To aid applicants we have included below a hierarchy of evidence which will inform how the Department assesses your application. We recognise that in some areas where improvement is needed, the evidence base is weaker than others because it is either incomplete or inconclusive, and the list below encourages you to think in these cases where meta evaluations or RCTs may not be available what other sources of evidence you could use. We hope it is helpful in considering how to put together the strongest possible application to the Strategic School Improvement Fund.

Indicative strength	Type of evidence	When / how it can be useful..
	• **Meta-analysis or systematic review** - analysis and summary across many individual evaluations – can be found in a number of places including: Sutton Trust Toolkit and research journals	• Strong evidence, IF / WHEN practice has been rigorously evaluated and demonstrates that the intervention works consistently (across many different studies), and includes good insights about how, where, when and why it works, and who with. • If it presents strong case but in a different sector or context, it can be used as wider supporting evidence or to make case for transferability and testing
	• **Matched-comparison design or a randomised controlled trial** – tests intervention against a comparison group - can be found in a number of places including: EEF and research journals	• Strong evidence, IF / WHEN practice has been rigorously evaluated and demonstrated that it works, and includes good insights about how, where, when and why it works, and who with. • Any limitations acknowledged, clear how it contributes to the narrative and used alongside wider evidence • If / when complementary evidence fills any gaps about context, proposed tailoring / innovation, new combination of approaches, new target group
	• **Sound theory backed by a growing body of empirical research** can be found in a number of places including: reseacrh journals; EEF, Sutton Trust Toolkit and goverment publications including research, statistics and policy	• Useful when it includes references to a number of quantitative or qualitative research study, or analysis across a number of studies that make the case why intervention is required, why approach fit for purpose and / or potenital for impact. • Useful to set the scene, evidence need for action, rationale for application to address a specific challenge, context or target group, and build upon this with other context specific evidence. • Be clear how it contributes to the narrative and use this alongside wider evidence. Sometimes quite high level and lack speciifcity about problem, intervention and the match between the two.
	• **Independent research / evaluation** – uses surveys, data analysis, monitoring, interviews, observations, focus groups, etc – can be found in non-peer reviewed research articles and local studies	• Useful as complementary / context to support e.g. application in a specific context, with a specific group; or • Reasoning for tailoring / innovation to adapt a more established approach / approach with robust evidence. • To explain the grounds for innovation and opportunities to test, learn and improve how to adapted / implemented, alongside plans to monitor and manage any risks • Good to acknowledge and addresses limitations of this evidence, use alongside other more robust evidence
	• **Interna/ / in-house evaluation.** Not independently evaluated and can include: case studies, observation, interviews, MI. Likely to be found in house and/or within local group of schools	• Can be very useful to demonstrate insights about the 'fit' of an established approach to a problem, target group or context • Evidence gaps or need to tailor / enhance established approach to address weaknesses / increase impact • Evidence for innovation e.g. additions, tailoring, combination of interventions, transfer to different context • Rationale for x,y,z in a proposed innovation and how it can be applied, tested and improved
	• **Expert opinion / advice** from consultants, academics or sector group. Likely to be gathered specifically for this task; may have been identified prior.	• Useful as background to support rationale for changing / improving / tailoring, innovation or to flag any risks / opportunities
	• **Media articles / anecdotal reports and interest groups:** Likely to be found on internet news sources; articles in the teaching press and social media platforms	• Can be effective when used to highlight potential risks / opportunities of proposed approach, flag gaps in a current approach or flag potential public / media response