

# The EEF guide to becoming an evidence-informed school governor and trustee



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# Introduction

**School governors and trustees play a crucial role in improving school performance by providing support and challenge to the headteacher and their leadership team. It is essential, therefore, that you can access and use the best available evidence-based resources.**

This can sometimes be difficult. Many governors and trustees are short on time and do not have a background in teaching.\* It can also be hard to know where to find jargon-free and trustworthy information.

This is where the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) can help.

We are an independent charity, set up in 2011, which has since been designated by the government as the What Works Centre for Education.

Our mission is to break the link between family income and educational achievement.

To this end, we support schools (as well as early years and post-16 settings) with two critical aspects of their work:

- improving outcomes for 3-18 year-olds by increasing the quality of teaching and learning, and
- closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged young people and their peers.

We do this by **generating evidence** of 'what works' to improve teaching and learning, funding rigorous trials of high-potential programmes and approaches.

We then support schools, as well as early years and post-16 settings, across the country in **using this evidence** to achieve the maximum possible benefit for young people.

Together with partners across the education sector, we have created a range of evidence-based resources, training, and support to achieve these goals.

All our resources are freely available online on the EEF website. This guide is designed to introduce you to some of them and to help you get the most out of them.

*Note on the difference between school governors and trustees: if your school is maintained by the local authority or is a faith school you will be known as a governor; if you govern on the board of a single- or multi-academy trust (MAT) you will be a trustee.*

## 5 THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT THE EEF:

1. Over **13,000 schools** in England have volunteered to take part in an EEF trial.
2. Since 2011, we have funded work with more than **ONE MILLION** children and young people, including 340,000 eligible for free school meals.
3. Up to **two-thirds** of all senior leaders in schools use our Teaching and Learning Toolkit to inform their decision-making.
4. The EEF's most promising programmes funded so far enabled students to make **+3 months** of additional progress in a year; these projects particularly benefited students eligible for free school meals, who made on average **+4 months' additional progress**.
5. The lifetime gains for students taking part in EEF trials amount to **three times** the cost of delivering and evaluating them, according to independent analysis.

\* A recent survey by the National Governance Association (NGA) of over 5,000 governors found that only 35% of respondents were currently or previously educational professionals; and only 52% said their role was manageable within 10-20 equivalent days per year.



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# How research evidence can help your school

“ Research can never replace professional experience and teachers’ understanding of their schools and students.

But it can be a powerful supplement to these important skills.

Used intelligently, evidence is the teacher’s friend. ”

**Sir Kevan Collins**

Chief Executive, Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)

We believe evidence is crucial in unlocking the potential of all schools to do better. For example, here are three ways evidence can help address big worries for school leaders right now:

- **Money is tight.** Evidence can help you spend smarter and capture the maximum benefit of your current investment.
- **Capacity is stretched.** Evidence can help you learn from the experiences of other schools which have already tested different approaches.
- **Workload is a concern.** Evidence can help you focus your school’s efforts on things which are likely to have the greatest impact.

This guide is designed to offer you a quick way into the evidence the EEF makes freely available to all schools. We hope our resources will help you to provide better support and challenge to your school’s leadership.

Of course, every school is different. Evidence can show you what has previously worked elsewhere – it cannot offer guarantees that it will work in your context. There are no easy answers, no simple recipe for success.

However, it’s all too easy to forget that there are more similarities between schools than there are differences. By understanding what approaches have worked well in the past in other settings, you are in a better place to think through what is likely to work well for your school.

Think of evidence as offering “best bets” – valuable starting points for a better-informed discussion in your governing board about how your school can improve.



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# How well are pupils achieving in your school?

A good education, with the qualifications to show for it, can transform lives for the better.

Conversely, young people who finish their studies without attaining the expected standards will struggle both in further study and the world of work.

## Why we focus on economic disadvantage

The EEF's focus is on the attainment gap between children and young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and their fellow students.

We use eligibility for free school meals (FSM) as the best available measure of economic disadvantage.

These charts show the national attainment gap between FSM-eligible pupils and all other pupils.

As can be seen, both at Key Stage 2 (11 year-olds) and Key Stage 4 (16 year-olds) this attainment gap is significantly larger than the gap for gender or first language.

There is a larger attainment gap for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) than any other group. This is linked closely with economic disadvantage: 26% of pupils with special educational needs are eligible for free school meals compared to 12% of pupils without special educational needs.

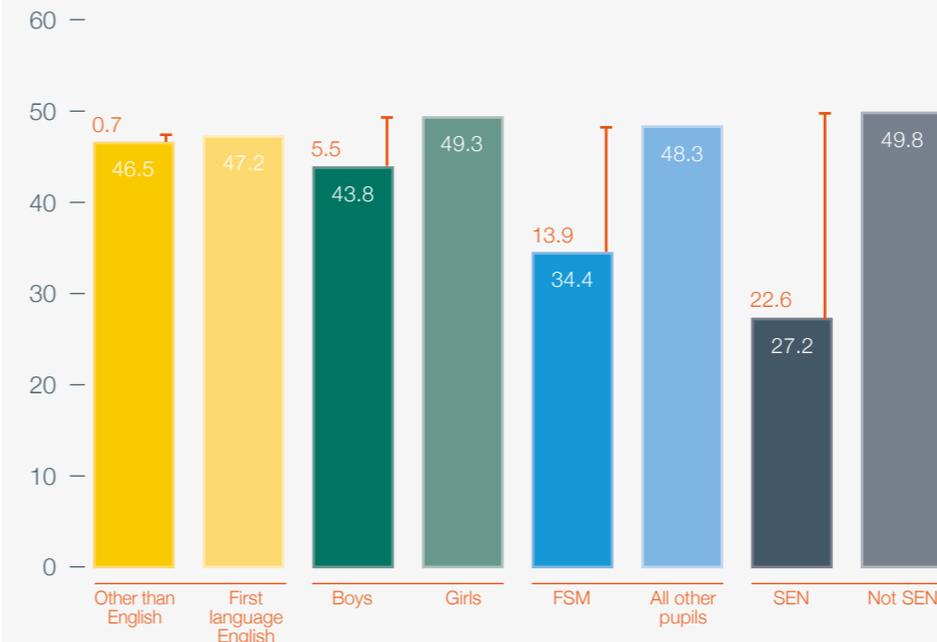
### Attainment gap, age 11, by different pupil characteristics:

