

Trust and school improvement offer 2021/22 Academic Year: Reading materials

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1. Purpose

This document provides recommended reading for system leader delivering the Trust and School Improvement (TSI) offer 21/22 academic year (AY); the reading materials covers five key areas. We **do not expect** you to read all the listed material but we want you to identify reading that you would benefit from according to your interests and professional development needs.

2. Reading materials

| Topic | Reference Materials |
|---------------------------|---|
| Curriculum and Assessment | <p>Willingham, D. T. (2009). <i>Why don't students like school?: A cognitive scientist answers questions about how the mind works and what it means for the classroom</i>. John Wiley & Sons</p> <p>Alternatively, you could access Willingham's research:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Via this accessible summary: Deans for Impact (2015). <i>The Science of Learning</i>. Deans for Impact: Austin, TX. http://www.deansforimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/The_Science_of_Learning.pdf- Willingham's own blog, which links to useful explanations of research on various areas: Willingham, D.T. (2021). <i>Daniel Willingham – Science & Education</i>. http://www.danielwillingham.com/articles.html <p>Department for Education (DfE) (2021). <i>Teaching a broad and balanced curriculum for education recovery</i>. DfE: UK. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-a-broad-and-balanced-curriculum-for-education-recovery</p> <p>Higgins, S., Henderson, P., Martell, T., Sharples, J., and Waugh, D. (2020). <i>Improving Literacy in Key Stage 1: Guidance report</i>. Education Endowment Foundation (EEF): UK. https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/literacy-ks-1</p> <p>Quigley, A., and Coleman, R. (2018). <i>Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools: Guidance report</i>. Education Endowment Foundation: London, UK. https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/literacy-ks3-ks4</p> <p>Kirschner, P., Sweller, J., & Clark, R. E. (2006). <i>Why Minimal Guidance During Instruction Does Not Work: An Analysis of the Failure of Constructivist, Discovery, Problem-Based, Experiential, and Inquiry-Based Teaching</i>. Educational Psychologist, 41(2), 75–86, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep4102_1.</p> <p>Collin, J., Quigley, A. (2021). <i>Teacher Feedback to Improve Pupil Learning: Guidance report</i>. Education Endowment Foundation: London, UK. https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/feedback</p> <p>Department for Education (DfE) (2021). <i>The reading framework: teaching the foundations of literacy</i>. DfE: UK. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-reading-framework-teaching-the-foundations-of-literacy</p> |

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| Behaviour | <p>Rhodes, I., & Long, M. (2021). <i>Improving Behaviour in Schools: Guidance report</i>. Education Endowment Foundation (EEF): UK. https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/behaviour</p> <p>Department for Education (DfE) (2016). <i>Behaviour and Discipline in Schools – A guide for headteachers and School Staff</i>. DfE: UK. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/488034/Behaviour_and Discipline in Schools - A guide for headteachers and School Staff.pdf</p> <p>Department for Education (DfE) (2011). <i>Getting the simple things right: Charlie Taylor's behaviour</i>. DfE: UK. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/571640/Getting the simple things right Charlie Taylor s behaviour checklists.pdf</p> <p>Davies, K., Henderson, P., & Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (2020). <i>Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools – Five recommendations on special education needs in mainstream schools: Guidance report</i>. Education Endowment Foundation: London, UK. https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/send</p> <p>Bennett, T., & Department for Education (2017). <i>Creating a culture: a review of behaviour management in schools</i>. DfE: UK. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/602487/Tom Bennett Independent Review of Behaviour in Schools.pdf</p> <p>Department for Education (DfE) (2020). <i>Checklist for school leaders to support full opening: Behaviour and attendance</i>. DfE: UK. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/899384/Checklist for school leaders on behaviour and attendance.pdf</p> <p>Department for Education (DfE) (2018). <i>Mental health and behaviour in schools</i>. DfE: UK. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/755135/Mental health and behaviour in schools .pdf</p> |
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| Teaching | <p>Coe, R., Aloisi, C., Higgins, S., & Major, L. E. (2014). <i>What makes great teaching? Review of the underpinning research</i>. Durham University: UK. http://bit.ly/2OvmvKO</p> <p>William, D. (2018). <i>Creating the schools our children need</i>. Learning Sciences International.</p> <p>Bennett, T. (2015) <i>Group work for the good – Unpacking the Research behind One Popular Classroom Strategy</i>. American Educator, Spring, 39, 1, 32-37. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1063868.pdf</p> <p>Kirschner, P., Sweller, J., & Clark, R. E. (2006). <i>Why Minimal Guidance During Instruction Does Not Work: An Analysis of the Failure of Constructivist, Discovery, Problem-Based, Experiential, and Inquiry-Based Teaching</i>. Educational Psychologist, 41(2), 75–86. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep4102_1</p> <p>Deans for Impact (2015). <i>The Science of Learning</i>. Deans for Impact: Austin, TX. http://www.deansforimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/The_Science_of_Learning.pdf</p> <p>Donker, A. S., de Boer, H., Kostons, D., Dignath van Ewijk, C. C., & van der Werf, M. P. C. (2014). <i>Effectiveness of learning strategy instruction on academic performance: A meta-analysis</i>. Educational Research Review, 11, 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2013.11.002</p> <p>Quigley, A., Muijs, D., & Stringer, E. (2018). <i>Metacognition and self-regulated learning: guidance report</i>. Education Endowment Foundation: London, UK. https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/metacognition</p> |
| School Culture | <p>Gutman, L. M., Schoon, I. (2013). <i>The impact of non-cognitive skills on outcomes for young people. A literature review</i>. Education Endowment Foundation: London, UK. https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Presentations/Publications/Non-cognitive_skills_literature_review_1.pdf</p> <p>Sibieta, L., Greaves, E., Sianesi, B., Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), & Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) (2014). <i>Increasing Pupil Motivation: Evaluation Report and Executive Summary</i>. Education Endowment Foundation: London, UK. https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/documents/projects/Pupil_Incentives.pdf</p> <p>Kirschner, P., Sweller, J., & Clark, R. E. (2006). <i>Why Minimal Guidance During Instruction Does Not Work: An Analysis of the Failure of Constructivist, Discovery, Problem-Based, Experiential, and Inquiry-Based Teaching</i>. Educational Psychologist, 41(2), 75–86. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep4102_1</p> <p>Deans for Impact (2015). <i>The Science of Learning</i>. Deans for Impact: Austin, TX.</p> |

http://www.deansforimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/The_Science_of_Learning.pdf

Donker, A. S., de Boer, H., Kostons, D., Dignath van Ewijk, C. C., & van der Werf, M. P. C. (2014). *Effectiveness of learning strategy instruction on academic performance: A meta-analysis*. Educational Research Review, 11, 1–26.

