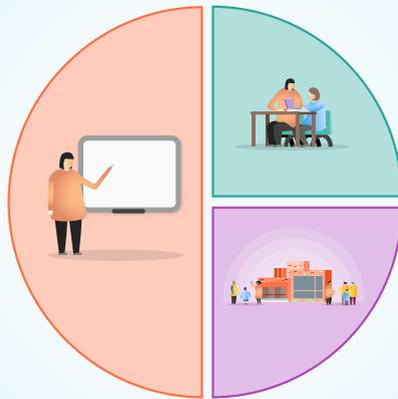


# The EEF Guide to the Pupil Premium—Autumn 2021



Education  
Endowment  
Foundation

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## **About the Education Endowment Foundation**

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is an independent charity supporting teachers and school leaders to use evidence of what works—and what doesn't—to improve educational outcomes, especially for disadvantaged children and young people.

Foreword	2	
The tiered approach to school improvement	3	
The four-step approach to strategy	4	
Pupil premium strategy content:		
Step 1	Diagnosing your pupils' needs	6
Step 2	Use strong evidence to support your strategy	8
Step 3	Implement your strategy	10
Step 4	Monitor and evaluate your strategy	12
Pupil premium myths	14	
Accessing and interpreting evidence	16	

## Foreword



Covid has potentially reversed a decade of progress in closing the attainment gap. The evidence is clear that disadvantaged students have fallen further behind during the pandemic. And we know that these students will also face the biggest challenges in educational recovery.

In this context, it is more important than ever to focus our efforts on what evidence tells us is most likely to be effective for pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

A decade of research into educational disadvantage has shown there are no ‘silver bullets’, but engaging with evidence offers schools a valuable tool for understanding which practices and programmes are most likely to deliver the greatest impact.

This guide is designed as a practical starting point to support school leaders to develop, implement and monitor an evidence-informed approach to their pupil premium strategy. The guide suggests a four-step cycle for school leaders to follow when developing and sustaining their strategy.

For the first time, the updated pupil premium reporting template requires schools to demonstrate that they have considered evidence when developing their strategy. We hope that the new section in this guide on ‘using and interpreting evidence’ will support school leaders to engage critically with evidence as they develop their strategy for the 2021–22 academic year and beyond.

Supporting education recovery for those children most in need will not be an easy task. And yet, our hope is that this guidance will help to support an excellent, evidence-informed education system in England that creates great opportunities for all children and young people, regardless of their family background.

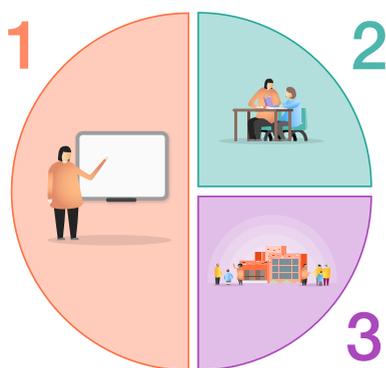
A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Becky Francis'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

**Professor Becky Francis**  
Chief Executive  
Education Endowment Foundation

# The tiered approach to school improvement

Considering a tiered approach to Pupil Premium spending can help schools balance approaches to improving teaching, targeted academic support, and wider strategies.

The tiered approach aligns with the DfE strategy template, so school leaders can be confident that their school improvement approach meets the needs of their pupils and fulfils the expectations of the pupil premium strategy document.



## 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. Ensuring an effective teacher is in front of every class, and that every teacher is supported to keep improving, is the key ingredient of a successful school and should rightly be a top priority for pupil premium spending.

## 2. Targeted academic support

Evidence consistently shows the positive impact that targeted academic support can have, including on those who are not making good progress, or those who have been disproportionately impacted by the effects of the pandemic. Considering how classroom teachers and teaching assistants can provide targeted academic support, such as linking structured small group interventions to classroom teaching and the curriculum, is likely to be an essential ingredient of an effective pupil premium strategy.