Percentage reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics for different groups: England, 2018 (state-funded schools)



### Attainment gap, age 16, by different pupil characteristics:

Average Attainment 8 score for different groups: England, 2018 (state-funded schools)



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# How well are pupils achieving in your school?

## → Next steps:

1. Do you know the attainment gaps in your school? You can ask your school for this data from Analyse School Performance (ASP), formerly RAISEonline, used by Ofsted inspectors. There is also the Fisher Family Trust's (FFT) governor dashboard, developed with the National Governance Association (NGA) and Wellcome. Which groups of pupils in your school do the data suggest need particular support?
2. Does your school have an action plan to improve overall attainment while also closing its gaps?
3. How do you as governors and trustees monitor the school's progress in closing your attainment gaps?

## ➤ Further reading:

- The NGA has published a number of guides to help governors get the most out of ASP and FFT on its website, some of which are free, [here](#). The Key also has guidance available [here](#).



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# How well are pupils achieving in your school?

## Understanding the national attainment gap

### It starts early...

The attainment gap begins in the early years and is already evident when children begin school aged 5. The gap then grows wider at every following stage of education.

### ... grows bigger over time...

This results in a *majority* of 19 year-olds who have been eligible for free school meals leaving education without 5 good passes in their GCSEs, including English and maths.

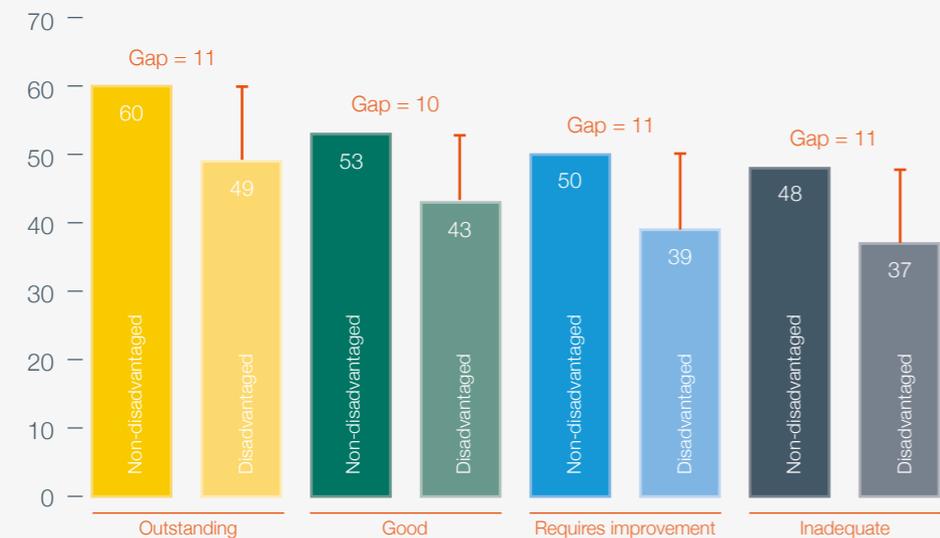
Without these qualifications, achieving their goals in the world of work or further study will be much harder.

### ... and is a problem in ALL types of schools

The attainment gap is found in all types of schools. For example, the graph below shows that the gap is all but identical across all four Ofsted-rated categories of secondary school, from 'Outstanding' to 'Inadequate'.

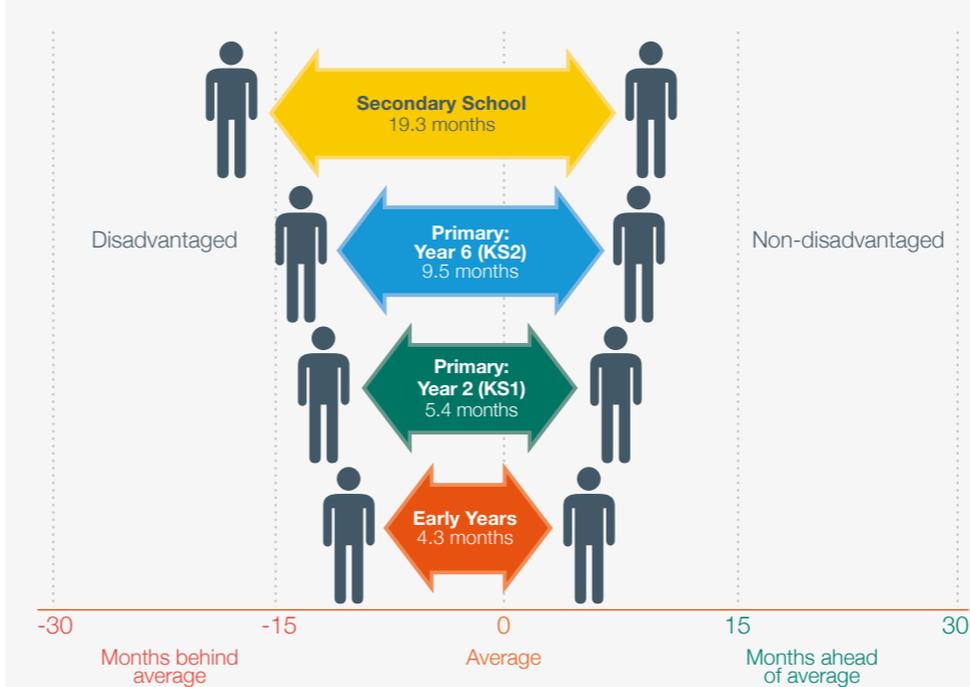
### GCSE Attainment 8 scores for disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils

