Department for Education

Opportunity Areas Insight Guide

School Improvement

School Improvement – Insight Guide

Opportunity Areas

The long-term objective of the Opportunity Areas (OAs) programme is to transform the life chances of children and young people in 12 areas of the country with low social mobility. In doing so, it aims to learn more about what works in improving education outcomes in coastal, rural and urban areas. The programme seeks to tackle regional inequality by convening resources, using evidence-based approaches and testing new approaches to unlock the barriers that hold young people back in geographic areas where the educational challenges are greatest.

The programme is being evaluated and reports will be available during the course of 2022. In the meantime, with this series of insight guides, we are sharing the experiences of those working hard to make a difference in the OAs from which others can learn.

Further information about the programme can be found on **GOV.UK**

School Improvement in the Opportunity Areas

Research shows that if children live in disadvantaged areas, they are less likely to be able to access high-quality education and good schools and are more likely to fall behind as they move through the education system.

School improvement approaches in the OAs have provided professional development and support to help schools develop their leadership, staff, the curriculum, and quality of their teaching and learning. This has been with the aim to help pupils engage in and progress within their education, providing the best chance for them to achieve and provide a foundation for their future careers and lives.

Levelling up disparities is at the heart of the OAs programme and a key part of the Government's work to support the most vulnerable as we chart our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

One way the OAs programme has been making a difference is by bringing national and local partners together from businesses, education, civil society and community organisations. The approach in each area has been led by local partnership boards and driven by data, evidence and a shared determination to ensure children have access to the best education.

Who is this guide for?

- Practitioners and system leaders with an interest in evidence-based school improvement approaches.

- Anyone working in a social mobility 'cold spot' who wants to learn from peers who face similar challenges within their areas/schools.

Each guide that we publish will be followed by a webinar to connect interested parties with those with experience in the featured projects. If you would like to find out more or attend a webinar, please contact: **Opportunity.Areas@education.gov.uk**

What this guide covers

This guide is the sixth in a series. It covers a selection of OA place-based school improvement projects that have tackled complex and multi-faceted obstacles to social mobility and regional inequality. Some of the best examples of local solutions to local problems are listed here. They cover a number of themes within school improvement, from the adoption of mastery approaches across all phases, to a specific targeted project to improve reading abilities for all pupils across a town's entire Key Stage 3 cohort.

Our aim is to cover tried and tested projects that vary in cost and, if match-funding has been secured, we show this too. We hope that these insights will support work to overcome similar challenges for schools and children elsewhere.

The following case studies are included:

Blackpool: Secondary schools were provided with professional development, external expert support and resources to implement evidence-based, whole-school approaches to systematically enhance pupil reading abilities across Key Stage 3 to enable them to fully access the secondary curriculum.

Derby: A suite of professional development programmes in phonics, reading, writing and maths aimed at Key Stage 2 to strengthen school improvement approaches and strategies to help meet the aim of closing the gap in English and maths progress and attainment within Derby schools.
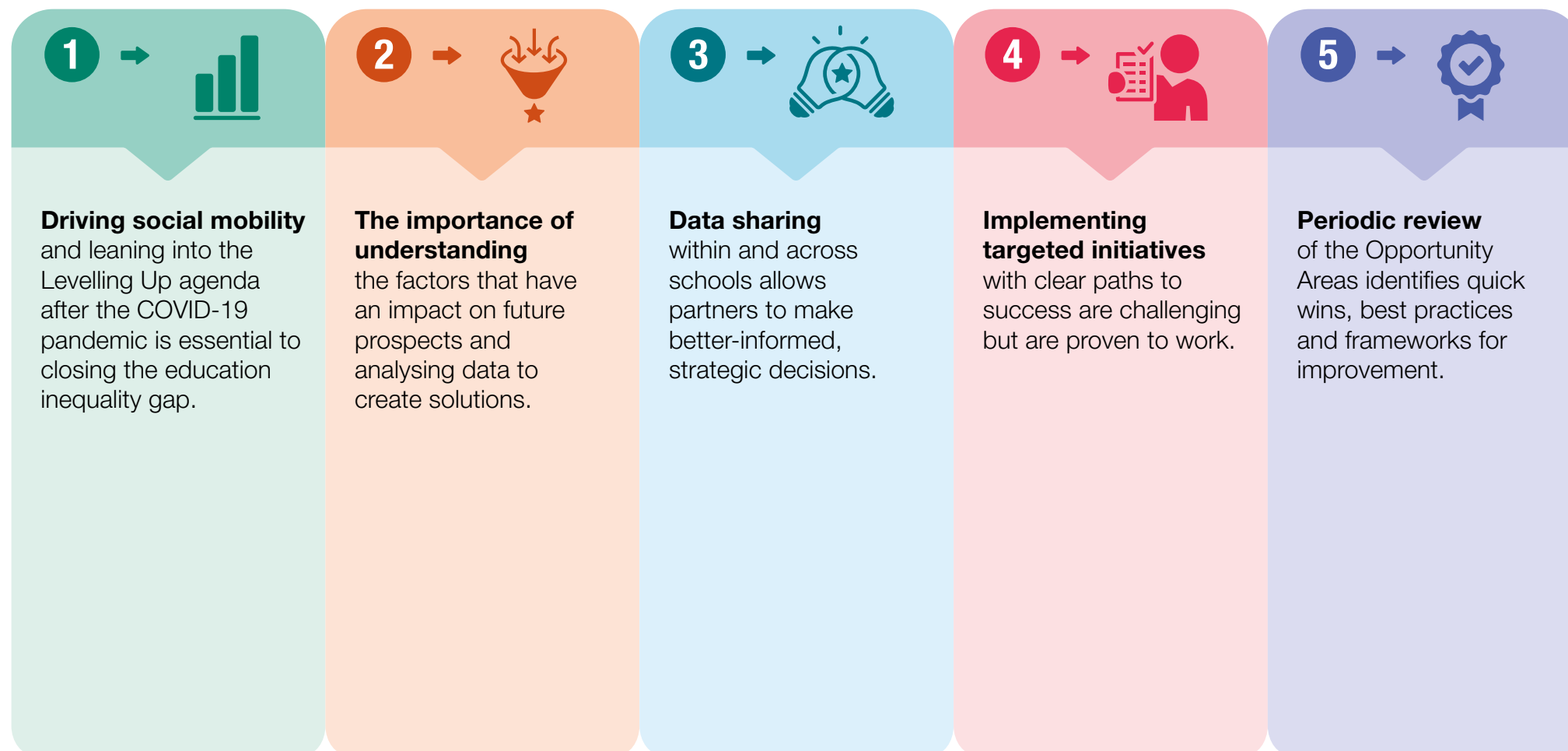
Stoke-on-Trent: The establishment of a focussed city-wide school improvement programme drawing in external expertise and using evidence-based interventions across English, maths and science in primary schools, to support Key Stage 3 transition and provide pupils with a strong foundation for improved outcomes in Key Stage 4.

Hastings: The Hastings Maths project, led by the Ark Academy Trust, focussed on introducing and embedding Mastery Approaches across more of Hastings' schools and the college to improve teaching and learning across all phases.

Oldham: The implementation of a school-to-school peer support programme providing intensive support between partner schools and focussed on enabling an enhanced quality of teaching and learning, and/or leadership, to lead to improved outcomes for pupils.

> " Levelling up disparities is at the heart of the Opportunity Areas programme and a key part of the Government's work to support the most vulnerable as we chart our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. "

Key insights

1 → **Driving social mobility** and leaning into the Levelling Up agenda after the COVID-19 pandemic is essential to closing the education inequality gap.

2 → **The importance of understanding** the factors that have an impact on future prospects and analysing data to create solutions.

3 → **Data sharing** within and across schools allows partners to make better-informed, strategic decisions.

4 → **Implementing targeted initiatives** with clear paths to success are challenging but are proven to work.

5 → **Periodic review** of the Opportunity Areas identifies quick wins, best practices and frameworks for improvement.

Observations from a Partnership Board Chair

Each OA has a local partnership board, which is headed by an independent chair and supported by a Department for Education Head of Delivery. This board comprises local stakeholders from schools, further education, businesses and beyond, to ensure a tailored and localised approach to delivering priorities and robust challenge.

Professor Liz Barnes CBE DL
Emerita Professor
Staffordshire University
Chair of Stoke-on-Trent Opportunity
Area Partnership Board

The well-recognised pillar of Government policy 'Levelling Up' had not been articulated as clearly when OAs were launched in 2016, but the whole concept of OAs was built around levelling up outcomes for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. It was recognised that 'talent is spread evenly across the country, opportunity is not' and that where you live will affect where you get to in life.

Having spent my career in education and now as co-Chair of the Stoke-on-Trent OA, I remain passionate about how education can transform lives and remain optimistic about what we can achieve in driving social mobility. However, on reading this collection of school-based projects it brings to the fore the real challenge that our schools face in tackling the impact of disadvantage.

Education in the early years is fundamental to preparing a child for the rest of their life, but children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are already behind their well-off peers by about 11 months when they start school. Children hold on to the gains that they make in early years education throughout their lives, making them better learners and therefore progressing further. (Stewart, K. & Waldfogel, J. (2017) Closing Gaps Early. Sutton Trust)

Derby in 2017 found themselves moving down to 316th out of 324 against the social mobility index, with—in 2016—only just above 54% gaining A*-C in GCSE maths and English against a national average of just over 63%. Blackpool, when they were able to review town-level data, identified that it had a much higher percentage of pupils with the lowest reading ability, three times that of the national average.

The case studies in this insight guide demonstrate to me that targeted, purposeful interventions can and do make a difference. The evidence emerging is not only demonstrating a move in the right direction that understandably will take some time to achieve the impact we are looking for, but there are also some quick wins emerging.

