



Regional Implementation Leads In Bristol

Pilot Evaluation

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About the evaluator

This evaluation was conducted by a team from the Sheffield Institute of Education including Ben Willis, Professor Bronwen Maxwell, Bernadette Stiell, Lewis Clarke, Anna Stevens, Lisa Clarkson, Dr Claire Wolstenholme, Dr Dee Rutgers, and Hongjuan (Sylvia) Zhu. The lead evaluators were Ben Willis, Professor Bronwen Maxwell, and Bernadette Stiell.

The Sheffield Institute of Education at Sheffield Hallam University is a leading provider of initial and continuing teacher education, undergraduate, post-graduate, and doctoral education programmes, and has a long-established track record in educational research, evaluation, and knowledge exchange. Key areas of research and evaluation expertise span curriculum and pedagogy, policy and professional learning, and diversity and social justice.

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Glossary

Term	Abbreviation, where applicable	Definition or description
Active implementation support ('wraparound' support)	AIS	Additional, bespoke support provided by RILs to priority schools.
Bristol City Council		Partner in the RILs/DELTA project.
Clusters		Groups of around ten participating DELTA schools (priority and non-priority schools) supported by a RIL, most commonly coming together for online sense-making clinics.
Developing Effective Leadership of Teaching Assistants	DELTA	An EEF partnership-led pilot—an integrated programme combining both evidence-informed practices for training and deploying teaching assistants and processes for effective implementation supported by skilled research intermediaries.
Implementation guidance		The EEF's Putting Evidence To Work: A School's Guide to Implementation —a guide for schools implementing evidence-informed practices and the framework on which most Research School Network implementation training and regional partnerships are based.
Learning Support Assistant	LSA	Like TAs, LSAs support pupils in the classroom. In this report, we use the term teaching assistant (TA), except when quoting participants who refer to LSAs.
Multi-academy trust	MAT	A group of state funded academy schools forming a partnership, independent from local authority control.
Maximising the Practice of Teaching Assistants	MPTA	https://www.maximisingtas.co.uk/courses/mpta-training-improving-pupil-independence —a consultant-led training programme for teaching assistants.
Non-priority schools		Bristol schools participating in the DELTA pilot receiving the modules and sense-making clinics, but not the additional RIL wraparound support.
Priority schools		Bristol schools identified by EEF as having higher numbers of disadvantaged pupils and lower attainment scores, which were targeted for RIL wraparound support.
Regional implementation lead	RIL	Experienced advisor and/or senior leader in education recruited as knowledge intermediary to provide implementation guidance to their cluster schools and wraparound support to priority schools.
Research schools		A network of 38 schools in England that lead schools in their region in the use of evidence-based teaching and supporting the use of evidence at scale.
School implementation lead	SIL	School leader designated to lead DELTA in their school.
School implementation team		Team drawn from staff across each DELTA school, bringing together a range of roles and skills to support the SIL in the implementation of DELTA in school.
Sense-making clinics		Online sessions led by the RIL to support their cluster of schools following some modules.
TA guidance		Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants: Summary of Recommendations —the EEF's evidence-informed guidance to help primary and secondary schools make the best use of TAs.
TA recommendations		The specific recommendations (7) in the TA guidance.
Teaching assistant	TA	TA is used to refer to TAs and LSAs in this report, but participants' quotes may refer to LSAs.
West Somerset Research School	WSRS	The EEF's regional delivery partner providing recruitment, coordination, administrative and delivery support for the pilot and participating DELTA schools in Bristol.

Executive summary

The project

The regional implementation leads pilot ('the RIL pilot', 'the pilot')—led by a partnership of the EEF, West Somerset Research School, and Bristol City Council—aimed to develop and test an approach to supporting schools to build the culture, capability, and capacity necessary to successfully implement and sustain evidence-informed school improvement and support progress towards establishing a city-wide evidence-informed ecosystem. The approach involved using regional implementation leads (RILs).