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Quigley, A., Muijs, D., & Stringer, E. (2018). *Metacognition and self-regulated learning: guidance report*. Education Endowment Foundation: London, UK. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/metacognition>

Implementation: Effective school improvement - what research tells us

Thinkpiece 1 -

Getting the foundations right

Introduction

The purpose of this thinkpiece is to present NLEs with the key research identified by DfE that best informs school improvement practice.

Please read through the summary of the implications for NLEs to consider in relation to the findings and research presented.





Scope

- How many new initiatives has the school taken on recently? How many have been successfully implemented? Does the leadership team show an understanding of the implementation process?
- Does the leadership team have the capacity (including staffing, expertise and time) to undertake the implementation process?
- Who in your own school/MAT exemplifies this work and has the capacity to offer support?



Explore

- Is the identified priority amenable to change?
- Have the senior leaders systematically explored quality programmes or practices to implement?
- How have decisions been made about the practices and approaches to implement?
- Have senior leaders examined the fit and feasibility with the school context?
- Does the school use a common language regarding the priority?
- Can the staff explain the reason why this priority has been chosen and what issue it is trying to address? Is there a culture of engaging with and critiquing evidence using professional judgement?
- Do senior leaders understand the preparation needed to implement the priority plan?
- Do senior leaders understand the delivery needed to implement the priority plan?



Diagnose

- Have you been able to identify a robust diagnostic process that was used to identify the problems that need to be addressed?
- How accurate and reliable is the data and evidence that you have been presented with?
- Is the school's implementation plan underpinned by reliable evidence, e.g., provided by EEF (Education Endowment Foundation)?
- As an NLE are you confident that the school – or you as an NLE – can identify the specific priority area that is not being addressed?
- Are you assured that the data or evidence you or the school is using is fit for purpose?
- Have you identified and raised risks or weaknesses in use of the assessment data?
- For further information on the implementation process, please see: [Putting Evidence to Work - A School's Guide to Implementation | Education Endowment Foundation | EEF](#)



Agreeing and preparing

- What are the specific areas of improvement the school is hoping to address? Do you concur with this?
- Are there specific phases, year groups or departments that require more support than others?
- Does the school have the capacity to support this improvement themselves and if not, where can they source this?
- Is the identified improvement research-informed?
- What DfE-sponsored programmes can the school take advantage of to enhance this improvement?
- What style of teacher professional learning best addresses the need in school?
- Is there a clear agreement between the NLE, Headteacher and Governing Body about who is responsible for making this improvement?
- Is there an improvement action plan in place that addresses any issues identified in the diagnose phase?

1 Introduction



As well as guiding new initiatives in schools, leaders provide oversight of initiatives introduced by others. At some point in our careers, we have all been on the receiving end of new initiatives. If we consider these initiatives, we can also identify those that, despite the best intentions, lost momentum and eventually faded away.

Leaders in schools need to be supported to consider the reasons why this might be the case, and to develop a better understanding of the characteristics of effective implementation.

2 Key message that underpins this thinkpiece



One of the characteristics that distinguishes effective and less-effective schools (in addition to what they implement) is how they put those new approaches into practice. Implementation is therefore fundamental to everything that we do in schools.

The busy nature of school life, alongside the internal and external pressure to ensure continuous improvement, means that the details of effective implementation can often be forgotten.

The EEF's Guide to Effective Implementation seeks to make the details visible by outlining a staged process. The starting point for this is an emphasis on the development of 'foundations for good implementation'¹.

When viewing implementation as a process, not an event, we need to ensure that adequate time is being given to this process. The amount of time needed does not necessarily fit within the segmented school calendar, with effective implementation potentially spanning across multiple years for complex initiatives.

A further element for creating the right foundations for implementations, is ensuring that we create a leadership environment and school climate that is conducive to this.

2 Key message that underpins this thinkpiece



Foundations for Implementation

Implementation is the process of managing the way in which we introduce change into school. For these changes to become embedded they need to be accepted within the practice of other members of staff. As such, staff need to feel open to change in a supportive climate where they are able to try new things, and in the case when we try something new, we may make mistakes or find something difficult.

2 Key message that underpins this thinkpiece

When this happens, staff need to feel that they will be supported with training and feedback, which will enable them to make further improvements in a culture of quality improvement – where there is no pressure to get it right immediately.

Implementation may then not benefit from the expertise of a range of individuals, and management becomes less connected with the organisation.

It ceases to be a shared activity and can lead to a top-down approach which is not necessarily conducive to an ‘implementation friendly’¹ climate. Distributed leadership should be utilised to empower multiple individuals across the school where staff are required to take on managerial responsibilities.



The process of distributed leadership

Distributed leadership may be advocated to mobilise multiple individuals across the school where staff are empowered to take on implementation responsibilities. For example, in a large secondary school, several members of staff could be involved in different elements of implementing a strategy to improve literacy.

2 Key message that underpins this thinkpiece

A strategy that focuses on disciplinary literacy may include explicit teaching of pre-identified Tier 2 vocabulary. Often an initiative such as this may be led by someone with responsibility for literacy across the curriculum, meaning that the policy becomes closely tied to this one individual.

An implementation team from across subject departments could provide stronger foundations for effective implementation and individuals may choose to step into the role of Vocabulary Champion to encourage ownership of the initiative. The viewpoint of a range of subject specialists is also important here to ensure that the policy will be deemed manageable and appropriate across the staff removing any barriers to effective implementation.

Questions we might consider:

- Is implementation seen as a process not an event?
- Is adequate time and care taken when preparing for implementation?
- Are a small number of changes selected for implementation?
- Are there systematic processes in place for reviewing existing practices for their effectiveness, and stopping those identified as less effective or worthwhile?
- Is the school climate conducive to effective implementation?
- Is there a culture of shared leadership that ensures changes are led at different levels in the school?

