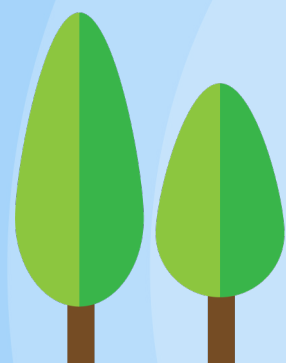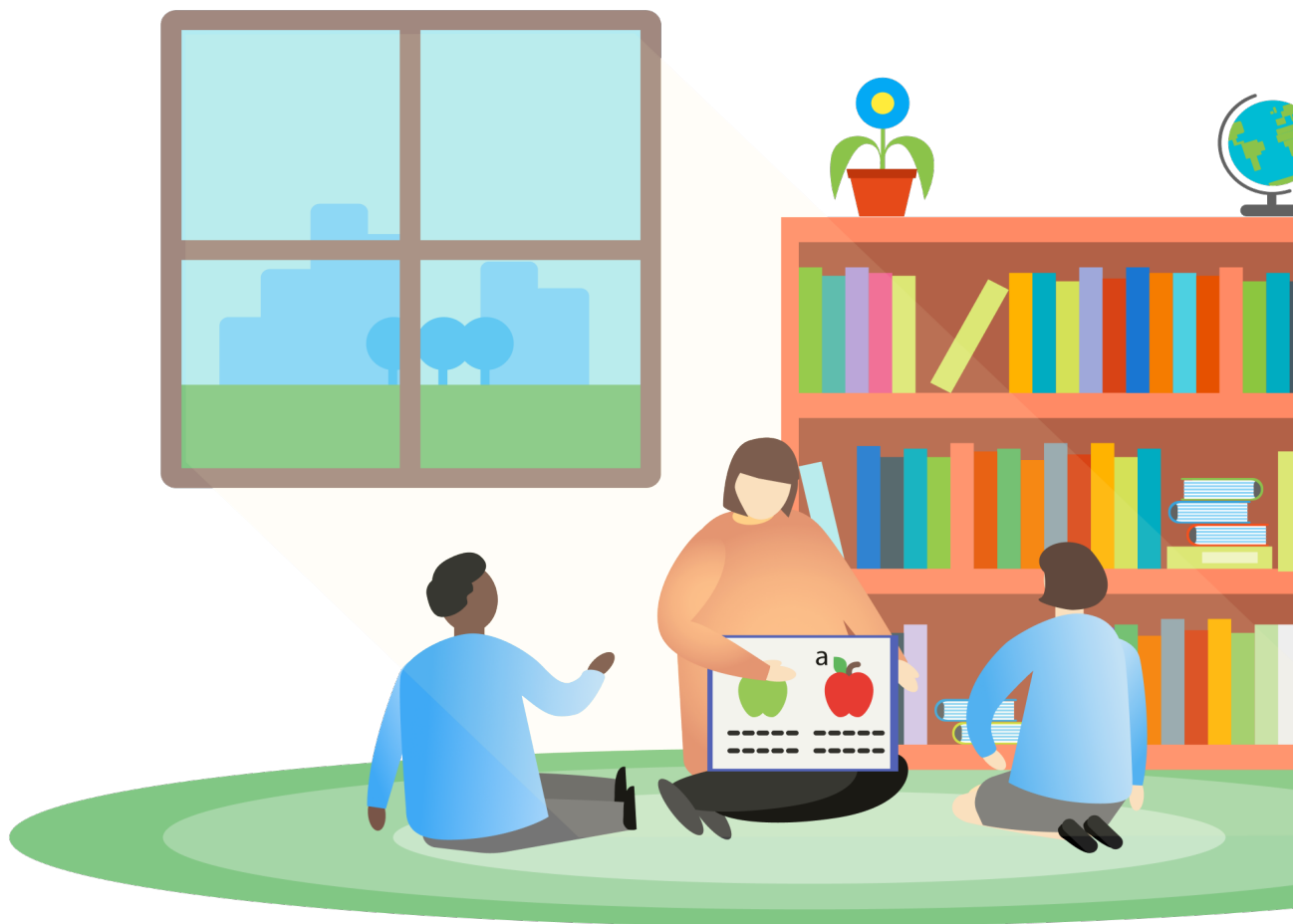Updated September 2023