Much of what I have referred to demonstrates an understanding and deeper analysis of the data. This is a theme across the projects: Oldham referred to 'critical dialogue' around school-level data and better use of it; Stoke-on-Trent referred to the importance of data sharing, using city-wide data to inform curriculum planning; and, as mentioned, Blackpool's town-level data enabled the local authority and other partners to make informed decisions at a strategic level.

Collaboration sits at the heart of all of the featured projects: working collectively, developing networks, and sharing best practice. As we talk about the legacy of OAs, a consistent theme is that of the power of the communities that we have brought together and the importance of an inclusive approach, engaging all relevant partners and stakeholders. As Chairs, we have reflected on some of the earlier challenges that we faced in establishing our local approaches, because of the plethora of different groupings, the complex school system and the broader stakeholders that could support this agenda.
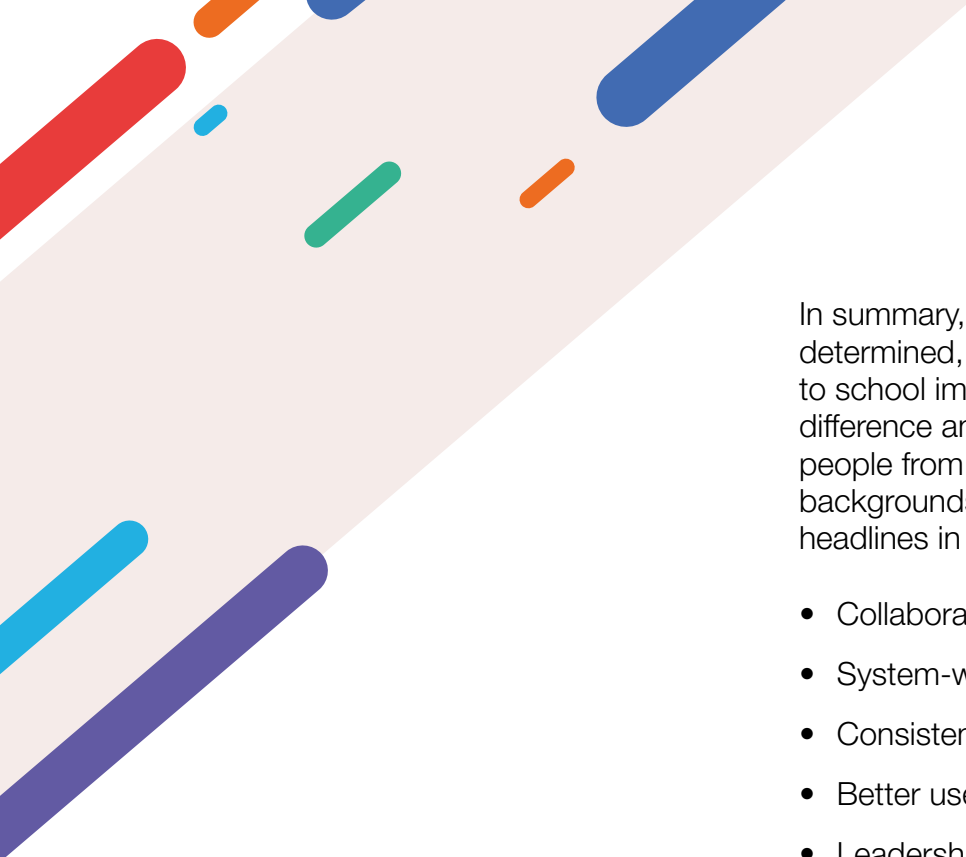
Oldham focussed on 'School-to-School' Support and how important it had been to break down the barriers that can be posed within a complex school system of multi-academy trusts, free schools etc. They were keen to see school improvement across entire regions, widening the pool of expertise and developing system-wide strategies. In Hastings, staff felt better supported working collaboratively and building a more consistent approach both within and across schools.

Place-based approaches, local solutions, and, importantly, the need for local buy-in and ownership runs through all the featured projects, but the importance of both drawing on national tools, policy and practice is also emphasised. Derby's maths recovery curriculum support was built around the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics curriculum prioritisation resource. Stoke-on-Trent worked with the Hackney Learning Trust to deliver reading moderation.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is central to any change agenda, but there is a focus on tailored CPD, driven and led at all levels. Derby, Stoke-on-Trent, and Hastings worked with National Leaders of Education (NLE) and Specialist Leaders of Education (SLE) in English and maths. Hastings and Stoke-on-Trent also worked with subject teacher coaches in science. Hastings focussed on a sustainable approach enabling staff to develop coaching and planning skills, picking up on the support needed by new and inexperienced team members. TeachMeets and mastery approaches also featured as models for sharing best practice.

These projects highlight the importance of all schools focussing on the fundamentals of science, maths, and English, from KS1, where Derby identified the attainment gap pre-school in phonics, through to the importance of the transition, for example of KS2 to KS3, where Stoke-on-Trent focussed on pedagogic bridges, but also recognised the power of parental engagement.

In summary, I am confident that, with a determined, managed and sustained approach to school improvement, we can make a difference and enable our children and young people from less traditional and disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve their potential. The headlines in implementation are:

- Collaboration.

- System-wide strategies.

- Consistency within and across schools.

- Better use of and sharing of data.

- Leadership at every level.

- Locally owned and supported CPD.

- Use of national expertise and evidence of best practice.

- Sharing of common issues and concerns, and of best practice.

> " **Collaboration sits at the heart of all of the featured projects: working collectively, developing networks, and sharing best practice** "

Blackpool
case study

Blackpool Opportunity Area Key Stage 3 Literacy Project

In 2016, attainment across secondary schools in Blackpool was identified as being significantly below the national average (47.8% of pupils achieved C or above in both English and maths at GCSE, compared with 63.3% nationally). In addition, progress by secondary pupils was identified as being the second lowest in England by Local Authority area.[1] As such, at its inception, the Blackpool OA focussed on raising attainment and progress across Blackpool's secondary schools, forming one of the three key priority areas in Blackpool OA.

One project within this priority area is the Key Stage 3 (KS3) Literacy Project. It aims to improve pupil progress and GCSE attainment over the longer term, bringing all 9 Blackpool secondary schools, including the Pupil Referral Unit, together, to collaborate and implement evidence-based, whole-school approaches to literacy. The aim is to systematically enhance pupil reading abilities across Years, 7, 8 and 9, identify and remove literacy barriers to learning, and enable pupils to fully access the secondary curriculum.

Details of the logic model and how this was developed and applied at school level can be found **here**.

What was the problem?

Pupils:

- Historical poor attainment and progress at GCSE across a range of literacy-based subjects including English.

- Analysis of Reading SATs data of pupils at the end of KS2 in St Mary's illustrates a particular weakness in reading comprehension (inference) in the area.

- Poor sentence and paragraph comprehension for a significant number of pupils due to poor decoding skills, limited fluency and vocabulary, and large variance in the culture of reading across the pupil population.

- Analysis of reading data showed a strong correlation between low literacy and school exclusion.

Schools:

- Limited ownership of literacy by teachers across the curriculum.

- A lack of consistency/whole-school practice in the teaching of reading.

- A limited knowledge and understanding of whole-school literacy approaches.[2]

---

1   **Blackpool Opportunity Area Delivery Plan**
2   **BEBC MAT led KS3 Project proposal analysis**

Implementation activities and successes

In terms of **activities**, working in partnership with the Blackpool School Improvement Board, the OA commissioned the project in 2018, which was awarded to a collaboration between the Blessed Edward Bamber Catholic Multi Academy Trust (**BEBCMAT**), national charity **Right to Succeed** and **GL Assessment**.

The project was led by a Blackpool-based system leader trained in and responsible for evidence-informed practice. They identified a named KS3 Literacy (senior) Lead who took responsibility for implementing a series of Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) evidence-based interventions and whole-school approaches to increase reading fluency, enhance students' vocabulary and improve comprehension within their own school.

To enable them to achieve this, EEF **implementation training** was provided by the **Blackpool Research School** using EEF's **secondary literacy guidance** as an overarching framework. Training and support was also provided throughout the project by the intervention providers, which included universal approaches and interventions – the development of Disciplinary Literacy through **Literary-Canon**, **Accelerated Reader** and **Bedrock Vocabulary** and targeted interventions – **Lexonik Vocabulary**, **Lexonik Leap** and **Curee Response to Intervention**.[3]

Right to Succeed managed the project and facilitated collective working by establishing a school peer-to-peer Project Steering Group with the Literacy Leads, to support collaboration and sharing effective practice across schools. They also provided coaching and co-ordinated development of the Literacy Leads through external experts. These included a **Senior Associate** at EEF who co-designed the Literacy Survey to help identify literacy-related barriers to learning for the project, and the **Director** of the Language and Reading Acquisition (LARA) Lab at Royal Holloway University, focussing on enhancing the knowledge of assessing and delivering impactful approaches to support those pupils with the lowest ability levels.

94%

completion rate across years 7-9,
around 3,500 pupils

---

3   KS3 Project SKEIN Interim Evaluation reports (2019)

All 9 schools adopted GL Assessment's New Group Reading Test (**NGRT**) and Progress Test in English (**PTE**) with their Key Stage 3 pupils, to provide standardised baseline and monitoring data to measure the impact of the project on pupil progress. This has included wider assessment, such as the Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (**PASS**) measure, and assessments related to dyslexia and dyscalculia. The level of commitment by schools undertaking these tests has been extremely high, with an average 94% completion rate across years 7-9, around 3,500 pupils. GL Assessment **scores** of pupils are shown using the 'Stanine' approach, which reflects how many pupils in a set sample are within 9 ability bands and compared to a national average. In Reading, these assessments are against a Standard Age Score (**SAS**). Schools have been provided with the results and training to help analyse these, enabling them to focus resources and interventions where they are most needed. In addition, unique to Blackpool, these results are presented at town level to allow the local authority and other partners to make informed decisions at a more strategic level.

