

Introduction

Evidence from the EEF, the National Literacy Trust and other researchers have identified that COVID-19 has had a significantly negative impact on the literacy and language development of a large number of pupils but particularly on those from disadvantaged families. Language is at the heart of education; *'Vocabulary skills at age 13 strongly predict both Maths and English Literature GCSE results more strongly than socio-economic backgrounds'* (Jean Gross CBE, Educationalist and former government's Communication Champion for children and young people.)

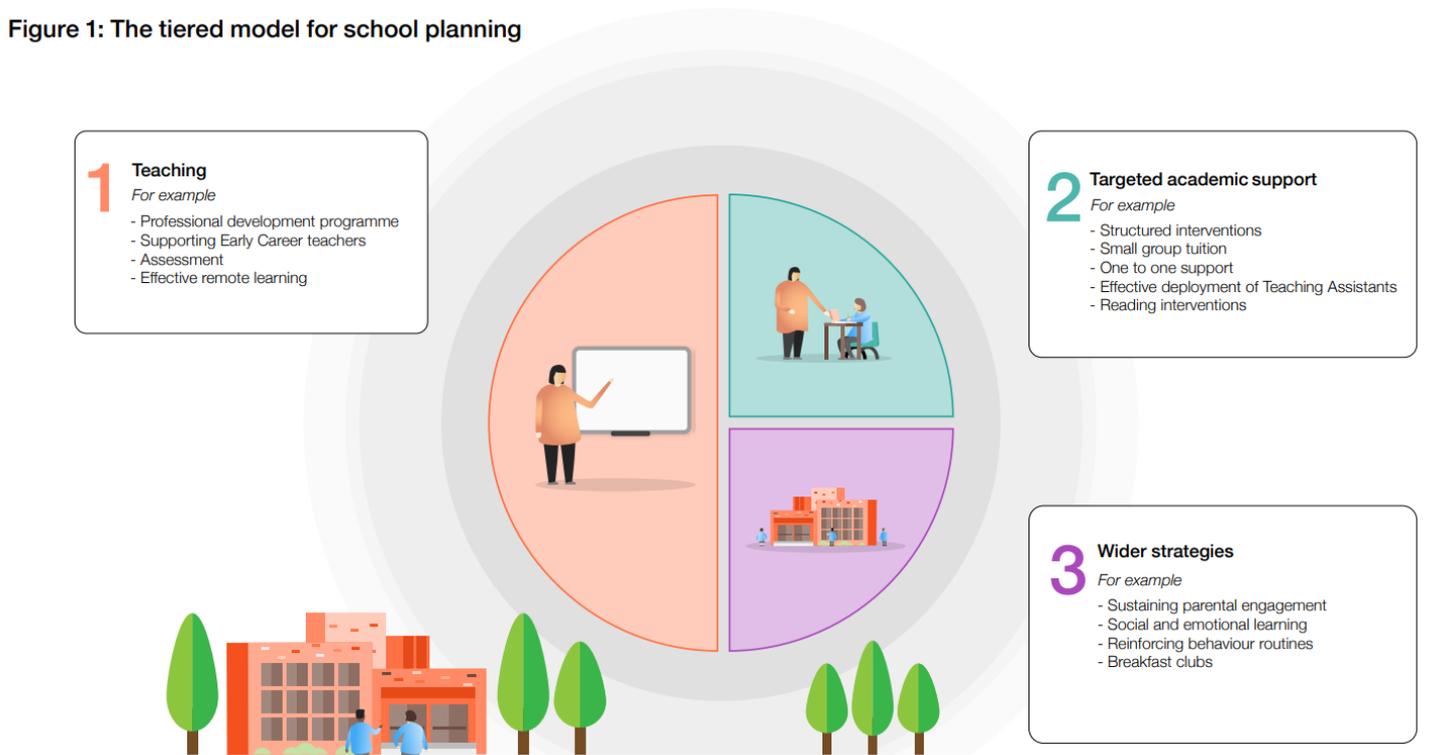
In Surrey we already know that prior to the pandemic disadvantaged pupils including service pupils lagged behind non-disadvantaged pupils in reading at all Key Stages.

SAfE has been working with a number of schools and trusts (see below) to develop a strategy to ameliorate this impact. This strategy is predicated on both national and international research that shows that Quality First Teaching has the most impact for all of our children, but especially for our disadvantaged. Research also shows that classroom strategies that are shown to be effective for one ethnic or socio-economic group tend also to be effective for others. Much of the work will be funded through existing SAfE funding streams. However, in order to have the biggest impact and to support schools additional funding will be required.

Approach – cross phase

The EEF identifies three aspects for a tiered model for school planning and catch-up during this academic year. High quality first teaching is at the centre of any amelioration and planning and evidence shows that unless schools have this in place intervention is less likely to be effective.