The EEF Guide to the Pupil Premium

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How to plan, implement, monitor, and sustain an effective strategy

About the Education Endowment Foundation

The EEF is an independent charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement. We do this by supporting schools, colleges, and nurseries to improve teaching and learning through better use of evidence.
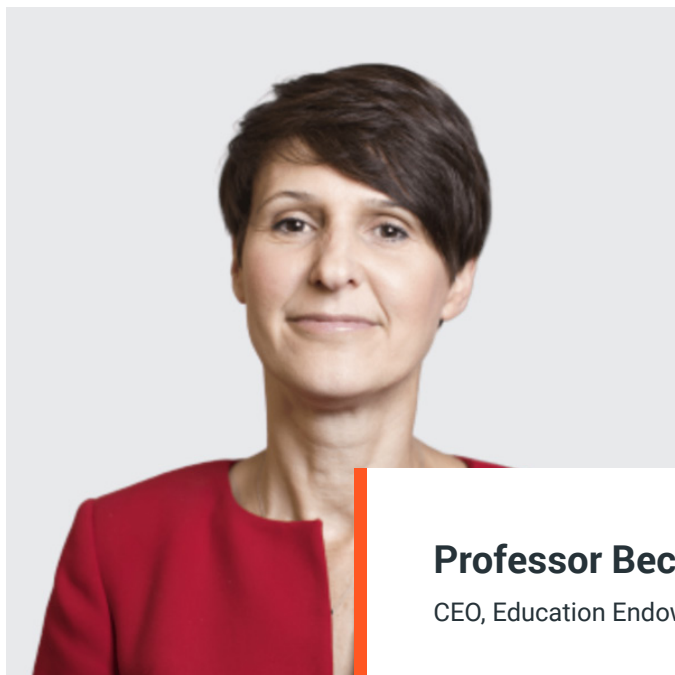
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Professor Becky Francis

CEO, Education Endowment Foundation

Giving every young person the best start in life, whatever their background and wherever they grow up, is a mission that unites everyone working in schools.

Teachers and leaders work hard every day to set their pupils up for success. But despite their tireless efforts, education inequality in England is entrenched and there is a stubborn link between socio-economic background and education outcomes.

The Pupil Premium is one of the most important tools we have to address this. Used purposefully, it can help tackle the barriers that stand in the way of eligible pupils' progress. This has never been more urgent, with over 100,000 more children meeting the threshold for free school meals this year than in 2022. Recent data shows that eligible pupils are also far more likely to be persistently absent from school.

But getting the most out of the Pupil Premium requires careful consideration and planning. Strategies for managing Pupil Premium spend must be clearly defined and responsive to the particular needs of individual schools and specific pupils.

Robust, ongoing analysis and assessment is central to developing a strategy that is fit for purpose. This alone makes sure that priorities are properly diagnosed and that the impact of any measures adopted as a result can be accurately monitored.

Our guide is designed to support you in taking a structured approach to Pupil Premium spending. It explicitly supports engaging with—and using—high quality, robust external research evidence.

Whether you are at the beginning of the three-year cycle and creating a new plan or undertaking your annual refresh of an existing strategy, we hope that this document helps you to forge a clear path forward towards improving outcomes for your pupils who need it most.

