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Planning for impact

**A guide for using research evidence to
support school planning for 2023**



Evidence for Learning's *Planning for impact: A guide for using research evidence to support school planning for 2023* was published in August 2022.

This guide has been developed based on the Education Endowment Foundation's publication '*Moving forwards, making a difference: A planning guide for schools 2022-23*'.

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About Evidence for Learning (E4L)

Evidence for Learning is an independent, not-for-profit organisation committed to ensuring all children and young people throughout Australia, regardless of background, make the best possible learning progress. We do this by improving the quality, availability and use of evidence in education and collaborating with education researchers, policy makers, systems leaders, educators, professional learning providers, philanthropists and the wider community.

Foreword

Disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) have impacted teaching and learning in schools over the last few years. Throughout this time, teachers and school leaders have had to adapt or find new ways of teaching, assessing, supporting and maintaining relationships with children and young people.

As educators well know, the challenge isn't over yet: student and staff attendance remains inconsistent due to illness, and the lasting impact of disruptions on academic achievement and wellbeing continues to be felt in classrooms across the country.

So, as planning for 2023 commences, how can schools develop and implement plans to ensure all students, regardless of background, make the best possible learning progress?

This guide incorporates the best available evidence on a variety of areas of teaching practice, from ensuring high quality teaching to removing non-academic barriers to achievement.

We hope it supports school leaders' decision-making by enabling the exploration of evidence on effective approaches and reflection on how to have the highest impact on student learning with the most efficient amount of time and effort.

The Evidence for Learning team

Introduction

What does this guidance cover and who is it for?

This guide has been developed to help school leaders draw on E4L's resources as they plan for 2023, in the context of the ongoing challenges of the last few years where some students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, may have been disproportionately impacted by Covid-19.

Drawing on a stepped model, the guide covers:

1. High-quality teaching for all
2. Targeted academic support
3. Wider strategies to support students.

It is designed to help school leaders in determining how best to focus time, effort, and resources by identifying evidence-informed strategies with the greatest potential to support student achievement.

This guide has been developed with existing school planning processes in mind and is intended to be used alongside relevant jurisdictional planning supports and tools.

School planning is related to the Professional Practice of 'Leading improvement innovation and change' in the Australian Professional Standard for Principals. For [more information on the Standard see the AITSL website.](#)

The stepped model for school planning

Meaningful school planning is not quick. It is a complex process that takes time, thought, and sustained effort. Focusing on key priorities is the first essential step in this process.

The stepped model for school planning is one method to enable busy school leaders to consider where best to invest time, energy, and resources for the benefit of their particular students and should be used alongside planning processes that exist in your school and jurisdiction.

1. High quality teaching

The evidence tells us that high quality teaching is the most important factor when it comes to improving achievement outcomes, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Schools should focus on developing teaching practice over a sustained period to drive meaningful change in their setting.

2. Targeted academic support

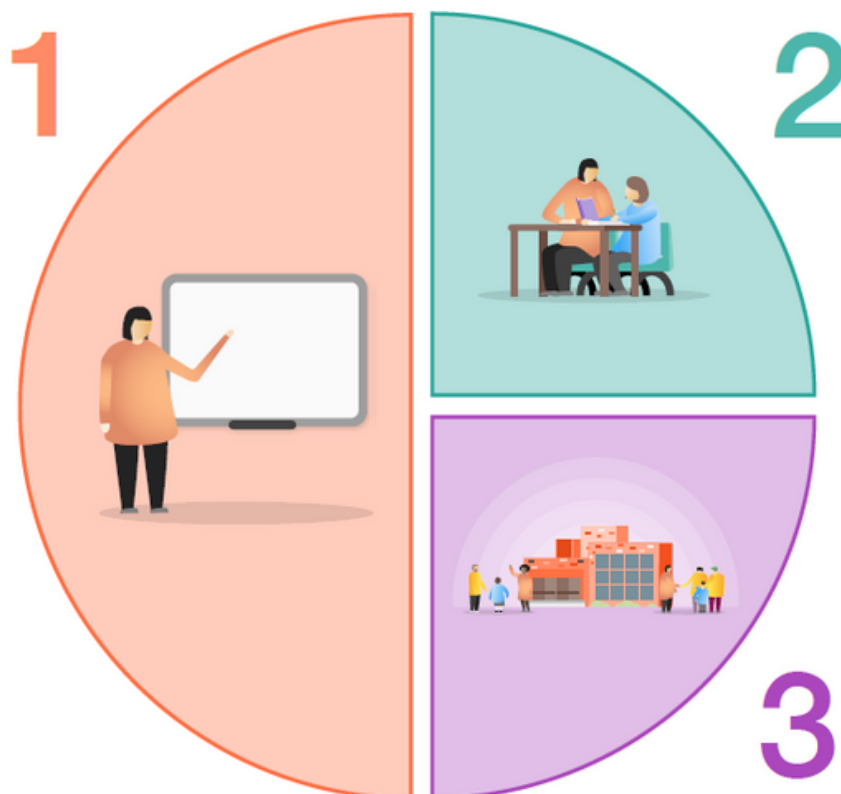
For students in need of additional support, research suggests that providing targeted academic support finely tuned to the needs of individual students offers potential benefits.

