



HFL GUIDE TO AN EFFECTIVE PUPIL PREMIUM STRATEGY.

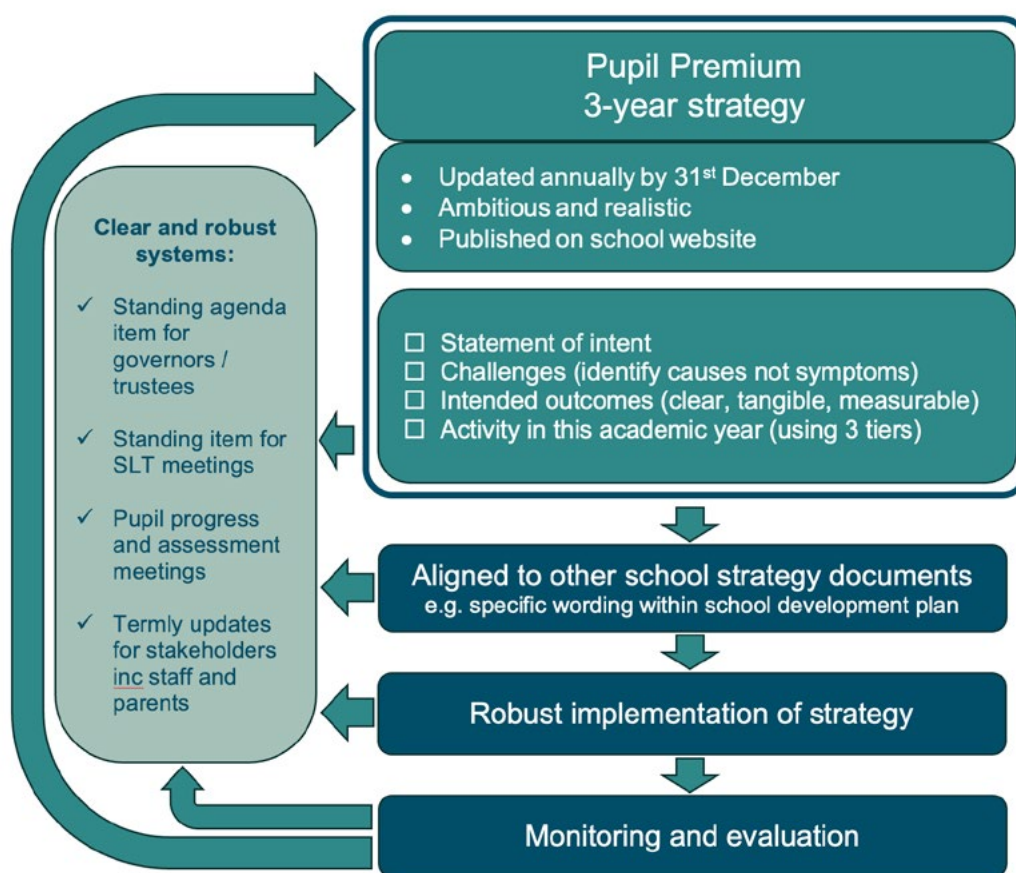
The writing of a great pupil premium strategy/statement is not a tick box exercise to comply with a DfE statutory duty. This document is one of the most crucial strategic plans that school leaders (SLT, MLs and governors/trustees) have responsibility for and hold themselves accountable to. It should be at the heart of the school's strategy to ensure that economically disadvantaged learners progress and attain as well as all other pupils and have in mind the potential negative social, emotional, health and economic consequences for these learners if their needs go unmet. It should communicate to all who read it the key barriers faced by underserved learners in the school, the (research-informed) steps that the school is taking to overcome them, who is responsible for what actions and how success is being measured and evaluated.

"We must fulfil our obligation to those who trust us and need us most. It is time for us to feel outraged and impassioned by the inequity and asymmetry in our society and, dare we admit it, within our schools. We need to understand and overcome the forces that act explicitly and implicitly to reinforce disadvantage over time; we need to systemically and collectively reconsider what is normal (and acceptable)."