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The aim of the Pupil Premium
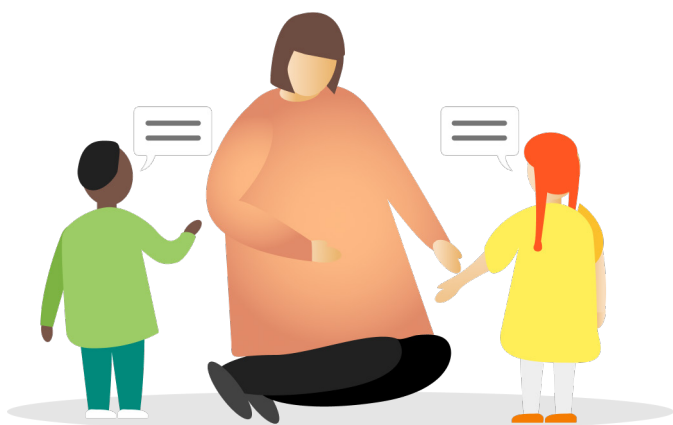
The Pupil Premium has one central aim: to improve outcomes for all socio-economically disadvantaged pupils. Since its launch in 2011, it's enabled schools to sharpen their focus on this group.

The Pupil Premium is paid for every eligible pupil in every eligible school. This means that schools can target their resources to the individual needs of their eligible pupils, so that they can flourish.

2.2m
There are 2.2 million pupils in England eligible for Pupil Premium funding.

28%
Over a quarter (28%) of pupils in England are eligible for Pupil Premium funding.

£1,455
Eligible primary pupils receive an extra £1,455, secondary pupils get £1,035.

£2.9bn
The Pupil Premium is worth £2.9 billion in total.

Who is this guide for?

This guide and its accompanying resources are aimed at senior leaders in primary and secondary schools, as well as Pupil Premium leads and anyone responsible for planning, implementing, and monitoring their school's Pupil Premium strategy. School governors and trustees will also find this guide useful.

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Introducing the tiered approach to Pupil Premium spending

Taking a tiered approach to Pupil Premium spending helps you balance the essential ingredients of an effective Pupil Premium plan: high quality teaching, targeted academic support, and supporting wider strategies.

It aligns with the **Department for Education's template** for creating a Pupil Premium strategy as well as its **'menu of approaches'**. This means you can be confident that your approach fulfils the expectations of the Pupil Premium strategy docume
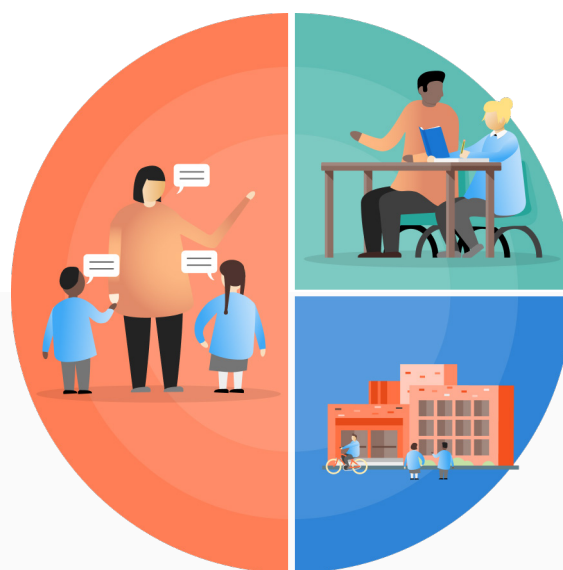
High quality teaching

Making sure an effective teacher is in front of every class, and that every teacher is supported to keep improving, is especially important for socio-economically disadvantaged pupils. Investing in high quality teaching should rightly be a top priority for Pupil Premium spending.
Strategies to support this could include investing in professional development, training, support for early career teachers, and recruitment and retention.

Targeted academic support

We know from a wide body of evidence that targeted academic support can have a positive impact on learning, particularly for those Pupil Premium pupils who are not making good progress.
Considering how classroom teachers and teaching assistants can provide targeted academic support—including through structured small-group interventions that link to classroom teaching and the curriculum—is an essential part of an effective Pupil Premium strategy.

Wider strategies

Significant non-academic challenges—such as attendance, behaviour, and social and emotional needs—can have a negative impact on academic outcomes. Addressing wider barriers to learning is an important part of any Pupil Premium strategy.
While many challenges may be common between schools, the specific features of the community your school serves will affect which approaches you prioritise in this category.