School planning should therefore be open to the idea of planning targeted academic support offerings to complement high quality classroom teaching.

3. Wider strategies

Wider strategies address non-academic barriers to success at school that have a significant influence on achievement. Approaches to wider strategies that are likely to support learning include:

- improving attendance; and
- improving behaviour and re-establishing routines and relationships.



1. High quality teaching

Much school planning for 2023 will rightly focus on ensuring high quality teaching, every day, for all students.

Recent evidence suggests some promising 'best bets' when it comes to developing, planning, and sustaining high quality teaching. These include:

- improving literacy and mathematics outcomes;
- high quality daily teaching: the 'five-a-day' approach;
- using diagnostic assessment to address learning gaps; and
- selecting and designing effective professional development.

As a starting point, school leaders may utilise resources such as the E4L Teaching & Learning Toolkit or Guidance Reports which are detailed below. Any new teaching approaches, or curriculum adaptations, should be informed by the best available evidence and implemented with care, taking into account how manageable such changes prove for busy teachers.

The Teaching & Learning Toolkit

The Teaching & Learning Toolkit provides an accessible overview of international and Australasian evidence on teaching for five to 16-year-olds. The Toolkit guides schools towards 'best bets' for improving students' achievement on the basis of research on what has worked (and also what hasn't) worked in the past.

Each of the topics covered in the Toolkit briefly answers four key questions:

- How effective is it?
- How secure is the evidence?
- What are the costs?
- What should you still consider?

The Toolkit is a good place to start when considering evidence-based practices. Use it to inform decision-making by considering the relative strengths and weaknesses of different strategies. A guide and reflection tool to support school leaders' use of the Toolkit is found [here](#).

Suggestions for use:

- Consider a snapshot of various approaches to help select a focus area.
- Review a summary of research related to a focus area.

Guidance Reports

Guidance Reports provide evidence on key school improvement priorities - such as literacy and mathematics - and go into greater detail than the Toolkit. They are based on rigorous reviews of the best available research evidence.

The evidence is translated into clear and actionable recommendations for schools, and are supported by additional resources such as illustrations of practice and self-assessment tools.

Guidance Reports are designed to support teachers and school leaders in developing their practice. Try to see the recommendations as a coherent whole rather than cherry pick those that you like.

Suggestions for use:

- Pinpoint and articulate what should be occurring in order for the approach to have the best chance of success (once a focus area has been identified).
- Review progress on the approach in a discussion with staff using the supporting tools.

1. High quality teaching

Improving literacy and mathematics outcomes

Literacy and mathematics outcomes are vital for students' success at school. Essential skills such as reading can unlock access to the entire school curriculum. For instance, reading fluency can support increased comprehension when reading historical sources, tackling local case studies in geography, or reading poetry in English. While mathematics is a crucial subject domain in its own right, mathematical ability is also important to enable students to access other curriculum areas such as science and geography.

Students' progress in literacy and numeracy may have been adversely impacted by the many challenges posed by the pandemic. Our Guidance Reports contain a range of evidence-based recommendations that help break down the complexities and inform priorities for literacy and mathematics development.