Dr Dan Nicholls 2023

The following is a guide to ensuring that your school's Pupil Premium Strategy is effective in addressing this moral purpose.

Graphic Summary



Make it a three-year strategy

The DfE recommends that schools have a three-year strategy. The [EEF guidance document](#) states: “Setting longer-term objectives will give you the time and space to diagnose the challenges facing your disadvantaged pupils accurately and implement key elements of your strategy plan, such as spending, recruitment, teaching practice and staff development.”

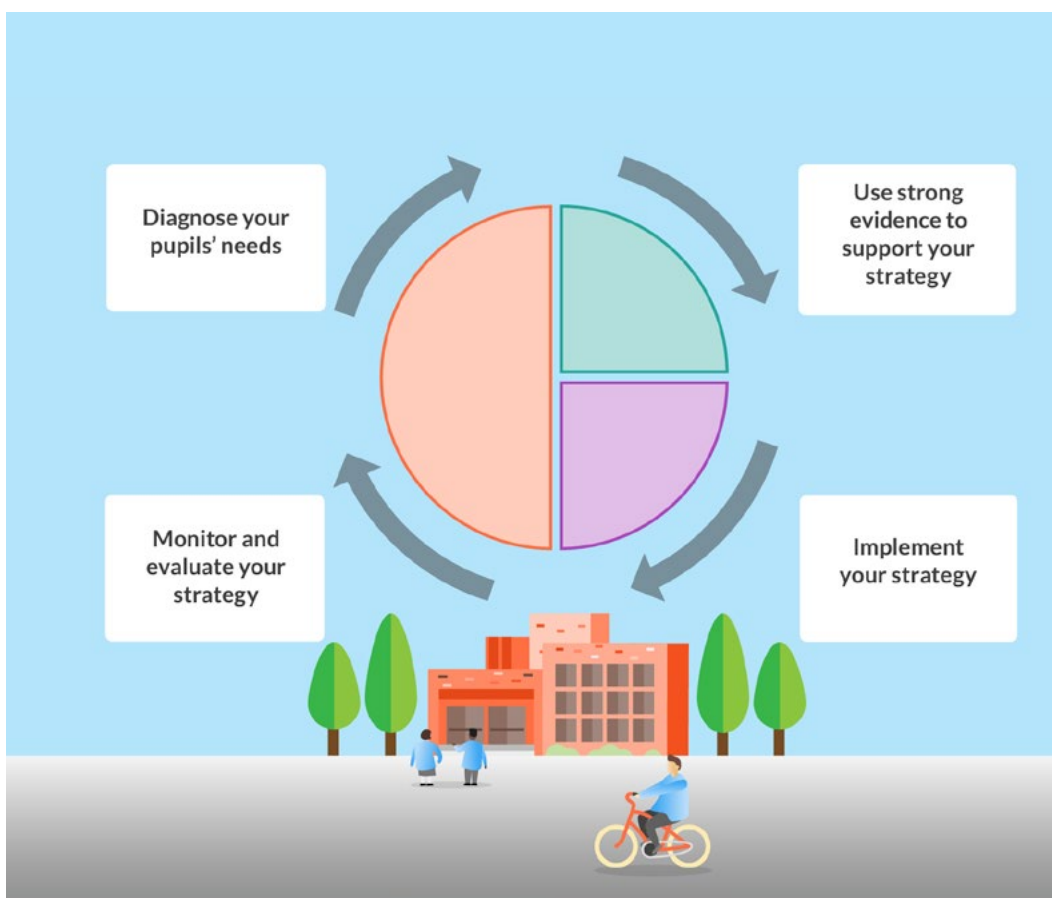
The three-year time period allows leaders to be ambitious yet realistic about changes anticipated over 36 months. For example, it is more likely that the attendance of learners eligible for PP can be increased from 92% to 95% over three years than one, with interim milestone targets of 93% by the end of Year 1 and 94% by the end of Year 2. It also allows for the planning of evolving actions to tackle one barrier. For example, to address lack of parental involvement, the action in Year 1 might involve various parent voice activities and the appointment and training of a parent advocate from the staff body. This would be followed by the implementation and evaluation of a programme of parental activities at the school and the training of staff in effective school-home engagement in Year 2. The third year might focus on the establishment of a parent drop-in room staffed by parent volunteers.