The tiered model provides a useful starting point for you to think about how to target your Pupil Premium funding. Many strategies within the tiered model will overlap and the balance between the three categories will vary from year to year as your school's priorities change.

Pupil Premium myth-busting

Myth 1

"Only eligible children can benefit from Pupil Premium spending."

The Pupil Premium is designed to support schools to raise the attainment of socio-economically disadvantaged pupils. However, many of the most effective ways to do this—including improving the quality of teaching—will also benefit other groups. That's fine! Just make sure that strategies have pupils that are eligible for Pupil Premium firmly in focus.

Myth 2

"The Pupil Premium has to be spent on interventions."

There's strong evidence showing the impact that high quality interventions can have on the outcomes of struggling pupils. However, while interventions may well be one part of an effective Pupil Premium strategy, they are likely to be most effective when used alongside efforts to improve whole-class teaching as well as strategies to address wider challenges to learning such as attendance and behaviour.

Myth 3

"Evidence from research can help you justify what you already do."

Collecting data about the attainment and progress of pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium can help schools identify priorities and target additional support. However, school data cannot tell leaders which approaches or programmes are most likely to be effective to address the needs of their students. This is why school leaders should use high quality external evidence to inform their decision-making alongside the expert knowledge they have of the pupils in their care.

Myth 4

"Pupil Premium spending is only for lower-performing pup

The Pupil Premium is intended to support the life chances of socio-economically disadvantaged pupils and compensate for this disadvantage, which extends to high achievers. So it can - and should - also be spent supporting programmes and interventions for eligible students who are high-attainers.

A five point plan to sustain an effective Pupil Premium strategy

An effective Pupil Premium strategy should be cyclical and viewed as an integral part of existing school development planning.

Setting longer-term objectives will give you the time and space to diagnose the challenges facing your socio-economically disadvantaged pupils accurately as well as implement the key elements of your strategy such as recruitment, teaching practice, and staff development.

Our five point plan can help you plan, implement, monitor, and sustain an effective Pupil Premium strategy.

|	
Step 1	Diagnose your pupils' needs
Step 2	Use strong evidence to support your strategy
Step 3	Develop your strategy
Step 4	Implement your strategy
Step 5	Monitor and evaluate your strategy

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Gaining a thorough knowledge of your disadvantaged pupils' levels of attainment is the first step to develop an effective Pupil Premium strategy.

Once you've assessed the performance of your disadvantaged pupils against national benchmarks, you should examine what could be hindering the attainment of those pupils who are below age-related expectations or are eligible higher attainers who are underachieving. This will involve **diagnosis** of academic challenges, for example to identify which pupils require additional support to develop literacy skills and in which specific areas.
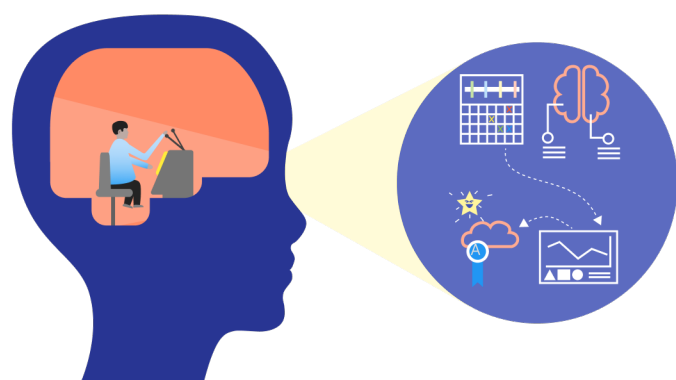
To do this, you can use a wide range of internal data and information, including:

- Attendance data and levels of persistent absence, including internal absence from lessons;
- Teacher feedback on pupils' levels of engagement and participation;
- Behaviour incidences and exclusions data;
- Pupil feedback;
- Reviews of pupil learning;
- Information on wellbeing, mental health and safeguarding; and
- Information on access to technology and curricular materials.

