

Maximising teaching assistants through clearly defined decoding training to close the reading attainment gap at KS2 and KS1

Overview

Local schools have an attainment gap in reading at KS2 due to groups of pupils having poor decoding skills. This project aimed to increase teaching assistants' capacity to improve decoding among these pupils, reach a greater number more effectively, increase collaboration across local schools, and enable a stronger assessment practice to support ongoing evidence of impact. It worked with KS2 teaching assistants and key staff to develop their understanding and effective implementation of decoding techniques and related strategies and, by doing so, intended to improve pupil outcomes in KS2 literacy.

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

Regular reporting at the Teaching School Alliance meetings kept head teachers involved and clear of the outcomes of the project. This is important as this helps to prepare and deliver the project. The Lead School of the project kept head teachers up to date of the project progress and summarised activity to date with clear lines of communication and milestones achieved. Sharing planned activity and activity for the next time period so all schools understood and engaged through the implementation of training the teaching assistants was key.

Linking to the English Co-ordinators and class teachers of KS2 and Y2 in KS1 was also important as this supported the prepare and deliver stage of the implementation process. A quick response was needed to any deviation from expected activity; use of both control phases and scaling up phases; working with schools of different sizes and demography to measure impact across a range of cohorts was acknowledged.

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

It is important that there is clarity around who will lead the project in each school and who will be responsible for implementation of the project in each school if it is not the head teacher. There is also a need to build in measures for impact of staff turnover and staff absence. Communication is key; face to face, via email and phone to enable the project to be successful. A key role for leaders during the delivery period is to manage expectations and encourage 'buy-in' until positive signs of change emerge. Adopting a flexible and motivating approach is important to enable the implementation of the project to be successful. Follow-on support from the software provider throughout the project enabled the success and sustainability in most schools.

Checking the amount of resources such as ipads for this project and key staff

to attend the training was also key to the success of the project. Schools that delivered and implemented well thought about which key staff to put on the training and which leaders in school to link with the software provider.

Schools who did less well showed that their delivery and implementation stages were not as strong regarding staffing selected and resources available. Time played a key role in the project and the more successful schools made time to implement the project well and used this to their advantage to sustain the work in their schools and increase the reading ability of their children by 5 months.

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

There are over 200 pupils still active on the software. To sustain the Teaching School Partnership will continue to review the schools and check who is continuing the use of the approach after the end of the project. The aim is that the outcome report with statistical analysis is disseminated not only to the schools involved in the project but wider to other schools who link with the Teaching School Partnership and through the Teaching School website. The report will be shared with partners with the intention that the participating schools would be encouraged to share their experience with other schools.

We are aware that sustaining implementation requires the leaders in the schools to continually engage in implementation processes, provide purposeful support and 'walk the walk'. Between 7-9 schools are still very active in the process, engaging in other programmes and sharing their findings at English Co-ordinator meetings in our Learning Network with Teaching School Alliance Schools, thus enhancing their KS1 and KS2 work.

Nine of the 17 participating schools have subscribed to the decoding resources for KS1 and KS2 and seven of these schools are piloting the comprehension programme over the coming term with Y5 and/or Y6 pupils.