Recommendations from the Guidance Reports are shared on this page and the next, and may help you consider evidence-based strategies if you are planning literacy and numeracy priorities for 2023. Although these are developed for specific areas of schooling, you will likely see some similarities between the recommendations.

Key questions to consider

- What are the specific literacy or mathematics issues that need to be addressed? For example, for young readers, is it a decoding issue, vocabulary knowledge, reading fluency, or something else?
- What are the existing literacy or mathematics practices and supports already established in school? Are these well targeted to best support students adversely impacted during the pandemic?

Recommendations from the E4L Mathematics Guidance Report

Improving mathematics in upper primary and lower secondary

- 1 Use assessment to build on students' existing knowledge and understanding
 - 2 Use manipulatives and representations
 - 3 Teach strategies for solving problems
 - 4 Enable students to develop a rich network of mathematical knowledge
 - 5 Develop students' independence and motivation
 - 6 Use tasks and resources to challenge and support students' mathematics
 - 7 Use structured interventions to provide additional support
 - 8 Support students to make a successful transition between primary and secondary school
- For more details see: e4l.org.au/mathematics-primary-secondary



1. High quality teaching



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Recommendations from the E4L Literacy Guidance Reports

Improving literacy in lower primary

- 1 Develop students' speaking and listening skills and wider understanding of language
- 2 Use an engaging approach to developing reading, which integrates both decoding and comprehension skills
- 3 Effectively implement a systematic phonics program
- 4 Teach students to use strategies for developing and monitoring their reading comprehension
- 5 Teach students to use strategies for planning and monitoring their writing
- 6 Promote fluent written transcription skills by encouraging extensive and effective practice and explicitly teaching spelling
- 7 Use high-quality information about students' current capabilities to select the best next steps for teaching
- 8 Use high-quality structured interventions to help students who are struggling with their literacy

For more details see: e4l.org.au/literacy-primary-lower



Improving literacy in upper primary

- 1 Develop students' language capability to support their reading and writing
- 2 Support students to develop fluent reading capabilities
- 3 Teach reading comprehension strategies through modelling and supported practice
- 4 Teach writing composition strategies through modelling and supported practice
- 5 Develop students' transcription and sentence construction skills through extensive practice
- 6 Target teaching and support by accurately assessing student needs
- 7 Use high-quality structured interventions to help students who are struggling with their literacy

For more details see: e4l.org.au/literacy-primary-upper



Improving literacy in secondary

- 1 Prioritise 'disciplinary literacy' across the curriculum
 - 2 Provide targeted vocabulary instruction in every subject
 - 3 Develop students' ability to read complex academic texts
 - 4 Break down complex writing tasks
 - 5 Combine writing instruction with reading in every subject
 - 6 Provide opportunities for structured talk
 - 7 Provide high quality literacy interventions for struggling students
- For more details see: e4l.org.au/literacy-secondary



1. High quality teaching

High quality daily teaching: the 'five-a-day' approach

Teaching is complex but there are certain key elements that can be integrated into daily practice to enhance its quality. The 'five-a-day' approach identifies these evidence-based 'best bets', which research evidence suggests can have a positive impact across phases and for all student groups. The five elements of the approach are summarised on the following page.

The 'five-a-day' approach may be especially helpful as schools look to address lingering knowledge gaps or longstanding misconceptions which might have been picked up as a result of disruptions to learning.

- **Explicit instruction** can ensure that all students have a secure understanding of previously learned content upon which to then build new knowledge.
- **Flexible groups** temporarily bring together students with a specific knowledge or skill gap — such as the ability to structure extended writing — to receive additional support.
- **Scaffolding homework tasks** — by providing, for example, worked examples or recording supporting guidance to be accessed via technology — can support students who may be struggling to learn independently at home.

These evidence-informed strategies support all learners, particularly when underpinned by strong teacher-student relationships.



Key questions to consider

- Are teachers and school leaders using the 'five-a-day' approach to promote good teaching for all students?
- What are the necessary 'five-a-day' teaching practices that would best support students in your school context?