By school overall effectiveness judgement



Source: Chart supplied to EEF by Ofsted (2017)

### All disadvantaged pupils



Source: 'Closing the Gap? Trends in educational attainment and disadvantage', Education Policy Institute (July 2017)

### Further reading:

The EEF has published a report – [Closing the Attainment Gap](#) – which highlights what we believe to be the key issues, and how this informs our practical work with teachers and senior leaders.

Other useful and interesting publications include:

- '[Closing the Gap? Trends in Educational Attainment and Disadvantage](#)' from the Education Policy Institute (EPI); and
- '[Spotlight on disadvantage: the governing board's role in spending, monitoring and evaluating the pupil premium](#)' from the National Governance Association (NGA).



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# How well are pupils achieving in your school?

Often, when trying to 'benchmark' how well your school is doing academically, its performance is compared to local schools, or other schools in an academy chain, multi-academy trust (MAT), or other network.

However, these comparisons can be unfair because we are not necessarily comparing like with like. In particular, it is important when assessing a school's results to consider the backgrounds of the pupils who attend.

The EEF's [Families of Schools database](#) is a free, online tool which helps you to find out (1) which school in the country is most like yours, and (2) what your school's position is within a "family" of 50 schools which have pupils with similar characteristics.



This takes into account the prior attainment of pupils, as well as the proportions eligible for the Pupil Premium, and with English as an additional language (EAL).

Our purpose in making this data easily accessible is about supporting schools to understand their own context by:

- Providing manageable school-level targets on the way to closing the national attainment gap;
- Identifying schools with similar challenges that can provide support and guidance.

Comparing your school to the other, similar schools in your "family" provides you with a much better picture of how well your school is performing.

For example, it might be that, although your school has better results than the national average, it is actually under-performing when compared to schools with similar intakes of pupils. Or it could be the other way round, of course!

## Next steps:

1. Download your school's [Families of Schools database](#) entry
2. Email your headteacher to check they are aware of it and request an item on the agenda of your governors' meeting for the headteacher to talk through your school's Families of Schools data.
3. If there are schools in your "family" achieving better results for their disadvantaged pupils, suggest that your school's leadership team contacts them to arrange a visit.



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# How effectively is your school spending its money?

“ The hallmark of an advanced education system, whether at school level or national level, is how it deploys its resources towards the most vulnerable. ”

**Marc Rowland**  
Rosendale Research School, London

After a long period when school budgets have grown, or at least been maintained, funding is starting to get tighter. Getting value for money is going to be critical to schools' ability to secure improvements in pupil outcomes.

## Pupil Premium funding is a valuable focus...

Additional public money, the Pupil Premium, is available to all maintained schools in England specifically to support the learning of disadvantaged pupils, from reception to Year 11, in order to close the attainment gap between them and their classmates.

Schools receive funding for each pupil registered as eligible for free school meals (FSM) at any point in the last 6 years:

- **£1,320 per annum** for Pupil Premium-eligible pupils in reception to year 6
- **£935 per annum** for Pupil Premium-eligible pupils in years 7 to 11
- **£2,300 for looked-after children** (LAC) and previously looked-after children  
(*Figures for 2018-19*)

The Pupil Premium represents a considerable amount of discretionary funding for most schools. It has been guaranteed in cash terms by the current government to 2022. The average value per school in 2018-19 is:

- Primary school = **£78,254**
- Secondary school = **£171,322**

How your school uses its Pupil Premium funding is entirely up to the school, though it is required to publish a strategy for its use and impact. The Department for Education has published [guidance on this for schools here](#).

While we do not know for sure how much of an impact the Pupil Premium has had on disadvantaged pupils' attainment, we do know it has increased schools' focus on the gap. Before it was introduced, 57% of school leaders said they provided specific support for their most disadvantaged pupils; this rose to 94% afterwards, according to a [survey](#) by the National Audit Office.

## ... And investing in quality of teaching matters most

Valuable as the Pupil Premium is in helping schools to target support towards their disadvantaged pupils, it will represent a relatively small part of your school's overall budget. And, though the Premium is ring-fenced, this should not cause it to become isolated from the core business of schools.

Quality of teaching is one of the biggest drivers of pupil attainment, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. There is a risk of being obsessed with add-on interventions. While there is undoubtedly a place for targeted support, high-quality teaching is a powerful driver of educational equity.

It is crucial, therefore, that if your school wants to both raise attainment for all young people and to close the gap for disadvantaged pupils it focuses its resources (not just the Pupil Premium) on well-evidenced ways of improving teaching.

These include tried and tested continuing professional development (CPD) for staff and effective approaches to pupil feedback.