## 3. Wider strategies

Wider strategies relate 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. Given the impact of the pandemic, issues such as securing high levels of attendance may be more prominent for schools as they develop their strategy. While many challenges may be common between schools, it is also likely that the specific features of the community each school serves will affect spending in this category.

Many approaches within the tiered model will overlap categories, and the balance between categories will vary from year to year as schools' priorities change.

Schools should always combine evidence with professional judgement about how transferable approaches are to their own setting.

# The four-step approach to strategy

School leaders may wish to consider the following four-step approach when developing and sustaining their strategy:

**1** Diagnose your pupils' needs

**2** Use strong evidence to support your strategy

**3** Implement your strategy

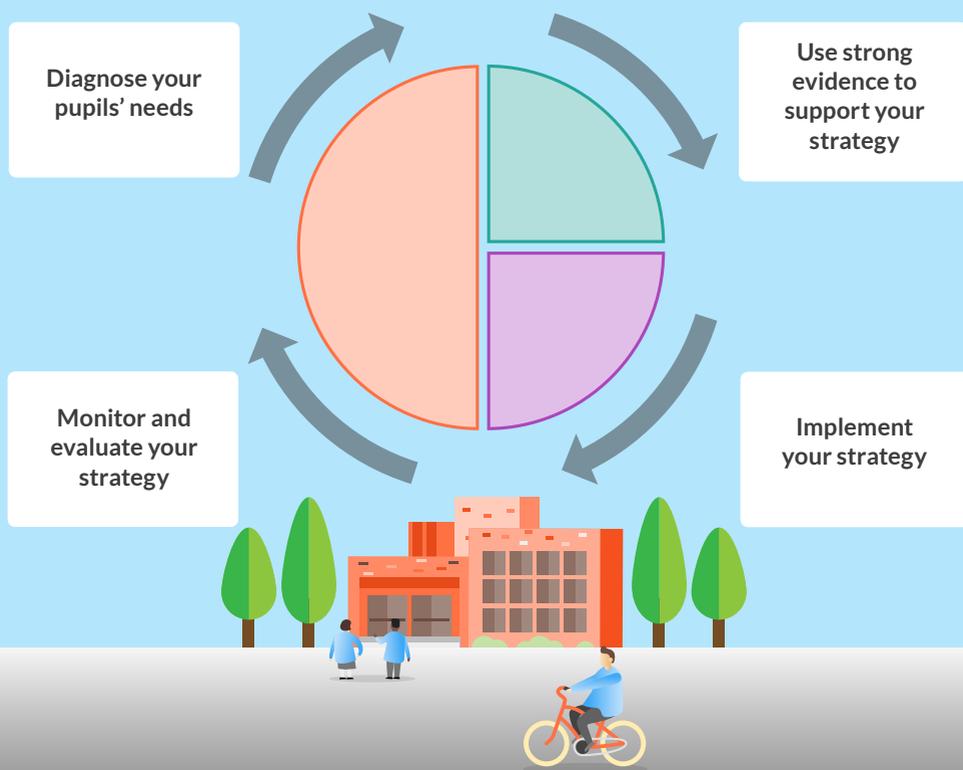
**4** Monitor and evaluate your strategy

The development of an effective pupil premium strategy should be cyclical and be considered an integral part of existing school development planning.

The DfE recommend a longer-term three year approach to planning, but require that if you use a multi-year approach, you still must review

and publish an updated strategy statement every academic year before 31 December.

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.