The initial stage of the pilot (March to June 2021) involved co-construction of the RIL role, an associated competency framework, and the Developing Effective Leadership of Teaching Assistants (DELTA) programme, as well as the recruitment and training of ten RILs. Development work continued over the duration of the pilot. The DELTA programme, which was delivered from June 2020 to September 2022, is a package of training, support, and resources that takes a staged approach to enabling schools to deploy the evidence-informed processes set out in the EEF's TA implementation guidance, *Making the Best Use of Teaching Assistants* (Sharples et al., 2019). The DELTA programme comprised a launch event and eight workshops led by EEF programme leaders and West Somerset Research School, five 'sense-making clinics' for clusters of approximately ten schools led by RILs, and tailored 'wraparound support' by RILs to enable individual schools to make, and act on, evidence-informed decisions in line with the implementation and TA guidance.

In line with the EEF's mission, the main targets for the pilot were schools with the highest levels of disadvantage in Bristol (identified in this project as priority schools). The remaining schools in Bristol were invited to join the DELTA workshops and sense-making clinics alongside the priority schools. Seventy-one schools (24 priority; 47 non-priority) participated in the DELTA programme. Each was asked to identify a school improvement lead—a senior leader—to participate in the DELTA programme and to establish a school implementation team.

The mixed-methods, theory-based evaluation (Weiss 1998, Belcher et al. 2020) had both formative and summative purposes. Baseline and follow-up surveys of senior leaders were primarily used to gather data on change over time. Qualitative data generation included interviews with RILs, school implementation leads, senior leaders, and stakeholders at different timepoints during the pilot and six school case studies at the end. The design of data collection instruments, the analytical framework, and the final synthesis of findings were based on the nested logic models co-constructed by the evaluators and EEF programme leads.

Figure 1: Summary of pilot findings

Research question	Finding
What evidence was there to support the theory of change?	<p>The intended pilot outcomes were partially achieved as detailed below. Some outcomes were delayed or impeded due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School implementation leads' knowledge and understanding of, commitment to, and skills in using evidence-informed processes and practices increased considerably in most schools. There was limited evidence of gains for other senior leaders not directly involved in the DELTA programme. There were modest gains for members of school implementation teams (where they functioned) in relation to evidence-informed TA deployment practices. In most schools, some progress was made in aligning culture and processes with the implementation guidance, particularly in relation to the Foundations and Explore recommendations. Despite initial concerns, many school implementation leads now recognise that effective implementation is a gradual process, in line with the implementation guidance recommendations. Most schools made progress in aligning TA deployment with the TA guidance. Strong cognitive and attitudinal gains were reported for TAs, together with greater recognition of their roles and TA 'voice', but practice change was variable across schools. Changes for teachers were more mixed and more modest overall than for TAs, and where teachers did not make the required practice changes it impeded TA practice change.

Research question	Finding
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There were some indications of evidence-informed processes and practices being championed and shared across Bristol and embedded in Bristol City Council's educational strategies and practices. <p>There was evidence, in some schools, to suggest that providing a sustained, integrated programme of training and support focused on using evidence-informed implementation processes to embed evidence-based practices is effective. The evaluation methodology does not allow causal claims to be made and cannot isolate the relative impacts of individual inputs, such as RIL support.</p>
How feasible was it to deliver the pilot?	<p>Suitably experienced and skilled RILs were recruited and retained and their support was valued by participants. RILs highly valued their own training and the support provided by the programme leaders.</p> <p>Overall, recruitment and retention of schools, particularly priority schools, was good. Recruitment and retention were challenging in some multi-academy trusts.</p> <p>There were high levels of participant satisfaction with the DELTA modules and wraparound support provided by RILs. Sense-making clinics were less well received.</p> <p>Limited progress was made in schools where there was a lack of senior leader support or where the school implementation lead did not have the authority to implement change. Challenging school conditions due to accountability pressures, or the significant rise in pupils with additional and more severe needs during and following the Covid-19 pandemic, also limited progress.</p> <p>Challenges in TA recruitment, retention, and resourcing were frequently reported to impede in-school implementation as did perceptions in some schools that the TA guidance was not wholly appropriate to their context.</p> <p>Stakeholders perceived that Bristol City Council's diminishing influence across the city, in the context of academisation and resource constraints (reflecting the changing role of local authorities nationally), together with the flux in leadership of education at the Council, were barriers to establishing a city-wide evidence-informed ecosystem.</p>
Is the regional implementation lead role ready for scale-up as part of the EEF's approach to regional delivery?	<p>The RIL role has the potential for scale-up, with refinement, codification and extension to the role, enhanced oversight and steering of RILs' engagement with schools, and the support of key regional influencers who can bring all schools on board.</p> <p>Schools in particularly challenging circumstances may require a period of preparation support before they are able to engage effectively with the demands of an ambitious integrated programme such as DELTA.</p>