### EEF's 4 tips for maximising the impact of your Pupil Premium:

1. Use evidence of 'what works' to inform your decision making, focusing on the areas that make the biggest difference to pupil outcomes.
2. We recommend a tiered approach to spending, focusing first on improving the quality of teaching, followed by targeted support, then whole-school strategies.
3. As part of an overall strategy to improve the quality of teaching, using some of your Pupil Premium to recruit and retain teachers is justified.
4. Disadvantaged pupils who achieve highly in primary school are much less likely than their peers to convert this potential into excellent grades at secondary school – so ensure all Pupil Premium-eligible students receive some targeted support, including those who are high attainers.



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# How effectively is your school spending its money?



“ Have decisions been made with reference to external evidence, for example, has the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Toolkit been used to determine pupil premium spending decisions? How will the board know if current approaches are working and how will the impact of decisions and interventions be monitored using appropriate tools such as the EEF DIY evaluation guide? ”

**Department for Education Governance handbook:** for academies, multi-academy trusts and maintained schools (2017)

And, as part of an overall strategy to improve the quality of teaching, schools should also regard it as absolutely legitimate to use some of their Pupil Premium to recruit and retain teachers.

By being clear about the issues facing your disadvantaged pupils, using evidence to identify the strategies most likely to work, and thinking hard about how these are implemented, your school will be in the best position to deploy its limited resources for maximum impact.



## Further reading:

- Further EEF guidance on the Pupil Premium can be found [here](#).
- Department for Education guidance on schools' Pupil Premium strategy is [available here](#).
- The National Governance Association has published guidance on assessing the impact of the Pupil Premium, [available here](#) (NGA members-only)



## Next steps:

1. Work with school leaders to put together an evidence-informed Pupil Premium strategy, allowing school leaders to write the strategy, but taking the lead in signing off the strategy.
2. Support - and challenge - your senior leadership team throughout the academic year to ensure your school's Pupil Premium funding is being spent in evidence-informed ways (see 'Top tips for supporting effective teaching', previous page).
3. Identify how your school's governors and trustees are taking strategic responsibility for monitoring the impact of Pupil Premium spending on pupil progress, including agreeing measures of success at the outset.
4. Ensure closing the attainment gap is a key part of your overall School Improvement Plan.



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# How does your school support effective teaching and learning?

It can seem daunting to governors and trustees, especially those without professional experience in the classroom, to ask questions of senior leaders about the quality of teaching in your school and its impact on pupils' learning. However, it's essential for good governance that you feel equipped to do so – and to challenge when necessary.

## Understanding the evidence of 'what works'

The EEF offers user-friendly resources which can help you.

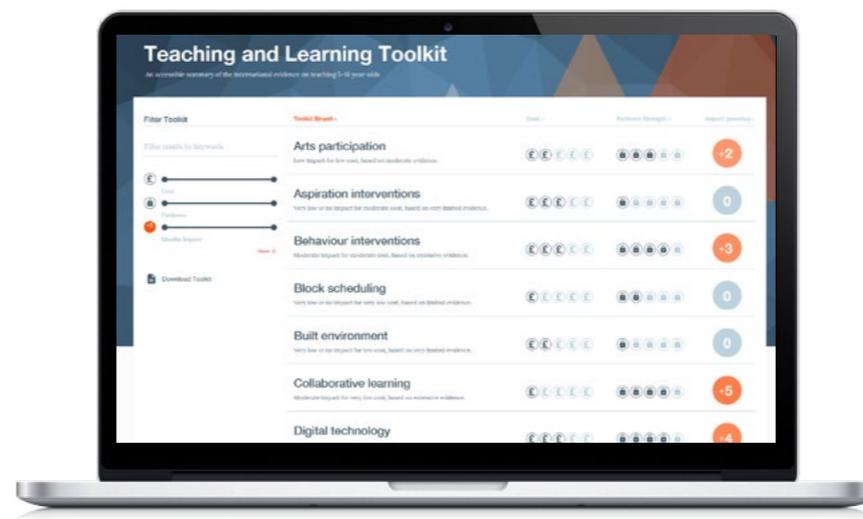
The 'Big Picture' section of our website pulls together evidence and resources in 14 high-priority themes selected in collaboration with teachers. Taken together, these provide a rich picture of the developing evidence base on how to improve the attainment and wider outcomes of children and young people.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>B</b> Behaviour                              | <b>M</b> Mathematics                                 |
| <b>C</b> Character and essential life skills    | <b>O</b> Organising your school                      |
| <b>De</b> Developing effective learners         | <b>P</b> Parental engagement                         |
| <b>Ey</b> Early years                           | <b>Fe</b> Post-16                                    |
| <b>E</b> Enrichment                             | <b>S</b> Science                                     |
| <b>F</b> Feedback and monitoring pupil progress | <b>Sn</b> Special educational needs and disabilities |
| <b>L</b> Language and Literacy                  | <b>St</b> Staff deployment and development           |

Our most popular resources—used by up to two-thirds of schools—is our [Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#). This offers an accessible overview of the international evidence on teaching 5-16 year-olds.

Together with its [Early Years](#) companion, the EEF Toolkit aims to guide schools towards the “best bets” for improving pupils' attainment on the basis of research of what has (and also what hasn't) worked in the past. Each of the 30+ topics covered in the Toolkit briefly answers four key questions:

- How effective is it?
- How secure is the evidence?
- What are the costs?
- What should your school consider?



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# How does your school support effective teaching and learning?