High quality daily teaching: the 'five-a-day' approach



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1 Explicit Instruction

Teacher-led approaches with a focus on clear explanations, modelling, and frequent checks for understanding. This is then followed by guided practice, before independent practice.



2 Cognitive and metacognitive strategies

Managing cognitive load is crucial if new content is to be transferred into students' long-term memory. Provide opportunities for students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning.



3 Scaffolding

When students are working on a written task, provide a supportive tool or resource such as a writing frame or a partially completed example. Aim to provide less support of this nature throughout the course of the lesson, week, or term.



4 Flexible grouping

Allocate groups temporarily, based on current level of achievement. This could, for example, be a group that comes together to get some additional spelling instruction based on current need before re-joining the main class.



5 Using technology

Technology can be used by a teacher to model worked examples; it can be used by a student to help them to learn, to practice, and to record their learning. For instance, you might use a class visualiser to share students' work or to jointly rework an incorrect model.



1. High quality teaching

Using diagnostic assessment to address learning gaps

Diagnostic assessments[1] help identify students' existing thinking, strengths, and weaknesses before commencing an activity, lesson, or topic. They can give useful insights into learning, adding to the richness of the information teachers hold about their students.

When used effectively, diagnostic assessments can indicate areas for development with individual students or across classes and year groups. Some methods can also help teachers isolate the specific misconceptions students might hold.

Regardless of what form they take, it is important that teachers know why they are conducting assessments prior to using them. It should be clear what information the assessment is being designed to produce and how this information will inform subsequent decision making.

With the information diagnostic assessments provide, teachers may:

- decide to adjust the level of challenge of activities;
- reteach specific concepts or topics;
- adjust curriculum content in the medium or long term;
- provide students with feedback through which they can address their own areas for improvement; or
- identify students who may need additional, targeted academic support.

Key questions to consider

- What assessments will give us the best diagnostic information about the prerequisite knowledge, skills, and competencies we want our students to develop?
- Are assessments used to diagnose issues at both an individual student level and at a cohort or class level?
- Are assessments being used to inform judicious adaptations to the curriculum?

To find out more you can access E4L's [resource on diagnostic assessment on our website](#). This resource outlines what diagnostic assessment is, how it might be used by teachers, and key questions to consider. It provides examples of diagnostic teaching to support teaching, including hinge questions, quizzing and pre-topic mind maps.

For further resources you can also access E4L's Guidance for Educators resource on assessment and feedback in schools here: e4l.org.au/feedback-schools



[1] A range of descriptions are used in different jurisdictions and settings for types of assessment. This guide is focused on diagnostic assessment that is used to identify students' existing thinking, strengths and weaknesses before commencing an activity, lesson or topic. Refer to E4L's [resource on diagnostic assessment](#) for details.

1. High quality teaching

Selecting and designing effective professional development

Effective professional development is vital to support, develop, and sustain high quality teaching. As schools are planning for 2023, professional development is an important focus for school plans.

E4L's Effective professional development Guidance Report identifies some 'best bets' on how to maximise the impact of the professional development opportunities that schools choose to invest time, energy, and resources in. The Guidance Report identifies essential building blocks, or mechanisms, which increase the likelihood that professional development will make a difference to classroom practice.

These mechanisms fall into four key groups that, taken together, are known as the 'balanced approach' to professional development design.

These four groups are:

- building knowledge;
- motivating teachers;
- developing teacher techniques; and
- embedding practice.

The details of each mechanism are summarised in the diagram on the following page.

When professional development activities include at least one mechanism from each of these four groups, the evidence suggests that it is more likely to bring about lasting change.

Schools should only address a small number of professional development priorities at a time, making sure that staff training exemplifies the balanced approach outlined on the following page.

Key questions to consider

- Does any proposed professional development focus align with school priorities? Does this professional development address the most important needs of teachers and students at this time?
- Is there capacity to sustain this professional development for the time necessary to embed changes to classroom practice?