3 Explore

Implementation can be described as a series of stages relating to thinking about, preparing for, delivering, and sustaining change. These stages can be seen within the implementation cycle below:

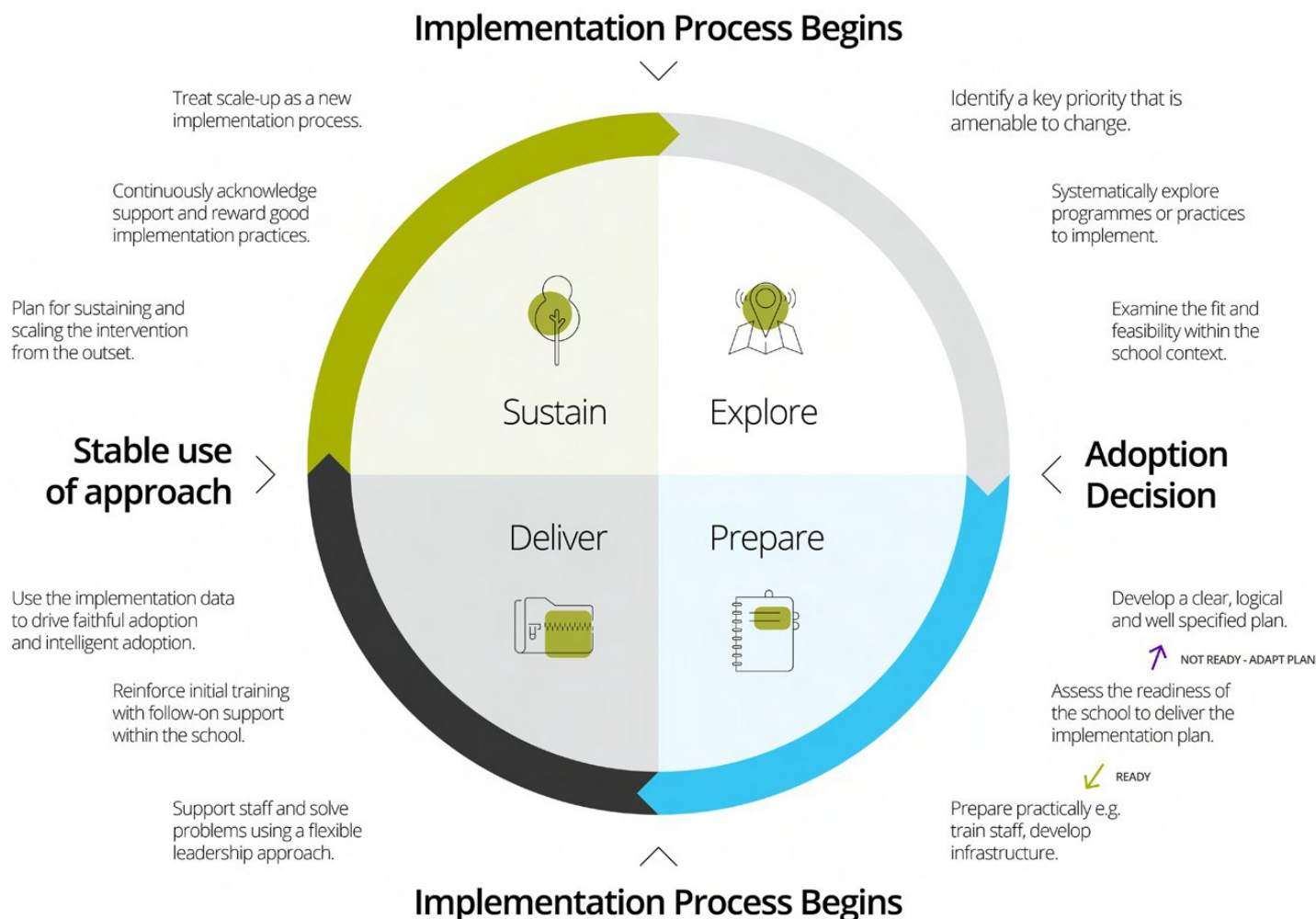


Figure 1: Implementation Cycle²

3 Explore

The explore phase is arguably the most important element of this diagram, but it is also the area that is often neglected. Prior to adopting any decision about a particular strategy or initiative to be implemented into schools, the most important question we need to ask ourselves and each other is:

What is the problem we need to fix?

This may reveal initial hunches, broad conclusions drawn from large data sets or a consensus about priorities. However, when school capacity and resources are limited, we need to be much more forensic in the way in which we approach diagnosis of the problems, as without this, we are unable to identify appropriate solutions. Schools need to routinely use a robust diagnostic process to identify the problems that need to be addressed.

Whilst supporting a school as an NLE, this is an important area to consider by reviewing the range of diagnostic tools currently being used by the school, alongside a review of the relevance and rigor of the data used to inform decision making.

Often, we use externally validated data such as SATs results and GCSE outcomes as key data sources, but this can lead to conflation of the symptoms and causes of underachievement. Therefore, we need to identify and then tackle the root causes of underachievement. For example, there is a range of diagnostics that can be used to offer greater precision when identifying difficulties with elements of Literacy. If writing has been determined as a priority, we may question to what extent this is an issue about transcription rather than composition.

3 Explore

The Detailed Assessment of the Speed of Handwriting (DASH) diagnostic would prove to be a useful tool here, as this can be relevant for pupils of all ages. The distinction between symptoms and causes is exemplified below. However, the triangulation of data from different sources alongside professional judgement would be needed to draw accurate conclusions.

| Symptom | Causes |
|--|--|
| Pupils' attainment in science is low at GCSE | Teacher subject knowledge Quality of teaching Negative impact of setting or streaming Motivation for subject Attendance in lessons Prioritisation of English or Maths Limited vocabulary |
| Progress data for Maths is negative and the PP gap is wide | What might the causes be? |
| Greater depth writing is not being demonstrated | What might the causes be? |

Once consensus has been reached about the problem that we need to address, we then need to make decisions about the programmes or practices that we may choose to implement.

3 Explore

If we ask schools to list the range of approaches, initiatives and strategies that they are currently implementing within their school, it is likely that they may come up with quite a long list. This is indicative of the current landscape in schools where school, phase and subject improvement plans are often rewritten each year with the identification of a range of new initiatives.