The three-year nature of the plan does not mean, of course, that once written the plan sits dormant. The construction of the plan should draw on the knowledge, skills, and expertise of all members of the school community, from governors/trustees, the headteacher, senior leaders, the PP lead, phase/curriculum/pastoral leaders and TAs, to parents and pupils. Everyone should be familiar with the plan and be active in its implementation and review. As the written plan becomes an implemented strategy, it will be subject to edits and updates as progress is monitored towards desired outcomes. As such, it will always be a live document.

The school should have a clear and robust system in place for ensuring regular review of activities undertaken as part of the plan. Review is likely to include routine discussion at SLT meetings; the inclusion of a standing item on governor/trustee meetings to receive and discuss feedback from the PP lead and termly updates from the head to parents in the school newsletter.

During the three-year life of the plan, it will be likely that key barriers faced by learners will change as the cohort changes, necessitating adjustments to the plan. It would be hoped that certain actions will become redundant as they have the desired impact, in which case they can be replaced by others. Equally, some actions may prove less effective and will require review and adjustment.

This graphic, produced by the EEF, may support leaders with the cycle of devising, implementing, monitoring and evaluating an effective pupil premium strategy.



The [EEF guidance document](#) states: “A Pupil Premium strategy is more likely to be effective if school leaders plan how to sustain it from the outset and monitor practice in an annual cycle. School leaders should not assume that strategies which have been effective in one year will continue to be effective in another.”

Update the strategy annually before 31st December

Even if a school adopts a three-year plan, leaders must review and publish an updated strategy statement every academic year before 31 December. That does not mean that the authors should change the dates of the three-year period; the school is simply publishing an update to the plan.

‘STATEMENT OF INTENT’ SECTION

The opening section of your Pupil Premium Strategy is your opportunity to outline your aims and aspirations for your underserved or disadvantaged pupils. It is where you can publicly declare your commitment to close progress and attainment gaps and overcome barriers to success. Here you can explain the key principles of your strategy.

The statement of intent section should not, however, be too general; you should reference the specific barriers faced in your school and, in summary, the precise ways in which your current pupil premium strategy plan works towards achieving your objectives.

‘CHALLENGES’ SECTION

Diagnose your pupils’ needs

Schools which are most effective at closing attainment gaps are skilled at quickly and accurately identifying the **specific** barriers that hinder the academic progress of **each individual** disadvantaged learner* in the current cohort at the current time. They use this information as the foundation for the strategy.

**The plan does not need to focus exclusively on those eligible for PP funding; we know that Pupil Premium eligibility is an imperfect proxy for educational disadvantage. However, funding for your PP+ learners MUST be ring-fenced to be used on them alone. [What is Pupil Premium Plus and How to Spend it? \(insidegovernment.co.uk\)](#)*

It is easy to slip into making assumptions or generalisations about the barriers that ‘disadvantaged learners’ face and to adopt generic strategies from this. The smaller the cohort, eligible for PP funding, the greater the likelihood of wider diversity of need.

Leaders should consult with parents and pupils (e.g., through parent and pupil voice activity) to

gain a deeper understanding of their lived experience, to draw on the knowledge of parents and pupils, and to use this to inform a responsive and effective pupil premium strategy. This, alongside the in-depth knowledge and understanding that teachers, TAs, the SENCO and others have of the pupils in their classroom setting, will ensure that leaders are in the best possible position to recognise the specific challenges that their disadvantaged pupils face.

“The first step – diagnosing the specific problems – is one that too many schools fail to execute with sufficient care and precision. We know that vulnerable learners and those at risk of underperforming are not a homogenous group. Some are eligible for PP funding and some are not. Some learners who are eligible for PP funding are not at risk.”
Rachel Macfarlane 2021

Here, discussion and consultation are key. The HFL PP Audit tool [PP audit tool](#) can help with the task of identifying barriers on a pupil-by-pupil basis. In a small school or one with a small number of learners on the PP register, this activity might be carried out by senior leaders together. In a larger school with significant numbers of learners eligible for PP funding, the audit might be completed class by class by form tutors, or year by year by pastoral or phase leaders with input from other staff who know the learners well. The [EEF guidance document](#) suggests, on page 6, that this activity will involve diagnostic assessment of academic challenges, but also take account of wider challenges, such as attendance.