“ The EEF has ensured that teachers in this country have much greater access to high-quality research than ever before. ”

**Nick Gibb MP**  
Minister of State for  
School Standards

Overall, the messages in the EEF Toolkit are encouraging for schools. The evidence shows that they can make a difference to pupils' learning, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. There are, however, no guarantees that what has been shown to work elsewhere will work for your school. This is why it is always important for governors and trustees to ensure there is effective monitoring and evaluation of new programmes and approaches introduced into schools.

The EEF Toolkit is used by up to two-thirds of senior leaders to inform their decision-making, according to the latest surveys – so it is important you understand if/how your school is using it so that you are able to hold them effectively to account.

## → Next steps:

1. Read the EEF's 'Big Picture' themes to get an overview of the issue, the evidence, and the resources available.
2. Visit the EEF [Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#). Select a handful of topics to read – ones which interest you, or where you find the impact rating surprising – to get a flavour of it.
3. Ask your school's senior leaders if/how they are using the EEF Toolkit to inform the Pupil Premium Strategy and the School Improvement Plan.
4. Check your fellow governors and trustees know about the EEF Toolkit. This is especially important if they have teaching and learning responsibilities.

## Use evidence-based guidance to provide practical support and challenge

For greater depth on key issues for schools, turn to the EEF's [guidance reports](#). These are based on rigorous reviews of the best available research evidence in key areas, such as literacy, maths, science, and metacognition.

The EEF then works with a panel of teachers, academics and other experts to strip out the jargon and technical information and translate each review's findings into clear and actionable recommendations that teachers can put to use in their classroom.

EEF guidance reports are written primarily for practitioners to support the classroom teaching decisions they make. While governors and trustees will not wish to get too involved in operational decisions, you can ensure that your school leadership team are aware of, and have seriously considered, the latest evidence-based guidance.

Each EEF guidance report is accompanied by a range of additional resources designed to support your school's successful implementation of the recommendations, such as self-assessment audit tools, staff observation tools, and draft school policies. Many of these have been developed by [EEF Research Schools](#), a national network of schools which support the use of evidence to improve teaching practice.

Some aspects of the reports are directly relevant to the strategic decision making that governors and trustees focus on, as the two examples on the next page highlight.

## 📌 Further reading:

- Read more about [using the EEF's Toolkits here](#) or watch this [video explainer](#) by its lead author, Steve Higgins, Professor of Education at Durham University.



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# How does your school support effective teaching and learning?

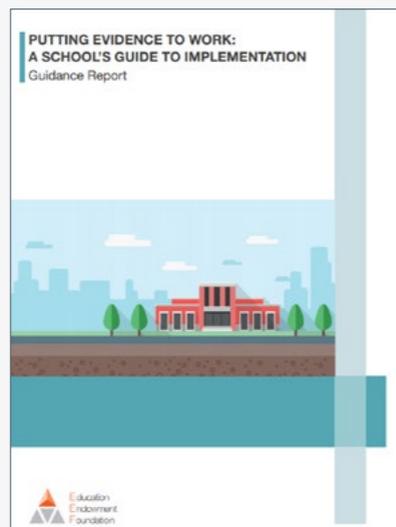
## Putting Evidence to Work: A School's Guide to Implementation

Implementation is what schools do to improve: to change and be more effective. Good and thoughtful implementation of a new teaching and learning strategy can mean the difference between it succeeding or failing. It really is that stark.

With so much at stake, it is absolutely crucial schools give their innovations the very best chance by working carefully through the who, why, where, when, and how of managing change. This EEF guidance report frames implementation in four stages that can be applied to any school improvement decision.

Governors and trustees can play an important role in supporting effective implementation, including by:

- fostering a healthy leadership environment in which staff feel trusted to try new things and make mistakes, safe in the knowledge that they will be supported with high-quality resources, training, and encouragement to try again and keep improving;
- ensuring senior leaders begin with clear definition of the problems that need solving and the setting of clear priorities for improvement;
- specifying a tight area of focus for improvement that is amenable to change. This means not defining the problem too broadly. For example, a summary of Key Stage 2 data for an incoming Year 7 cohort may indicate that the average reading score is low, but a more detailed analysis might reveal that pupils' decoding skills are good but their comprehension is poor. Questions to consider include:
  - What does local data and experience tell us about the greatest barriers to driving up standards?
  - How can we define and measure those barriers?
  - What do we hope will change?
  - And how will we monitor and evaluate whether it did, in fact, change?



## Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants

380,000 teaching assistants (TAs) are employed across the country, at an annual public cost of some £5 billion, but previous research had shown that in many schools they were not being deployed in ways that improve student outcomes. Indeed, for students from poorer backgrounds the impact of TAs was too often negative.

However, EEF trials have demonstrated that, when they are well-trained and used in structured settings with high-quality support and training, TAs can make a noticeable positive impact on pupil learning.

To achieve this, though, it might be that the roles of some TAs in your school need to change wholly or in part.

This report outlines a number of tools and strategies that schools have successfully used to review the use of TAs and develop more effective practices. As changes to the deployment of TAs could have impacts on budgets and staffing, this should involve the governing board.



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# How does your school support effective teaching and learning?

“ The EEF’s approach to experimental design, with rigorous power analyses before work is funded, is state-of-the-art. The work that the EEF is doing is world-leading, in terms of impact and value for money. ”

Professor Dylan Wiliam

## ➔ Next steps:

1. Is your school leadership team considering improvements to literacy, maths or science teaching? Send them a link to the relevant EEF [guidance report](#) and ask how they’re incorporating its recommendations.
2. Look through your school’s School Improvement Plan to see how it could be strengthened through better use of evidence and a tighter focus on effective implementation.
3. Suggest that the school leadership team uses one of the self-assessment tools, for example in ‘[Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants](#)’, to review its current practice.

