

Improving Key Stage 1 outcomes across 21 Local Primary Schools by implementing a Systematic Phonics Programme

Overview

The project aims to significantly improve outcomes for 21 local primary schools where results have been consistently poor and below the national average (last 2 years or more) of achieving the expected standard of Phonics attainment in Year 1. The local authority is identified by the DfE as the one of the lowest performing in the region and following questioning by Nick Gibb, Minister of State for the DfE (Nov 2017), this proposal is focused on addressing under-performance.

We will use a systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) package from the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) to target improvement in Phonics from early years to the end of KS1, with specific reference to Year 1 phonics screening. For the 21 schools, currently the average success rate achieving the expected standard is 65% (2017 data). Over a 2 year period we aim for a 20% increase to 85%. If achieved, the average performance in target schools will exceed current national figures by 4% (based on 2017 national figures of 81%). The long term aim (5 years) will be to secure a 35% improvement on current figures, resulting in all children without an identified learning difficulty reaching the national expected standard.

Funding will provide capacity to train, support, challenge and lead delivery of the Phonics programme. Activities will improve teacher subject knowledge and practice and generate shared schemes of work, training and assessment materials to reduce staff workload; teachers will not need to independently investigate and source materials. Pupils will improve their life chances as they are some of the most disadvantaged in the local area. Leadership, capacity, skills and expertise will improve to implement a sustainable programme in local schools. Measurable outcomes will be shared with the local authority to effect long term change. The bid has been endorsed as a priority by the Locality Improvement Board.

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

It is important to ensure that there is a very well thought out delivery plan managed by experienced NLE practitioners, who have the respect and trust of Headteachers and schools in a community. The Delivery Board then needs to recruit well-qualified SLEs who can gain the confidence and trust of colleagues in schools.

It is crucial to buy-in expertise from organisations that have National experience in the delivery of Phonics Training - the CLPE (Centre for Literacy in Primary Education) was excellent and the training of NLEs, SLEs and colleagues in schools was of the highest standard.

The last major point is that quality training, delivery of school-based support and project management, initially appears to be expensive, however, only with well-funded and supportive training delivered over time, will change happen.

What the project may do differently in the future

It is difficult to find any actions that we would do differently. We had excellent sustainability and all the schools involved were very complimentary regarding all aspects of the project.

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

The systems used to deliver the project involving a Management Board of NLEs, along with a Delivery Team of SLEs, was very successful and in the future, the Local Authority may well want to replicate the structure when implementing initiatives for School Improvement.

Presentations and informal discussions have taken place on a regular basis with the local cluster of Primary Schools and the awareness of the Phonic Programme has been raised to an audience well beyond the 21 schools involved in the funded project.

We had plans to ensure that there would be a structured approach to opening the project to a wider number of local schools, through a self-funding SLE Support Programme. Currently, the pandemic has put this on hold and schools are restricting visitors and just trying to cope with the day-to-day actions associated with Covid-19.