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic presented significant challenges for programme delivery and in-school implementation. Although the affordances offered by the switch to more online delivery were valued, restrictions on face-to-face delivery and in-person wraparound support were not optimal. Restrictions on in-school support by RILs meant that they were less able to gain a deep understanding of a school's context, develop trusting relationships, or tailor support effectively.

Specific challenges faced by schools included having to reprioritise resources, including staffing, in response to illness and staff shortages. This exacerbated existing limitations on the time that could be made available for leaders, teachers, and TAs to engage with evidence-informed change and contributed to the limited functioning of many school implementation teams.

Overall, the impact of the pandemic slowed progress toward intended outcomes and in part explains why intended outcomes were only partially achieved. However, some schools saw the many disruptions and changes wrought by the pandemic as an opportunity to reset TA practices.

Although Covid-19 had a marked impact on the pilot and its outcomes, the evaluation also identified a set of additional factors that are likely to modify potential programme effects irrespective of the pandemic.

Introduction

Background evidence

Improving schools' use of research evidence to inform practice is central to the Education Endowment Foundation's mission to raise attainment and close the disadvantage gap. However, research use is not yet well embedded in all schools (Coldwell et al., 2017; Walker et al., 2019) and EEF evaluations suggest that schools have variable, and at times weak, underlying capacity to make, and act on, evidence-informed decisions (for example, see Maxwell et al., 2019a; Wiggins et al., 2019). This presents a potential limiting factor on the EEF's knowledge mobilisation work and, in turn, negatively impacts school practices and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils at scale.

One of the characteristics of schools that embed research evidence effectively is that in addition to focusing on *what* approaches to adopt they pay attention to *how* to implement those new approaches so that they bring about sustained changes in practice (Sharples et al., 2021). In response, the EEF and Research Schools are emphasising the importance of evidence-based processes (including implementation) in addition to evidence-based programmes (for example, Promising Projects) and practices (such as guidance reports and related Research School training programmes). Since the EEF first published **Putting Evidence to Work: A School's Guide to Implementation** (Sharples et al., 2021),¹ which we refer to in this report as 'the implementation guidance', this guidance has become the common framework on which most Research School Network implementation training and regional partnership projects are based.

Prior evaluations of EEF pilots of the scale-up of evidence use (for example, Maxwell et al., 2019a, 2019b, and 2019c; Nelson et al., 2019), evaluations of Research Schools (Gu et al., 2019; Gu et al., 2017), as well as the wider literature on knowledge mobilisation (for example, Cooper and Shewchuk, 2015; Powell et al., 2017; Sharples, 2013) all indicate that 'translating' research evidence into a guidance document is insufficient on its own to lead to widespread or effective evidence use. As Sharples (2019) notes, the findings of these and other studies suggest that evidence-informed practice in schools relies on the interaction and alignment between four factors:

- the quality and usefulness of the evidence;
- the presence of skilled research intermediaries;
- the receptiveness and capacity of schools as evidence users; and
- the alignment with the wider school system.