In terms of successes, by working effectively to establish a shared common agenda, way of measuring success, sequential developmental activity, and continuous collaboration, the project has succeeded in synergising approaches to reading in the secondary phase across Blackpool.

It has provided a catalyst for both formal and informal collaboration, for example the sharing of experiences and effective practice, within and across schools, multi-academy trusts and the pupil referral unit. This has helped underpin a cultural shift towards whole-school approaches to literacy (changes in teachers' self-efficacy and beliefs about literacy; increased school prioritisation of literacy in KS3; improved professional development for staff on literacy leading to improved implementation within classrooms) and has been key to maintaining project momentum, particularly during the various periods of lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The following key factors point towards this significant positive shift:

Approximately

6,550

pupils have undertaken GL Assessment tests during the lifetime of the project

3

times national average
of pupils in lowest reading
ability identified

Schools:

- All schools have literacy as a key priority within their development plans.

- Improvement across staff self-efficacy/ beliefs, school prioritisation and quality of Continuing Professional Development as reflected in the annual literacy audit.

- Latest findings from EEF Research School fidelity visits have found evidence of 'reading culture' within and across schools.

- Staff being aware of their own literacy knowledge gaps, and proactively requesting additional Continuing Professional Development to support these.

- Schools dedicating additional reading time, funding resource and staffing to focus on literacy development.

- Special educational needs and disabilities co-ordinators, pastoral staff and teaching and learning leads working more collectively to provide more of a nurture-focussed, multi-agency hub style approach to triangulating and analysing GL Assessment school level data in order to co-design bespoke solutions required to effectively support individual pupils.[4]

Classroom practice:

As a result of teachers becoming more effective at identifying and removing barriers to learning, consistent, research-informed approaches to literacy development have been implemented, including but not limited to:

- Reciprocal reading.

- Use of **Frayer** models to support explicit vocabulary teaching across subjects.

- Explicit vocabulary instruction, particularly tier 2 and 3 words.

- Structured teaching of prefixes, suffixes, etymology and morphology of words.

- Consistent and effective approaches to marking and feedback.

- High quality examples of disciplinary literacy approaches across certain subjects.[4]

---

4   KS3 Literacy Project Learning Review 2021

Pupil outcomes:

- Approximately 6,550 pupils have undertaken GL Assessment tests during the lifetime of the project, providing a rich source of pupil, class, year group, school and town-wide data that has informed both pupil-level, focussed responses and helped make strategic-level decisions.

- GL Assessment data identified that Blackpool has a much higher percentage of pupils with the lowest levels of reading ability (stanines 1 and 2) with 12% of its pupils in this category, three times higher than the national average (4%). This has facilitated additional funded focussed work in this area bringing in external expertise to support.

- High-Ability Readers (the proportion of pupils performing above national average) increased by 73% - with almost three fifths (31%) of pupils in stanine 7 to 9 in Summer 2021 compared to 17% in Autumn 2018.[5]

- Four of the eight schools saw significant progress of 3 or more SAS points from Autumn 2018 to Summer 2021, with two showing substantial progress, equivalent to more than half a GCSE grade.

- Special Educational Needs pupils made up a fifth of the pupil cohort and average reading ability improved significantly from below national average (84.5) in Autumn 2018 to just within national average range (89.2) in Summer 2021, an improvement of 4.7 SAS points.

- Protecting pupils against their potential learning loss as a result of disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic – GL Assessment New Group Reading Test and Progress Test in English scores showed expected progress (i.e. no significant change in SAS) from Autumn 2020 to Summer 2021, reflecting that the majority of Year 7-9 pupils progressed as expected, which is a remarkable achievement, compared to their peers nationally where 1-3 months of learning loss was generally reported. [6] [7]

73%

increase in the number of high ability readers

---

5   GL Assessment analysis report – Reading Progress Year 1-3

6   GL assessment results presentation to OA partnership board September 2021

7   https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/learning-during-the-pandemic/learning-during-the-pandemic-review-of-research-from-england

Wider outcomes:

The KS3 Literacy Project was an important element of a wider drive to increase collective working between schools and the pupil referral unit, with the aim of improving access to the curriculum for children at risk of exclusion or have been excluded from school.

Due to its unique nature, and growing interest in place-based collective impact approaches, learning from the project has been shared, for example with the Liverpool Archdiocese, Right to Succeed's **Every Child Project** in Manchester and a number of Local Authorities. Project Leads have worked alongside Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (**CUREE**) to participate in the evaluation of their **SKEIN**, an expert, evidence-based school improvement service provided by CUREE.

The project has gained positive coverage in a number of media sources including the following articles:

- "A quarter face literacy barriers to GCSE success" by Pete Henshaw in SecEd which can be accessed **here.**

- "There is a magic bullet in education, after all" by Crispin Chatterton in TES which can be accessed **here.**

- "One in four 15-year-olds have a reading age of 12 or below and struggle to understand questions in their GCSE exams" by Sarah Harris which can be accessed **here.**

- "Blackpool's lockdown readers aren't lost for words" by Sonja Astbury which can be accessed **here.**

"It has been a real catalyst and has changed the whole culture and ethos around literacy and how everyone perceives literacy. All the teachers have bought into it, it's a whole school priority."

Lead for English and Literacy – participating school

Project Costs

Total **£865,000** of OA funding (September 2018 to August 2021)

Additional match funding from Right to Succeed – **£365,000** (through the charity's philanthropic activity)

Project Leadership – **£45,000**

In-school staffing – **£685,000**

Training – **£180,000**

Resources – **£190,000**

Monitoring and Evaluation – **£130,000**

GL Assessment – cost approximately **£100,000** per year for all KS3 pupils, this is paid for on a per pupil basis, hence this has varied year on year. Positive feedback from the schools on the value of these assessments resulted in the Local Authority agreeing to fund these for this academic year (2021/22).

Sustainability

The publication of the **Blackpool Literacy Strategy 2020-30**, which references the project, sets out how strategic leadership by the local authority will continue to support the ambitions of the project, and a recent survey has confirmed schools are committed to building on the implementation and resultant cultural shift realised by the project and are developing their own sustainability plans within this current (2021/22) academic year. Further funding sources are also being sought to help ensure new elements of the project that have materialised, primarily the additional work focussed on those pupils identified with the lowest abilities, have time to fully embed.

> The data demonstrates that Blackpool schools through this project have been incredibly resilient and able to protect education through this global pandemic

Key Ingredients for Success:

- Clear evidence articulation to underpin the need for the project, coupled with evidence-based solutions to help meet that need.

- Early engagement with and commitment from the schools at a senior level, including clarity about the benefits to the school and in turn what would be expected from the school in terms of involvement in the project, e.g. a named individual for the Literacy Lead role, and likely time resource from teachers and pupils to undertake the assessments.

- An experienced local and credible system leader to drive the project forward, supporting and liaising with school senior leaders across Blackpool.

- Professional and engaging project management and backbone support provided by Right to Succeed to support the schools to work collectively to deliver the project. This included supporting the Literacy Leads and schools through the implementation and development phases and co-ordinating external inputs, such as training from intervention providers.

- Robust monitoring and evaluation provided by the Research School.

- Consistent use of robust nationally benchmarked assessments to measure impact and progress.

"The data demonstrates that Blackpool schools through this project have been incredibly resilient and able to protect education through this global pandemic. And so, I want to place on record my thanks to teachers, school leaders and the support staff in Blackpool for what they've done. It's not just one school working in isolation, it's a group of schools working in collaboration to improve Key Stage 3 reading. That evidence [Key Stage 3 Literacy Project] will help me in terms of designing how we in future fund the improvement in literacy and numeracy across England."

Secretary of State Nadhim Zahawi said on a recent visit to the Key Stage 3 Literacy Project

Derby
case study

Derby Opportunity Area Primary School Improvement

To meet our aim of significantly closing the gap in English and maths progress and attainment at Key Stage 2 (KS2), Derby OA commissioned a suite of KS2 School Improvement professional development programmes in reading, writing and maths. We know that when an attainment gap is evident before a pupil starts school, it grows wider at every following stage of education.[8] This shows the importance of intervening early and is why, to further improve literacy attainment at KS2, we also commissioned a Key Stage 1 (KS1) Phonics project to ensure pupils have the necessary foundations to achieve the expected standard at KS1 and throughout their school life. The projects have run from 2018 until August 2022, costing a total of £345,859.

What was the problem?

In 2016, Derby was ranked 303rd of 324 in the Social Mobility Index and dropped to 316th in 2017. When Derby was announced as an OA in 2016, educational performance was weak. Results at primary (KS2) and secondary (KS4) were below the national average, with disadvantaged children and those with English as an additional language especially at risk of not achieving the expected standard.

There was widespread underperformance in English and maths. Only 54.2% of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 (KS4) achieved A*-C in both English and maths in Derby, against a national average of 63.3%. Attainment at the end of KS2 in reading, writing and maths was just 48% in 2016, against a national average of 54%.

The percentage of pupils meeting the required standard of phonic decoding was also below the national average at 78% for Year 1 (against a national average of 81%) and 90% for Year 2 (against a national average of 91%).

8   **The Attainment Gap' Education Endowment Foundation (2017)**

Implementation Activities and Successes

To address this need, the Derby OA partnership board commissioned a suite of primary school improvement support that was focussed on and tailored to the needs of Derby schools and pupils. The projects prepare and support schools to improve teaching and learning, securing leadership buy-in to enable systematic, school-level, sustainable changes. Each project cost up to £25,000, and aimed to work with approximately 25 schools, per year.

