

To improve outcomes in literacy across KS2 with a focus on diminishing the differences for vulnerable groups through an evidence informed professional development programme

Overview

Literacy outcomes for disadvantaged children at KS2 in Doncaster, Barnsley and Sheffield, were significantly low at the end of 2015/16, particularly in reading and EGPS where gaps to national are wide. In addition, improving outcomes in literacy at the end of KS2 and the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, were regional priorities and priorities for the Doncaster opportunity area. A diagnostic process was used, working with Local Authorities, to identify target schools - all had literacy outcomes in need of improvement based on national attainment and/or progress measures for 2016/17 and/or 2017/18.

We used the Education Endowment Foundation's 'Improving Literacy in KS2' guidance and associated recommendations, as the basis for school to school support and professional development. As a Research School, we worked with the EEF as part of their national literacy guidance working party to develop specific programme content, resources and tools and to draw on national best practice from schools within the Research School Network nationally.

We identified high performing lead schools and system leaders within them to work with literacy leaders in target schools. There was 4 programme delivery strands relating to: improving pupils' language capability to support their reading and writing; improving reading capabilities and comprehension, improving writing skills and improving literacy assessment, diagnostics and intervention. Literacy leaders, through the development of change teams within their schools, worked alongside lead practitioners to drive improvements which improved the quality of teaching and learning and the literacy curriculum. Targets for cohorts and individual pupil groups were set and monitored rigorously, with additional bespoke support available for identified schools. The programme aimed to improve outcomes in literacy (reading, writing and EGPS) with gaps closing for disadvantaged pupils.

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

The Research School commissioned an external process evaluation and a number of active ingredients were identified as part of this process:

- (1) The programme design - underpinned by the DFE standard for teacher's professional development, the EEF Implementation Guidance report and the EEF KS2 Literacy Guidance report. Fidelity to the evidence and EEF recommendations has been essential to avoid professional bias. Effective adult learning processes were modelled and then used by schools to disseminate learning from the face to face days.
- (2) The high quality planning and facilitation of face to face days with

expert input from colleagues from across the country (mainly through the Research School Network).

- (3) The quality and impact of follow on support from system leaders - this was rated most highly by participating schools and identified as an essential element of the programme
- (4) The availability of a wide range of additional tools and resources including audit tools, evaluation questionnaires, diagnostic tools. Some of these were bespoke and designed specifically for the programme. All resources are available on an on-line learning space accessible to all participating and partner schools. Schools have also contributed to this uploading their own resources and tools which may be useful to other schools.
- (5) Programme evaluation - this was designed from the outset with specific audit tools and questionnaires to ensure a secure baseline and precise ongoing monitoring and evaluation - see above for Guskey process. The role of operational leads was crucial in monitoring school participation, engagement and impact. Each operational lead was responsible for a group of 5-6 schools and their supporting SLE and were able to respond to any issues, provide additional support and challenge where required. In addition, the external programme evaluation provided an extremely useful external perspective, enabling us to respond and review/reshape aspects of the programme.

What the project may do differently in the future

Doncaster Research School by Partners in Learning has secured funding from the Doncaster Opportunity Area to deliver the programme to a second cohort of 15 Doncaster schools. In addition, the programme has been used as a core Research School Network programme (Improving Literacy Outcomes at KS2) and we have led and delivered 'train the trainer' events nationally. We have also delivered the programme for schools in the Stoke Opportunity Area. It has therefore been important for us to rigorously evaluate the programme and undertake a full programme review. Both internal and external evaluation outcomes have been used to re-shape the programme.

Changes which have been made include:

- (1) Delivering the face to face days closer together at the start of the programme then undertaking the baseline evaluations - this will enable schools to make more informed and accurate baseline evaluations
- (2) Providing more coaching training for supporting system leaders to ensure a more consistent approach
- (3) Ensure that those leaders attending face to face days are able to affect change and make decisions in school affecting the literacy curriculum