> **"Understanding our pupils, their families, and barriers to learning is at the heart of our strategy to support disadvantaged pupils.**
>
> **"It helps us help them to overcome challenges and difficulties, making the best use of our Pupil Premium funding. Our whole Trust strategy involves using a diagnostic tool which applies a range of criteria to identify pupils who are likely to need additional support. These criteria include eligibility for Pupil Premium as well as SEND, attendance, behaviour for learning, progress, and mental and physical health.**
>
> **"We then work to support all staff in recognising the level of needs within a particular criterion. For our pupils in receipt of Pupil Premium, this tool has enabled our schools to sharpen their focus on consistently identifying barriers and to have a consistent language around both the barriers and the significance of the barrier.**
>
> **"Developing a shared understanding around the barriers has enabled us to map the interventions, resources, and assets that can be accessed by teachers and school leaders to have a positive impact."**

Sarah Stock

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Diagnose your pupils' needs

Using data to identify your school's priorities requires careful planning. Schools are data-rich environments but, given the finite capacity of school leaders, it can be tempting to 'cherry pick' data that confirms 'hunches' about how best to proceed.So how can you approach data to understand better the real challenges and opportunities for your pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds?

Our **Gathering and Interpreting Data** tool from the **Putting Evidence to Work: A School's Guide to Implementation** guidance report is a great place to start.

"At Manchester Communication Academy we recognise that attendance is a key challenge in our context. We work to establish the drivers of this challenge, both in school and outside of school, so that we can provide the best support. This includes monitoring patterns in absence so that we can identify any potential triggers or barriers as well as building effective relationships with families so that we can consider other ways in which we, as a school, can support other potentially challenging circumstances.

"Once we've understood the nature of the challenges, we're better able to draw on the evidence including the EEF's rapid evidence assessment into attendance and their parental engagement guidance report to identify strategies that might be effective in our context. We've adopted some universal strategies such as regular, accessible communication with students and families about attendance and high-profile rewards for excellent attendance. We also consider some more targeted approaches that are agreed upon through collaboration with the families themselves."

Susie Fraser

Vice Principal of Manchester Communication Academy

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Use strong evidence to support your strategy

Developing a Pupil Premium strategy is best supported by making use of the best available evidence. This can help you select approaches that are likely to work in your school. You should make use of a broad array of external research evidence to inform your decision-making.

For example, after identifying pupils in need of targeted reading interventions through standardised assessments, school leaders should seek relevant and robust research evidence on which approaches are most likely to provide appropriate and effective solutions. This could include particular phonics programmes or approaches to support reading fluency.

While evidence from research provides valuable insight into what has happened in classrooms in the past, it doesn't automatically mean that approach will be effective in the future. It's important to use careful judgement of the relevance and applicability of any source of evidence.

What is evidence?

'Evidence' is a broad term that means different things to different people, which may include:
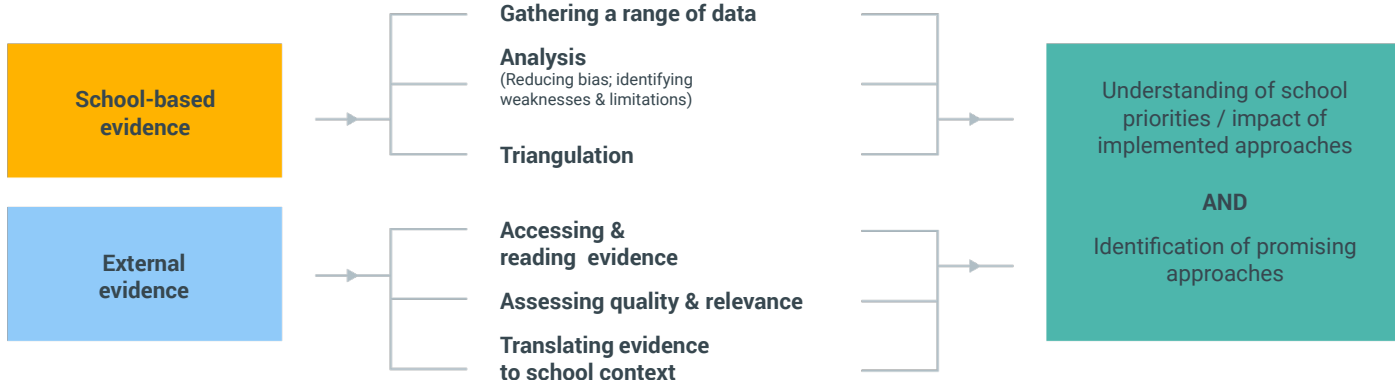
- Evidence generated through research outside of school by researchers, academics, and others, often assessing the impact of practices or approaches; and