The necessity of these four factors for effective evidence use at scale has shaped the EEF's design of the Regional Implementation Lead (RIL) pilot in Bristol. In relation to the first necessary factor—the quality and usefulness of the evidence—the pilot aimed to support schools to use high quality evidence-informed practices on the deployment of teaching assistants (TAs), as summarised in the EEF guidance **Making the Best Use of Teaching Assistants** (Sharples, Webster and Blatchford, 2021), which we refer to as the 'TA guidance' in this report. Training and supporting resources related to the TA guidance were developed in two earlier EEF scale-ups of projects on the effective use of TAs (see Maxwell et al., 2019b and 2019c for the evaluations of these projects) and further developed through the Research Schools Network. In addition, Bristol schools were to be supported to use high quality evidence on implementation processes as set out in the implementation guidance. Implementation training and supporting resources have been developed through the Research Schools Network.

The RIL project represented a development of the existing Research School three-day training programmes on the use of high-quality evidence-informed practices or evidence-informed implementation. It piloted an integrated programme of training and support for both evidence-informed practices and processes as well as wraparound support from skilled research intermediaries—the second necessary factor for effective evidence use at scale. There are indications from previous scale-up of evidence-use projects that direct implementation and leadership support by research intermediaries

¹ This study rationale and design drew on the 2018 version of the Putting Evidence to Work guidance. The guidance documents were updated in 2021 during the project lifespan. The 2018 version is no longer accessible online.

can facilitate tangible changes in practice and outcomes. For example, in the previous projects aiming to mobilise the TA guidance, school and regional system leaders played a valuable role in modelling the changes in TA deployment to other schools (Maxwell et al., 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). The RIL pilot was an opportunity to explore how senior school leaders could support evidence-informed implementation more widely.

Previous research and evaluations have identified a range of necessary characteristics and attributes for research intermediaries. These include generic personal and professional skills, research and evidence mobilisation knowledge, professional development or adult learning knowledge, leadership skills, and knowledge and skills to effect educational change (Cooper, 2010, 2014; Lavis et al., 2006; Lomas, 2007; Maxwell et al., 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Sin, 2008). These findings were used in the developmental phase of the RIL pilot to develop a RIL role specification and competency framework and inform the pilot design. A potential issue in drawing on senior school and system leaders to undertake RIL roles, identified at the design stage, was that they may struggle to ‘stick to the script’ in terms of evidence-informed implementation processes and practices and default to their own approaches when supporting other schools. This indicated the need for a robust pilot to examine how effectively school and system leaders can support the EEF’s regional delivery.

The third necessary characteristic identified for effective evidence use at scale was ensuring the receptiveness and capacity of schools. EEF evaluations of the scale-up of evidence use and the evaluation of Research Schools suggest that a lack of requisite skills in schools to make, and act on, evidence-informed decisions can be a barrier to successful implementation of evidence (Maxwell et al., 2019a, 2019b and 2019c; Nelson et al., 2019, Wiggins et al., 2019). Furthermore, these studies and the wider evaluation literature (for example, Coldwell et al., 2017, Nelson et al., 2022, Maxwell et al., 2022) repeatedly highlight that when senior leaders are not committed to evidence-informed change, it is unlikely to be successful. The wraparound support provided by RILs to schools was intended to address this issue.

‘Alignment with the wider school system’, the fourth necessary characteristic for effective scale-up of evidence use, recognises that supporting individual schools to implement evidence-informed practices and processes is insufficient, on its own, to bring about substantial and sustainable change. It is also necessary for the wider education system to support the desired changes. To address this, the RIL project builds on a core element of the EEF’s knowledge mobilisation strategy, namely the building of strategic partnerships with school and system leaders at a regional level to embed evidence-informed school improvement in local structures and processes. The regional strategic partnership for this project, which included Bristol City Council and other system leaders, was coordinated by the EEF’s South West Regional Delivery Lead, working alongside West Somerset Research School (WSRS). There is limited evidence that regional partnerships have the potential to drive forward and support the scale-up of evidence use. For example, in the Lincolnshire scale-up pilot, tangible changes in practices and outcomes (albeit variable) were found and significant progress made in building sustainable, large-scale infrastructure for future research use (Maxwell et al., 2019c).