## ➔ Further reading:

- EEF Blog: [Actionable evidence - the process behind our guidance reports](#)
- National Governance Association (NGA) has produced a series of questions on the curriculum [available here](#).
- Wellcome has published online, ‘[Questions for Governors: a framework to facilitate discussions between governors and school leaders](#)’

## Invest first in the quality of teaching at your school...

We said it earlier, but it cannot be stressed enough: high-quality teaching is a powerful driver of educational equity. Governing boards play a key role. First, in ensuring recruitment and retention of the best possible staff. Secondly, in valuing the importance of professional development.

This isn’t just about making sure there is sufficient provision in your school’s ‘Continuing professional development’ (CPD) budget line.

More importantly, it is about ensuring the governing board and senior leadership team are clear about their priorities for school improvement; that these are explicitly linked to teachers’ personal development plans with the purpose of significantly enhancing pupil learning; and that they are then given the leadership support they need to implement and embed change in the school.

The type and quality of CPD that schools use really matters when it comes to improving teacher quality and pupil attainment. Usually, effective CPD is:

- supported by the school’s leadership,
- sustained over at least two terms,
- includes expert input, peer collaboration, and opportunities for teachers to consider and experiment with their learning and get feedback on their work.

All the programmes evaluated by the EEF with positive impact for pupils have high-quality staff training at their heart. The single biggest reason programmes evaluated by the EEF do not work is because of poor implementation, usually linked to challenges with training.



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# How does your school support effective teaching and learning?

## →→ Next steps:

1. Ask for a discussion at your governing board of your school's recruitment and retention success. Are you getting – and keeping – the teachers you need to improve pupil learning? If not, consider if using some of your Pupil Premium funding could make a difference.
2. Ask to see your school's programme for professional development. Is it clearly linked to the School Improvement Plan with the purpose of improving pupil learning?
3. Is there more the governing board can do to emphasise its commitment – to the senior leadership team and to the wider teaching staff – to investing in high-quality CPD and to supporting the changes which flow from it?

## ➔ Further reading:

- The EEF's 'Big Picture' theme [Staff deployment & development](#) offers an overview of the evidence on improving the quality of teaching through staff deployment and CPD.
- The Teacher Development Trust has carried out a review of the international research – [Developing Great Teaching](#) (see following page) – into what constitutes effective professional development for teachers.

## ... then think hard about what additional targeted support is needed

While high-quality teaching is the priority, there undoubtedly remains a place for targeted support, particularly for those pupils who are struggling.

Targeted small-group and one-to-one interventions have the potential for the largest immediate impact on attainment. But—be aware!—not all will work. Or, even if they work, might have unintended consequences. For instance, removing a child for a literacy catch-up intervention during timetabled maths lessons might boost their literacy at the expense of their numeracy. This is why it is so important to carefully monitor the impact of new approaches.

It is also essential to ensure that the right intervention is selected. The choice of intervention should be informed by a detailed consideration of pupils' strengths and weaknesses. The aim is to select an intervention that builds on pupils' existing knowledge, addresses their weaknesses, and focuses on the next steps that they need in order to make progress.

An example: difficulty with learning to read could have several potential causes, including, for instance, undiagnosed visual impairment. An intervention designed to improve vocabulary will not improve reading overall if limited vocabulary is not the key barrier to reading development.

A number of the EEF's [Promising Projects](#) – EEF-funded projects which have shown promising results when trialled – provide intensive support for struggling pupils. Several of these have been delivered by teaching assistants, properly trained and supported.

Though some whole-class and whole-school interventions have shown promise you should be aware they may take longer to show results (but, if they do, this may have greater cumulative impact on pupil learning).



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# How does your school support effective teaching and learning?

## Four core roles for school leaders in effective professional development

– according to [Developing Great Teaching](#), a review of the international research into what constitutes effective professional development for teachers, commissioned by the Teacher Development Trust.

- **Developing vision** – including helping teachers believe alternative outcomes are possible and creating coherence so teachers understand the relevance of CPD to wider priorities.
- **Managing and organising** – including establishing priorities, resolving competing demands, sourcing appropriate expertise, and ensuring appropriate opportunities to learn are in place.
- **Leading professional learning** – including promoting a challenging learning culture, knowing what content and activities are likely to be of benefit, and promoting “evidence-informed, self-regulated learning”.
- **Developing the leadership of others** – including encouraging teachers to lead a particular aspect of pedagogy or of the curriculum.

These were adapted according to the school context and the nature of changes being implemented. The review highlighted the role of governing boards offering *'valuable support and challenge, to encourage school leaders in their movement towards more strategic, effective decision making'*.



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# How does your school support effective teaching and learning?

## Looking for evidence-based programmes?

**EEF Promising Projects:** if your school is looking to purchase an external programme, then start with this list of programmes which have demonstrated initially encouraging findings when rigorously and independently evaluated.

**Evidence4Impact:** another useful and freely available resource, maintained by the Institute for Effective Education, this is a repository of the best available evidence on programmes that are commercially available to schools in the UK.

## BEFORE you buy in a programme – read this!

Sometimes schools will want or need to draw on outside expertise to drive improvement. These may be whole-school improvement programmes, or programmes focused on priority areas (eg, Key Stage 2 writing), or support targeted at specific groups of pupils (eg, pupils with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND), or with English as an Additional Language (EAL)).

However, governors, trustees and senior leaders are right to think hard before spending their limited funds buying in programmes which make great claims about their impact on pupil outcomes.