# 1 Diagnosing your pupils' needs

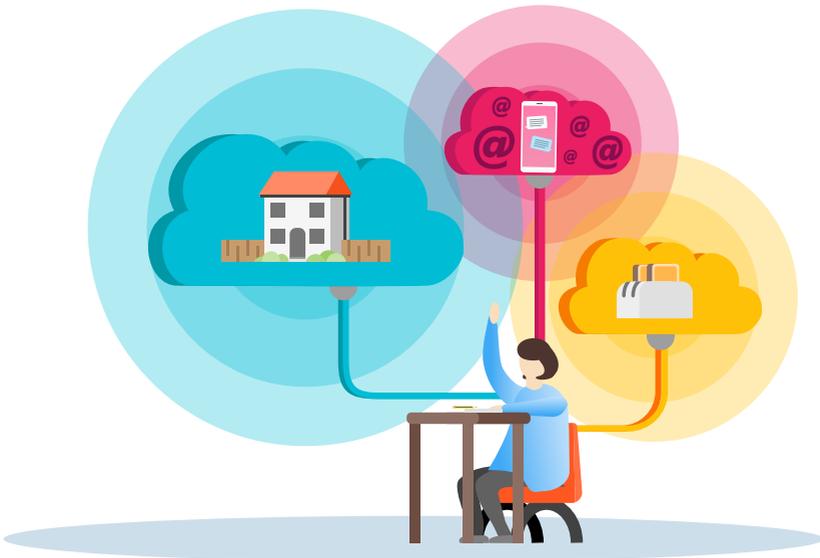
Gaining a thorough knowledge of your disadvantaged pupils' levels of attainment is the first step in developing an effective pupil premium strategy.

Once you have gauged the performance of your disadvantaged pupils against national benchmarks, for pupils whose attainment is below age related expectations, you should examine what could be hindering their attainment. This will involve [diagnostic assessment](#) of academic challenges, but also take account of wider challenges, such as attendance.

School leaders will take account of their in-depth understanding of any challenges that disadvantaged pupils are facing when

developing their strategy. These can be identified using a wide range of internal data and information, including:

- Attendance data and levels of persistent absence;
- Teacher feedback on pupils' levels of engagement and participation;
- Behaviour incidences and exclusions data;
- Information on wellbeing, mental health and safeguarding;
- Access to technology and curricular materials.



## Case study: Greetland Academy



At Greetland, we have high expectations and ambitions for all of our pupils, including those eligible for pupil premium funding. As such, we prioritise building on our children's actual starting points and secure prior learning when designing our curriculum, school development plan and pupil premium strategy. All three of these plans echo each other and lie at the heart of our provision.

We use a variety of tools to assess secure learning, from commercially bought packages, such as Language Screen from NELI, to our own internally developed assessment tools. These focus staff not on what we have covered, but on what has been retained and can be applied by our pupils.

This academic year, our assessments have allowed us to identify the core challenges some pupils are facing in writing and maths. We also know from our internal qualitative data that enrichment opportunities for the most disadvantaged have also been restricted and we have increased need for social and emotional support for our pupils.

We try to strike an effective balance between using standardised assessment tools and teacher administered diagnostic assessments rooted in the classroom. For instance, when it comes to pupils' writing, we train staff to use 'The Simple View of Writing' as a diagnostic tool to identify specific needs, such as support with handwriting (transcription).

# 2

## Use strong evidence to support your strategy

School leaders must also utilise a broad array of external evidence to inform their decision making, alongside the expert knowledge they have of the pupils in their care. For instance, after identifying pupils in need of targeted reading interventions through standardised assessments, school leaders should seek relevant and robust evidence on which approaches are most likely to provide appropriate and effective solutions, such as particular phonics or reading comprehension programmes.

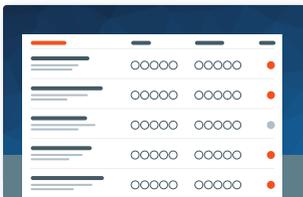
Evidence from research provides insight into what has happened in classrooms in the past, but not whether it will be effective in the future. Careful

judgement of the relevance and applicability of the evidence is necessary. Additionally, thinking hard about the specific contextual factors of your school, and any necessary 'intelligent adaptations', is essential when interpreting the evidence that informs your strategy.

The DfE guidance '[Using pupil premium: guidance for school leaders](#)' includes worked examples of pupil premium strategy documents that exemplify the use of a range of high-quality evidence sources.