This activity may reveal some common barriers and some that are more specific to certain learners. It is also likely to identify intersectionality of needs for some pupils: many young people eligible for PP funding also have SEND or are EAL or LAC, as this exemplar document illustrates: [co-occurrence exemplar](#).

Focus on what you can control

The PP strategy should focus on those challenges that are within the school’s control and on the priorities that are **most** preventing pupils from thriving in the classroom and in wider school life. The template has space for five challenges (with the option to add or delete rows). The EEF, in *Putting Evidence to Work* (Sharples et al. 2018), advise leaders against selecting too many priorities to work on at one time, suggesting that there is a greater likelihood of success if the number of strategies being implemented is kept to a manageable limit.

Leaders should not focus on social issues that are beyond the control of the school or unintentionally increase the stigma associated with being poor in the way they describe barriers in the plan. The pupil premium strategy is a public document and should not be a source of shame for those identified as ‘disadvantaged’. Statements like the following should never appear in a PP strategy:

- Most of our Pupil Premium pupils live in flats with no access to safe outside space.
- Our PP children often come to school hungry without correct or clean clothing and the resources to support their learning needs.
- Our disadvantaged children have limited experiences and instability in home life.
- Parents of disadvantaged pupils do not engage in their children’s education or provide support

at home.

“Disadvantaged pupils and their families are not a problem to be resolved. They are our school community and held in high regard. Work in partnership to ensure everyone feels they belong, in all aspects of school life. Be mindful of the risk of a ‘school within a school’: where school life works for the vast majority of pupils, but a small number are on the margins.

Assessment, not assumptions are at the heart of an effective approach. Start with the needs of the individual pupils and build a strategy around emerging themes and common issues. Avoid looking for themes to address with a ready-made solution. Pupil need, not labels should inform all decision making.”

Marc Rowland 2022

Ensure that you are identifying causes, not symptoms

For example, identifying lateness to school as a barrier to high performance is absolutely valid, but there may be myriad different reasons for pupil lateness. For some it may well be that they go to bed very late or bed share and don't get a good night's sleep and there is no reliable way of waking them each morning. But what about the child who is isolated at school, whose dad gets her up but then heads out for work himself, trusting that his daughter will leave on time for school? Or the boy who is late because he drops his younger sisters at their infants' school first and his siblings' school gates do not open until 8.45am when he is due at his own school? Or the child who lives two miles away and whose mum does not have enough money for a bus fare? Different interventions will be required to support these learners to be on time.

‘INTENDED OUTCOMES’ SECTION

The purpose of this section is to identify the outcomes you are aiming for by the end of your strategy plan, and how you will measure whether they have been achieved (interim milestones). Ensure that your objectives and success criteria/performance measures are SMART. Objectives in some schools' PP strategies are too woolly or non-quantitative – ‘Improve the P8 score of PP students’ or ‘Fewer behaviour incidents for PP pupils’ - and do not define what success will look like or how long the school is giving itself to reach its goal.

Be brave and commit to tangible, clear and measurable goals. The public declaration of goals is in itself a powerful step towards reaching them.

It's one thing committing to public targets and setting clear success criteria, but how do leaders know where to pitch their targets to ensure that they are challenging but achievable? Is 95% attendance a realistic target for your school to aim for? Would it be overly ambitious to aim to reach that goal within a year? What are appropriate milestone markers to set?

