

Improving stubborn reading performance data in Nottingham through evidence based practice and shared accountability

Overview

This was an intensive project to shift stubborn performance data and poor practice by replicating proven improvement frameworks and evidence based interventions underpinned by quality support, purposeful collaboration and shared accountability. The aims of the project were to reduce the attainment gap in reading in EYFS, KS1 and 2, to bring schools in line with the national averages and disadvantaged pupils in line with peers through:

- Consistent application of a series of proven interventions and professional development initiatives that targeted comprehension/inference strategies, phonics and language.
- The creation of a Literacy Hub and cohorts of skilled practitioners by improving specialist content knowledge of reading and pedagogy, combined with quality first teaching and coaching skills.
- Embedding a leadership assessment and accountability framework to target, build and lead resource to impact on reading.
- Integral internal and external evaluation to provide deep understanding of teaching, CPD and leadership practices that impact on pupil performance.

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

It became very apparent from the focus groups and surveys that strong leadership matters. The conditions for effective implementation of the interventions at school-level tend to centre on the capacity and capability of staff and alignment with existing school improvement priorities.

Head teachers and participants felt very strongly about being part of a network and said: “You are buying into a network not just training from a provider.”

Other observations from the evaluation collected to date, were that relationships matter. We found that participants working collaboratively in partnership with like-minded leaders and schools, is a necessary condition for the success of the SSIF project. The opportunity to access other schools and establish new networks for learning and development were perceived by participating schools as an important outcome of the project. One participant said “we will miss the opportunity to check in, see what others are doing and share what we have learnt so far.”

One of the strengths of the programme was that schools found it valuable to work with new partners and said, "We collaborated with schools we wouldn't usually work with. We don't tend to collaborate outside of our own trust."

It is important to be mindful of any other interventions the school might be involved in. Being pulled in too many different directions can have an impact on capacity and enthusiasm across a whole school. Clear dialogue with senior leaders is important at the outset of a project, about their staffs' ability to engage, commit and implement.

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

- Nottingham City Reading Hub was established within the lifespan of the SSIF project. A new Nottinghamshire Literacy Hub has just been commissioned (May 2019) which will be used to forge new links and support. This will provide an opportunity for schools within Nottingham City to connect and collaborate with schools beyond this project. The nearest literacy hubs until this point were Lincolnshire or Doncaster, which are perceived to be too far away to engage with.
- The project has been a catalyst for change and many schools have developed a love of reading with adults too and this in turn has resulted in adult libraries appearing in staff rooms and school receptions. Reading for pleasure groups have been formed across the city for adults to come together to find ways to inspire reading with children.
- We have been able to establish 23 Early Leaders and 23 Reading Specialist Leaders across Nottingham City who are now well placed to improve reading in their schools and to cascade their learning beyond their own schools.
- At the finale, we were able to invite head teachers from schools who were not part of the project to join us so they could benefit from the learning and evidence we presented.