Effective Interventions:
Promoting Learning, Tackling Workload

Contents

About this document

Teachers and school leaders continue to raise concerns about the educational value of many of the 'interventions' they are required or expected to implement in the course of their work with pupils. Teachers and school leaders have also noted that many of these interventions create unacceptable workload burdens.

This document summarises the findings of research into many of the typical interventions used in schools across the UK, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. It highlights those interventions that are more likely to generate excessive and unnecessary workload burdens and that are difficult to justify on the basis of available evidence about their educational value. It also identifies other interventions that are more promising, both in terms of their manageability for teachers and school leaders and the support they provide to pupil progress and achievement.

Key points

- Interventions, properly understood, can be a helpful way of providing additional support to pupils' progress and achievement.
- However, many interventions used currently in schools are not only associated with limited evidence of their educational value but also create excessive and unnecessary workload burdens for teachers and school leaders.
- Evidence is readily available to schools to help them to evaluate the educational efficacy of possible interventions as well as their potential workload impacts.
- Nevertheless, all interventions, badly implemented, can increase workload burdens. It is therefore essential that in all circumstances, the potential workload implications for teachers and school leaders of any intervention under consideration are taken into full account prior to implementation.

Background and context

It is essential to establish a meaningful definition of the types of activity that might reasonably be described as 'interventions' if their educational and workforce implications are to be evaluated effectively.

Interventions are normally understood as those activities or strategies that are different from, or additional to, those employed routinely with pupils.[1] It should be recognised, therefore, that an intervention can become part of

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[1] Campbell, D.T. and Stanley, J.C. (1966). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research*. Rand McNally; Chicago.

routine practice if its use is sustained over a period of time and becomes part of the expected repertoire of teachers in meeting the needs of pupils. In these circumstances, a practice identified previously as an 'intervention' could no longer be accurately described as such, given its incorporation into standard classroom practice.

An intervention, properly understood, is undertaken when a teacher or other suitably qualified person, such as an educational psychologist, believes that a pupil, or a group of pupils, might not be reaching expected levels of performance or behaviour. In concluding that an intervention might be appropriate, it is found that 'common' or 'standard' methods (i.e. those routinely deployed in classrooms) are not sufficient to support pupils in meeting these expectations.[2]

Interventions are generally considered when evidence of pupil underperformance is identified. This evidence is comprised typically of some form of summative assessment information and data. Interventions are then selected on the basis that they will support work to narrow gaps between actual and expected levels of pupil attainment. Research notes that effective use of interventions is usually associated with measures to evaluate their impact on learning.[3]

Interventions and teacher and school leader workload

The NASUWT is clear that interventions have a legitimate place in the range of strategies available to schools to support pupils' progress and achievement and to remove any barriers to learning they may face. It is evident from research that some interventions can be highly effective and secure widespread professional support.[4]

However, the NASUWT has become increasingly concerned that schools are implementing interventions in ways that not only fail to take adequate account of their likely impact on learning, but also create excessive and unnecessary workload burdens for teachers and school leaders. It is, nevertheless, important at the outset to recognise that many of the interventions frequently identified as workload intensive could, in principle at least, be implemented on an acceptable basis, given sufficient resources and effective organisation. Similarly, interventions with lower risks of creating excessive and unnecessary workload

[2] Hsieh, P. (P.-H.); Acee, T.; Chung, W.-H.; Hsieh, Y.-P.; Kim, H.; Thomas, G. D.; Robinson, D. H. (2005). 'Is Educational Intervention Research on the Decline?', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 97(4), 523-529.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Burroughs-Lange, S. and Douetil, J. (2006). *Evaluation of Reading Recovery in London Schools: Every Child a Reader 2005-2006*. University of London: Institute of Education.

burdens might still have adverse implications for teachers and school leaders in this respect if they are applied inappropriately.

Workload concerns, therefore, often arise in circumstances where an intervention is imposed on teachers and school leaders without adequate resources or effective organisational support, and can arise regardless of the form of intervention selected for implementation.

The information set out in this document will assist teachers and school leaders in evaluating the potential workload impacts of interventions under consideration and how these impacts can be ameliorated. The document identifies evidence associated with some of the most widely used interventions in respect of their educational effectiveness and their implications for teacher and school leader workload. In particular, it highlights those interventions that carry higher risks of increased workload and identifies alternative approaches that may have lower risks in this respect, but that have been found to have genuine potential in terms of supporting pupil progress and achievement.

Evidence base

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) *Teaching and Learning Toolkit* summarises available evidence about the effectiveness of a range of strategies used commonly in schools.[5] The *Toolkit* draws on existing evidence, both from the UK and internationally, about the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of these strategies, as well as the relative strength of the current evidence base for each intervention.[6] Currently, the *Toolkit* evaluates the effectiveness and value for money of over 30 distinct interventions.