“The answer to these questions is that there will always be a degree of uncertainty

when setting goals, as it is impossible to see into the future and consider all the circumstances that might unfold. The best way to approach target setting is to be informed by evidence. When pitching their targets, smart leaders combine findings from research, information gained from conversations with colleagues from similar schools and settings, and their own professional expertise. The EEF Guide to the Pupil Premium advises that:

Taking an evidence-informed approach to Pupil Premium spending can help schools to:

- Compare how similar challenges have been tackled in other schools
- Understand the strength of evidence behind alternative approaches
- Consider the likely cost-effectiveness of a range of approaches (Education Endowment Foundation 2019: 4)

When deliberating around targets to close PP gaps, it is worth remembering that in many schools nationally, attainment of learners eligible for PP funding is above the national average for all pupils. It can be done, and it is being done by thousands of teachers, departments and schools up and down the country. On the question of setting milestones, it is important to remember, of course, that cohorts vary considerably and that progress will not always be linear.”

Rachel Macfarlane 2021

‘ACTIVITY IN THIS ACADEMIC YEAR’ SECTION

Once you have set SMART objectives, agreed your success criteria and identified some milestones, the next step is to choose the strategies that will produce the desired outcome. Again, the role of research, published reports and surveys is key here. Wise leaders seek out examples of impactful practice at other similar schools and talk to their colleagues about what has and hasn’t worked for them (whilst appreciating that what works in one context may need adapting or not be right in another). The EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit is useful in this task, providing thousands of meta-studies into the impact of various initiatives to raise attainment and close gaps.

Consider carefully appropriate activity to meet needs

The DfE identifies three tiers for pupil premium funding allocation:

1. **High quality teaching** - Spending on developing high quality teaching may include investment in professional development, training and support for early career teachers, along with recruitment and retention.
2. **Targeted academic support** – 1:1 or small group intervention or tutoring, pre or post teaching
3. **Wider strategies** - relating to the most significant non-academic challenges to success in school, including attendance, behaviour, and social and emotional support, which also may negatively impact upon academic attainment. Enrichment and activities to eliminate economic

exclusion also apply here.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) recommended approach is that schools should prioritise high-quality teaching (tier 1) in their funding decisions, with the allocated ratios to the three tiers indicated as 50:25:25. The exact balance of spending between tiers may, of course, vary depending on the specific needs of pupils and the nature of the school.

“Good teaching is the most important lever schools have to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Using the Pupil Premium to improve teaching quality benefits all students and has a particularly positive effect on children eligible for the Pupil Premium. While the Pupil Premium is provided as a different grant from core funding, this financial split shouldn’t create an artificial separation from whole class teaching.”

Education Endowment Foundation 2019: 5

Marc Rowland advises leaders to respond to assessment of need **within whole class teaching and learning**, as well as through bespoke interventions. For example, if one of the challenges identified for your disadvantaged learners is low reading ages, this should elicit a response across the curriculum (for example, whole staff training on phonics or literacy support, mentoring or coaching of specific staff, or time to review and enhance the curriculum), not just through reading interventions and whole school reading programmes.

It is tempting to view meeting additional learning needs (e.g. emotional or literacy) of pupils eligible for PP as tier 2 or 3 activity, when in fact, supporting class teachers to meet needs through high quality, adaptive and inclusive teaching in the classroom may well have the most impact.

As an example, schools often identify poor motivation or low levels of confidence as barriers to learning for disadvantaged children. Gorard, See & Davies (2012) suggest that it is tempting to identify these features as the cause of the pupils’ low attainment and assume that it is both necessary and possible to address the motivation and confidence issues (through a tier 3 intervention) before attempting to teach the children new material. In fact, evidence shows that attempts to enhance motivation in this way are unlikely to achieve that end. Even if they do, the impact on subsequent learning is close to zero. In fact, suggest Coe, Aloisi, Higgins and Major (2014), the poor motivation of low attainers is a logical response to repeated failure. Adapting the delivery of the curriculum in whole class teaching time, which involves considering the curriculum components needed by an individual to bring about learning success, is what will make the most significant difference in the learners’ motivation and confidence levels.

Tier 1 activity that involves staff training should focus on building capacity rather than simply supporting key individuals; training middle leaders on how to instil high expectations, hold colleagues to account effectively, coach, mentor and line management with impact is likely to benefit successive cohorts of PP eligible learners.