The EEF has funded independent evaluations of a large number of programmes since 2011. In our experience, most programmes are no better than what schools are already doing: around 1-in-4 EEF trials show enough promise for us to re-invest in.

Before buying in a programme, therefore, it is important to ask some key questions of the developer. The following are based on the questions we as a charity ask when assessing funding applications.

### Key questions to ask:

1. What is the evidence that this programme makes a positive difference to pupil outcomes?
2. What is the evidence that this programme is particularly beneficial for disadvantaged pupils – ie, will it help your school close its attainment gap?
3. Has the programme been independently evaluated, either by the EEF or another organisation? Programme developers may well have commissioned their own evaluations. Feel free to take these into consideration, but be aware that such evaluations (through inadvertent bias) are often favourably skewed.
4. Did that evaluation have a 'control group' of pupils – ie, a group of pupils who didn't receive the programme so that you can directly compare their outcomes with the outcomes of those pupils who did receive it? This is the most robust way of assessing if a programme can achieve positive impact.
5. Are the programme's key requirements (eg, suitably qualified staff needed to deliver it; time needed for training) achievable in your school's context?
6. How much will it cost per pupil per year to deliver? Don't forget to add associated costs, such as teaching cover, if there are training requirements.
7. How straightforward will it be to implement in your school? Is your school ready to deliver it (staff trained, infrastructure developed, follow-on support in place)?
8. Are there other programmes that might deliver similar impact for lower cost/effort?



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# How does your school support effective teaching and learning?

“ Schools increasingly turn to the research for guidance: two-thirds now consult the EEF’s advice, up from one-third in 2012, according to a report by the National Audit Office.”

The Economist

## IF you buy in a programme – read this!

Even the best evidence can only tell you that something has worked for other schools in the past. It can offer no guarantees it will work for your school now!

It is crucial, therefore, if you do decide to buy in a programme that you:

- Give it the best possible chance of success. This means implementing it properly. The EEF’s guidance report, [Putting Evidence to Work: A School’s Guide to Implementation](#), can support this process.
- Monitor and evaluate it for yourself. This means governors and trustees agreeing the success measures before the programme begins. The EEF’s [DIY Evaluation Guide](#) can support teachers and senior leaders looking to evaluate for themselves the effectiveness of new programmes being implemented.

## Think carefully about what you should STOP doing

It is tempting when you identify an area for school improvement to think only about what new initiative is needed to solve the problem.

However, it is important to make space for additional programmes by considering very carefully what you should stop doing. Otherwise you risk spending money and effort unnecessarily, adding to your budget and workload worries.

This is not only about identifying areas of your school’s activity you think are not working. Trickier, but still important, is identifying areas which work but are less effective than their alternatives.

Here are three questions the EEF Toolkit’s co-authors, Prof. Steve Higgins and Dr Lee Elliot Major, urge evidence-led teachers to ask. They are also valuable for governors and trustees to ask of your senior leadership team, particularly when embarking on a new area of work.

1. If something does not directly contribute to the quality of teaching and learning interactions, is it needed?
2. Do you have evidence that the activity you are undertaking impacts on pupil progress?
3. And could there be equally effective approaches that take less time?

### Example: written marking

The EEF’s evidence review on written marking—[available online here](#)—told us that we just don’t know whether or not the time teachers are spending on marking is having a positive effect on pupil outcomes. This in spite of the fact that the typical teacher will spend nine hours each week marking their pupils’ work.

So what can senior leaders—supported by their governing boards—do to ensure their teachers are providing constructive and useful feedback to their pupils?

Rather than relentlessly pursuing unproven and unsustainable approaches, a guiding principle might be to **mark less, but mark better**, informed by what the evidence tells us so far is likely to have the most impact:

*There is little justification for time-consuming approaches such as triple marking. In general, teachers need to consider how their marking contributes to timely, focused feedback for pupils, which is then acted upon. Less can be more: comment on fundamental misunderstandings rather than careless mistakes; comments accepted and used by pupils are more powerful than grades.*

Dr Lee Elliot Major and Prof. Steve Higgins, original co-authors of the EEF Toolkit



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# How does your school support effective teaching and learning?

“ One of the key roles of a school leader is to reflect on how they are doing, identify gaps in the performance of their team and think about what to do about it. We do this because we are all striving to do the best for our students, so we try new things, seek to learn from those experiences, and work to adopt and embed the practices that work best. ”

**Shaun Allison**  
Director of Durrington Research School and Head of School Improvement of Durrington Multi Academy Trust.