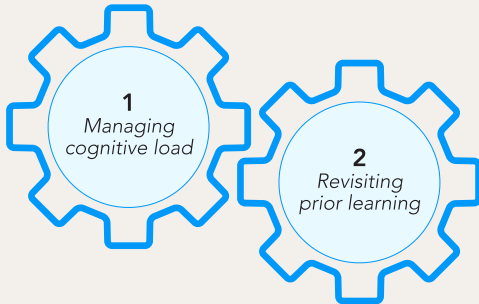
To find out more you can access E4L's Effective professional development Guidance Report here: e4l.org.au/professional-development

Underpinned by a systematic review, this report explains 14 mechanisms of professional development and provides a guiding set of principles to ensure that professional development is as effective and efficient as possible.

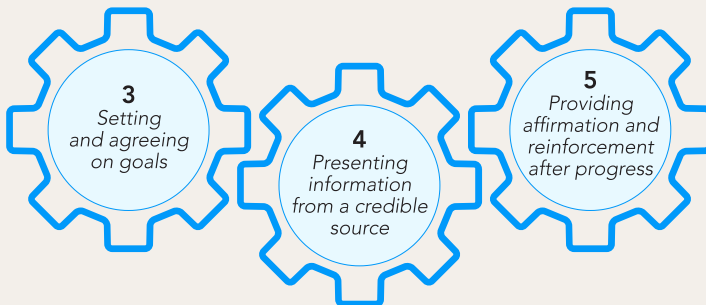




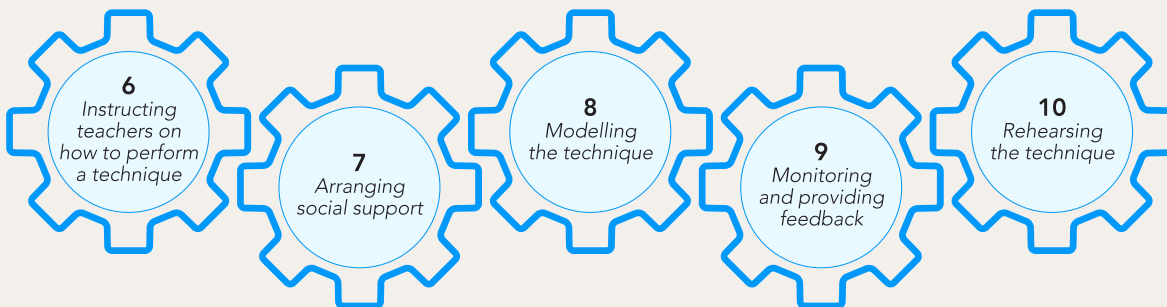
A. Build Knowledge



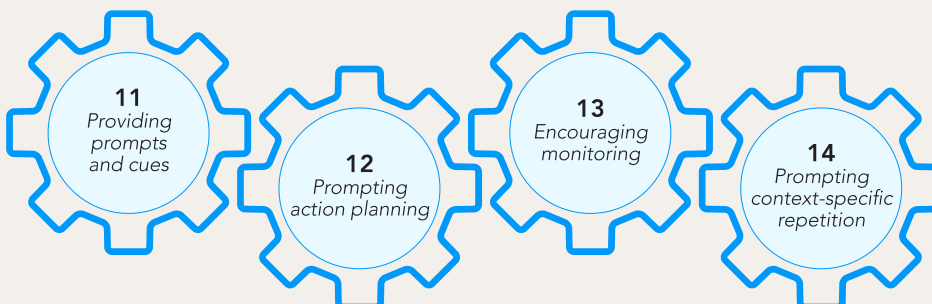
B. Motivate Teachers



C. Develop Teaching Techniques



D. Embed Practice



2. Targeted academic support

Most students will benefit from a focus on high quality, whole-class teaching. However, some may require extra, targeted support that is tailored to their specific needs to get their learning back on track.

Additional support could involve revisiting foundational knowledge, practicing basic skills, or pre-learning upcoming content. Key to success will be making sure that any support given complements and strongly links to the curriculum content being covered in-class, with the content being set by teachers where possible.

The TARGET model, drawn from insights from a range of trials and programs investigated by our partners at the Education Endowment Foundation, offers a helpful summary of typical active ingredients of successful targeted academic support.