If we then scrutinise the lists in more detail, we can consider where some of these initiatives came from:


- Are they historic policies that the school has always used?
- Are they approaches that they know have been used by other schools?
- Are there some initiatives that we are unsure about where they originated from?
- How many of them have been selected following a rigorous review of the evidence base?
- In how much detail has the strength of the evidence base behind the approach been considered before adopting a decision?

When reviewing the lessons learned from the EEF's first six years and their impact on closing the attainment gap, it was identified that sufficient evidence now exists to enable us to make a positive difference⁴. For some schools, the evidence that now exists within the system is an untapped resource that could support them in making more informed decisions. Schools may continue to use their own insights and evidence of what has been effective, but they should also be encouraged to review the external evidence of what has worked in similar contexts.

Schools now have the benefit of a wide range of resources to enable them to make evidence-informed decisions on what to implement. For example, the Teaching and Learning Toolkit on the Education Endowment Foundation's website is a vital resource for schools as it provides an accessible summary of the international evidence on teaching 5–16-year-olds.

3 Explore

An example of an entry from the toolkit and how to navigate this is outlined below:

| Strand | Cost | Evidence strength | Impact (months) |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|-----------------|
| Metacognition and self-regulation | £ £ £ £ £ |  | +7 |
| | This indicates that the cost per pupil of implementing metacognition is relatively low. | The number of padlocks indicates the strength of the evidence. We have very secure evidence about metacognition. | |

This provides useful information to decision makers in schools, but the devil is also in the detail. Owing to the fact that metacognition is the strand that sits very high up, due to the potential impact it can have on pupil outcomes, it has become increasingly popular as an approach to be adopted³. However, without a deeper understanding of what metacognition is and what it would look like when implemented successfully as part of a long-term project, we cannot expect the same impact on pupil outcomes.

Thinking in schools may need to be challenged to avoid statements suggesting that they are ‘doing’ metacognition; to work towards a greater consideration of the principles and practices or ‘active ingredients’ (see next thinkpiece) that characterize their approach; and to encourage schools to consider what they would expect to see happening in classrooms. This type of thinking could also be applied to other strands from within the toolkit such as Feedback, which has many nuances.

3 Explore

The Early Years Toolkit is now supported by the more detailed Guidance Report following a more systematic review of the evidence given the previous unknowns in this area. Many schools might be familiar with the main toolkit, but they may not be as familiar with the Early Years Toolkit. This uses the same format but provides an accessible summary for early years teaching.

Making decisions based on evidence can help us to choose the best bets for our pupils. In order to do this, however, we need to be able to interrogate the evidence itself with a critical eye to ensure that the evidence we are using is credible. The Institute for Effective Education highlights red flags that we need to consider⁴.

These include reviewing:

| Some points to consider | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Author and publication | <p>Is there a vested interest in presenting favourable findings?</p> <p>How far is the author an expert in the field?</p> <p>May there be any form of bias?</p> <p>Is this the opinion of one practitioner in one school?</p> |
| Literature and evidence reviews | <p>Which studies are included, and which are omitted?</p> <p>Are poor quality studies included without critique?</p> <p>Are findings applied beyond the scope of the initial research?</p> |

3 Explore

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Experimental research methods | How big was the sample? Was there an intervention and control group? What were rates of attrition? How far is this reflected in the conclusion? |
| Data analysis and conclusions | Are findings scaled up beyond the scope of what the research demonstrated? Are the limitations of the review referred to? Is correlation confused with causation? |

With the rise and popularity of social media and blogs, it is very easy for us to access reports and sound bites of experiences and approaches used by other schools. Whilst this is important for opening professional dialogue and may help with engagement in reflective practice, we need to read with caution prior to making any decisions about what to implement.

High quality sources such as the guidance reports (produced by the Education Endowment Foundation) are practices with recommendations for classroom practitioners and leadership.

Leaders should be supported to develop their familiarity with trusted sites as a tool to support their decision making. As we move towards becoming an evidence-informed system that outlines the knowledge, and in turn the behaviours, that we expect teachers and leaders to have, we need to consider how we then integrate this research evidence with professional judgement to enable 'evidence-informed practice'⁵.

3 Explore

Through a review of the evidence, we should now have been able to select a particular approach.

Time now needs to be spent considering the extent to which it is feasible within the school context and the extent to which it will align with norms, values and other practices. This is where deep knowledge of the school context and culture, as well as aligned thinking across the senior leadership team, can ensure that there has been sufficient consideration of how practices and initiatives will work **alongside** each other.

When we are armed with strong evidence and enthusiasm for a new initiative, we need to slow ourselves down as without the time, space, motivation and knowledge within the school, we are at risk of introducing an initiative that may gradually fade away. The COM-B model of behaviour referred to within the next thinkpiece may also be a useful resource here for considering whether the factors that need to be present for behaviour change to occur are present.

Questions we might consider:

- How have school priorities been identified and how wide is the distributive leadership that has arrived at this decision?
- How relevant and rigorous is the data that has been used? Are interpretations of this data plausible and credible?
- How have decisions been made about the practices and approaches to implement?
- How far is the evidence base used to steer decision making?
- Is there an open culture of engaging with and critiquing evidence using professional judgement?
- Is sufficient time given to ensuring that the approaches selected are feasible within the school context?

3 Explore



If it has been determined that the particular practice fits and is feasible then the explore phase comes to end with the adoption decision. This is an important stage in the process of implementation but in order for this particular practice or approach to have the best chance of success, thorough consideration of the details and what it will look like, now to be fleshed out through the preparation stages. This begins with the preparation of an implementation plan, which needs to be clear, logical and well specified.

The next thinkpiece will provide further insight into the preparation of a logic model as a tool to support schools practically with preparing for implementation.

4 Final thoughts



- Implementation is fundamental to everything that we do in schools.
- Implementation is a process not an event, and time should be allocated accordingly to ensure the best chance of success.
- The starting point for implementation should be identification of the problem that you are trying to fix.
- Leaders must also make decisions about the practices and policies that will be stopped as well as those that will be introduced.
- The evidence base provides us with the 'best bets' about what has previously worked, and schools should use this to inform decision making.