Phonics:

Led by the Derby Early Years Teaching School (DEYTSA), the programme supported schools to improve and secure the teaching and learning of phonics, resulting in an increase in the percentage of children who pass the Phonics Screening Check in both Year 1 and Year 2. The programme consisted of:

- Support for quality-first teaching and interventions.

- High-quality Continuing Professional Development (CPD) on fundamentals in phonics and Developing Fluency in Early Readers, based on education providers previous track records.

- In-school 'deep dives' of a school's current phonics provision, action planning, and consistent monitoring of plans to secure improvement.

- Network meetings with DEYTSA and all schools engaged in the project, to provide an opportunity to share best practice.

Reading and writing:

Led by Transform Multi Academy Trust, the programme provided training for classroom teachers and teaching assistants to develop a whole-school strategy for reading and writing, with support from a team of English specialists. The programme consisted of:

- A suite of training led by a team of English specialists from Transform Trust, including training for classroom teachers and teaching assistants.

- Focussed English leader sessions to develop a whole school strategy for reading and writing, and guidance on how to disseminate in schools.
- Facilitated audits, self-evaluation and monitoring by schools.
- Access to online resources used in every training session

Maths:

From 2018-2021, Derby OA commissioned a number of providers (Landau Forte Teaching School Alliance, Spencer's Academy Trust, and Transform Trust) to deliver projects which support schools to strengthen their mathematics provision, through:

- Strengthening maths subject knowledge and pedagogy.
- Providing diagnostic support to help schools to engage appropriately with suitable maths improvement offers, such as the Strategic School Improvement Fund and Maths Hub's Maths Mastery programme.

- Leader sessions designed to develop a whole-school strategy for maths, including guidance on how to disseminate in their schools.
- Scheduled audits, self-evaluation and monitoring by schools throughout the duration of the project facilitated by Transform delivery team.

2021/22 Projects

In 2021/22, DEYTSA continue to deliver phonics support to schools across Derby and we have commissioned the Derby Research School to offer COVID-19 recovery support in reading and writing, and maths:

- **English Writing and Reading Network** – Support from literacy specialists to assist subject leaders and/or phase leaders to develop the literacy curriculum in their setting. Utilising evidence base and statutory guidance on key themes, including the Department for Education Reading Strategy, the Education Endowment Foundation guidance reports on best practice, and Ofsted feedback on inspections.

- **Maths Recovery Curriculum support** – Wrap-around programme to support Derby's maths leaders and non-specialists to conduct a self-audit and develop a curriculum that covers the full maths national curriculum. The project is built around the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics' recently published curriculum prioritisation resource for 2021/22[9], an asynchronous programme that enables schools to join the programme and use the materials at their own pace.

---

9   **Primary curriculum prioritisation resource for 2021/22 | NCETM**

> **The percentage of Year 1 pupils meeting the required standard of phonic decoding in Derby has improved each year, increasing to 83% in 2019 (from 78% in 2016), surpassing the national average (82%)**

Impact of COVID-19

A number of aspects of the project, including one-to-one audits and monitoring visits had to be cancelled, and others such as CPD and network meetings, were moved online. School closures and staff illness also impacted schools' capacity to engage.

2020/21 projects were adjusted to better meet the needs of schools in the COVID-19 pandemic, with delivery partners asked to provide direct support and resources for those in greatest need to remove barriers to learning, facilitate re-engagement in education, and support learning recovery for lost learning time. Providers were also asked to ensure schools with limited capacity due to COVID-19 pressures could still access the offer, by offering a 'step-down' less intensive model or by recording training sessions to enable schools to catchup on sessions they were unable to attend. These changes proved successful. All the projects in 2020/21 exceeded their target to engage 25 schools (30 phonics, 26 maths, 35 reading and writing) indicating an ongoing demand for support in these areas, and the success of the flexible model.

Output Measures

Phonics across the city has seen a significant improvement since the phonics programme was introduced. The percentage of Year 1 pupils meeting the required standard of phonic decoding in Derby has improved each year, increasing to 83% in 2019 (from 78% in 2016), surpassing the national average (82%).

> "Staff directly involved with teaching phonics are now mentored and have a plan that they can refer to and follow. The plan is set out in such a way that staff have clear guidelines and dates for assessment of progress. Staff are more aware of how to use the assessments in a diagnostic way to impact on need."
>
> **Participant in school survey**

> "It has changed the way I teach phonics and gave me tips that I used to help those struggling."
>
> **Participant in school survey**

Attainment at the end of KS2 in reading, writing and maths is on an upward trajectory (61% in 2019 compared to 48% in 2016) although it is still below the national average (65%). Attainment for disadvantaged pupils also increased to 47% (from 35% in 2016) against a national figure of 51%.

> **"It has been nice to be given the opportunity to take part in this programme, I have really enjoyed it. It has given me a positive approach to think of ideas to use for creative writing with the support from my literacy lead and other teachers."**
>
> **Participant in school survey**

> **"We have been part of the PSG Project since it began and have implemented a range of recommendations outlined by the project. We are now looking at consistency across the school and there were very valuable sessions on policy and accessing English for all groups of children."**
>
> **Participant in school survey**

The percentage of children achieving the expected standard in writing at KS2 in Derby has remained static at 74% in 2019. However, those supported by the KS2 writing project saw, on average, a 3 percentage points increase (against a national increase of zero).

The percentage of children in Derby meeting the expected standard in maths at KS2 increased to 76% in 2019 (from 64% in 2016) against a national figure of 79% (70% in 2016).

We do not have data for KS2 for 2019-21 to measure further progress owing to the cancellation of national curriculum assessments and associated data collections due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sustainability

These programmes consisted of high-quality training, support for in school improvement, network meetings and the opportunity to share best practice. The projects were centred around preparing and supporting schools to improve teaching and learning, resulting in an increase in the percentage of children achieving the expected standards, beyond the life of the programme. The projects worked by securing leadership buy-in to enable a systematic, school-level, sustainable change.

Key Ingredients for Success

- Trusted and credible delivery partners – To ensure local buy-in of interventions, it is helpful for delivery providers to be able to demonstrate evidence of impact and a track record of working with local schools and stakeholders. Providers that were known locally were able to use existing relationships to promote the project, secure engagement and start delivery quickly.

- A flexible model to support COVID-19 lost learning – Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic the capacity of schools to engage in training opportunities has significantly reduced. Education recovery pressures and staff absence means that schools are having to be selective about which external offers of support they can accept, particularly when those offers require staff to be out of school for training courses. A flexible approach to training has been crucial to the continued success of Derby's School Improvement projects. Delivery partners have worked with schools to ensure the model is accessible, including consulting schools on their preferred training times, running training sessions virtually, and recording events and webinars to enable staff who were unable to attend the chance to catchup in their own time.

Project Costs

	Sept 2018 – August 2020 (projects commissioned over 2 years)	2020/21	2021/22
Phonics	38,121	17,980	24,980
Reading and writing	98,298	40,000	50,000
Maths	31,480	20,000	25,000
Total (across 4 years):	**£345,859**		

Stoke-on-Trent
case study

Stoke-on-Trent Opportunity Area

Curriculum Excellence Partnerships

The Curriculum Excellence Partnerships – in English, maths and science – have been instrumental in bringing about significant system and cultural change across the city, from developing a culture of strong collaboration across schools and trusts, to a more confident and empowered teacher workforce, and to improved systems and processes in transition from Key Stage 2 (KS2) to Key Stage 3 (KS3). In particular, the KS2 science project has been transformative in increasing the status of the subject in primary schools, with the work recognised on national platforms; Stoke-on-Trent Science coaches presented at the 2022 National Association of Science for Education, Europe's largest science education conference.

What was the problem?

It was a key priority for Stoke-on-Trent OA to improve educational outcomes in English, maths and science and build strong foundations for Key Stage 4 (KS4)

by boosting attainment in primary schools. The projects also addressed one of the OA's key enabling themes, to put quality teaching at the cornerstone of attainment at all stages of education.

In 2016, at Key Stage 2, Stoke-on-Trent was behind the national average in English, maths and science:

- **Reading** – 41% of pupils failed to reach the expected standard (behind the national average by 7 percentage points).

- **Writing** – 30% of pupils failed to reach the expected standard (behind the national average by 4 percentage points).

- **Maths** – 37% of pupils failed to reach the expected standard (behind the national average by 7 percentage points).

- **Science** – 23% of all pupils failed to reach expected standards (behind the national average by 4 percentage points).

In addition, evidence from schools' self-evaluation forms showed that teachers were frustrated with a top-down approach to Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

which often involved people delivering one-off training from a prescriptive menu of options, and which did not always meet their needs. Teachers reported that they wanted ownership of their development and to receive training which more directly reflected their needs over a sustained period of time.

Implementing Activities and Successes

Activities

Each English, maths and science project shared a common approach to delivery, with a focus on:

- Providing targeted support, including curriculum leadership support, to priority (underperforming) schools from National Leaders of Education (NLE) and Specialist Leaders of Education (SLE) in English and maths, and subject teacher coaches in science.

- A universal offer of CPD programmes of support, drawing from national expertise and evidence of best practice, for example Education Endowment Foundation-associated programmes such as **Thinking, Doing, Talking Science**.

- Pupil opportunities to all schools, providing enrichment activities in which pupils engage directly, for example creative writing competitions, inter-school maths competitions and live video calls with inspirational scientists to answer pupils' questions.

- Building workforce capacity, through CPD and teacher development, and commissioning and linking up with CPD offers from outside the city.