This all supports the recommendation that 50 % of the grant should be spent on tier 1 activity.

Ensure the chosen activities address the challenges you have identified

In some schools' Pupil Premium statements, the activities chosen under the three tiers bear little resemblance to the barriers and challenges identified earlier in the document. All challenges identified should have corresponding activity identified to meet need.

Use evidence to support the choice of activities

Pupil premium guidance from the DfE suggests that leaders should consider a range of external evidence, alongside the school's own knowledge of their pupils, to better understand which specific activities have been found to be the most effective in addressing the types of challenge that pupils face. This includes considering what implementation strategies may be important to ensure success and the relative impact of different approaches. There is also **EEF guidance** which provides leaders with indicators for evidence that may be considered of higher or lower relevance. Leaders should consider these documents when providing evidence which supports the school's chosen approach.

Align your strategy

The pupil premium strategy should be aligned with other school strategy documents. It is not a separate, stand-alone document. The **EEF guidance document** states:

“Successful implementation of a Pupil Premium strategy is a carefully staged process that takes time, rather than being a one-off event. The strategy needs to be aligned with other school development plans and existing practices to ensure a sustained impact.”

In line with the conditions of the grant, any activity that schools fund using pupil premium must fall under an approach listed in the table on page 8 of **Using pupil premium: guidance for school leaders**. Therefore, leaders should consult this document when reviewing their PP strategy statement to ensure that their chosen activities meet the requirements of the DfE guidance. It would not be appropriate, for example, to use PP funding to enhance the general staff salaries budget under tier 1.

Aligning the PP strategy with other school plans includes the school budget. **Sutton Trust research** in 2023 revealed that 41% of school leaders were using the pupil premium to plug gaps in their budget. In other words, the PP funding, whilst allocated to the three tiers in the strategy document, was being swallowed up in the general budget. This should not be happening and it is key role of governors/trustees to ensure that it is not.

Implement your strategy

The following diagram, from the EEF's very helpful guidance report, Putting Evidence to Work (Sharples et al. 2018), is an excellent aide-memoire for leaders when implementing their PP strategy. The 12 instructions it contains, if followed carefully, should support schools in designing and implementing an action plan that leads to higher performance and closing disadvantaged gaps.

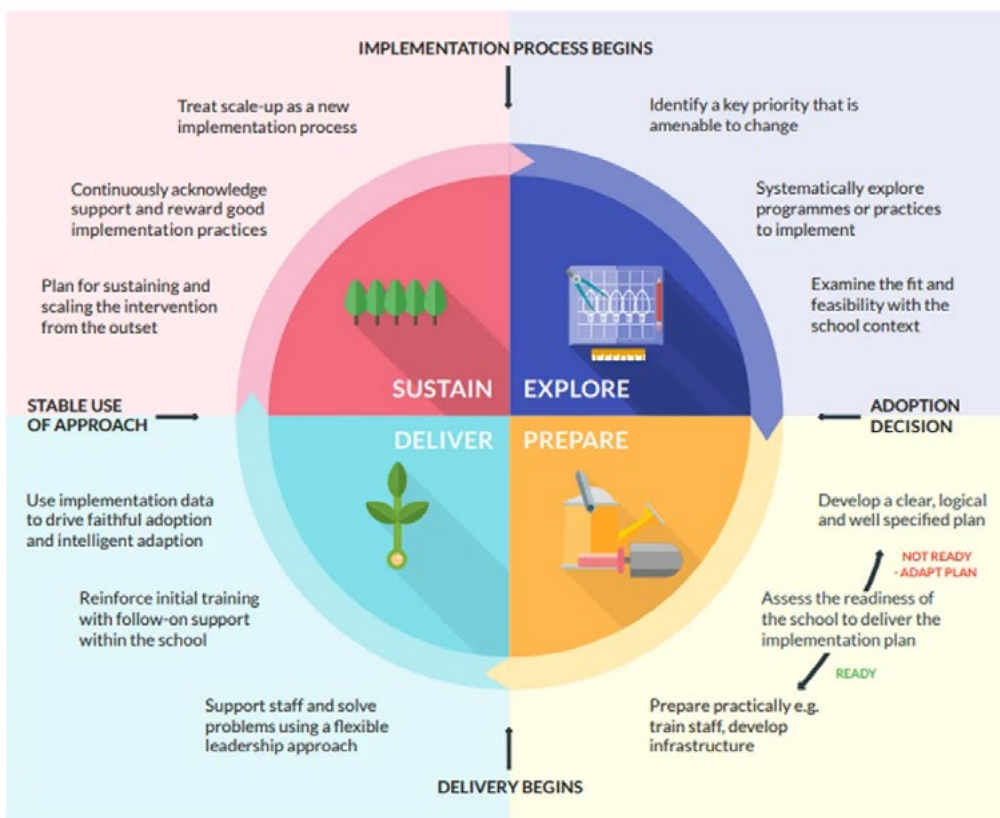
The three steps in the 'deliver' stage of the cycle emphasise the need for leaders to support staff in the delivery of the strategy and to provide ongoing CP to ensure that all staff are equipped to play their part in the delivery. It goes without saying that, for the plan to be effective, all staff need to be familiar with it! In too many schools staff are unaware of the school's chosen strategies for improving the academic performance of disadvantaged pupils.