5 References

1. Sharples, Jonathan, Albers, Bianca, & Fraser, Stephen. (2018). *Putting evidence to work: a school's guide to implementation. Guidance Report*. Education Endowment Foundation: London, UK. [Online] Accessible from: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/Implementation/EEF_Implementation_Guidance_Report_2019.pdf
2. Education Endowment Foundation (2017). *The Attainment Gap*. Education Endowment Foundation: London, UK. [Online] Accessible from: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Annual_Reports/EEF_Attainment_Gap_Report_2018.pdf.
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4. Institute for Effective Evidence (2019). *Engaging with Evidence Guide* [Online] Accessible from: <https://the-ieee.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Engaging-with-Evidence.pdf>.
5. Sharples, J.M. (2013). *Evidence for the Frontline*. London: Alliance for Useful Evidence.

Implementation: Effective school improvement - what research tells us

Thinkpiece 2 - Deliver and sustain

Introduction

The purpose of the thinkpiece is to present NLEs with the key research identified by DfE that best informs school improvement practice.

Before you get started, read through the summary of the implications for NLEs to consider in relation to the findings and research presented.





Scope

- Are you clear about the secure evidence base to inform improvements in how learning happens?
- Who in your own school or MAT exemplifies this work and has the capacity to offer support?
- What can you learn about the school before visiting that is linked to the school's approach?



Explore

- Do the staff agree that the problem being identified is a priority for the school?
- Have the senior leaders shared and communicated their vision to staff?
- Do the staff currently have the knowledge and experience to undertake the change?
- Have senior leaders identified which of their current behaviours have to stop in order for the implementation to be successful?
- Does the school use a common language regarding the priority? Is that common language understood by all?
- Do leaders understand how to make appropriate adaptations to the implementation plan?
- Have leaders analysed the capability of staff, the opportunity for staff to effectively deliver and ensure that staff have the motivation to engage and sustain the implementation plan?



Diagnose

- Have you been able to identify a robust diagnostic process that was used to identify the problems that need to be addressed?
- How accurate and reliable is the data and evidence that you have been presented with?
- Is the school's implementation plan underpinned by reliable evidence, e.g., provided by EEF?
- As an NLE are you confident that the school – or you as an NLE – can identify the specific priority area that is not being addressed?
- Are you assured that the data/evidence you or the school is using is fit for purpose?
- Have you identified and raised risks or weaknesses in use of the assessment data?



Agreeing and Preparing

- What are the specific areas of improvement the school is hoping to address? Do you concur with these?

1 Introduction



Delivery is often where poor implementation begins; 'let's do this, School X did it and it worked'. A focus on delivery too early in the process and when there is no clear problem identified, actions chosen or plan created, runs a huge risk of being a failure. This is not to say that delivery is unimportant (it matters a great deal), but it is a **stage** within an effective implementation cycle not the process itself.

Do the schools in which you work have current plans started with the 'what' rather than the 'why' or the 'how'?

How can you ensure that future plans don't make the same mistake?

Let's find out.

2 Delivery: Supporting Staff

We're going to start by looking at what implementation actually is. It's about identifying Thing X that we need to change in order to achieve Outcome Y. In education, Outcome Y should always be framed in terms of pupils and their learning and progress, for example, wanting to improve GCSE outcomes in science or to increase the number of pupils at greater depth in writing. The route to changing the attainment level though, lies not in the pupils but with teachers. If pupils are not currently attaining in GCSE science or writing at greater depth, one needs to ask what is missing from the current curriculum or pedagogy that is stopping this from happening? Delivery is therefore about focusing on changing behaviour of the staff.

A useful model for thinking about how to implement behavioural change is the COM-B model used extensively in implementation science, as seen in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: The COM-B Model of Behaviour Change¹

2 Delivery: supporting staff

It is essential to support staff in making changes in their behaviour and this can be seen in the following three headings in the table below:

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Motivation | Do the staff agree that the problem being identified is a priority for the school? Do they think the identified actions are likely to result in positive changes for the pupils? This is about leaders being able to both share and communicate their vision to staff. This means being able to say exactly what is being expected of them at a classroom level. |
| Capability | Do the staff currently have the knowledge and experience to be able to put what is being planned into place? If they don't then supporting them will involve both staff training and ongoing coaching. Staff training should be mapped against the Standards for Teachers' Professional Development implementation guidance ² . Staff, like pupils, will learn at different rates so planning delivery involves thinking about how this challenge of different learning will be managed. |
| Opportunity | This can mean the resources to enact the practice (for example, not having a phonics reading scheme would be a barrier to putting SSP into place consistently) but more crucially it often means the time to do it. Too often, development plans mean adding things to an already long list of essentials within a lesson: teaching vocabulary on top of a recall challenge, metacognition, self-reflection and a WWW/ EBI (What Went Well / Even Better If) might mean that no new substantive content can be taught in a lesson. |

So the question to ask of leaders could, therefore, be **which practices are you going to stop in order to give the staff the opportunity to enact this?**

2 Delivery: supporting staff



Supporting staff is more than just providing them with professional learning. It is about sharing the vision effectively, so they know what is being asked of them and why that is likely to work. It is acknowledging that some of them will be able to do this quicker than others and that differential support is available and not seen as a bad thing. It is creating real time and opportunity to do the practice in a meaningful way. So we need to ask ourselves:

- Has adult behaviour change been planned in sufficient detail to support all three elements of the COM-B model in the schools in which you are working, and
- Are there examples from your own school you could use to walk leaders through how to do this?

3 Monitor progress



The purpose of school improvement plans is to make changes to pupil outcomes but there is a danger in jumping to pupils' outcomes too quickly. To go back to the equation '**Outcome Y will improve as a result of Thing X**', our starting point should be '**is Thing X actually happening**'?

These are called process evaluations and are much more commonplace in health implementation than education. They help to identify if and why our plan may not be working. If you click on link 3 in the end of this thinkpiece you can explore this in further detail, but this is an important quote from that publication:

"Process evaluations can also help explain why interventions do not work: for example, the underlying theory of change may be sound, but the intervention may not have been delivered as planned, that is, the delivery had poor fidelity"³.

3 Monitor progress

Once plans are in place, schools need to identify the data they can and will collect as the plan unfolds to check two key elements as seen in the table below:

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Fidelity | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are the elements of the plan in place as they were intended?• Are staff doing them?• Are staff doing them well? For example, are staff teaching three new words per week? Are they teaching the words well? |
| Acceptability | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do stakeholders such as the staff feel about the process?• Is planning for the teaching of the new words taking too much time?• Do they have time in lessons to teach the vocabulary alongside everything else? |

Fidelity matters because if staff are not doing the intervention as it was planned then we may not be able to draw an accurate conclusion about whether or not to continue with elements of the plan.

