Improving reading outcomes across the primary key stages with a particular focus on reading in the early years, the teaching of comprehension at KS2, and implementation of effective interventions to narrow existing gaps

Overview

This was an intensive programme of support to improve reading outcomes across the primary key stages, delivered in the following areas:

- Development of the capacity and capability to deliver high quality early language/communication skills, early reading in EYFS, and family learning strategies to support the foundations of reading with the aim of improving outcomes in EYFS.
- Development and implementation of a curriculum framework to ensure quality first teaching of reading at all key stages, with a particular focus on reading comprehension and inference.
- Ensuring all schools had access to a range of CPD, high quality texts, and access to effective whole school leadership to support curriculum, teaching and a whole school culture of reading as well as opportunities for pupils to engage in their assessment.
- Implementation of a series of evidence informed interventions to support struggling readers/early language barriers.
- Development of a reading review assessment toolkit which was used to review the effectiveness of reading outcomes, the quality of teaching and leaders, and support systematic driving up standards. This was also used to inform the development of assessment tools linked to the curriculum framework.

The long term aims of the project were to improve EYFS reading and communication outcomes as well as reading outcomes at key stage 1 and 2 and improve the quality of teaching and leadership in reading.

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

Recruiting a Speech and Language therapist for the duration of the project

This in-school support for early language was provided by a speech and language therapist from the same team who provide early language training which meant that in-school practices fully reflected the training accessed by teachers.

Schools believe the speech and language therapist improved practitioner subject knowledge through in-school specialist training and directed school support, including early identification methods which include daily assessment of early language, adult interactions with children and support for the development of the early language environment with a particular focus on how this is used to support early interaction and language.

Early Language intervention Training

Early language intervention training has been one of the key strands of training of the project and was aimed at ensuring all project schools had a least one member of staff trained as an early years champion, who would be able to embed and cascade the learning from this project. The training package chosen was an intensive learning programme over a number of weeks with home study, but was very well supported by schools who committed the CPD investment time for their staff, and staff were fully engaged in the time commitment requirements of the training. The success of the training was demonstrated by the request by schools for an additional cohort of training (20 staff) due to the level of interest and need for the programme. The additional cohort of training was provided and has meant that some of our larger schools have two "Early Language Champions" and this is particularly important where there is provision for 2 year olds. This also adds more sustainability to the Early Language development developments in long-term practice.

Establishing a Reading Framework in every school

Schools were also provided with significant resources and tools to support them in delivering the different strands of teaching reading. The project recognised that although this training was at the core of every project school establishing a structure reading framework within their school, it also recognised that some schools would not have the 'readiness' or capacity to implement change, and this was considered to be a pivotal to the success and long term sustainability of the project. In response to this, all schools were allocated an initial SLE support day to ensure every school had a plan of action/developments to support implementation, and it was via this initial one day of planning, which determined whether a school only needed future monitoring support in relation to implementation or additional SLE expertise and capacity to enable delivery and implementation of the plan. In some cases, where schools had interim or no identified lead to take on the leadership requirements of the project, the SLE would fulfil the key elements of this role working in partnership with teachers.

Resources

As part of delivery the project team became aware that some schools didn't have appropriate books, with the relevant level of engagement linked to early reading skills, and in response to this, through partnership links with other organisations the project team was able to access some initial resources to use, which also reinforced the need for the school to invest in these resources, which for a small number of pupils required limited funding.

Whole school Culture of Reading

Assessing schools views and actions to create a whole school culture of reading were gathered at the beginning of the project both through the reading review and questionnaire. This enabled the project to a) ensure all schools understood that this was integral to the project, and b) gain an initial

understanding of where different schools were at in relation to the achievement of this. The project identified the need to ensure whole school culture of reading developments were linked into the overall project development strands rather than it being seen as a standalone development. An example of this was the development of the environment which was linked into specific developments such as creating an 'Early Language environment' and working with parents to support reading at home, which was linked into the overall reading framework regarding homework.

