

Sparx Reader and the EEF implementation guidance

“Even the most promising intervention will fail with poor implementation. Once an approach has been identified, it is important to take the time to train the staff involved, monitor the delivery of the approach, and consider how to sustain it over time”

– Education Endowment Fund, 2021

Introduction

Intervention science has been of interest to researchers in recent years as part of an evidence-informed practice approach. It concerns the characteristics of effective implementation of curricula and educational programmes. Albers and Pattuwage (2017) conducted a scoping review of a range of interventions, with the aim of identifying what factors positively relate to successful implementation: when the intended outcomes are achieved. When considering how to support staff to successfully implement curricula, interventions or initiatives, there are several points to consider:

1. **Implementation is a long-term process, not an event.** This implies that staff need ongoing support, and that key messaging needs to be disseminated and reinforced regularly, rather than just at the beginning of their employment or when change is introduced
2. **Any change needs to be clearly defined.** This indicates that staff need to know what is happening, why it is happening, and what they need to do. Ensuring that staff are trained is therefore important for ensuring that they can effectively implement what is intended. In line with the above point, this training should be ongoing, with feedback sought in order to identify and address challenges that staff are encountering. This helps to ensure fidelity towards what is being implemented, as well as ensuring a higher level of consistency.
3. **Data and evidence should be used to inform practice.** This includes data about how student outcomes are being affected and how the implementation process is working. There are a range of methods to do this, including data, observations and staff feedback. This need not be always highly formalised but can be cascaded through levels of leadership and also include peer support. This evidence-informed approach also enables further support to be put in place for staff when it is needed, and for adaptations to be made based on local need.

The Education Endowment Fund (EEF, 2019) has been involved with implementation protocols for over a decade and has established an implementation framework that is based on a review of international evidence and in consultation with school leaders and staff. The EEF highlights that

what distinguishes more effective from less effective schools is not *what* they choose to implement but *how* they are able to implement it (p. 3). This means that staff need the knowledge and tools to implement any change properly.

“ ***It’s really been in the last 12 months that we’ve gone heavily into the implementation around Sparx Reader, and that’s the bit that’s paid dividends...we’ve seen significant improvements over the last 12 months.***

Head teacher, Secondary School ”

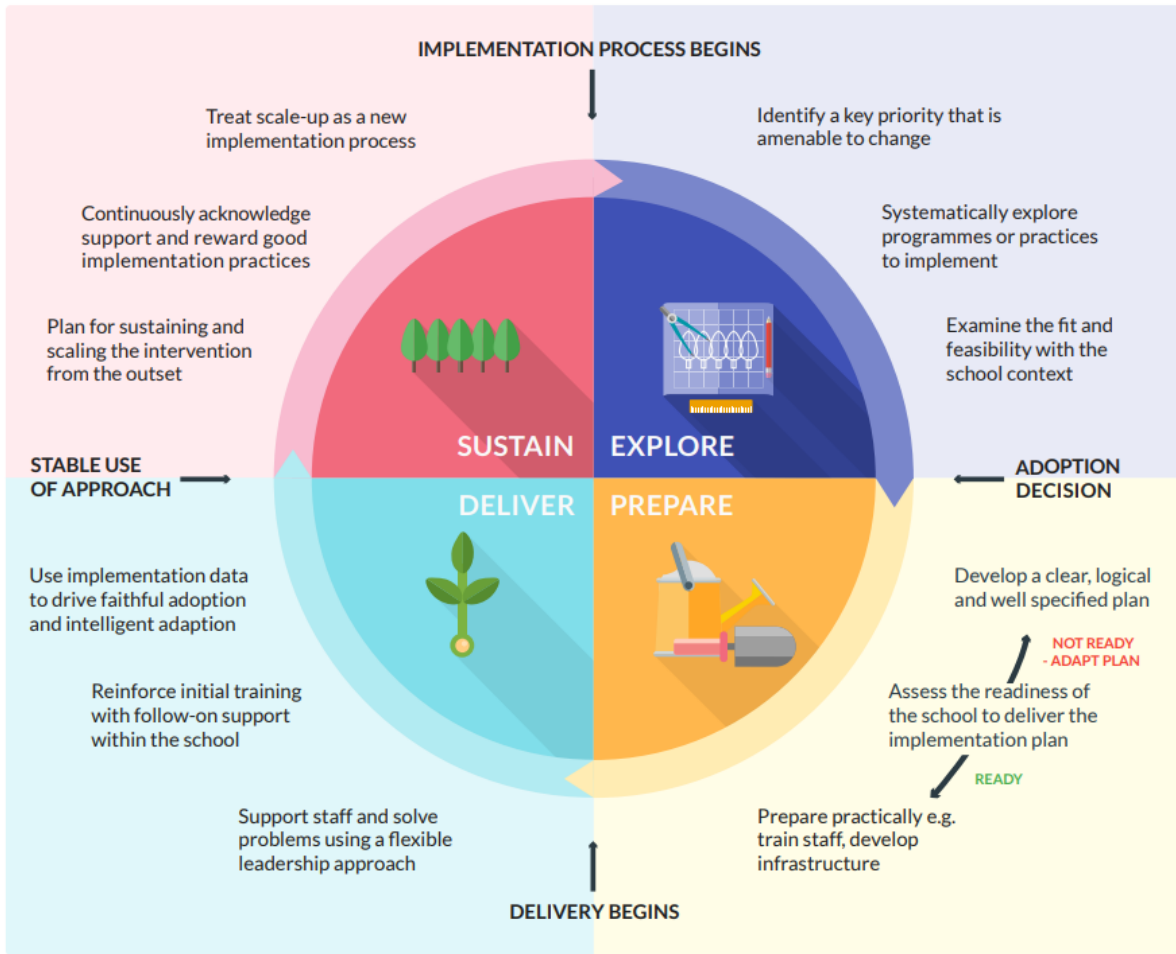
The Teacher Workload Advisory Group (November 2018) highlights that school and trust leaders have a duty to evaluate the time costs for implementing policies and programmes in school, such as collecting and analysing data. When considering who will be responsible for this, leaders should ensure that the people responsible have enough capacity. The Advisory Group also advises that where data practices are causing excessive workload burdens, leaders should question existing practices to change this. Sparx Reader reduces the data gathering burden for reading. The student activity and insights pages generated by Sparx Reader allows teachers and school leaders to see at a glance details of learners’ reading.