## Bringing it all together: an evidence-informed school improvement cycle

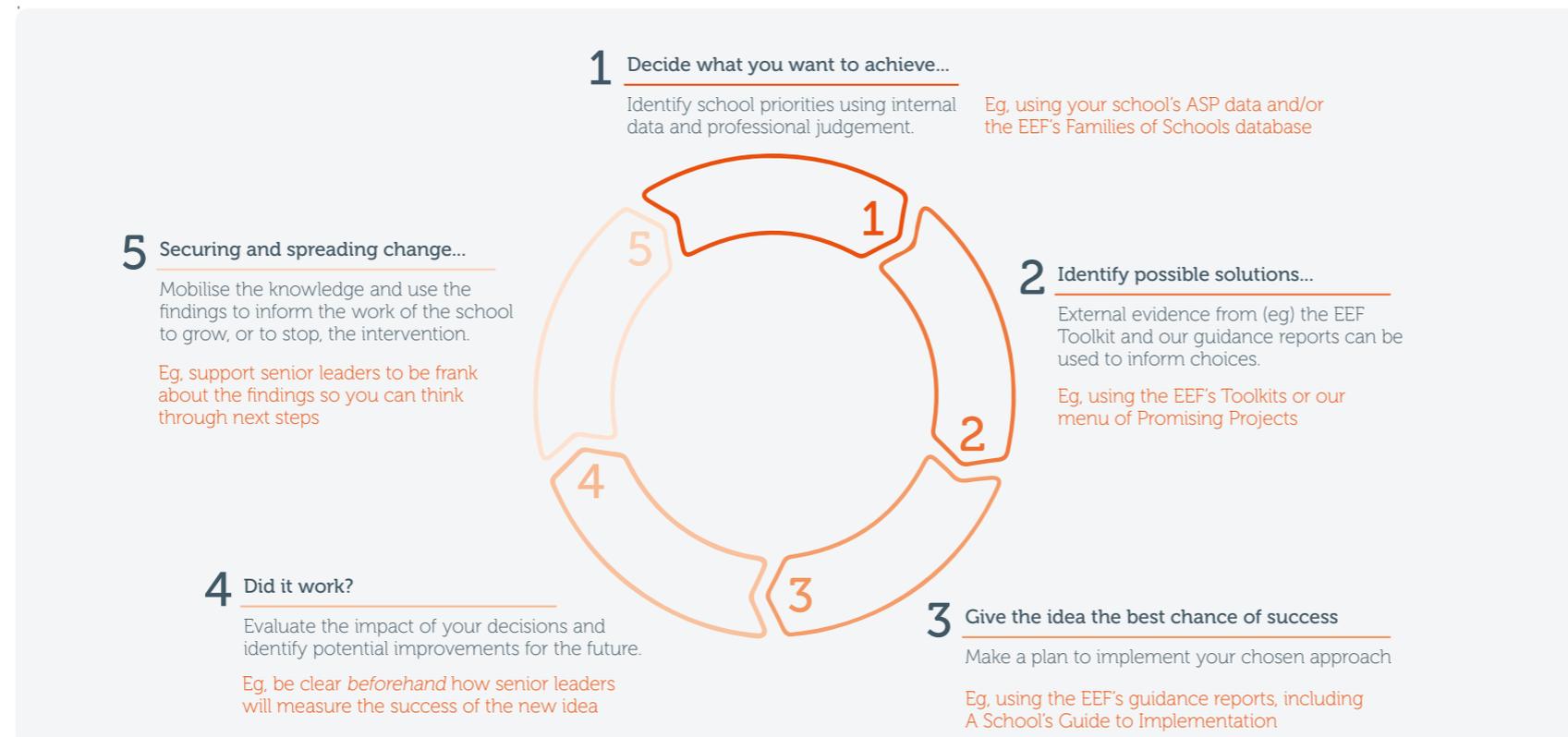
It's a reality that schools and senior leaders are time-poor and resource-poor. As a result, some big decisions are made hastily, often based on scant evidence.

And yet, we know that classroom challenges have no quick and easy fixes. So how should we be using research to improve the quality of teaching and learning in our school?

A useful tool to help senior leaders – and governors and trustees – is our 'School Improvement Cycle'. Essentially, it offers a framework to tackle school problems, big and small:

## ⇒ Next steps:

1. Identify a priority in your school improvement plan and discuss with your senior leadership team – using the improvement cycle framework – the steps necessary to achieve progress.
2. Agree when you will review the senior leadership's evaluation so you can make an informed decision about next steps.



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# How your school can get involved with the EEF's work

## Find training and support from an EEF Research School

Generating evidence of 'what works' is valuable, but not sufficient. We also need to make sure schools are able to act on it, and that it benefits the most disadvantaged pupils.

To support schools across England in doing this, we have established a national network of Research Schools, together with the Institute for Effective Education and Department for Education. These schools – spanning expertise in early years, as well as primary and secondary – have all demonstrated an outstanding ability to apply research evidence to their own practice as well as to support other schools to improve.

We are funding them to work with other schools in their area, to share what they know, and help them to make better use of evidence to inform their teaching. Go to <https://researchschool.org.uk/> to find out more about the network.

### → Next step:

1. Make sure that your senior leadership team is aware of the opportunities provided by the Research Schools Network.

## Get your school involved in trialling high-potential programmes

Over 13,000 schools have so far become involved in an EEF-funded trial of projects aiming to boost the attainment of disadvantaged children and young people - more than half of all schools across England.

Once the EEF has approved funding for new projects, our grantees begin recruiting schools, as well as early years and post-16 settings, to take part.

You can read about those currently looking for volunteers on the '[Now recruiting!](#)' section of our website. Each project has contact details so you can register your school's interest directly.

Not only will your setting benefit from the opportunity to trial a high-potential project, but you will also be contributing to important research which will help colleagues across the education sector.

### → Next steps:

1. Check the latest opportunities for involvement in EEF trials [here](#).
2. Suggest that your school takes part!



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# Get involved

## Keep up-to-date with the latest from the EEF

**Your feedback.** We hope this guide has been useful for you. If you have questions about any of the information presented here, please do get in touch. Also if you have any feedback about what you've found helpful – or suggestions for improvement – please do let us know. We are keen that our work is of genuine, practical use to schools – your support and challenge is useful for us, too!

Email: [info@eefoundation.org.uk](mailto:info@eefoundation.org.uk)



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The EEF was established in 2011 by The Sutton Trust as lead charity in partnership with Impetus Trust (now part of Impetus–The Private Equity Foundation)



With a £125m founding grant from the Department for Education

Department for  
**Education**

The EEF and Sutton Trust are, together, the government-designated What Works Centre for Education



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