In addition to its use of high-quality research evidence, the worth of the *Toolkit* in informing professional discussions with employers and others about the effectiveness of interventions is further enhanced by its specific endorsement by the Department for Education (DfE), the Welsh Government and the Scottish Government.[7]

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[5] Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). *Teaching and Learning Toolkit*. Available at: (https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit), accessed on 03.02.18.

[6] Higgins, S.; Katsipataki, M.; Coleman, R.; Henderson, P.; Major, L.E.; Coe, R.; and Mason, D. (2015). *The Sutton Trust-Education Endowment Foundation Teaching and Learning Toolkit.* July 2015. London: Education Endowment Foundation.

[7] Department for Education (DfE). (2017). *Pupil premium: funding and accountability for schools*. Available at: (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings), accessed on 03.02.18.; Learning Wales. (2013). *Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Toolkit*. Available at: (http://learning.gov.wales/resources/browse-all/education-endowment-foundation/?lang=en), accessed on 03.02.18.; Scottish Government (2017). *New attainment tools for teachers*. Available at: (https://news.gov.scot/news/new-attainment-tools-for-teachers), accessed on 03.02.18.

Other evidence, including the reports of the Independent Teacher Workload Review Group on marking and planning, has also been referenced, where appropriate, in the analysis below.[8]

Relatively ineffective interventions with higher workload risks

i. Extending teaching time

Extending teaching time can take a variety of forms, including lengthening the school day (for example, by adding a so-called 'period six' to the end of the standard school timetable) or reducing holidays and lunch periods. Interventions based on extending teaching time can either be targeted at all pupils within a class, cohort or school, or focused on particular groups of pupils, such as those felt to require additional support to meet expected standards.

Extending teaching time can have profound workload consequences for teachers and school leaders. Without compensating and adequate reductions in the existing tasks required of staff, such practices risk adding substantially to workload burdens that are often excessive and unsustainable.

The available evidence suggests that, overall, the educational value of extending school time is low.[9] Where some positive impacts have been identified, the evidence confirms that these relatively modest effects are only secured if they have support from parents and staff. Feedback from teachers strongly suggests that attempts are often made to extend teaching time in a way that fails to take into account the legitimate expectations and views of teachers and school leaders. Consequently, such approaches are likely to have an even more limited positive impact on pupils than those established on the basis of staff engagement and agreement.

The clear majority of interventions included in the *Toolkit* are rated as more effective than extending the school day. The EEF's information on this intervention, therefore, prompts schools to use existing school time more effectively before considering extending the school day.[10]

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[8]   Independent Teacher Workload Review Group. (2016). *Eliminating unnecessary workload around marking; Eliminating unnecessary workload around planning and teaching resources;* and *Eliminating unnecessary workload associated with data management.* Available at: (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-teachers-workload/reducing-teachers-workload), accessed on 08.02.18.

[9]   EEF (2018). *Extending school time.* Available at: (https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/pdf/generate/?u= https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/pdf/toolkit/?id=153&t=Teaching and Learning Toolkit&e=153&s=), accessed on 07.02.18.

[10] Ibid.

ii. Holiday schools

Holiday schools involve the provision of lessons out of normal term times and are often designed as 'catch up' sessions for pupils believed to be at risk of not securing expected outcomes, although other approaches seek to include other pupils that have also been identified in the evidence.[11]

The EEF *Toolkit* rates the overall impact on pupil progress of these interventions as 'low' and notes that sessions without a clear academic component are 'not usually associated with learning gains.'[12]

While holiday schools can be organised on the basis of the voluntary participation of teachers, the NASUWT is aware of cases where attempts are made to pressurise or instruct teachers to participate in them. It is important to recognise that any such attempt is in direct contravention of the provisions of the NASUWT's action short of strike action instructions and is, therefore, entirely unacceptable.

Notwithstanding the basis on which holiday schools are organised, the extensive evidence of their limited impact on pupil achievement suggests that alternative approaches, which have lower costs and workload risks, are likely to be more effective.

iii. 'Deep' or 'triple' marking

The report of the Independent Teacher Workload Review Group on marking evaluated the implications of the over-frequent use of 'deep', 'triple', 'dialogic' or 'quality' marking. The Group defined such marking as:

'…a process whereby teachers provide written feedback to pupils offering guidance with a view to improving or enhancing the future performance of pupils. Pupils are then expected to respond in writing to the guidance which in turn is verified by the teacher.'