“ ***I’ve used a whole host of reading programmes, and it’s really hard to get the data out of, whereas Sparx it is really straightforward to get that data out, and I think people underestimate what that means, so it means that when I’m comin to work out which kids need the most support, I can see it, I can see which classes need the most support, and I can whether our implementation is going well and what we need to do. I haven’t found another programme that enables you to do that in the same way, so I’d always recommend Sparx’***

- Head teacher, Secondary school ”

Sparx Reader offers a range of support for school leaders and teachers. This document provides an overview of the EEF implementation cycle, and for each stage of the cycle we have identified key questions to ask to ensure effective implementation. We have also identified the ways in which Sparx Reader provides initial and ongoing training and support for each stage of the cycle.

The EEF Implementation Cycle



Implementation Process Diagram, Education Endowment Foundation, 2019

Explore phase

- Identify a key priority that is amenable to change
- Systematically explore programmes or practices to implement
- Examine the fit and feasibility with the school context

Explore phase: questions to ask

Staff and students

Do staff know how much their learners are reading?

Do staff know what pupils are reading?

Do staff know how long pupils spend reading?

Do staff know if their pupils understand what they are reading?

How do teachers ensure that learners develop engagement with reading?

Is reading taught in lessons? / How is reading taught in lessons?

Is reading ever set as independent work for pupils? With what success?

Wider School

How would you describe the reading culture in your school?

How do you celebrate reading within your school?

Would you say reading is a school priority?

Does anything block reading from flourishing? If so, what does?

What role does the library/librarian play in promoting reading within your school?

Is reading promoted in tutor time or via any whole school initiatives, and are the impacts of this being measured?

Are there any existing reading interventions for pupils, and how effective are they?

Are staff given training in how to teach reading, for form time group reading activities for example?

Which departments are considered responsible for promoting and developing reading, and fostering a love of reading?

Which subjects require pupils to do the most reading?

How involved is the SLT in discussions around reading?

How do you test whether pupils have made progress in their reading? If so, what do you do as a result of the reading age data you have gathered?

How Sparx Reader supports the explore phase

- Sparx Reader provides visibility of reading, so that school staff are able to see **what** learners are reading, **when** they are reading, **how much** they are reading, and if they **understand** what they are reading. Student activity reports provide comprehensive data about learners' reading engagement.
- Sparx Reader provides a platform with an e-book library which can be read on any device with an internet connection. Learners read high-quality books and their understanding of what they have read is checked through frequent questioning.

Prepare phase

- Develop a clear, logical and well-specified plan
- Assess the readiness of the school to implement the plan
- Prepare practically e.g. train staff, develop infrastructure

Prepare phase: questions to ask

Staff

Who will be the main person responsible for Sparx Reader (the Sparx Reader Leader)?
Which member(s) of SLT will be line managing the Sparx Reader Leader (if not on SLT already)?
How will other teachers be introduced to Sparx Reader – Librarian, Form Tutors, English teachers, Head of English, SLT?
Which staff will need training on using Sparx Reader?
How will staff be trained on using Sparx Reader?
Are SLT supportive of the intervention?
How will the Sparx Reader Leader keep SLT updated with the school's progress?