Although each project started independently, they have evolved over the life of the programme to a point of collaboration and streamlined support for schools. Project leads meet regularly to review schools' needs and to co-ordinate the support offered for all schools, to ensure the support is appropriate and timely.

Projects linked to the new Teaching School Hub (TSH) in 2021/22 to provide additional support to schools, with the TSH focussing on generic CPD, as well as Pupil Premium training and special educational needs and disability (SEND) training for reviewers.

Science (Science Across the City)

The project was launched in April 2019 and led by Moorpark Junior School, with expertise from an in-house Primary Science Teacher Trust Fellow and National Science Consultant. The focus was to improve pupil outcomes in science in KS2 for all schools, leading into KS3, by developing a co-ordinated and collaborative leadership approach to school improvement, supported by a universal offer of CPD to meet the diverse needs of teachers. Learning communities focussed on leadership, assessment, enquiry and creative teaching, with recognition of impact through schools' accreditation with the Primary Science Quality Mark.

The project has established a subject improvement team. Building capacity and nurturing good subject leaders has led to known and recognised subject improvement coaches. This team of coaches are school-based across 6 Stoke-on-Trent schools, and focus on additional school support through reviews and CPD implementation; all schools can access the subject support that can be personalised, localised and contextualised.

The science project has enabled curriculum and pedagogical cross-phase dialogue for Years 6-7 through initiatives including:

- **Curriculum Transition Translator** – a framework enabling a more consistent understanding of the aims of science across the key stages.

- **BEST** (Best Evidence Science Teaching) diagnostic tools – city-wide data to inform responsive curriculum planning for Years 6 and 7.

- **CALM** – a framework for learning objectives mapping and planning, to respond to COVID-19 gaps.

- Primary SLE representation at secondary subject leader forums.

Maths (Stoke-on-Trent Mathematics Excellence Partnership)

Launched in January 2019, led by **The Stoke-on-Trent Maths Excellence Partnership** and run through **St Joseph's College**, the project focusses on improving pupil outcomes in mathematics in KS2 and leading into KS3. Alongside the local **Maths Hub** workgroups, it develops a co-ordinated, collaborative and tailored system leadership approach to school improvement and early career and leadership development. Transition from KS2 to KS3, as well as parental engagement and peer mentoring was also implemented with reference to evidence-based interventions, with the sharing of pedagogy between teachers of KS2 and KS3 and promoting challenges for all pupils. The project has created networks of primary maths leads, transition networks and year group networks, and excellent links with maths organisations and CPD providers.

English (English Excellence Partnership)

Led by **St Gregory's Academy** and **The Potteries Teaching School Alliance**, the project started in April 2019 and aims to improve end of KS2 reading and writing outcomes, specifically on improving the achievement of pupil premium and male pupils by:

- Providing targeted support to underperforming schools through high quality NLE and SLE support.

- Developing curriculum leadership.

- Networking and CPD offers in order to enable strategic and targeted deployment of SLE resources to support schools.

- Working closely with KS3 clusters to engage in shared pedagogy.

- The creation of a sustainable 'Excellent English learning community'.

Successes

Building pedagogical bridges between KS2 and KS3:

The English project has established an English Transition Unit; KS2 and KS3 SLEs produced a high-quality unit of work on Robert Louis Stevenson's text 'Treasure Island', to address the 'gap' in knowledge between the key stages. The project uses the same text, differentiated to reflect individual pupil's reading levels, to build familiarity with the text, with the aim of improving pupil confidence and building a pedagogical bridge between KS2 and KS3.

This approach addresses potential subject deficit, intensified by the impact of COVID-19 restrictions, and elaborates the differences in teaching pedagogy and skills with the aim of providing continuity and consistency for pupils between the two key stages.
 The Unit has expanded to include teachers across key stages, who come together to share and develop best pedagogical practice, creating a sustainable Excellent English Learning Community.

Feedback from 8 secondary schools who had studied the text suggests that around 80% of students are now sufficiently prepared to continue the reading unit at the start of KS3.

The maths project has a clear focus on transition and progression for pupils in Years 3-8, with a focus on:

- Sharing pedagogy between primary and secondary schools.

- Building relationships and trust between primary and secondary teachers and leaders of maths.

- Events to support pupils with transition and at post-transition.

- Developing leadership of transition to support pupils with resources pre- and post-transition.

"The transition has not just become about the movement of students between KS2 and KS3 but has encouraged the development of clear pedagogical approaches to teaching mathematics."

Emma Hawkes, Park Hall Academy

80%

of students are now sufficiently prepared to continue the reading unit at the start of KS3

At Subject Level

In science:

- Engagement in high quality CPD, and making national expertise available locally has improved teacher subject knowledge, improved understanding of subject-specific pedagogy and developed subject-specific vocabulary. Survey data from pre- and post-CPD events shows that teacher confidence, including non-science specialists, has increased.

- Subject leaders are now immersed in the wider STEM sector and have better know-who, know-where and know-how of relevant policy, resource, support, and funding beyond the project.

- Regular publication of **Connect**: The journal of professional development in science in Stoke-on-Trent, has identified, celebrated and enabled dissemination of good practice beyond individual schools and beyond the city.

- Networks of like-minded, enthusiastic subject leaders are firmly established and active as responsive and supportive communities of practice (Science Influencers, cluster leaders, action research).

- Priority schools have built professional relationships, trusted peers who are empathetic and provide professional challenge along with guidance on the most appropriate actions.

- A talent map of local expertise provides the city with quality-assured 'go-to' teachers capable of leading teacher development.

- Piloting pupil enrichment opportunities enabling school-based exploration of novel approaches, for example **SPOTY** (School Physicist (scientist) of the Year) awards, Project **PotterBot**, where pupils design and construct innovative machinery, and **STEM Sisters Theatre production**, challenging gender stereotyping in science.
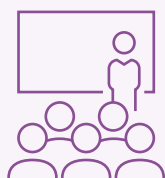
"Being part of an external community gives worth to what you are trying to do, and it challenges you to do it better."
Becki Price, Science Influencer

> **A talent map of local expertise provides the city with quality-assured 'go-to' teachers capable of leading teacher development.**

90%

of primary schools have participated in English-specific CPD.

In English:

- **An English Excellence Partnership (EEP) newsletter** is now sent to primary and secondary schools; teachers from all key stages are invited to attend CPD sessions/events to increase awareness of pedagogy across the KS2/3 National Curriculum.

- EEP Subject Leader network meetings provide opportunities for leaders to keep up to date with current thinking around their subject and share best practice. Leaders arrange visits to schools to see this practice in action.

- Working with the Hackney Learning Trust to deliver reading moderation sessions. The Trust has been impressed with the engagement of Stoke -on-Trent schools, inviting further collaboration to create additional resources for their reading moderation package.

- Engaging **Matt Windle**, the 'poet with punch', to enthuse and engage pupils with vocabulary and rhyming skills.

- Reading challenges for primary and secondary schools. Working with the National Literacy Trust, who promote the love of reading, pupils reading with their parents, and encourages pupils to complete reading challenges. In 2021, over 40 primary schools took part. As a result of its success, the challenge has been extended to all 14 secondary schools.

- 90% of primary schools have participated in English-specific CPD.

- Ten new SLEs have been recruited, 6 of whom are working in priority schools. Her Majesty's Inspector (Ofsted), Jo Evans, provides annual updates about the inspection of early reading at English Excellence Partnership leader networks. An average of 90 delegates attend each meeting.

- Priority schools have received bespoke CPD, providing support for English Leaders and the 'intensive teaching support programme' in inverse proportion to need.

- Commissioning nationally regarded trainers to lead sessions based on schools' specific needs.

- Good practice visits and collaboration across schools is working exceptionally well. For example, the implementation of a 'Reading Squads' approach of good practice visits has resulted in an increase in the proportion of pupils on track from a baseline of 33% (September 2021) to 58% in December 2021. 78% of pupils are now on track to achieve the expected standard in the Phonics Screening Check at the end of the year.

"We valued the opportunity to focus on reading linked to the new framework. The review was supportive and the report comprehensive in strengths and development areas. The professional discussions throughout the day confirmed and appropriately challenged our thinking. A very useful quality assurance activity that has supported our judgments for reading."

**Amanda Smith,
Deputy Headteacher,
Alexandra Infants School**

In maths:

The project has created a team of 12 SLEs, with 3 support SLEs, 9 moderator leads and 7 developmental maths reviewers.

- Access to high quality training, delivered by maths specialists such as **MEI**, has increased teacher subject knowledge.

- Staff now have the skills and expertise to plan effectively and deliver a mathematics curriculum that supports and extends pupils' understanding.

- Stoke-on-Trent MEP have provided maths manipulative tool kits, online subscriptions and workbooks for schools.

- Priority schools have received bespoke CPD, looking at a whole-school or whole-MAT approaches. Pupil opportunities, such as times tables competitions, roadshows, and intervention and challenge events. Forty-two schools in Year 5 and 6 competitions correctly answered more than 8.4 million questions in one week.

78%

of pupils are now on track to achieve the expected standard in the Phonics Screening Check at the end of the year

Output Measures

The impact of COVID-19 means that there is no national performance data against which to measure progress. However, there are other sources of information, for example external evaluations, that demonstrate success:

A formal independent evaluation of the KS2 maths project showed:[10]

- The project has created a thriving professional development network of teachers who are continually endeavouring to improve their practice and try new pedagogical techniques.

- CPD activities are raising staff confidence and ability to teach maths; this has in turn raised pupils' mathematical confidence, ability and problem-solving skills.

- Primary schools reported almost unanimously that the teaching of maths had improved, and that raised levels of confidence among teachers and pupils.