If no-one is teaching three new words a week, then it will not be surprising if pupils don't have an increased lexicon. It doesn't mean that teaching three words per work 'doesn't work'. Acceptability matters because there may be some unforeseen or unplanned consequences.

3 Monitor progress



We can see that they are teaching the three words per week, but they may tell us that this is at the price of reviewing previously taught content; this might be a desirable outcome happening alongside an undesirable outcome. Measures should be in place to capture both.

If process data shows either that the desired change isn't happening or is resulting in unintended negative consequences then there need to be iterations and adaptations to the plan as we cannot carry on as if all is well.

Is there evidence in schools of collecting process data as part of their routine delivery of school improvement planning?

Is there evidence that they have made adaptations as a result of this?

4 Make adaptations

Adaptations need to be made, and much like teaching a lesson, the more data we collect in the act of delivery, the more we are able to adjust our teaching as we do it; the same applies in improvement delivery. Once again, the COM-B model is useful.

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Capability | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If the desired adult behaviours are not happening, is it because they lack the capability?• Was the original training poor quality?• Too long a gap between the sessions?• If the answer to any of these is yes, then the plan should return to further staff development and we need to ask: do we need further training or additional coaching for key staff? |
| Opportunity | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are they not able to do it because it is taking too long to plan to teach?• Do they lack resources?• Again, if these are the reasons then how can we provide a solution? We could reduce the number of words they have to teach, or provide further resources around teaching vocabulary. |
| Motivation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This may occur because they are unconvinced that this is a problem. They may agree that it is a problem but think that there are other priorities that should be tackled first. They may be unconvinced by the solution. |

4 Make adaptations

Here the actions should be about supporting leaders to share their vision again and take staff through the **theory of change** underpinning it.

- A theory of change can come in many different visual or written forms. But whatever it looks like, it should answer some fundamental questions about your intervention.
- Why is the intervention needed for children's development?
- Who is the intervention for? What are the crucial characteristics of the people who will be taking part?
- How does the intervention work? What is its content, and what will participants do?
- What is the primary outcome for the children taking part, and why is this outcome important to their development?⁴

Intelligent adaptation is an important feature of high-quality implementation. Helping school leaders to plan for data collection that allows them to take appropriate action will be a key area of support from NLEs.

So what do we need to do? One of these could be rewarding good implementation.

5 Reward good implementation

Sustaining change is hard; new initiatives and priorities come along and school leaders are under constant pressure to react and alter what they are doing. However, if data shows that the changes at pupil level are effective then we have to ensure that this work isn't lost in the next plan.

One strategy may be to have development plans that last longer than a single academic year; another may be to keep focus on the strategy in annual plans until there is firm evidence that it is embedded as part of school culture.

Consider safeguarding as an example. Implementation of safeguarding in most schools is excellent. Staff are clear about why it matters; staff are clear about what they must do, required actions are clear and unambiguously described and set out. Training is upfront and revisited everywhere, in posters, in staffrooms, on lanyards. The reminders are everywhere. Safeguarding is returned to every year. Its visibility is kept high.

School improvement could ask for the pedagogical equivalent of this: how can we make our development of pupils' written and spoken language as embedded in our culture as our understanding of safeguarding?

The role of leadership in maintaining this focus on safeguarding is one of the key factors in its implementation success. Leadership drives it forward and keeps its visibility high. It is not treated as 'done'.

Acknowledging and rewarding this is an important part of a leader's role, "to ensure that the changes brought to a school can be sustained, school leaders should continuously acknowledge, support, and reward its use"⁵.

5 Reward good implementation



Finding, sharing and celebrating the implementation successes of any plan sends messages about the value leaders place on the priority. It supports motivation when we celebrate staff success in enacting new knowledge and skills and when we can show that these changes have resulted in better outcomes for the pupils. That our theory of change was right.

Asking leaders to compare their implementation of safeguarding as a model for planning, delivering and sustaining a pedagogic strategy, may help them to unpick how to approach their plans.

6 Final thoughts



- Implementation underpins everything. The best, most evidence-informed strategies will fail if plans don't think about how to give staff the motivation, capability and opportunity to enact them.
- Effective implementation requires process data to be collected so adaptations can be made.
- NLEs can help with both post-mortems ('why have previous plans failed?') and pre-mortems ('what might be the sticking points in this plan?') through the lens of effective implementation.
- Safeguarding implementation can give leaders a useful blueprint for the features of effective implementation.
- Supporting, sharing and celebrating implementation success matters.

We hope you have found this thinkpiece thought provoking. Please have a look at the references below for further reading for this thinkpiece.

7 References

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Implementation: Effective school improvement - what research tells us

Thinkpiece 3: Implementation road map

Introduction

The purpose of this thinkpiece is to present NLEs with the key research identified by DfE that best informs school improvement practice. Please read this summary of the implications for NLEs to consider in relation to the findings and research presented.





Scope

- What does the school leadership think are the barriers to improvement and what have they identified as the solutions to these barriers?
- What does the following information tell you about the school?
 - [Financial Health and Efficiency self-assessment tools](#)
 - The workload reduction toolkit including school-based case studies: [Workload reduction toolkit](#)
- Are the senior leaders aware of and actively engaging with:
 - [The professional standards for headteachers](#)
 - [The standards for teachers](#)
 - [The early career framework?](#)
- Who in your own school/MAT exemplifies this and has the capacity to offer support?



Explore

- Can leaders tell you how they know that the priority they have chosen is the right one? Is there evidence of triangulations? What data is being used?
- Is their interpretation of what the data is telling them plausible?
- Where have the 'solutions' come from? Are they evidence-informed?
- Has the right training been identified? Is the training of high quality?
- Has capacity from within the school been identified to lead the implementation process?
- Have leaders analysed the capability of staff, the opportunity for staff to effectively deliver and ensure that staff have the motivation to engage and sustain the implementation plan?