In addition to this strategies to develop a whole school culture of reading, including children having a love of reading, were shared within the networks and included discussions around engagement of parents, the environment, need to invest in books, the use of texts to stimulate interest, communication and learning and the learning structure of the day to include time for reading. Schools began to take the view that without the time and opportunities for pupils to engage in reading, including opportunities at home; without appropriate reading resources which stimulate interest, engage pupils and support their ongoing reading skills; and without a school environment which puts reading and language development at the heart, then progress in reading – a key skill to success in writing and all other curriculum areas – schools will struggle to raise standards. 'Key Look Fors' were developed to support schools in having clarity regarding what effective practice looks like in relation to both delivery/teaching and leadership. These have specifically described what we are expecting to see or for a school to have in place, to enable them to demonstrate effective delivery/teaching and leadership.

Governance and Management Group

The project had a clearly identified governance and management structure with pre-project determined reporting timelines and remits, and clear expectations regarding agendas and minutes. This has enabled the project to be held to account and for all relevant leaders to be clear about reporting arrangements in relation to key milestones, prioritising and directing of resources in line with project funds available, and also the reporting of challenges which are being faced to ensure appropriate action can be taken to resolve these where possible. The project delivery leadership was appointed at the beginning of the project from a range of interested and experience leaders within the LA and Nottinghamshire Teaching Schools, through an open and transparent interview process. The leaders had particular expertise in – Early Years/ KS1, Whole School Reading and KS2, Inclusion and Interventions, and although not employed to the project on a full time basis they all had to demonstrate their availability to the project in line with the set number of days required per term, also allowing some additional flexibility, if required.

A governance group was identified to include representation from the key strategic SSIF delivery partners, including the lead teaching school (Chair) and two out of the other 4 remaining teaching schools, an LA representative, and 1 external provider (Speech and Language Team). The governance

group met on a ½ termly basis throughout the project to consider and hold the project and the project management team to account in line with their remit and the long and short term project targets. This involved receiving information and progress updates in relation to project activities, key milestones, and finance, along with engaging in decision making to approve the targeting of resources, ensuring openness and transparency, which was particularly important where project schools are from different MATs or from the LA.

Enthusiasm of schools and sharing of their good practice

A key success of the project, not only in relation to supporting delivery and impact of the project but also in supporting sustainability of the project, was the building of engagement and enthusiasm of key leaders within project schools, with an increasing number of school leaders in sharing their practice to support others. This has been achieved by the project delivery leaders and SLEs recognising and valuing the developments leaders and teachers have achieved and by doing this also building their confidence and engagement in the project. The ½ termly networks in early language/reading, phonics and whole school reading have increasingly moved from project led to school led, reflecting the development journey of the project. The enthusiasm of schools and their willingness to share good practice has been demonstrated through their willingness to provide case studies, which will form part of the overall end of project toolkit.

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

Ensuring sufficient System Leaders available

SLEs were recruited through individual Nottinghamshire teaching schools and the LA identifying system leaders with the skills and expertise to support project schools with reading developments. Due to the scale of the project a large number of SLEs with expertise from Early Years to KS2 were required and this led to an initial training issue where there were a large number of SLEs to be trained. Although the training was effective, due to the number of SLEs this did not achieve full consistency of deep understanding of project requirements, and in particular their role in determining individual school needs in relation to a specific aspect of development. This led to project schools initially receiving variable support. Also some system leaders found the project 'not specific enough' to enable them to do their role [they were used to being asked to support the Year 6 teacher and not to identify the support needs and target where most needed]. In other cases some SLEs wanted to deliver support which was not part of the project, and they found this restricted their practice.   In addition to this reliability of the SLEs proved an issue as the SLEs available at the beginning of the project (Year 1) did not necessarily have time available in the second year due to changes in role etc., also as project schools were from across the whole of Nottinghamshire, SLEs were not necessarily based in the areas they were most needed which led to a number of SLEs having time/ capacity but being unwilling to travel to project schools outside of a given radius.

In the future should we require 'System Leaders' in particular areas we would recruitment them on either a fixed term contract or secondment or agree specific days (set days) per week from schools for a fixed period of time. This would mirror what we have achieved with the Speech and Language Therapist and would increase consistency and reliability from day one, and would also impact further on outcomes at the end of the project.