- The project is enabling smoother progression from KS2 to KS3, and Year 7 pupils are offered a challenging curriculum which builds on their prior learning at KS2 and provides continuity of progression.

Keele University's independent evaluation of the English and science projects found: [11]

For the English project:

- Effective CPD and resources are supporting teachers in easing pupil transition between KS2 and KS3.

- The support offered towards a change in pedagogy and practice is leading students towards better KS2 outcomes.

- Targeted NLE and SLE support, developing curriculum leadership and Hackney Learning Trust Resources are seen to improve KS2 reading and writing outcomes overall.

---

10   Trueman Change: **Primary Maths Improvement Offer**, 25 January 2021

11   Keele University: **Evaluation of Excellence projects**, 8 July 2021

- The project reported that there had been a general improvement in pupil reading outcomes, from an average of 58% in 2019 to a 70% average in 2020 (mock SATs) in 17 priority schools, with 3 primary schools almost doubling their scores.

For the science project:

- Science Influencers are effective in supporting teachers and science leaders to build effective systems of science leadership, pedagogy and practice.

- Improvements in purposeful practical work where pupils get to think and work like scientists, enquiring, exploring and finding out answers, and student-led science practice and pedagogy.

- The project has increased teachers' sense of being valued locally, feeling proud of what they do, contributing to their intention to continue teaching science in Stoke-on-Trent.

There is also evidence of supportive external validation of the impact of the projects, for example where Ofsted have referenced the project's work in school inspection reports:

"In mathematics, the curriculum is well planned, with a clear sequence of learning. Teachers use key mathematical vocabulary to support pupils' understanding."

Mill Hill Primary Academy, January 2020

"Pupils enjoy learning the science curriculum. It is exceptionally well organised. Any new work builds well on prior learning. Most science work builds knowledge and develops skills of enquiry. This helps pupils become confident scientists. During their time at school, pupils learn a good range of scientific knowledge and skills."

Hillside Primary School, December 2019

"Staff promote books and encourage pupils to read through the many displays and incentives. In all classes and subjects, reading is a frequent activity and efforts to raise standards are beginning to pay off."

Maple Court Academy, June 2021

Project Costs

Project name	Years 1-3 Costings (£)	Year 4 Costings (£)	Year 5 Costings (£)	Total (£)
KS2 Science				
Staffing	115,300	143,500	115,900	**374,700**
Other	84,000	116,500	34,100	**234,600** (e.g. supply cover, CPD costs, resources, subsidies for national programmes)
Total				**£609,300**
KS2 English				
Staffing	145,666	143,500	84,075	**373,241**
Other	13,800	118,300	165,425	**297,525** (e.g. resources, supply cover, CPD costs)
Total				**£670,766**
KS2 Maths				
Staffing	340,350	212,540	89,800	**642,690**
Other	164,375	72,400	10,200	**246,975** (e.g. resources, supply cover, CPD costs)
Total				**£889,665**

Sustainability

The projects' investment in establishing and developing learning networks, and in creating a more confident and knowledgeable workforce, has created a strong infrastructure on which to build further, beyond the life of the OA.

Communication across schools and key phases continues to develop, with links to the OA's early years project and expansion to Key Stage 1. Collaboration with high schools is cemented through centralised moderation meetings and formal networks. Projects have transformed the culture, from one in which schools often worked in silos, to one of open doors, open coaching and collaboration, building trust, responsiveness and support.

Confident teachers, teaching assistants and nursery practitioners are demonstrating greater understanding of the pedagogy and subject knowledge, and subject leadership has also developed. Trained moderation leads and network meeting leads are in place, as well as trained reviewers and those leading CPD. The project is encouraging cross-academy trust working and is developing trust-wide models of transition. Professional learning communities are established which are developing collaborative working practices, and there is strong evidence of greater school-to-school support, as shown by attendance at network meetings and visits to other schools.

> **"It was a really valuable experience and has shone a light on areas we wanted to review. Having a fresh set of eyes to look at our maths curriculum was refreshing and insightful."**
> **Teacher, Oakhill Primary School**

10

new SLEs have been recruited, 6 of whom are working in priority schools.

Key Ingredients for Success

- Build relationships. Consult, co-ordinate, and collaborate.

- Establish and maintain regular communications with schools and respond quickly to their requests and needs so that interventions are timely, and without having to wait for the next programme of CPD.

- Value and empower teachers and leaders and give them ownership in the direction of their development.

- Nurture leaders and teachers to be specialists – SLEs, moderators, reviewers – to create self-sufficiency to support school improvement.

- It is more cost-effective to share bespoke CPD delivered by someone with expertise than all schools sending one person to a course costing £100-£200 each. Teachers and schools now identify CPD to match their needs, rather than choosing from an organisation's CPD offer.

> " The project has increased teachers' sense of being valued locally, feeling proud of what they do, contributing to their intention to continue teaching science in Stoke-on-Trent. "

Hastings
case study

Hastings Opportunity Area Raising Attainment in Maths

Hastings' schools and its college now have maths subject leaders who are confident in delivering a Maths Mastery Approach,[12] who feel supported by senior leadership and have been supported by Specialist Leaders in Education (SLEs) and/or the Sussex Maths Hub. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard at Key Stage 2 (KS2) has significantly improved over the lifetime of the Hastings OA based on 2019 data, including by disadvantaged pupils.

What was the problem?

In 2016, achievement in maths in Hastings was low across all key stages. At KS2, 59% of pupils achieved the expected standard in maths compared with 70% nationally. 48% of disadvantaged pupils achieved the expected standard in maths at KS2 compared with 58% nationally. Pupils made less progress in maths than their peers nationally at all 4 mainstream secondary schools in Hastings. Disadvantaged pupils achieved over half a GCSE grade lower than their peers in maths. In 2016, 37.5% of disadvantaged pupils aged 19 had reached Level 2 (GCSE grade C equivalent) in maths by age 16 (compared to 53.9% nationally). The rate of disadvantaged pupils who reached Level 2 maths by age 19, not having done so by age 16, was 9.6% (compared to 12.5% nationally).[13]

Implementation Activities and Successes

Four of Hastings primary schools were working with the Sussex Maths Hub prior to the Hastings OA being established, to adopt Mastery Approaches, and had seen attainment in maths improve. Ark schools were also involved in implementing their own Mathematics Mastery programme. In its first year, the Hastings OA developed a cross-trust proposal for the Strategic School Improvement Fund 2018-19, to deliver the Hastings Maths Project, working with the Ark Academy Trust to lead the project. The aim was to introduce and embed Mastery Approaches across all of Hastings' schools, 12 schools initially took part. The Hastings OA funded the project from 2019-22.

77% 👍

felt that students at their school 'made **good progress** in maths'

---

12   https://www.arkcurriculumplus.org.uk/our-programmes/primary/mathematics-mastery

13   Level 2 and 3 attainment by young people aged 19 in 2016 – GOV.UK

KS2 and KS3 were the focus in Year 1 (2018/19) along with KS1 and KS4 in Year 2 of the project (2019/20), when the Hastings Maths Project supported 12 schools (50% of schools in Hastings). The following expert support was provided to each of those 12 schools (primary, secondary, special schools and the college) across Hastings:

- Funding for a dedicated mathematics Specialist Leader in Education (SLE), 4 days of in-person and 4 half days of virtual support per term to:

  – Create a personalised school development plan, written by the SLE and school's maths lead.

  – Develop best practice in the teaching of maths focussing on the accurate use of mathematical language, use of multiple representations, deepening student thinking, and problem solving.[14]

  – Build a sustainable development cycle enabling staff to develop their coaching and planning skills to support new and inexperienced team members. Positive feedback from staff shows how they feel valued when they are able to provide this support.

- Funding to purchase manipulatives (physical objects for the hands-on teaching of maths).

- Funding to enable continuation of a subscription to a Maths Mastery licence package.

- Funding for teacher cover to allow staff to visit other schools and for time with SLEs.

- A series of 'Teach Meets' for maths leads from participating schools, to review common issues of concern and access learning on core issues.

- A celebratory Teach Meets at the end of each year for practice-sharing between schools.

75% ✓

felt that students at their school '**attain well** in maths'

---

14 Multiple representations are carefully selected so that they are extendable within and between different areas of mathematics. Using these rich models encourages learners to develop different perspectives on a concept.
www.arkcurriculumplus.org.uk/curriculum-intent/our-principles/

In Year 3, the charity, 'Get Further', was commissioned to develop a bespoke curriculum to support students retaking maths GCSE at East Sussex College to achieve a grade 4.

Year 4 funding enabled more schools to get involved with the Hastings Maths Project, providing specialist support and coaching for 16 schools and the college; providing support for 4 schools to undertake additional school improvement work complementing their Mastery Approaches support from the Sussex Maths Hub; and allowing the 'Get Further' project to continue. Two schools in Hastings were already implementing Mastery Approaches and did not need support. Year 4 funding also enabled consultations with schools and working groups to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on pupils during Year 3. This identified a clear need to prioritise support for core areas such as literacy and maths – where pupils' progress had stalled during the lockdown period in the 2019/21 academic year. Year 5 continues the embedding of Maths Mastery as part of educational recovery due to COVID-19.

15 schools attended a network maths meeting in November 2021. This gave an opportunity to collaborate and share learning on approaches to an Ofsted 'deep dive' in maths, with first-hand experiences shared by Ark Castledown and Ark Alexandra Schools. This was followed by a discussion on Years 5-8 transition activity with checkpoints delivered by the Sussex Maths Hub.

Output Measures

Improvement in maths across Hastings' primary schools (measured in 2018/19 as outcomes at KS2) outpaced the East Sussex and national average.

- In 2016, 59% of Hastings' pupils (in 12 schools – 50%) achieved the expected standard in maths at KS2. By 2019, this increased to 77.8%, above the East Sussex average of 75.3% but below the national average of 79.1%.

