Group and were tasked with training a literacy expert in every school who could assume responsibility at the end of the 5 terms using an evidence base.

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

- Through the evaluation of the project, the providers identified a number of factors which ensured that project was focussed on delivering the intended outcomes.
- The core steering group all shared the same focus and buy-in to the project.
- The planning of the project prioritised the development of a training

programme for the teaching of reading that was based on well tested methodologies and practice.

- The use of a whole-school pupil premium evaluation gave a baseline of practice at the start of the project, the development of a whole school plan to change policies and culture, and an end of project evaluation framework.
- The recruitment of a core group of SLEs, the training of those SLEs and then regular networking to ensure focus and to resolve issues that arose within placements
- The recruitment of LLEs to focus on the whole school leadership onto the project and to maintain focus and stamina through the project
- All client schools and SLEs and LLEs were brought together at the start of the project to ensure clarity of purpose
- The regular communication and group meetings which maintained the key messages and the moral purpose throughout project

What the project may do differently in the future

The strength of this project lay in the whole-school change of culture which allowed the improvement in Wave 1 teaching of reading to have the impact of diminishing the difference between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils. The few incidences where the project was less successful were due to a lack of school leadership buy-in.

- Ensure that schools identified to be part of the project are fully committed. In one instance, a school identified by the Local Authority for inclusion in the project disagreed that they needed to be part of it, and following the end of the 3rd term stopped attending and engaging.
- Vulnerable or insecure leadership will be a greater agency of poor outcomes than teacher subject knowledge alone. In a number of incidences, schools identified by the Local Authority for inclusion in the project had significant leadership changes during the time of the project. In some cases this had a positive impact on project management (particularly KS3-4). However, in some cases the new leadership did not prioritise engagement in the project which therefore diminished its impact.

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

Plan for sustaining and scaling an innovation from the outset:

Primary

- The sustainability of the project lies in the development of new practice within whole school leadership of the teaching of reading in school, beyond the focus cohorts for this project.

Across the schools the main aspects of leadership impact are:

- Reading environments have been significantly improved in all schools and there has been a concerted effort to establish a reading culture by actively promoting reading in all parts of schools' environments.
- Senior leaders have given reading a higher profile in schools' work since the start of the SSIF project. They have taken a personal lead and in several schools this has involved reconsidering how reading is monitored. Consequently, reading now has a high profile in the monitoring work of the project's participants.
- Some schools have introduced reading exercise books and, as a result, it has become easier to monitor the regularity and quality of reading comprehension work in schools where this was not the case. Schools have actively considered the specific comprehension skills which pupils need to develop and have made particular use of the 'Core 4' which have been encouraged during the SSIF project.
- Several schools have invested significantly in time and resources to work with parents to better promote home learning and to particularly support the development of children who are pre-Nursery or in Early Years.
- Early Years is a strength of many schools and there is a strong understanding amongst leaders of the importance of working with disadvantaged pupils and their families as early as possible to increase the chances of narrowing disadvantaged pupils' "word gap".
- Leaders have given more thought and consideration to how learning environments can support pupils' vocabulary development. In the majority of schools, there is now a greater focus on using learning environments to actively enable pupils to broaden their word knowledge and to support their acquisition of technical vocabulary.
- Schools have given considerable thought to increasing the impact of Teaching Assistants by promoting an increased level of strong practice from all staff and have an increased focus on all staff developing pupils' independence.
- A further legacy of this project has been the development of a group of Reading Ambassadors who are connected through the Aspire Teaching School. These Reading Ambassadors have cascaded their training and new expertise to other teachers in their schools, and across to new schools not included in the formal scope of this project. Reading Ambassadors have been able to share this learning through

new SLE roles with Aspire Teaching School and Jerry Clay Lane Reading Hub.

End of project impact questionnaires captured the following impacts:

- Teaching of reading has been transformed. The training was of such high quality that the inspired individuals were passionate in delivering training back at school throughout the project.
- The SSIF project messages and CPD have been shared across the school and the profile of reading has been raised across the school.
- The teaching of reading is now consistent and quality first teaching has improved. Our Year 5 teacher, has now rolled the training out at another school over two staff meetings. Already we can see the difference in evidence within the reading journals."

Secondary

- Accelerated Reader and Lexia programmes in use in all three schools and will continue to be used to assess reading age on entry, show progress over time and inform teachers where and when interventions are required.
- Whole-school literacy strategies (Drop Everything and Read, tutor time reading and CPD for quality first teaching) to be continued in all three schools.
- One-to-one intervention tutors in place in all three schools and to be continued after the end of the project.
- A senior leader given responsibility for literacy in each of the three secondary schools, which is to be continued after the end of the project.