Diagnose

- Have you been able to identify a robust diagnostic process that was used to identify the problems that need to be addressed?
- How accurate and reliable is the data and evidence that you have been presented with?
- Where applicable, have audits been used from curriculum hubs, i.e., English Hubs, Maths Hubs, etc.?
- Is the school's implementation plan underpinned by reliable evidence i.e., provided by EEF?
- Does the plan make use of available expertise within the school?
- As an NLE, are you confident that the school with can identify the specific priority area that is not being addressed and if not, can you support the diagnostic process area that is not being addressed?
- Are you assured that the data/evidence you/the school is using is fit for purpose?
- Have you identified and raised risks/weaknesses in use of the assessment data?
- For further information on how the implementation process please see: Putting Evidence to Work - [A School's Guide to Implementation | Education Endowment Foundation | EEF](#)



Agreeing and preparing

- What are the specific areas of improvement the school is hoping to address? Do you concur with these?
- Are there specific phases/year groups/departments that require more support than others?
- Has the school got the capacity to support this improvement themselves and if not, where can they source this?
- Is the identified improvement research-informed?
- What DfE-sponsored programmes can the school take advantage of to enhance this improvement?
- What style of teacher professional learning best addresses the need in school?
- Is there a clear agreement between the NLE, Headteacher and Governing Body about who is responsible for making this improvement?
- Is there an improvement action plan in place that addresses any issues identified in the diagnosis phase?

1 Starting points: being clear about the NLE role



System leadership in your NLE context is about both exemplifying and supporting at the individual school level, with accountability and quality assurance on behalf of the wider school-led system. There is a clear potential for these two elements to conflict with each other for all NLEs and a useful starting point for working with schools could be a shared understanding of both the **Nolan Principles** and the **NLE standards**. A balanced position can be reached linking to both the **Headteacher** and **Teacher Standards**.

The 7 Nolan principles:

1. Selflessness
2. Integrity
3. Objectivity
4. Accountability
5. Openness
6. Honesty
7. Leadership¹

1 Starting points: being clear about the NLE role

Make it clear to both parties that the process of working in school support requires all 7 to be present. A school leader's job is not to obfuscate or avoid, and as an NLE neither is it to prejudge or cherry pick.

This might mean robust and challenging conversations are necessary and are central to the process of effective and meaningful **due diligence**. Similarly, the NLE standards² make it clear that the professional role of the NLE is evidence based, focused on better outcomes for pupils and to be a proxy for the wider system. Whilst as an NLE, we understand we are representing not only our school/trust but the whole school system, and clarity for those receiving our support sets a clear message.

In an ideal situation, the school and leadership have the capacity to act upon the joint working and the role of the NLE results in 'strengthen(ed) school leadership by ensuring that leaders articulate an ambitious vision and create a strong and positive culture, which shape all aspects of the school's provision'². Leaders are empowered to take their plans forward, and their **independence and capacity** improve as a result. However, there will also be 'robust' conversations where it becomes clear that the capacity for further improvement is limited and significant action needs to be taken to ensure that this changes. This 'honesty and courage' is a fundamental part of the role of the NLE when undertaking this support. As NLEs, in order for the process to lead to long-term sustained improvement, we are neither **doing for** nor **doing to**, we are all clear that the process is very much based in **doing with**.

Both the Nolan Principles and the NLE standards might form a part of an initial meeting and contact with a school. How could they be used to aid understanding and set parameters and expectations for working together at this point?

2 Phase 1: scoping and exploring

Where do they think the issues and solutions are?

Seeing the scoping and exploring phase as the 'tell me' phase can begin to embed the climate of building trust whilst using NLE skills to track barriers – as an NLE, being the listener, whilst sense checking and recording themes for subsequent tracking: **'what does the school leadership think are the barriers to improvement and what have they identified as the solutions to these barriers?'** NLEs can find out more about the research base for the 4 broad themes of curriculum, teaching, behaviour and school culture, in this learning platform but in addition the following documents provide useful context and reading:

- Financial Health and Efficiency self-assessment tools³
- The workload reduction toolkit including the school-based case studies⁴
- The professional standards for headteachers⁵ and teachers⁶
- The Early Career Framework⁷

The establishment of trust and of a willingness to listen in these first stages will be important and clearly exemplify the objectivity, honesty and openness elements of Nolan but equally an NLE will be listening with a critical ear. The following could be the basis of the questioning used to frame the discussion in this phase:

- Can the leaders tell you **how** they know that this is their issue? Is there evidence of triangulation? Is high quality data being used to drive the identification?
- Is their interpretation of what the data is telling them plausible?
- Does this apply to all the leaders? The wider SLT? The governance leaders? Is there shared understanding of the issues?

2 Phase 1: scoping and exploring

- Are the issues fine-grained enough? White, working-class boys' reading is not the issue described narrowly enough. It is a description of the symptom but not the cause. Inconsistency of SSP in the teaching of early reading resulting in poor decoding for 75% of the PP pupils is a description of the cause.
- Where have the **solutions** to the issues come from? Have they been tried before in this school? Do they have a robust evidence base from outside the school?
- Have solutions to attainment, in particular, been framed through a tiered approach that includes how improving quality-first teaching is being addressed alongside targeted interventions and whole school initiatives such as breakfast clubs?

The solution needs not only to be identified but also delivered and monitored. Having satisfied yourself with the quality of the identification of the issue and solution, how well has the leadership of the school prepared to implement that solution? A sense check on capacity and expertise as two potential barriers is always key. Again, a conversation could be framed around some key questions:

- Has the right training been identified?
- Is the training provided by an organisation with sufficient expertise?
- Does the pattern of training and coaching map against the professional standards for teacher CPD⁸ ?
- Is process evaluation embedded into the plan alongside success criteria that consider the outcomes for children?
- Has capacity from within the school been identified to lead this plan forward?