- Evidence generated inside of school through the collection and analysis of pupil assessments and other sources of data.

Given the range of demands teachers and school leaders are faced with, keeping up to date with high quality evidence generated through research outside of school can prove challenging. If, though, you are going to make strategic school improvement 'best bets' based on a range of evidence, identifying credible evidence sources and reflecting on them critically is crucial.

Evidence Type

Evidence Type	Action	Outcomes
School-based evidence	Gathering a range of data **Analysis** (Reducing bias; identifying weaknesses & limitations) **Triangulation**	Understanding of school priorities / impact of implemented approaches **AND** Identification of promising approaches
External evidence	**Accessing & reading evidence** **Assessing quality & relevance** **Translating evidence to school context**	

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Use strong evidence to support your strategy

Our website hosts a range of evidence-based resources that are likely to be useful for different purposes.

The Teaching and Learning Toolkit	A summary of thousands of quantitative and experimental research studies conducted in schools, comparing the average impact and costs of different approaches to teaching and learning.
Guidance reports	Practical advice, recommendations, and tools taken from evidence to help schools develop practice on a wide range of topics.
Early Years Toolkit	A summary of the best available evidence on key areas for learning and development for 0 – 5 year olds.
Early Years Evidence Store	Support to help you put evidence-informed approaches into practice.
Pupil Premium 'menu of approaches': evidence brief and supporting resources	Signposts to relevant evidence and practical resources for each approach in the Department for Education's 'menu of approaches'.
Programme evaluations	Findings from our evaluations that test the impact of high-potential programmes and approaches in England.
Blogs	Concise and accessible summaries of findings from research evidence and other sources.

What makes a good piece of research evidence?

Three pointers are useful when you consider the relevance, robustness, and applicability of a piece of evidence.

Independence

Is it possible that the research was biased in any way or was the practice or programme tested by someone other than the person delivering it?

- Organisations and individuals sometimes evaluate their own products to test their impact but if they are involved in the research themselves it's possible the research may be prone to bias.

Relevance

Which schools and pupils were involved in the research and how similar are they to your own school and context?

- If an approach has been researched in secondary schools, for example, school leaders will need to consider how to monitor its effectiveness if delivering it in a primary school.

Purpose

**What research activity generated the evidence you are looking at and does it justify the claims made?**

- Different research methods can be used to answer different types of questions. For example, a case study might exemplify a school's experience but will not provide evidence for whether an approach improves pupil learning.

- Evidence that an approach is effective needs experimental research. This means one group receives a programme or intervention and their outcomes are compared to a similar group of pupils in a control or comparison group.

Get support from your local Research School

The **Research Schools Network** is a national network of schools that support the use of evidence to inform teaching practice.

