



Pupil Premium Reflections

Introduction

Following the participation of large numbers of schools in our programme, and reviewing many completed Pupil Premium strategies, we are offering some overarching reflections that we think may be helpful. We thought that the plans had many strengths, and it was excellent to see colleagues increasingly using evidence effectively to guide decision-making.

We have identified four themes that we think are worth considering when thinking about evidence-informed practice, including future updates to your Pupil Premium strategies.

1. Identifying priorities

One of the ways that evidence is useful is to identify key priorities. When reviewing individual plans, it was often clear how the priorities had been carefully identified. We also observed common mistakes, including:

1. Focusing on issues that were not key priorities so were unlikely to dramatically improve outcomes
2. Focusing on priorities that were too broad, such as writing, without a more detailed investigation
3. Focusing on symptoms without convincingly getting to the underlying issues
4. Focusing on matters that are not very amenable to change.
5. Starting with solutions, rather than using high-potential solutions to respond to specific challenges

Support to avoid these challenges is provided in the EEF's report [Putting Evidence to Work](#).

2. Identifying high-potential solutions

The plans typically drew effectively on evidence, particularly the EEF's Teaching and Learning Toolkit and guidance reports. This could be strengthened by taking a more critical approach. For instance, it was not always clear the solutions identified were necessarily a good match for the challenges identified. Simple tests to ask include, what alternatives did you consider? And what is the best evidence against the approach?

3. Defining quality

Evidence can help us to make the most of any given approach. For instance, while approaches like formative assessment and retrieval practice are ubiquitous in schools, the ways that they are implemented are not always faithful to the evidence. The evidence base can help us to define more sharply what it means to do a particular approach effectively, and what to avoid. Some of the most effective plans used evidence to clarify the detail of the planned approaches. Sometimes this was done using what the EEF call 'active ingredients', but it was also sometimes done effectively by simply providing a rich description.

4. Leading change

The plans themselves provided limited detail on how the approaches would be implemented, which is understandable given the Pupil Premium template. Nonetheless, from the materials reviewed, there were two key areas that this could be strengthened. First, by phasing activity more appropriately, which is the first recommendation in the Putting Evidence to Work guidance. Phasing is particularly important for complex projects. Treating implementation as a process, not an event is a hallmark of effective implementation

Second, plans were often relatively weak in terms of how the ideas would be evaluated. For instance, evaluation often relied on SATS or GCSEs, which are likely too broad to judge the impact of any specific approach. Thinking carefully about 'evidence of promise' could help to dramatically strengthen evaluation. This could include thinking about if the work is 'on track' or 'off track' at different stages.