Timing

Support sessions are often brief (e.g. 15–60 mins) and regular (e.g. 2–5 per week).

Assessment

Assessments are used to identify students, guide areas of focus, and to track student progress.

Resourcing

The support sessions have structured supporting resources and lesson plans, with clear objectives and possibly a delivery script.

Give it time

Careful timetabling is in place to enable consistent delivery. Sessions are typically maintained over a sustained period (e.g. 8–20 weeks).

Expert delivery

Support is delivered by a qualified teacher or, if they are unavailable, a trained teaching assistant. The additional support or program is followed precisely and suggested delivery protocols are followed.

Teacher links

If not delivered by the classroom teacher, the support deliverer and the teacher/s communicate regularly and make appropriate connections between out-of-class learning and classroom teaching.

2. Targeted academic support

In the year ahead, schools may be considering what tutoring strategies are feasible and best fit the needs of their students.

E4L's Teaching & Learning Toolkit features three specific strands on different approaches to implement: one to one tuition, peer tutoring and small group tuition.

Key questions to consider

- Does your planned targeted academic support draw on the principles highlighted within the 'TARGET' model?
- Are students missing important curriculum content when removed from class to receive additional support, and how can this challenge be mitigated so that learning gaps are not compounded?

One to one tuition

+5 months

Short, regular sessions over a set period of time (up to ten weeks) appear to result in optimum impact. Evidence also suggests tuition should be additional to, but explicitly linked with, normal teaching.

Peer tutoring

+5 months

This includes a range of approaches in which learners work in pairs or small groups to provide each other with explicit teaching support. Use it to review or consolidate learning rather than to introduce new material.

Small group tuition

+4 months

Small group tuition is most likely to be effective if it is targeted at students' specific needs. Diagnostic assessment can be used to assess the best way to target support.

To find out more you can access E4L's guide for school leadership teams on implementing and monitoring tutoring initiatives here:

e4l.org.au/implementing-tutoring

E4L also has a dedicated guidance for educators page focused on tutoring in schools which you can access here:

e4l.org.au/tutoring-schools



3. Wider strategies

'Wider strategies' support positive learning behaviours that enable schools to remove non-academic barriers to achievement. The success of these strategies is strongly influenced by whether or not they are implemented with a focus on supportive relationships and strong routines.

Prioritising wider strategies can be key for the wellbeing and achievement of all students but will be especially important at transition points, whether the student is moving to the classroom next door or to an entirely new setting. Evidence suggests this is particularly true for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Attendance

All teachers understand how important it is for students to be in the classroom, where we know they learn best. However, attendance continues to be an area of difficulty for some schools, particularly in the wake of the pandemic.

Parental engagement approaches

It may be useful to reflect on school processes for engaging parents or carers. There are a number of approaches which the evidence suggests can improve attendance for all students, including:

- sharing students' attendance percentage with parents or carers at key points in the year;
- frequently restating the importance of regular school attendance; and
- utilising technology, such as text messaging.

For those students in need of additional support, the evidence also suggests that engaging parents through targeted approaches can be successful. This approach, more commonly employed to support students with significant attendance concerns, often involves schools working positively and closely in partnership with parents, collaborating to support the student or family.

This could include making referrals to specialist services such as counselling and mentoring to support the student's individual needs.

Responsive supports to target the individual causes of low attendance

Schools can also support students with particularly low attendance by creating and implementing bespoke plans that respond to the often very individual reasons why a student may not be coming to school. Success will be more likely when this work is underpinned by strong relationships and a good understanding of student needs.

Key questions to consider

- How effective are current systems of communication with parents around attendance? Could these be improved or strengthened?
- How are you identifying students at risk of disengagement? Do you need a process of using data to identify and take early action to support students at risk of disengagement?
- What support is available for students with poor attendance or who are otherwise at risk of disengagement from school? Does this address the root cause of their disengagement?

3. Wider strategies

Behaviour for learning

Many schools have invested time on re-establishing strong routines following the disruption caused by Covid-19. Alongside this, many have put considerable effort into supporting positive learning behaviours for all students.