The reference to 'intelligent adaptation' is also important.

"In high-performing schools, staff review progress every few weeks, to check that the strategies being implemented are having the intended impact, that staff energies are being well invested and to spot any signs of underperformance so that they can be addressed swiftly. Many schools have a PP coordinator or champion for disadvantaged learners, whose role it is to track the interventions put in place for each student on the PP register or disadvantaged list. They monitor the success of the support strategies implemented and report back to the senior leadership team, making evidence-based recommendations about whether these interventions are proving effective, require adjustment or should be replaced."

Rachel Macfarlane 2021

The EEF's Implementation templates are also a useful tool. [EEF Implementation Plan template](#).



Sharples et al. 2018: 8.

Monitor and evaluate your strategy

Most schools are good at describing how they are using their PP grant, but few are as effective in assessing its impact. This is perhaps not surprising. It is hard to know the extent to which any changes we observe in attitude, behaviour, progress and performance are a result of the actions that we have taken. Also, unless we have a control group, we cannot assess the counterfactual – what would have happened if we had not done what we did.

Yet, holding ourselves to account against our original success criteria is important. Seeking external input to the review process can be beneficial, ensuring rigour and objectivity. Many schools use leaders from other schools – or perhaps an adviser, consultant or school improvement organisation – to review their action planning or to conduct a review of provision for learners eligible for PP funding. It is also crucial that the governing body/trust board takes an active interest in pupil progress, especially that of disadvantaged learners, and that governors/trustees ask for forensic evaluations of the impact of interventions, ask insightful questions of leaders and engage in robust dialogue based on this data. They should check to ensure that previously-used strategies that have yielded little impact are not repeated without adaptation from one year to the next.

In order to execute their accountability function effectively, governors/trustees need to be trained in matters relating to the PP grant and impactful practice to raise the performance of disadvantaged learners. Having a lead PP governor who liaises closely with the staff PP lead can be an effective way of expanding governance expertise on the subject.

The DfE recommends that schools include an evaluation of the impact of the pupil premium activity from the previous year. The DfE states that when evaluating impact, schools should use objective data that is focused on pupil outcomes (which could relate to attendance, progress, behaviour, attitude or attainment, for example) – and should avoid basing evaluation on the perceptions of those delivering the activity. Leaders should consider the recommendations for evaluating and reviewing pupil outcomes found on page 7 of [Using pupil premium: guidance for school leaders](#).

CONCLUSION

In an age of growing societal inequity, economic challenge and unprecedented disruption to education, it is perhaps no surprise that we see the disadvantage gap increasing at all key stages across the nation and locally. Yet there are many examples of schools which are succeeding in eliminating any differentials in the progress and attainment of more and less economically advantaged learners. The construction, delivery, tracking and evaluation of a robust and smart PP plan, to which all key stakeholders feel allegiance and accountability, is central to ensuring a high-quality education for all.

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