Research Schools work with other schools in their area to help them use evidence more effectively. You can contact your local Research School for support when developing your Pupil Premium strategy.
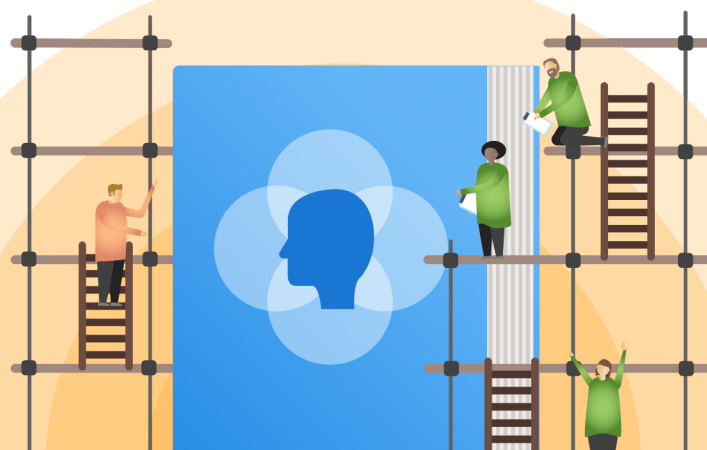
> ### "Knowing your school's context is key.

"For my junior school, this meant knowing that a higher than average number of children were likely to have experienced four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences and had many of the vulnerabilities listed in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2022. The EEF's Improving Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in Primary Schools guidance report helped us plan protective factors for these children.

"The EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit states that a SEL approach to a whole-school emotional regulation framework could be implemented for low cost and could yield four months' progress. Funding was used for universal programmes to take place focused on staff professional development—developing explicit teaching of resilience, empathy, communication, and teamwork. Funding was allocated to evidence-based programmes with Emotional Literacy Support Assistants providing targeted support."

Clare Greene
Evidence lead in education for West Somerset Research School

Develop your strategy

The Department for Education recommends a longer term, three-year approach to Pupil Premium planning but still requires you to review and publish an updated strategy statement every academic year before 31 December. Its **Pupil Premium guidance page** includes worked examples of Pupil Premium strategies.

You should combine evidence—both from school-based data to identify priorities and through critical evaluation of external research evidence—to identify promising approaches. Your professional judgment and knowledge of your context will inform how transferable these approaches are to your setting. This step in the process is an opportunity to reflect on how the different sources of evidence come together as you develop your strategy. Schools are required to ensure that approaches in their strategy align with those listed in the **DfE 'menu of approach'.**
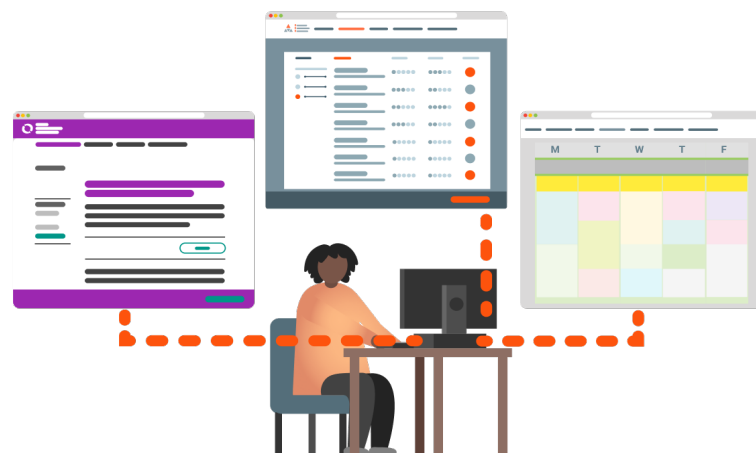
Questions to consider

- Is funding allocated to evidence-informed strategies that align with the DfE 'menu of approaches'? What evidence have you drawn on and why?

- How does your strategy align with other strategic school improvement documents such as your school improvement plan?

- Do approaches to develop high quality teaching for Pupil Premium pupils sit at the heart of your plans?

- How will you consult governors, academy trust leadership, and trustees, if applicable, when developing your strategy?

- Who else in school will develop your strategy (for example, subject leads, SENCo, teaching and learning lead)?

"As a leader, it's important to enable time to engage with research. Is it a priority on your school improvement plan? What does your CPD calendar look like? Is it strategic in its approach? Are we trying to cram too many things in or do a few things better?"

Asima Iqbal

Vice Principal of Billesley Research School

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The successful implementation of your Pupil Premium strategy isn't a one-off event, it's a carefully staged process that takes time. It's important to make sure your strategy is aligned with other school development plans and existing practices to make sure it has a sustained impact.