- In 2016, 48% of disadvantaged pupils achieved the expected standard in maths at KS2. By 2019, this increased to 68.6%, above both the East Sussex average of 60.9% and the national average for disadvantaged pupils of 67.5%.

80%

of students had **improved** their score between assessments

45%
⬆

of students had **moved up a grade boundary**

- Pupil attainment in GCSE increased across secondary schools in Hastings. In 2017, 55.5% of Hastings' pupils achieved a grade 9-4 in maths at GCSE, below both the East Sussex and national average. By 2019, this increased to 60.4%, although still below both the local and national average.

> **"It has impacted our Pupil Premium and SEND students by exposing them to the Mastery Approach and building the solid foundations in Early Years Foundation Stage KS1, so that they develop and deepen their understanding of maths (while applying it to unfamiliar contexts) throughout KS2."**
>
> **Teacher from Ark Castledown Primary Academy**

A Hastings Maths Project survey of 70 maths teachers at the end of the 2019/20 Academic Year reported that, as a result of the Hastings OA intervention:

- 93% felt more confidence in delivering maths lessons.

- 75% felt that students at their school 'attain well in maths'.

- 77% felt that students at their school 'made good progress in maths'.

Pupils' confidence in maths has increased leading to greater levels of enjoyment and engagement with maths across Hastings' schools.

In Year 4 (2020/21), the 20 schools (an additional 2 were already implementing Mastery Approaches and did not need support) participating in the Hastings Maths Project and funded for additional support from the Sussex Maths Hub, completed a questionnaire on their experience, its impact on pupils and on the schools' confidence in delivering a Maths Mastery Approach. The findings highlighted that 86% of schools felt confident or very confident; and 78% of subject leaders said that they and other teachers within their school were confident or very confident.

Schools were positive about the support of the Hastings Maths Project and commented on:

- SLEs being instrumental in improving planning and practice through high-quality coaching and mentoring and Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

- The bi-termly maths network helped to bring together all the maths subject leaders who are part of the Hastings Maths Project to share good practice and ideas.

- The increased confidence from the subject leaders, improved teacher-subject knowledge and subject leaders feeling that they were better at planning.

- Pupils' increased understanding of maths and concepts which has resulted in greater enjoyment of maths lessons.

- Pupils being more enthused and engaged, and that the loss of learning due to the lockdowns had been reduced.

- The ability to provide additional support to Pupil Premium and pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) using a targeted curriculum with effective use of small intervention groups and appropriate manipulatives.

- That had the national exams taken place, progress was likely to be seen, even with schools' closures.

- Staff felt better supported.

- That they have further strengthened a positive working relationship with the Maths Hub.

In Year 4, additional funding was provided for 3 of the schools in Hastings who were engaged with the Sussex Maths Hub programmes. This enabled these schools to undertake additional school development work using SLEs that complemented and embedded the input they received. It also enabled them to purchase resources to support teaching and learning using a Mastery Approach. The schools were unanimously positive about the support they received and the common approach that has enabled them to teach with better consistency and fluency.

To determine the impact of the 'Get Further' Curriculum project, each student sat a baseline assessment in October 2019 and a follow-up assessment in late January 2020, both using past examination papers. Comparing results from the two assessments, the project saw:

- 80% of students had improved their score between assessments.

- 55% of students had improved their score by at least half a grade.

- 45% of students had moved up a grade boundary.

"…Year 3 and 4 teachers successfully developed their maths planning to include questioning, challenge and multiple representations. Pupils are positive about their maths lessons. Pupils who are 'working towards' made accelerated progress, therefore closing the gap between them and their peers. Maths has a higher profile in the academy now."

Teacher from Robsack Wood Primary Academy

Project Costs

Purchase	Years 1-3 2017/20 £	Year 4 2020/21 £	Year 5 2021/22 £	Years 1-5 2017/22 £
SLE visits	294,850	67,000		
Senior maths advocate - National Leader of Education (NLE)	24,000	1,500		
Cover for teachers to visit other schools	9,000	1,500		
Travel	15,660	1,883		
Implementing Maths Mastery materials and resources	37,500			
Manipulatives	0	9,000		
Celebratory TeachMeet resources	1,000			
Project management	2,000			
Admin/ finance support	2,000	3,000		
Maths Curriculum - funding to ESCC for their project helping resit maths GCSE	42,000			
Maths Hub funding went directly to 4 schools to purchase SLE support, teacher cover, manipulatives and licences		26,000		
Allocation to schools for them to fund their individual priorities			£50,186	
TOTAL	**428,010**	**109,883**	**50,186**	**588,079**
Cost per beneficiary (school/college):	**3,658**	**5,233**	**2,641**	

	Total no. in area	Years 1-2 2017/19	Year 3 2019/20	Year 4 2020/21	Year 5 2021/22
No. primary schools	18	8	10	15	15
No. secondary	3	4	3	3	0*
No. special schools	4	1	2	4	
College	1		1	1	
Total no. beneficiaries	**26**	**12**	**15**	**21**	**19**

* Year 5 secondary schools are not directly funded for Maths Mastery as funding was allocated in a different way, though they are continuing this approach.

Sustainability

The initiatives already underway have led to systemic change in Hastings, with the main Academy Trusts now working collaboratively and with a more consistent approach across all schools. Embedding the effective practice and culture of collaboration is being promoted across Hastings schools to ensure that the existing maths programmes that are showing positive outcomes, can be delivered in ways that normalise practice post Hasting OA funding. Schools can continue their relationship with SLEs using funding from their school budget. The Maths Network will be able to continue. The Sussex Maths Hub has been heavily involved to encourage schools to be a part of it.

> **"SLE has challenged me professionally when required and has helped me build systems that will support with overseeing the faculty and quality assuring the work that is being completed by the faculty."**
>
> **Teacher from Ark Alexandra Academy**

Key Ingredients for Success

The key successes are captured in the survey outcomes, statistics and quotes from schools as beneficiaries incorporated above. Instrumental to the implementation of this intervention were:

- The support from senior leadership and the Maths subject leader at the participating schools, the SLEs, the Sussex Maths Hub and Ark Academy Trust (whom co-ordinated the programme for the first 3/4 years).

- Targeted interventions specific to pupil needs, ensuring all children learn maths in a Mastery Approach, allowing pupils to acquire a deep, long-term, secure and adaptable understanding of the maths. Achieving mastery means acquiring a solid enough understanding of the maths that has been taught to enable pupils to move on to more advanced material.

90%

of pupils said that their maths lessons were **'just right'**, rather than 'too easy' or 'too challenging' in a recent pupil voice.

- Co-ordination by the Hastings OA Team and DfE colleagues, which was pivotal in brokering relationships with senior leadership at each school, and then ensuring buy-in and excitement from the subject leaders, and with communication with the bursars. This brought a strategic approach to meet the needs of the school and the level of support provided to the subject leader to deliver a Mastery Approach. It also gave the best use of grant funding and enabled the monitoring of activity to ensure accountability.

A local Maths Network for the schools created by the Hastings OA team has allowed schools to share information and learning/good practice with other schools, allowing them to feel like they belong to a group and have CPD.

"Pupils enjoy maths more because of the increase in physical resources and the high-quality teaching materials. Lessons are pitched more accurately because of the detailed formative assessment that takes place. 90% of pupils said that their maths lessons were 'just right', rather than 'too easy' or 'too challenging' in a recent pupil voice."

Teacher from St Leonards CE Academy

45%

of students had **moved up a grade boundary**

Oldham
case study

Oldham Opportunity Area School-to-School Support

What was the problem?

In 2017, the percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2) was 4.4 percentage points lower for Oldham pupils than for all pupils in England.

For Key Stage 4 (KS4), the average Attainment 8 score of Oldham pupils at the end of KS4 was 2.8 points lower than for all pupils in England. This meant school improvement was a key focus of the Oldham OA. Oldham Local Authority (LA) was responsible for school improvement in line with its statutory duty. However, Borough-wide school improvement, both strategically and operationally, had been overseen in previous years by the Oldham Education Partnership (OEP). This was a locally-led partnership aiming to improve the quality of education for all children and people in Oldham and had focussed on LA maintained schools. Schools that were academies or part of a multi-academy trust had not previously been included in improvement activity.

As most Oldham secondary schools were academies, the LA had limited involvement in KS4 improvement activity.

Oldham OA sought an intervention that would support those schools understood to be 'most in need'. A model of 'School-to-School' Support was therefore funded and developed as a potentially sustainable means of providing intensive peer support for selected schools.