Students

How will learners be introduced to Sparx Reader?
When – and where – will learners complete their Sparx Reading?
What will you do if learners haven't completed their Sparx Reading?
Do learners know who to go to if they have a problem, and do they have the opportunity to seek help?

School

What will the timeline be for implementing Sparx Reader?
What do you need in terms of resourcing (staff, financial, tech. etc.?)
Which year groups will be using Sparx Reader?
How will you engage parents with Sparx Reader?
What do you predict will be potential blockers to the successful rollout of Sparx Reader, and how will you prevent them from happening?

How Sparx Reader supports the prepare phase

- Sparx provides a programme of onboarding support to schools through video training calls for school leadership and training videos for teachers. The Sparx Reader platform is clearly explained, including accessing the platform, how it can be used, and the data that schools can track. Teachers and leaders also have the opportunity to ask questions to enhance their knowledge.
- Sparx has provided a series of video explainer guides which can be used to scale training to additional school staff members or provide refresher training.
- Sparx provides best practice guidance based on our case studies about how schools have successfully implemented Sparx Reader. We can also put new Reader schools in touch with schools who are successfully using Reader to create a community of shared practice.
- Sparx has created a 10-part CPD course for schools - 'Reading Matters' - that brings together current, research-informed best practice into practical sessions for teachers to engage with.

Deliver phase

- Support staff and solve problems using a flexible leadership approach
- Reinforce initial training with follow-on support within the school
- Use implementation data to drive faithful adoption and intelligent adaptation

Deliver phase: questions to ask

How will you know if Sparx Reader is being implemented well?

What data will Sparx give you?

How will the data be used, who will look at it, and how often?

Is Sparx Reader being used consistently?

How are staff being supported as they roll out Sparx Reader to their classes?

How do Sparx Reader homework completion rates compare to those in other subjects?

Have you aligned Sparx Reader with your school's existing reward and sanction systems?

How have teachers responded to the rollout?

How have pupils responded to the rollout?

Are you satisfied with how you implemented Sparx Reader, and have you noted any changes for future rollouts?

How Sparx Reader supports the deliver phase

- Schools have access to data every week which gives teachers visibility of learners reading. Teachers can celebrate those learners who have achieved or exceeded their expected reading. They can also encourage those who have not yet completed their reading.
- School leaders can see an overview of all classes using Sparx Reader to see which learners in which classes are completing their reading regularly. Where there is inconsistency in class completion rates, leaders can identify best practice and use this as the basis for sharing good practices through training and coaching.
- Sparx offers a check-in phone or video call with schools shortly after they begin their implementation of Reader.

- Sparx Reader encourages feedback from schools. Schools can contact Sparx with any feedback about the platform.
- Schools are able to contact Sparx with any queries about the platform.
- If schools have any urgent queries that require immediate attention (such as learner access issues), they can contact our highly responsive team, who are on-hand to help.
- Sparx Reader has produced a checklist of points to identify good implementation, below. Schools can use this checklist to monitor the effectiveness of their implementation.

How will I know if Sparx Reader is being implemented well?

- Sparx Reader homework is set every school week for every class
- 100% of homework set is completed every week
- There are consistent consequences for learners who do not complete their homework on time
- Students who complete their Sparx Reader homework, and do extra reading to earn more SRP, are celebrated
- Teachers / form tutors / school librarians talk to learners about what they are reading
- Students have a 'good or above' rate of answering the question checks correctly



Really getting the children to understand why Sparx Reader helps them, that was one of the first conversations we had around why they need to read, why Sparx helps them read, so that they have the intrinsic motivation building. That also helped their resilience too.

Sparx Teacher, Secondary school



Sustain phase

- Plan for sustaining and scaling the intervention from the outset
- Continuously acknowledge support and reward good implementation practices
- Treat scale-up as a new implementation process

Sustain phase: questions to ask

Which practices are instrumental in Sparx Reader being delivered effectively?

How is good practice celebrated?

How is good practice shared?

Is Sparx Reader being implemented consistently over time? If it is not, which positive practices have declined?

Are staff still using the data reports regularly?

Is the SLT aware of how Sparx Reader is operating within the school (strengths and areas for development)?

How does SLT provide ongoing support for teachers?

How will good practice be maintained if teachers leave the school and new teachers join?

Scale-up

Will Sparx Reader be expanded to additional year groups?

Which additional staff need training?

Will you change anything in the way that Sparx is introduced to learners?

Which staff can support scale-up through training sessions or coaching?

How Sparx Reader supports the sustain phase

- School staff and leaders can use student activity data reports over time to identify consistent use of the Sparx Reader platform
- Sparx Reader training videos are available to train additional staff for scale-up
- Schools can book in a refresher call with the Sparx Reader team at any point once they have begun using Reader

References

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