Find out more in our guidance report on implementation.

Questions to consider

- How do aspects of the strategy align with the existing beliefs, assumptions, and practices of staff? Do any of these need challenging or development in order to enable success?

- Does the approach require changes to processes or structures, such as timetables or team meetings?

- Does the strategy provide the necessary professional development and support for staff to implement the approach successfully?

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Monitor and evaluate your strategy

School leaders should continually monitor the progress of their Pupil Premium strategy so that the approach can be adapted when and where appropriate.

As new initiatives are put into practice, it's important to provide support for staff so that they can take ownership of them and deliver them successfully.

Questions to consider

- **What information will we gather to monitor and evaluate the impact of approaches?**

- **How can we provide flexible and motivating leadership as challenges emerge?**

- **What training or follow-on support is needed for staff beyond initial training?**

- **How will we respond to implementation data- for example, on how teachers are engaging with the initiative - to tailor and improve approaches?**

A Pupil Premium strategy is more likely to be effective if school leaders plan how to sustain it from the outset and also monitor practice in an annual cycle. Strategies that have been effective one year may not continue to be effective into another.

An effective Pupil Premium strategy needs clear goals underpinned by the short, medium, and long term outcomes needed to reach them. To make sure these are realised, it's important to support ongoing rigorous evaluation of their impact on pupils' attainment as well as on wider barriers to learning.

Monitor and evaluate your strategy

"We complete an implementation plan for each of the key elements of our Pupil Premium strategy, such as improving attendance. We consider how the changes will be managed and what steps are needed to maximise chances of success. This helps us to consider competing priorities and to prevent projects from fading away. Alongside these plans we complete timelines showing who, why, where, when, and how the aspect of the strategy will be implemented (avoiding the sense it is a 'bolt on' to core daily work).

"We take time to consider factors such as potential barriers and other work streams that are already underway. We undertake this work in smaller groups before coming together to share our work, thereby creating a shared understanding whilst avoiding competition for time and resources.

"Our carefully planned timeline enables the relevant senior leader to monitor and review the strategy.

"The implementation activities that will take place are identified above the timeline, monitoring activities are shown below. This includes data collection, student voice, observations, and teacher and parent voice.

"An update is scheduled every half term at SLT meetings for this to be reviewed. The relevant senior leader outlines what has taken place, any amendments and adaptations that have taken place, and what further support is needed. Termly updates are undertaken to monitor the strategy—opportunities for our governing body to support and review. We provide a termly update, which is another chance for questions to be asked and for us to reflect on whether our strategy is being implemented as planned."

Jane Elsworth
Director of Huntington Research School

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Monitor and evaluate your strategy

"Since improving what teachers do in the classroom is essentially a behavioural change, careful thought is required for what professional development is needed to make these changes happen. Drawing on the evidence from the EEF's Effective Professional Development guidance report, the role of mechanisms in behaviour change is, therefore, key for our Pupil Premium strategy.

"Have we clearly identified the outcomes? We often make changes without fully considering what we want to see at the end. The pressure to make immediate improvements results in too many priorities not being sufficiently thought through. If we want our actions to make a difference, we should probably focus a little more on evaluation: identifying what success will look like after the training has taken place.

"Our key questions include: What will teachers need to know? What will teachers need to do? How will pupils behave differently?

"How do we adapt and refine our strategy? Even the best designed development plans require adaptation in practice. Being clear about the intended outcomes in the short, medium, and long term will help to identify where things have gone wrong and where amendments are needed, such as more follow up training or providing increased time to sustain change."

Phil Stock
Director of Greenshaw Research School

How can school governors help?

School governors and trustees play a crucial role in improving attainment for disadvantaged pupils by providing support and challenge to school leaders. All governors should be aware of their school's Pupil Premium strategy, ask questions, and promote a whole-school approach. We recommend all schools appoint a Pupil Premium link governor

Use our tool for governors to support your school's Pupil Premium strategy.

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For further support and resources
search "EEF Pupil Premium"