Ensuring effective communication channels and systems regarding booking and arrangements for training

It was communicated to all project schools that the booking arrangements were via their action plan, which specifically identified their training, but in the absence of a specific booking form many schools failed to understand that they were 'booked on the training' and so in some cases did not attend as expected. Also communication and arrangements with regard to training relied on the head teacher identifying the teachers/ leaders to attend and ensuring they were informed of this, which also did not happen as effectively as required. Although changes took place in relation to communication of bookings and arrangements throughout the project, the project was on the back foot of this and were trying to 'catch up' and ensure schools were effectively informed. We also had to build in additional communication to ensure all relevant partners e.g. lead partners in MATs/English directors wanted to know which training was being accessed, and in some cases were key to ensure the relevant school was engaged. In the future we would ensure we placed greater emphasis at the beginning of the project on establishing these procedures and systems and communicating them and ensuring all relevant contact details were available so that the full range of partners had access to the information.

Establishing a clear ICT infrastructure for the project

The project team included a FHT/Cotgrave Candleby Lane School (CCLS) based member of staff who was responsible for all formal communication via the CCLS/ FHT secure ICT system, and for storing centrally all relevant documentation. However, end of project evaluation identifies that the project team would have found it much easier to have a common ICT system for sharing documentation and completion of documentation etc. and for email communication. Although this did not directly impact on the overall outcomes of the project, it is felt that this is something that would be considered with any other future project.

Engagement of relevant MAT leads in relation to relevant project schools

Although MATs, the LA and other relevant partners, including governors, were invited to the project launch event, the initial project communication channels were established between the project team and the 34 schools. What became evident early in the delivery of the project was that some aspects of the project could be conflicting with or overlapping with practices of the MAT any project school was linked to. In response to this additional communication channels were developed and implemented, early on in the project, with relevant MAT leaders and this minimised any future overlap or

conflict. The only barrier that remained throughout the project was the need for the project to be sensitive regarding project targets to ensure project schools did not end up with three sets of targets – the school target, the MAT target and the project target, and therefore monitoring of schools in line with project targets was linked into the overall monitoring of their school and MAT target and how this related to project expectations. The key focus of this was to ensure that the project supported and enhanced what schools, MATs, and the project were aiming to achieve without building in additional layers of bureaucracy – ensuring that current systems and processes are enhanced to support what needs to be achieved rather than conflicting with it.   In the future, on setting up communication channels we will ensure communication channels and agreements with relevant key partners are established at the beginning of the project.

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

The project, although focused on achieving demonstrable impact, was more importantly focused on changing or improving the quality of the leadership and teaching and learning of reading, to ensure that a) outcomes/impact would be achieved during the project, and b) further outcomes/impact will continue to be achieved beyond the project. Changing the culture of reading, including the reading environment and fostering a love of reading was key and something that will have a lasting impact beyond the end of the project.

A key sustainable project action was to ensure that every school had a clear framework for supporting the teaching of reading which would be effectively led and monitored to ensure year-on-year impact

More recently an English Hub has been designated through Flying High Trust (the lead organisation for the SSIF Forever Reading Project) and developments are currently taking place to enable the English Hub to continue training, support and bespoke developments for the project schools which are not yet within 10% of national or where there still remains significant teaching or leadership concerns, working in partnership with the relevant organisation - the LA or Multi-Academy Trust. This project has also played a key role in establishing models of working within the context of a diverse landscape which will support the English Hub in being able to work with schools from different MATs and the LA and in partnership with the relevant English Leaders within these organisations, as the project has been a joint LA and MAT project and the benefits of working together to achieve a common goal have been recognised.

To support sustainability of the project developments and learning for other Nottinghamshire Schools and Schools beyond Nottinghamshire - A toolkit of the key resources, project 'Look Fors' and Individual Project School Case Studies has been developed and will be circulated to all Nottinghamshire Primary Schools, relevant Nottingham Schools and the LA and Nottinghamshire MATs at the end of July 2019. The developments of the project are also currently being reviewed and linked into the English Hub offer from September 2019, as part of the transition from the reading project into

the English Hub. The early language and phonics champions, and outstanding reading leaders are being linked into the English Hub to enable their skills and expertise to impact on other schools beyond the project.