The Group recognised that the use of this form of marking had grown to such an extent that most teachers taking part in the DfE's Workload Challenge exercise found it 'excessive' and 'burdensome'.[13] The Group suggested that, to some extent, 'deep' marking and other similar practices may have arisen as a result of a distortion of the messages associated with Assessment for Learning and a misplaced expectation that such marking was required by Ofsted and the DfE.[14]

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[11] EEF (2018). *Summer schools*. Available at: (https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidencesummaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/summer-schools/), accessed on 07.02.18.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Independent Teacher Workload Review Group (2016). *op.cit*.

[14] Ibid.

However, the Group was also clear that the growth in deep marking was:

'…supported by an assumption that marking provides a more thorough means of giving feedback and demonstrates a stronger professional ethic, as well as improving pupil outcomes. Deep marking often acts as a proxy for 'good' teaching as it is something concrete and tangible which lends itself as 'evidence'. In some cases, the perception exists that the amount of marking a teacher does equals their level of professionalism and effectiveness. These are false assumptions.'

The Group found that there is little robust evidence to support the extensive use of deep marking imposed on teachers and stressed the need for teachers to be given the scope to make effective use of their professional judgement in determining the most appropriate means of ensuring that pupils benefit from effective feedback. In terms of the impact of the excessive use of deep marking on the quality of educational provision, the Group noted that teachers forced to mark work late at night and at weekends were unlikely to operate efficiently in the classroom.[15]

In its review of marking, the EEF found that the quality of evidence on written marking was low and that the extensive use of written marking in schools, noted by the Group, was 'surprising and concerning.'[16] The introduction of deep marking as an intervention to raise standards of attainment is, therefore, unsupported by any meaningful evidence.

iv. Detailed short and medium-term planning

The Westminster Government's Workload Challenge exercise identified excessive planning as a significant driver of excessive workload. The Independent Teacher Workload Review Group undertook a detailed evaluation of planning practices, including those that lead to unacceptably burdensome practices in schools.[17]

The Group acknowledged that planning is an essential element of teachers' professional practice and is central to ensuring that pupils can access high-quality learning experiences. However, the Group recognised that the use of detailed, individual lesson plans had become more widespread as an intervention designed to support pupil progress and achievement.

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Elliott, V.; Baird, J.; Hopfenbeck, T.N.; Ingram, J.; Thompson, I.; Usher, N.; Zantout, M.; Richardson, J. & Coleman, R. (2016). *A marked improvement? A review of the evidence on written marking*. Available at: (https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/EEF_Marking_Review_April_2016.pdf), accessed on 08.02.18.

[17] Independent Teacher Workload Review Group. (2016). *op.cit.*

However, the Group expressed concern at the use of lesson plans as a proxy for effective teaching, where the teachers' written plans themselves become the required end product, to be scrutinised and assessed by others. The Group noted that:

'…too often, "planning" refers to the production of daily written lesson plans which function as proxy evidence for an accountability "paper trail" rather than the process of effective planning for pupil progress and attainment.'

The Group further noted that:

'…the fundamental purpose of planning is to support effective teaching in the classroom, not to satisfy external audiences. Plans cannot show what actually happened in the classroom, nor the outcomes or progress made.'

The Group concluded that:

'…detailed daily or weekly plans should not be a routine expectation.'

Therefore, the use of interventions based on the monitoring and scrutiny of extensive and detailed daily or weekly lesson plans as a means of supporting learning cannot be supported on any evidential basis.

v. Excessive and over-frequent use of homework

The EEF *Toolkit* reports that homework, when used appropriately, can have a positive impact on pupil progress and achievement, particularly for secondary pupils.[18] However, the *Toolkit* recognises that the setting of homework can have implications in terms of staff time for preparation and feeding back to pupils.

Evidence confirms that the routine setting of homework is not only potentially burdensome but is also likely to have limited positive educational impacts.[19] Its value in any circumstances in the primary sector is noted as particularly questionable.[20] In secondary schools, evidence suggests that where homework is used as a short and focused intervention, it can make a more significant contribution to pupils' progress and attainment. The EEF notes that where homework is set in secondary schools, its quality, in terms of its relationship with pupils' learning objectives, rather than its quantity, is most important.[21]

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[18] EEF (2018). *Homework (Primary); Homework (Secondary)*. Available at: (https://educationendowment foundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/homework-primary/ and https://educationendowment foundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/homework-secondary/), accessed on 08.02.18.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

More effective interventions with lower workload risks

i. Behaviour interventions

Behaviour interventions can focus on a range of issues including low-level disruption, anti-social activities, aggression, violence, bullying and substance abuse.[22]

The EEF *Toolkit* records a range of behaviour-related interventions that can have a beneficial impact on learning outcomes. The *Toolkit* confirms that the provision of specialist, targeted support for pupils with problematic behaviour is associated with the largest educational gains. Evidence indicates that programmes of between two and six months tend to have the most sustained results in terms of pupil progress and achievement.