Go to **p16** for more insights into 'accessing and interpreting evidence'.

The EEF focuses on ensuring that our research evidence is comprehensive, independent and high quality.



### The Teaching and Learning Toolkit

An accessible summary of the international evidence on teaching 5-16 year olds.

[eef.li/toolkit](http://eef.li/toolkit)



### Guidance Reports

Clear and actionable guidance on a range of high-priority issues, including literacy and numeracy.

[eef.li/guidance](http://eef.li/guidance)



### Evidence Reviews

EEF commissioned literature reviews investigating specific areas of interest in depth.

[eef.li/reviews](http://eef.li/reviews)

## Case study: Grange School



Grange School is a special school in Manchester with 231 pupils on roll from EYFS through to KS5. All pupils at Grange have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and have a diagnosis of autism. Many have additional social and emotional mental health and/or significant sensory processing difficulties. The proportion of pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium is above national average.

We do draw upon evidence that specifically supports pupils with autism. For example, the Ambitious for Autism's 'Coronavirus and Lockdown: the impact on autistic children and young people' survey has helped inform our strategic response. At Grange School, we also recognise that regardless of school context, high quality teaching is the most important lever that schools have to improve outcomes for all pupils.

The use of research and evidence in special education can sometimes be a challenge due to the bespoke provision we put into place for our pupils. However, we use the EEF's [Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#) to prioritise areas for development, such as mastery learning (we are part of the North West Maths Hub) and teaching assistant-led interventions .

The development of metacognition and self-regulation (drawing upon the EEF guidance report) is a key feature of our strategic plan for targeted academic support. We offer specialist interventions such as occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, whilst also providing an array of other supportive interventions run by professionals, such as our Music Therapist. These specialist therapists also work closely with the teaching and learning team to ensure that the best practice is embedded throughout high quality teaching, such as ensuring consistency in the use of visuals.

The research school network is a national network of schools which support the use of evidence to inform teaching practice. Launched in 2016, the Network currently numbers 38 schools: 28 Research Schools and 10 Associate Research Schools.

Research schools work with the other schools in their area to help them use evidence more effectively, so do contact your local Research School for support when developing your pupil premium strategy:

<https://researchschool.org.uk>



# 3 Implement your strategy

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.

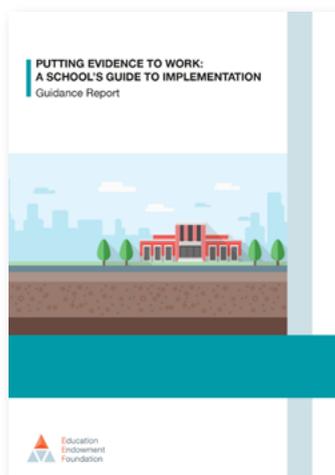
School leaders will scrutinise the evidence that has informed their strategy with a focus on effective implementation.

Practical questions that may attend this focus on implementation may include:

- How have we successfully addressed similar challenges and needs of disadvantaged pupils in the past?
- How do aspects of the strategy align with existing beliefs, assumptions and practices of staff?
- Does the approach require changes to processes or structures, such as timetables or team meetings?
- Does the strategy provide the necessary professional development and support for staff to implement the approach successfully?

- Are there any activities that you should stop doing, either because they are not working, or because their impact is weaker than you believe new approaches may be?

The EEF's guidance report '[Putting Evidence to Work: A School's Guide to Implementation](#)', offers comprehensive advice around the implementing change in schools.



## Case study: Mary Webb School and Science College



Our core aim of opening learners' minds and expanding the breadth of their experiences underpins so much that we do at our school, and the support we provide to our disadvantaged pupils. A key component of our strategy is that we prioritise high-quality teaching, so that we broaden the horizons of our pupils.

As such, we have implemented a school professional development (PD) plan which includes teachers, Teaching Assistants (TAs), and Early Career Teacher mentoring. We allocate timetabled sessions to collaborative work to develop this plan, both across the whole school and in specific departments. This year, this work has focussed on using the latest evidence around scaffolding and feedback.