Figure 1: The tiered model for school planning



Ameliorating the COVID-19 Gap - Language and Literacy Strategy – an approach for disadvantaged including service children

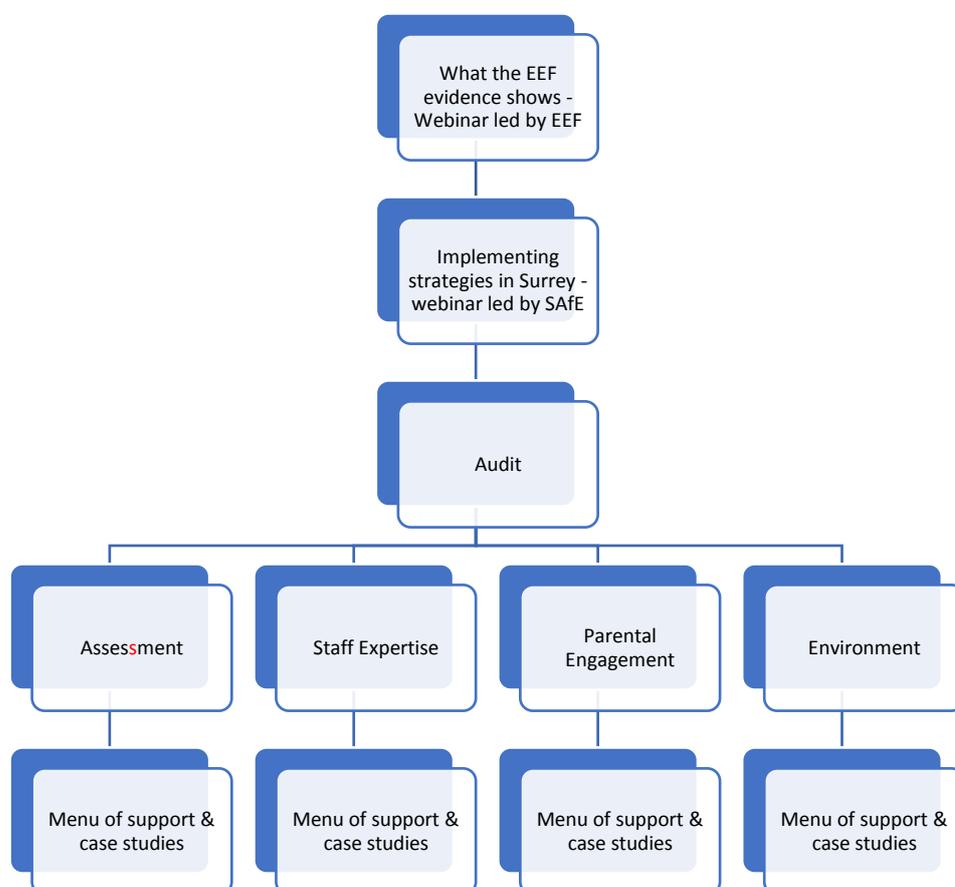


We launched our work focused on improving literacy and language with a webinar led by the Education Endowment Foundation on effective learning and teaching practice in literacy and language (Tuesday 22nd September).

This was then followed by a second webinar (Thursday 24th September) which explored the implementation of these principles in Surrey Schools. It primarily focused on developing core classroom teaching strategies that improve the literacy capabilities of the whole class. With this in place, the need for additional support should decrease. Whilst Secondary schools do not tend to teach literacy specific lessons for all, we hope that the best practice and learning that was shared will assist key Secondary professionals in their work (particularly at KS3) with children who would benefit from greater competence in literacy.

The session shared an accessible and efficient audit which will allow schools to highlight the priority focus for improving the teaching of early reading and language acquisition from:

- **Assessment** - Establishing a baseline for each child and class to determine where children are in their learning and to inform teachers' planning;
- **Staff expertise** – ensuring that staff have the depth of knowledge and skills set to enable them to effectively teach literacy to and strengthen the language skills of disadvantaged children;
- **Parental Engagement** - Empowering parents to support their children's language development and literacy skills;
- **Environment** - Creating a language-rich environment with ready access to high quality texts;



Ameliorating the COVID-19 Gap - Language and Literacy Strategy – an approach for disadvantaged including service children



The additional funding SAFE is providing to schools is aimed to support schools to implement one aspect of their audit. For example:

- Assessment – funding of a commercial programme to establish baselines.
- Staff Expertise – training/coaching/mentoring to support subject knowledge and deeper understanding of pedagogy
- Environment – developing provision to improve access to and effective use of high quality texts for disadvantaged children
- Parental engagement – supporting staff to create their own bespoke short video clips to empower their community's parents to support their children's reading and development of language skills

Schools with service children

In order to access additional funding schools with service children will be contacted to undertake an audit and this will be monitored by expert system leaders. In this way this enables us to monitor impact and also amend and target our strategy.

We propose that once schools have completed the audit, they commit to implementing one of the suggested interventions against one of the focus areas. SAfE would evaluate and assess the quality of the proposal and allocate resources and evaluate impact. Schools may choose to work in small groups.

We also plan to provide a showcase of successful interventions and case studies.

In order to build on any work that schools are doing in developing their quality first teaching SAfE will be working with the Surrey CC Specialist Teachers for Inclusive Practice Team and Surrey's Library Service.

Benefits of this approach

This approach places the focus on Whole Class Quality First Teaching. In the light of the pandemic there is a risk that schools will seek out and look for 'quick-fixes' or 'golden-bullets'. The evidence from the EEF suggests that without wholesale whole class improvements in pedagogy there is substantial risk that any interventions that successfully narrow the gap in the short term will not make a sustained difference in the long term.

This page is intentionally left blank