LEAP (Lincolnshire English Attainment Project): Reduce the attainment gap for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups by improving literacy and communication skills

Overview

In Lincolnshire the attainment and progress of vulnerable groups is low against comparator pupil groups nationally. Compared to comparator groups & national data, looked after children, children with English as an additional language (EAL), disadvantaged pupils and white British boys eligible for free school meals achieve poorly.

The project identified schools in Lincolnshire which had a history of low outcomes and where outcomes remained low in 2016. This project aimed to provide these schools with the tools and knowledge to review and refine their approach to closing the gap in literacy, alongside an evidence-based package of interventions and programmes aimed at supporting disadvantaged children and vulnerable groups.

The project aimed to do this through the establishment and facilitation of professional learning communities (PLCs) empowering schools to reflect on their own practice, and select appropriate interventions and support from a carefully designed menu set around 4 themes; English as an additional language, improving literacy, leadership of quality first teaching, and leadership development and coaching (including governance).

The overarching programme, facilitated through the PLCs will focus on implementing the recommendations within the EEF KS1 and KS2 Literacy Guidance (and Early Year, once available). Each school will receive the support of a system leader.

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

- Holding a launch event was an effective way of ensuring that all stakeholders understood the rationale, process, impact measures.

- Creating opportunities for hub leads to meet each other, share good ideas and ensure consistency of approach and fidelity to the research was vital.

- The PLC model proved to be effective; forming small clusters with local connectivity and relationships.

- Investment in skilled oversight, quality assurance and the use of evidence was crucial.

- Build in steps to ensure you address sustainability, talent spotting and identifying leaders to lead on later delivery and value the importance of a legacy event to identify and share lessons learned and impact with participating schools.

- Set realistic expectations in relation to the times that you expect people to attend sessions, hours in school etc.

- Ensure that leaders are on board and engaged with supporting the implementation of the required improvements/support within their schools.

- Use the research but do not forget good classroom practice and adapting to meet the needs of groups.

- Maintaining consistent professional dialogue has been critical. The use of 'Basecamps' to ensure that research was interrogated prior to sharing through the PLCs was seen to be a crucial part of the effectiveness of the shared messages given through the PLC networks. It gave confidence to Hub Leads and shared good practice, ensuring the meetings with school leads maintained a clear focus and intent.

- The strong accountability, triangulation of discussion and expectation of delivery between the LLE, headteacher and school-based lead ensured momentum was maintained and in-school delivery was effective.

What the project may do differently in the future

- Hold more joined up conversations between all the different groups leads eg create more opportunities for LLE, headteachers, hub leads and literacy champions to meet to ensure that actions are aligned and a collaborative approach to whole school improvement is developed.

- Involve Governors from the outset of the project to ensure school commitment.

- Do not underestimate the time required to plan and prepare. Allow for contingency for additional support or catch up.

- Follow the story of improvement more closely, share it and celebrate it more widely.

- Do not make the paperwork onerous.

- Nail the vision early on and have a strategy to communicate this succinctly and with passion/purpose to every member of staff in a school.

- Having a collaborative approach, distributed roles and utilising appropriate expertise across the system is essential.

- Do not assume the skills of system leaders (SLEs and LLEs) and ensure all system leaders access the training from the outset.

- Be attentive to the timing of the project implementation and plan to fit it into the school's own improvement cycle.

- Project ambitions should align with priorities rather than be shoehorned into an existing school development planning.

- Plan for changes of leadership. When school-based leads or headteachers have changed it has been important to have a robust communication of project ambitions, processes and school actions to ensure the project continued to have an impact in the school. The change in ownership has caused problems in maintaining the rigor of delivery in school.

- Plan time to revisit the project impact beyond the end of the project. Identify what remains in place, which strategies have had an impact and what that impact has been and what impact/change has there been in school culture, attainment etc

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

- Plan for sustaining and scaling an innovation from the outset. Other school improvement CPD adopts a similar model to the LEAP hub model ie a hub lead supporting subject champions with research being used to improve teaching & learning. The PLC model ensures that learning is disseminated into schools so the whole school can support.
- A legacy event was conducted with input and activity on planning for actions for further implementation (deeper or wider).
- Connections and involvement with Locality Leads was in place for more vulnerable schools.
- At the planning stage, sustainability was always a key element. All PLCs were designed around blending CPD into settings rather than bolt-on ideas and activities. The PLC model is about sustainability. School Leads were given the Legacy books for their professional development and to share with colleagues in school. School Leads are part of an e-network that the Hub Lead is maintaining to keep in touch post-project. The intention of this is to share ideas and discuss how strategies that have been adopted as part of the project are going in school.
- The evidence brief of LEAP through the Mobilise English Strand (a project aiming to raise outcomes and aspirations in Lincolnshire), and this will continue into a second-year next year. LEAP is also being offered to schools across Lincolnshire as a paid-for school improvement.