In practice, this may mean:

- re-establishing a whole-school culture in which behaviour routines are implemented positively, consistently, and with transparency;
- explicit teaching of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills, to all students, which also integrate well into high quality teaching in every classroom and at the whole-school level; and
- approaching transition carefully, ensuring that students:
 - receive well-sequenced curriculum content that builds on their prior learning experiences;
 - have a strong understanding of school routines and expectations; and
 - benefit from opportunities to establish new friendships.

“A learning behaviour can be thought of as a behaviour that is necessary in order for a person to learn effectively in the group setting of the classroom.”

Ellis and Todd, 2018

Key questions to consider

- Are behaviour routines explicitly understood and enacted across your whole school?
- During periods of transition, do students have a clear understanding of any changes to routine, the opportunity to develop relationships with peers, and access to curriculum content that builds on what they already know? What changes might be needed to ensure this?

School leaders exploring how wider strategies support teaching and learning may wish to consider the following E4L resources.

Guidance Reports

Improving social and emotional learning in primary schools



Working with parents to improve children's learning



Evidence review

Student health and wellbeing: systematic review



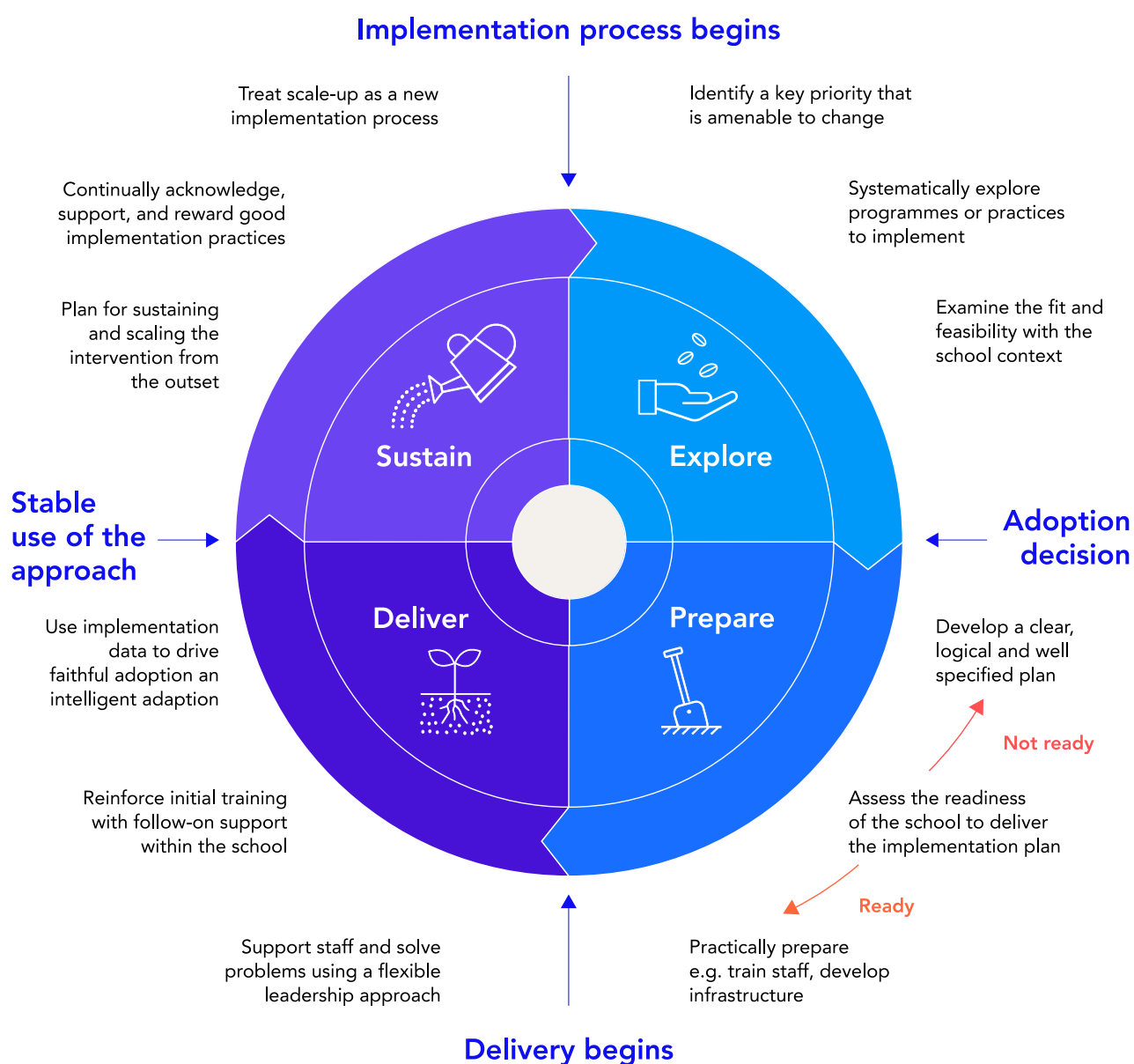
Insights

Insights into students at risk of disengagement



As schools develop their plans for the year ahead, it is important to recognise that successfully implementing new approaches is not a quick, one-off event. Additionally, there may be a need to stop existing approaches or practices: attention to de-implementing may be necessary.

Meaningful change happens in planned stages and unfolds over an extended period of time — within and across school years. The E4L implementation cycle offers schools a clear, accessible process for planning and delivering changes in practice.



E4L's Putting evidence to work: a school's guide to implementation provides key recommendations that can help school leaders looking to implement evidence-informed approaches in the year ahead. These highlight the importance of:

- **clearly defining the area of practice in need of development and identifying appropriate practices or programs to address this:** this will involve using robust practitioner generated evidence to identify a tight focus for improvement and utilising robust research evidence to inform decisions on what to implement;