We have been careful to ensure that this work builds on that undertaken in previous years, helping us to progress towards our three-year long focus for improvement.

We implement our strategy by ensuring that targeted, expert support is available to staff, and that subject specific expertise informs our decision-making. A small portion of pupil premium budget is 'devolved' for specific subject spend, which is carefully guided and monitored by the PP Lead on SLT. Pastoral and SEND teams work with subject leaders to identify pupils who would benefit from small group or bespoke support, such as reading interventions or subject specific approaches.

To ensure our pupil premium strategy is being implemented effectively, we have a Pupil Premium Learning Mentor post. This ensures we have expertise to closely monitor key data, such as pupils' attendance, or the attendance of parents/carers at information evenings.

# 4 Monitor and evaluate your strategy

School leaders must continually monitor the progress of the pupil premium strategy, adapting their approach when and where appropriate.

As new initiatives are implemented it is important to provide support for staff so that they can take ownership of them and deliver them successfully.

School leaders will likely consider:

1. How to provide flexible and motivating leadership as challenges emerge;
2. What training or follow-on support is required for staff beyond initial training; and
3. How to respond to implementation data to tailor and improve approaches.

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.

An effective pupil premium strategy requires goal setting, underpinned by short, medium and long term outcomes needed to reach those goals. The ongoing rigorous evaluation of pupils' attainment, barriers to learning and needs is essential.

A focus on the achievement of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds is no doubt challenging for school leaders, especially given the disruptions and impact of Covid-19, but it has never been more important.



## Case study: Wilbury Primary School, Enfield



At Wilbury Primary School, we strive for continuous improvement through an open and enthusiastic culture of learning for staff and children. Our approach sharply focusses on the learning needs of our disadvantaged children and our ambition for every child. School staff speak with one voice.

Our current priority for these pupils is to develop their language skills. As such, we are working to refine teaching practice in this area, whilst also providing targeted interventions to struggling learners both prior to, and at the end of, the school day. Critically, we believe in a compassionate approach towards engaging our parents.

Our leadership team play a significant role in evaluating progress through ongoing, and crucially, supportive monitoring and quality assurance. They devote time to our staff for collaborative team planning, teaching and modelling by spending time in classrooms to provide on the spot coaching, training and immediate feedback to develop practice.

The impact of our current priority is measured by pupils' outcomes in class, and in specific speech, communication and language assessments, such as those from the Communication Trust and Ican.

A clear, shared understanding of strategic milestones and goals, set out at the start of the strategy, enable constructive conversations between staff members, governors and executive leaders. This interacts positively with partnership/school-improvement work with organisations such as Challenge Partners and the Research School Network. It means quality assurance is unequivocally purposeful, transparent and focussed on the main thing, improving teaching and learning.

## Pupil premium myths

### Myth 1:

*“Only eligible children can benefit from Pupil Premium spending”*

The Pupil Premium is designed to support schools to raise the attainment of socially disadvantaged children. However, many of the most effective ways to do this—including improving the quality of teaching—will also benefit other groups: that is fine. Likewise, you may wish to direct some forms of targeted academic support or wider strategies towards other pupils with identified needs, for example, those who have or have had a social worker, or those who act as young carers.

### Myth 2:

*“The Pupil Premium has to be spent on interventions”*

There is a strong evidence base showing the impact that high-quality interventions can have on the outcomes of struggling students. However, while interventions may well be one part of an effective Pupil Premium strategy, they are likely to be most effective when deployed alongside efforts to improve whole-class teaching, and attend to wider challenges to learning, such as attendance and behaviour.

### **Myth 3:**

*“Pupil Premium spending can be justified using school data alone”*

Collecting data about the attainment and progress of pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium can help schools identify priorities and target additional support. However, school data cannot tell leaders which approaches or programmes are most likely to be effective to address the needs of their students. That is why school leaders should use high quality external evidence to inform their decision making, alongside the expert knowledge they have of the pupils in their care.