School-to-School Support has been shown to enable schools to overcome issues of limited resource by collaborating positively. There is also a growing body of research that suggests that School-to-School Support can help school improvement across entire regions, by making visible and widening the pool of expertise that schools can access and embedding this within system-wide improvement strategies.[15]

---

15 **Department for Education: Effective school partnerships and collaboration for school improvement – a review of the evidence, October 2015**
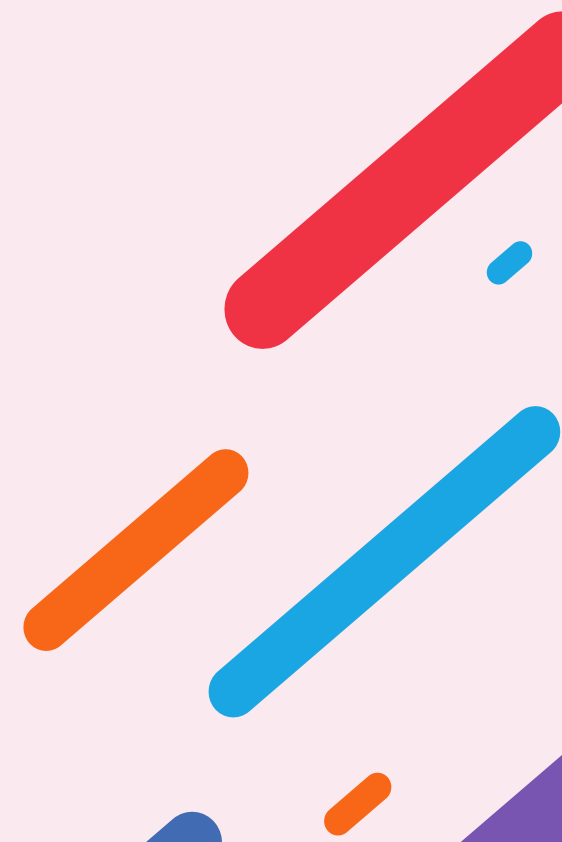
Implementation Activities and Successes

In summer 2017, the OEP identified an initial cohort of 10 schools (later expanded to 29 schools) that might benefit from a School-to-School Support programme, drawing upon their own local knowledge of schools and academies that the OEP had gathered through self-review, as well as baseline and predicted data for each school.

The programme was later expanded to include 27 schools, reaching 11,273 pupils, and included academies, which were not originally within scope for OEP consideration. This represents one third of Oldham's education sector.

The OA ran a process to seek expressions of interest for providers of support, which included high performing schools within the borough or in neighbouring boroughs, or those with pre-existing relationships, e.g., within the diocese or through the existing DfE school improvement offer. Providers spent at least 5 days per month working in a supportive capacity with their partner school, for up to 30 days in total. Each recipient school was also able to access additional funding to implement recommendations made by their provider.

The objective for each provider was to support their partner school in ways that would raise outcomes for pupils, quality of teaching and learning, and/or leadership. Their first task was to create an Action Plan with the receiving school, drawing upon the school's Self-Evaluation Form, School Improvement Plan, current data, as well as a broad dialogue between provider and recipient, including governors. The development and delivery of action plans were largely agreed between provider and recipient, and monthly monitoring meetings took place between the OA and the provider.

The process of planning was often challenging for the partnerships, involving difficult, often critical, dialogue around school-level data, the recipient's School Improvement Plan, and more general priorities. One provider described the process as a 'steep hill to climb', highlighting the professionally exposing nature of the joint work.

Nonetheless, the process was consistently identified as valuable, positive, and even 'exceptional' by one recipient, in enabling the beginnings of strong relationships, commitment, trust and mutuality between providers and recipients. Perhaps most crucially, some participants even highlighted a sense of relief at being able to share professional anxieties and dilemmas with a sympathetic professional colleague, whose remit was to provide much valued support. A key strength of School-to-School Support therefore appears to be the way that planning processes enable reflective yet critical conversations, as well as a space to listen and to be listened to.

> **"It's worked really, really well with [the provider], because I know him. We have a good working relationship, through coaching and mentoring and so on. So, it seems like a really sensible fit for [him] to do this work."**
>
> **School-to-School Support recipient**

Most providers felt that the successful School-to-School Support partnerships were structured in a way that enabled the receiving Headteacher to delegate the delivery of the Action Plan and to navigate the operational and strategic needs of the school effectively. A perceived strength of this approach was that it allowed other members of staff to grow into the process and drive change and development.

Most often key staff in receiving schools were in the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) (but in some cases included middle leaders), that the partnership felt were 'best placed' to support a strand of work, such as designated a Maths Lead or Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator. In some schools, key staff emerged through the process rather than being specifically identified at the outset. Some providers also followed a distributed leadership model in their support of the school in question, by linking the Headteacher and SLT into a wider network of educational colleagues who might advise on specific strands.

> **There also appeared to be an increase in confidence, belief and assurance across school leaders within receiving schools, where School-to-School Support partnerships had been a positive experience.**

"Initially the deputy head was going to take on the curriculum planning, but it became quite evident that his strengths lay elsewhere. Whereas the new assistant head had come up through the ranks here - so it was considered a better fit for her to take on that role and it was a great decision. That's when the plan evolved and developed. You had someone in mind but then realised that [we should] go another way."

School-to-School Support recipient

Each school was able to tailor support to their context-specific needs. Examples of activity include work to improve literacy, maths, leadership and management, curriculum planning and assessment, improving governance and accountability, and topics such as effective use of Pupil Premium, or support for those using English as an Additional Language. Each action plan would usually include activity, such as training and development for teaching staff; purchase of resources; support to implement an approach, such as regular teaching and learning reviews; and support to improve the use of data or tools to monitor and evaluate progress.

Output Measures

27 Oldham schools received bespoke School-to-School Support from the programme during years 1-3 of the OA.

All receiving schools who participated in the first phase of an independent evaluation (10) reported a positive impact on school-level data and/or Ofsted reporting at the end of the programme.[16] As at May 2022 and of the 27 schools, 14 have had an Ofsted inspection since the package of support started in 2018. 7 of these inspections have resulted in an improved outcome. 13 of these schools are now no longer considered vulnerable. Vulnerable schools are those at risk of becoming schools causing concern to the Local Authority.

All participants felt that data was being 'used' better at school level as a result of the initiative, for instance analysing and triangulating datasets, before feeding these insights back into practice. With school-level data being the driver for a school's inclusion in this programme — both in terms of the quality of data and what the data showed — these improvements suggest

16   **Evaluation Report School to School Support - Oldham Opportunity Area**

that, overall, School-to-School Support has had a considerable and positive effect on the receiving schools involved.[17]

All receiving schools involved in the School-to-School Support programme reported progress towards all their Key Performance Indicators in their individual support plans. For example, one school reported that all year groups achieved at least 71% of the age-related expectations for reading and writing, and maths, as well as being able to recall the expected times tables for their year group.

Schools also provided qualitative feedback that the project had resulted in a 'forward momentum' in terms of development, driven by a shift in mind-set across school staff: "We think differently". There also appeared to be an increase in confidence, belief and assurance across school leaders within receiving schools, where School-to-School Support partnerships had been a positive experience.

For example, one receiving school specifically mentioned an increase in pride among pupils:

> "There has been progress in data but more importantly a massive increase in behaviour and attitudes of the pupils. They are proud of their school and community."
> **School-to-School Support recipient**

Another receiving school commented on parental voice:

> "…parents of children with additional needs (SEND) stated they were happier with the provision in place now and the improved systems and procedures. They could see the impact these were having on their children."
> **School-to-School Support recipient**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the summer exam series was cancelled in 2020 and 2021, and as a result improvements reflected in attainment data could not be identified.

"There has been progress in data but more importantly a massive increase in behaviour and attitudes of the pupils. They are proud of their school and community." School-to-School Support recipient

---

17   Information provided by Oldham Local Authority

Project Costs

£1,104,144.37 has been committed to the School-to-School Support programme across 4 years of the OA. £353,272.79 of funding was paid in year 2, £482,890.70 in year 3 and £267,980.88 in year 4.

This funding was used for workforce training, school grants, workforce investment and resources.

Funding to schools	**£941,532.16**
Local project management	**£162,612.21**
Total	**£1,104,144.37**

Sustainability

The Oldham OA School-to-School Support initiative, having now concluded, has achieved much in terms of individual school improvement through collaborative partnership, which has in turn enabled and been sustained through the building of positive relationships and the sharing of good models of practice between schools. Specifically, schools receiving support have seen some tangible improvements in school-level data and against accountability frameworks, as well as developing new and possibly more effective ways of working, all suggestive of School-to-School Support as a potentially significant school improvement approach.

Key Ingredients for Success

- Positive relationships built on trust, shared understanding and respect between the receiving school, provider and LA, where the receiving school has ownership of the activity.

- A structured and critically reflective dialogue within the planning process.

- A model of distributed leadership to enact the evidence-based Action Plan, with monthly reviews.

Further information

Further Reading

The Blackpool OA received further mention in a number of books and online articles, including:

- A case study featuring Project Lead, Rebecca Jones' work on the St Mary's Catholic Academy Literary Canon was also featured in Alex Quigley's book, "Closing the Reading Gap".

- The project also featured in GL Assessment's recent report "Read All About It: Why Reading is key to GCSE Success." The report can be accessed **here.** As well as featuring in a webinar: "Closing the language gap – Blackpool Key Stage 3 Literacy Project – with Stephen Tierney and Bernadette Kaye." The webinar can be accessed **here.**

- The project is also referenced in '**Leadership: Being, Knowing, Doing**' by Stephen Tierney

For maths support: **NCETM landing page**, **Maths Hubs**, **Teaching for Mastery**.

Opportunity Areas

OAs selection methodology

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/ system/uploads/attachment_data/ file/650036/Opportunity_areas_selection_ methodology.pdf

Delivery plans for the 12 OAs

www.gov.uk/government/publications/ social-mobility-and-opportunity-areas

An independent process evaluation of the set-up phase of the programme and a summary document featuring case studies of progress in each area

www.gov.uk/government/publications/ opportunity-area-programme- research-and-analysis

Transparency data: Education statistics by local authority district and pupil disadvantage

www.gov.uk/government/publications/ education-statistics-by-la-district-and- pupil-disadvantage

Blackpool
blackpoolopportunityarea.co.uk

Derby
derbyopportunityarea.co.uk

Stoke-on-Trent
stokeontrentopportunity area.co.uk

Hastings
hastingsopportunityarea.co.uk

Oldham
oldhamopportunityarea.co.uk

Photo credits

Pages 15, 21, 26: Redwood Primary School, Derby

Pages 19, 34, 48: Ashwood Spencer Academy, Derby

Pages 43, 45: Sacred Heart School, Hastings