- **creating an implementation plan that clarifies how changes will take place in practice:** this will help to build a shared understanding of changes to come, and consider how best to support staff and allocate resources (including time); and
- **continually monitoring the implementation process to track progress and make adaptations to suit the needs of the students and school context:** this will help schools to solve any problems which might arise and identify areas where staff might require additional support, to keep improving the use of an approach over time.

Implementation is easier when staff feel trusted to try new things and make mistakes, safe in the knowledge that they will be supported with high quality resources, training, and encouragement to try again and keep improving. This may mean choosing to implement fewer key actions in order to ensure that time, resources, and teachers' efforts and energy can be focused where they will make the most difference.

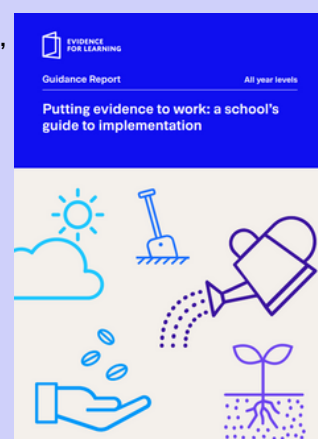
Key questions to consider

- What evidence (research evidence or practitioner-generated) will be needed to identify the most pressing priorities for our school plans?
- Does this include information from a range of sources (for example, assessment information, lesson observations, or staff and student surveys or interviews) to build a rich evidence picture?
- How will staff be supported to implement the practices that will address the priority identified? What will be expected, supported, and rewarded?

E4L has a suite of resources to support school leaders as they plan for, and implement school improvement initiatives and new approaches.

The Guidance Report 'Putting evidence to work: a school's guide to implementation' is a good place to start. This Guidance Report includes accompanying materials such as:

- a summary poster of recommendations
- an explainer about active ingredients
- a guide to gathering and analysing data to identify priorities
- an editable implementation plan
- illustrations of implementation from Australian schools.

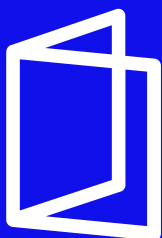


Further support

E4L's website contains a range of tools and supporting materials that may be useful in your schools planning process.

You can explore the [Guidance for Educators](#) section to find evidence summaries, resources and tools based on key themes, or the [Support for Implementation](#) section which contains support for planning and implementing new approaches in your context as well as insights on using research evidence to support school improvement efforts.

If you have questions, or need further support, you can contact the E4L team on info@evidenceforlearning.org.au.



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Helping great practice become common practice in education.