### **Myth 4:**

*“The Pupil Premium cannot be used to support education recovery”*

Evidence shows that disadvantaged pupils have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Activity to support those pupils to recover missed learning is an appropriate use of pupil premium funding.

Schools will also receive additional funding to support education recovery through the recovery premium. The recovery premium can be spent on a wider cohort of pupils than those who attract the funding, depending on where school leaders think the need is greatest. Schools should consider their use of this funding alongside developing their pupil premium strategy.

## Accessing and interpreting evidence

Developing a pupil premium strategy is best supported by accessing the best available evidence. Given the range of demands teachers and school leaders are faced with, keeping up to date with high quality evidence can prove challenging. Reflecting critically on how evidence is used to inform, implement, and monitor school strategy is therefore crucial.

‘Evidence’ is a broad term that means different things to different people. If we are going to make strategic school improvement ‘best bets’ based upon evidence, then it is important to work at identifying credible evidence sources.



### What makes a good piece of evidence?

The following prompts can help school leaders interpret and appraise the quality of different evidence sources:

-  **Consider the sample that was used and whether it is relevant to your context.** For example, if an approach has largely been researched in secondary schools, what needs to be put in place to monitor its effectiveness if delivering it in a primary school?
-  **Consider the independence of the evidence.** Is it likely to be biased or was the programme evaluated by someone other than the programme developer?
-  **Consider the purpose of a piece of research.** The aim of case studies might be to exemplify a school's experience and surveys will be useful in understanding how teachers view approaches, but they will not provide evidence for the efficacy of an approach.
-  **Consider whether the evidence is comprehensive and whether other studies have similar findings.** Would most experts in the field agree/ disagree about the claims being made?
-  **Consider if this is evidence or an evidence-informed viewpoint.** Has research been carried out where researchers collected data directly, or is this someone's opinion (based upon primary research)?

# Interpreting relevant evidence

The 'relevance' of evidence typically depends upon the question we are looking to answer and the appropriateness of a particular study or piece of research for answering this question.

For example, if you are looking to improve pupil attendance, you may use the EEF guidance report, underpinned by a research review, on

['Working with Parents to Support Children's Learning'](#), with a specific, actionable focus on tailoring communications to parents.

The table below provides some indicators for evidence that may be more or less relevant for leaders considering how to spend their pupil premium:

Lower relevance research	Higher relevance research
<p><i>Research has taken place in a small number of schools or with a small number of pupils.</i></p> <p><i>Research was conducted in a different context to your own, for example with a different age group or demographic.</i></p>	<p><i>Research involved many schools or a large number of pupils.</i></p> <p><i>The schools and pupils involved in the research are similar to your own, for example in terms of pupil age and demographics.</i></p>
<p><i>Research focuses on perceptions or self-reported outcomes rather than measures of impact—for example '70% of teachers valued the training'.</i></p> <p><i>The team who conducted the research also designed the programme being tested, which may make it relevant to schools but compromise the quality of the evidence.</i></p>	<p><i>Research compares outcomes for pupils that received the intervention and those that did not, with those outcomes relating to impact on pupils' learning.</i></p> <p><i>The research was carried out by an independent academic or organisation who did not have a vested interest in the outcome.</i></p>
<p><i>Research summarises the evidence selectively, rather than providing a comprehensive overview of a topic.</i></p> <p><i>Key findings and conclusions appear to reflect the interpretation of the authors, without systematically reviewing the strength and quality of evidence.</i></p>	<p><i>Research demonstrates a clear and transparent process and any claims that are made are clearly referenced and well supported.</i></p> <p><i>Key findings provide concrete conclusions on the impact of approaches, and security and reliability of the available evidence.</i></p>

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Education Endowment Foundation  
5th Floor, Millbank Tower  
21–24 Millbank  
London  
SW1P 4QP

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