2 Phase 1: scoping and exploring

The process of hearing what leadership thinks it needs to address could start to reveal a potential theme for the NLE to target once satisfied that it is a priority. Key to this will be evidence about the internal capacity to improve.

| Phase 1 road map | |
|--|--|
| Findings | Response |
| Leaders are able to articulate the barriers to progress | Yes: move to Phase 2 for further sense checking No: flag as a leadership capacity concern. The school is likely to need further support from a Trust; this should be reflected in the delivery plan |
| Leaders are able to articulate the approaches they wish to take to address the concern | Yes: move to Phase 2 for further sense checking No: flag as a leadership capacity concern. The school is likely to need further support from a Trust; this should be reflected in the delivery plan |
| Leaders have identified the capacity and expertise to deliver the plan | Yes: move to Phase 2 for further sense checking No: flag as a leadership capacity concern. The school is likely to need further support from a Trust; this should be reflected in the delivery plan |

2 Phase 1: scoping and exploring

| Phase 1 road map | | |
|---|----------|------------------|
| Findings | Response | |
| <u>Outcomes of Phase 1</u> | | <u>Evidence?</u> |
| Development of relationship of trust | Yes/no | |
| Clear communication about the leadership's current capacity for improvement | Yes/no | |
| Agreed set of actions for Phase 2 from the school | Yes/no | |
| Agreed set of actions for the NLE for Phase 2 | Yes/no | |

3 Phase 2: diagnosing

Are they right?

If Phase 1 is 'tell me', Phase 2 is 'show me'. NLE questioning could now easily move from '**what do they think the issues and solutions are**' to '**are they correct about the issues and solutions?**' This signals the need for NLEs to use their working knowledge to get under the surface of their data and see the primary data rather than the synthesis.

Examples could be:

- How did they arrive at the issue of inconsistency of phonics teaching?
- Did they have an audit or use tools from an English Hub? When?
- Has staffing changed since then?
- Or from secondary, why have they chosen this approach to vocabulary?
- What evidence do they have that vocabulary is an issue and for whom?
- What evidence is there that this way of teaching vocabulary is likely to improve outcomes?

Oversight of a broad range of potential issues, and using time to question and explore these, will be time well spent at this stage. Remember the '**if you always do what you have always done you will always get what you always got**' message – prioritise sense checking all potential barriers.

3 Phase 2: diagnosing

There may be issues that they have not identified such as resource management that are adding to/causing the issues. Or weaknesses in the oversight and quality assurance measures from the leadership team that might mean a 360 of the leadership or Chair of Governors or Trust:

- Are you satisfied that the data is high quality, recent and robust?
- Where applicable, have audits been used from Maths Hubs, English Hubs, Behaviour Hubs, EEF research schools, Ed Tech Demonstrator schools etc?
- Are you satisfied that other possible issues are not being hidden because of a lack of data? If so, how could this be tackled?

At this stage, the challenging conversation could be around the misidentification of the issues. If these are robust, however, the diagnosing phase can quickly move to solutions.

The second element of the diagnosing phase is the **suggested solutions**. Has the school identified issues that have the greatest possible chance of success? This means that they have been shown to work in schools to fix this particular issue:

- Is there an internal evidence base for the solution chosen if they have already begun to use it?
- Is there an evidence base from the external evidence sources such as the EEF toolkits (both the Teaching and Learning Toolkit⁹ and the Early Years Toolkit¹⁰), the Early Intervention Foundation Guidebook¹¹, the EEF Guidance Reports¹², or the database of interventions¹³?

Again, if these elements are not in place, then as an NLE, a robust and honest conversation may be needed to take leaders through the evidence and why their plan may not succeed if not based on some evidence that it is likely to work.

3 Phase 2: diagnosing

The final element within the diagnostic visit is the capacity and training evaluation. Meeting with the team in charge of developing the staff's knowledge and capacity, reviewing the plans for data collection during and at the **end** of the agreed timescales:

- Does the plan make use of the available expertise within the school?
- Does that plan need to make further use of the expertise within the system such as the subject and behaviour Hubs and the EEF research schools?
- Do key staff need to be developed through the NPQ offer via the Teaching School Hubs?
- Does the school require additional capacity beyond this that may need to come from a Trust?

The aim for the end of the diagnostic phase is an agreed understanding of both the issues that need to be addressed within the school and the most likely solutions to these issues.

| Phase 2 road map | |
|---|---|
| Findings | Response |
| NLE agrees with the barriers identified by the school | Yes: move to Phase 3 No: flag this with the leadership team and identify as an issue for Phase 3 |

3 Phase 2: diagnosing

| Phase 2 road map | | |
|--|---|------------------|
| Findings | Response | |
| NLE agrees with the actions to be taken by the school | Yes: move to Phase 3 No: flag this with the leadership team and identify as an issue for Phase 3 | |
| NLE agrees that suitable expertise and capacity has been identified internally or externally | Yes: move to Phase 3 No: flag this with the leadership team and identify as an issue for Phase 3 | |
| <u>Outcomes of Phase 2</u> NLE and leadership agreement on the barriers between the NLE and the leadership NLE and leadership agreement on the solutions between the NLE and the leadership NLE and leadership agreement on expertise and capacity to implement the plan between the NLE and the leadership | Yes/no Yes/no Yes/no | <u>Evidence?</u> |

4 Phase 3: agreeing and preparing

Creating the plan, a road map and reporting the findings

The final phase for the NLE is to work with the school leadership to turn these discussions into an effective **implementation plan**. Examples of implementation plans can be found from the EEF¹⁴.

This phase can be seen as crucial for the modelling of how to write effective plans and to ensure that the school leadership has a robust and realistic understanding of what needs to be done in order for the plan to succeed. This may include approaching a Trust or other external organisations to increase their current capacity and capabilities.

The school leaders need to be able to articulate to the staff and stakeholders in a road map and ask:

- Why is this a priority?
- How will this issue be solved?
- Who will be involved?
- What will it look like (using the 3 tiers if appropriate, in the classroom, in targeted interventions, in the wider school)?
- When will the criteria for success be collected and evaluated?

4 Phase 3: agreeing and preparing

| Phase 2 road map | | |
|---|----------|----------|
| Outcomes | Response | Evidence |
| A clear plan and road map is written by the school with NLE support and QA | Yes/no | |
| Any further external expertise and support have been identified and contacted | Yes/no | |
| NLE ensures that this plan is shared with relevant | Yes/no | |

NLEs can use this overview to help consider their approach to supporting other schools and to help plan for their interactions with Headteachers they are working alongside. This document can also be accessed in the Programme Resources section and is available for you to download and print as with all other resources.

5 Final thoughts



- The role of the NLE in this brokered support is very much focused on exploring and capturing the current leadership understanding and capacity.
- Best-value evidence will always be an ask of all NLEs. Planning a one-place capture and report as part of our QA within the delivery plan, and providing the report to stakeholders at all levels, should also enable capture of any subsequent evidence for NLE conditions of designation.

6 References

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