While it is possible that teachers might be asked to undertake these interventions in addition to their other responsibilities, it is clear from the evidence that support additional to that provided by teachers in classrooms is required to secure the greatest impacts.

ii. Collaborative learning

Evidence suggests that the integration of structured, classroom-based approaches that encourage pupils to work together within existing teaching and learning repertoires can have a significant impact on attainment and progress. Approaches to collaborative learning that promote talk and interaction between learners tend to result in the best learning gains.[23] Collaborative learning has also been found to increase the effectiveness of other approaches including mastery learning or digital technology.[24]

Such approaches, informed by teachers' professional judgement and discretion about their use, can be implemented in non-workload-intensive ways, given that they involve methods of classroom organisation rather than additional time-intensive and resource-intensive activities.

iii. Peer tutoring

Peer tutoring interventions involve pupils working in pairs or small groups to provide each other with explicit teaching support.[25] These approaches

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[22] EEF (2018). *Behaviour interventions.* Available at: (https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/ evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/behaviour-interventions/), accessed on 08.02.18.

[23] EEF (2018). *Collaborative learning.* Available at: (https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/collaborative-learning/), accessed on 08.02.18.

[24] Ibid.

[25] EEF (2018). *Peer tutoring.* Available at: (https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/peer-tutoring/), accessed on 08.02.18.

include older pupils working with younger tutees, or pupils of similar ages swapping between the tutor and tutee roles.

Evidence suggests that peer-tutoring systems are particularly effective at supporting pupil progress and achievement when pupils are provided with support for their interaction with peers and where tutoring takes place in intensive blocks of time.[26] Tutoring is also regarded as most effective as a way of consolidating pupils' learning rather than as a replacement for direct teaching of concepts and understandings.

As with collaborative learning, the use of peer tutoring as an intervention can minimise workload risks if it is integrated into, rather than added to, existing classroom activities.

iv. Social and emotional learning

Activities focused on the social and emotional aspects of learning seek to improve pupil achievement through strategies focused on: universal, classroom-centred programmes; targeted, individual interventions for specific pupils; or school-level approaches based on producing an overall learning ethos or climate more conducive to raising levels of progress and attainment.[27]

The EEF *Toolkit* suggests that social and emotional learning has an 'identifiable and significant' impact on attainment. However, the *Toolkit* indicates that the most effective approaches are those that are embedded into routine educational practices and where staff have access to professional training and development.[28] These approaches are also likely to have lower workload risks than those that require teachers to engage in tasks and activities additional to those they are typically expected to undertake.

v. Meta-cognition and self-regulation

Meta-cognition and self-regulation approaches are intended to help learners to think more explicitly about their own learning.[29] Such approaches typically involve pupils being helped to set goals and manage their own academic development and motivation towards learning.

They have also been found to have a relatively high impact on pupil progress and achievement, particularly for low-achieving and older pupils and where

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[26] Ibid.

[27] EEF (2018). *Social and emotional learning*. Available at: (https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/ evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/social-and-emotional-learning/), accessed on 08.02.17.

[28] Ibid.

[29] EEF (2018). *Meta-cognition and self-regulation*. Available at: (https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/ evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/meta-cognition-and-self-regulation/), accessed on 08.02.18.

related activities take place with pupils working in groups.[30] These strategies are likely to be most effective when integrated into pupils' normal classroom routines, as indicated, for example, in the outcomes of the *Improving Writing Quality* study of the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) programme focused on struggling writers in Years 6 and 7.[31]

Conclusions and next steps

The information set out above confirms that there is a range of interventions available to schools that not only offers the prospect of raising levels of pupil progress and achievement but also reduces risks of adverse workload implications for teachers and school leaders.

It is important to recognise that there is a substantial evidence base available to schools that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of many of the interventions they may use currently or that are under consideration. Therefore, it remains a matter of profound concern that, despite the relative accessibility of this evidence, teachers and school leaders continue to have interventions imposed on them that are not only of limited demonstrable benefit to pupils, but that are also likely to increase workload burdens significantly. The NASUWT will continue to seek to draw attention to the evidence on effective interventions and to use this evidence to help it promote more acceptable practices across the UK.

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Torgerson, D.; Torgerson, C.; Ainsworth, H.; Buckley, H.; Heaps, C.; Hewitt, C. & Mitchell, N. (2014). *Improving Writing Quality. Evaluation Report and Executive Summary.* Available at: (https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David_Torgerson/publication/266967554_Improving_Writing_Quality_Evaluation_Report_and_Executive_Summary/links/5446601a0cf22b3c14de1e2a.pdf), accessed on 08.02.18.

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