The location of the RIL pilot in Bristol arose from a combination of circumstances. Bristol has a high number of schools designated as priority schools by the EEF (37), which enabled the piloting of the RIL role in schools with high numbers of disadvantaged pupils with below average attainment (based on 2016 to 2019 data).² Priority schools were identified as part of the EEF’s regional strategy and not directly by Bristol stakeholders. Bristol is also an area where the EEF has not previously worked extensively. The city has a complex school improvement system characterised by multiple stakeholders and fragmentation in approaches to support, meaning that it is representative of other areas of interest to the EEF nationally. Fortunately, prior to the pilot, Bristol City Council had identified the need to improve the use of TAs across Bristol schools. Being able to design a RIL pilot that focused on the implementation of the TA guidance, which had been the focus of earlier approaches to scaling up research evidence, meant that the development team had a

² Primary schools identified as priority schools were those with below national average combined reading, writing, and maths (RWM SAT scale) attainment scores for their disadvantaged pupils cohort over a three-year period (2016 to 2019) plus above national average numbers of disadvantaged pupils in school (note: numbers not percentage). Secondary schools identified as priority schools were those with below national average Attainment 8 score (note: not Progress8 score) for their disadvantaged pupils cohort over the same three-year period plus above national average numbers of disadvantaged pupils (note: numbers not percentage). Although the approach to identifying the priority schools was influenced by the Fischer Family Trust (FFT) it was adopted internally by the EEF as part of its Regional Strategy 2019–2023.

good understanding of the challenges that schools face in implementing this guidance as well as a well-developed set of tools and resources to draw on in the design of the RIL pilot.

Pilot approach

The description below outlines the 'how, what, where, and by whom' of the RIL pilot. Due to the developmental nature of the project, adaptations were made throughout the pilot lifespan. This took place through a process of co-construction with key stakeholders and RILs, and in response to the formative aspects of the evaluation and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Overview

The RIL pilot was developed and delivered by a partnership comprising the EEF, WSRS, and Bristol City Council. The partnership was brought together and coordinated by the EEF South West Regional Delivery Lead.

The initial aim of the pilot was to enable priority schools in Bristol to apply evidence-informed implementation processes (in line with the implementation guidance) to implement evidence-informed approaches to TA deployment (in line with the TA guidance). This was to be achieved by providing training in the form of workshops and 'sense-making clinics', and wraparound support for in-school implementation from a RIL. The pilot was launched as part of a differentiated offer to all schools in Bristol and marketed as the Developing Effective Leadership of Teaching Assistants (DELTA) project. Non-priority schools were initially only offered the training workshops and sense-making clinics. However, as reported in Findings 1: Recruitment, Attendance, Attrition and Dosage, there was a degree of 'creep' due to some RILs giving some non-priority schools additional support and some blurring of the boundaries between sense-making clinics and wraparound support.

'Test and learn' phase

The design of a programme of RIL support for the DELTA project was based on development work undertaken by the EEF and the Cornwall Education Learning Trust (CELT) which began in January 2021. The Cornwall project aimed to use evidence-informed implementation processes to implement evidence-informed approaches to metacognition and self-regulation. A short 'test and learn' phase in Bristol (March to June 2021) drew on the learning from the Cornwall project about the RIL role, necessary RIL characteristics, skills and experience, recruitment, training and development, and the best approaches to the delivery of RIL support. During this phase, two development groups operated concurrently. The RIL development group focused on developing a competency framework for RILs (Appendix 1), specifying the RIL role and refining approaches and resources to be used by RILs in supporting schools. The DELTA development group focused on designing the DELTA modules. Some stakeholders worked across both groups, enabling a coordinated approach to development across the RIL pilot and DELTA programme. The EEF's Strategic Lead, its South West Regional Lead, and another member of the Bristol development team also worked on the Cornwall project, enabling the ongoing sharing of learning from Cornwall with the Bristol team.

Regional implementation lead recruitment, selection, training, and support

RIL recruitment and selection was undertaken during spring 2021. RIL recruitment and selection are discussed in Findings 1: Recruitment, Attendance, Attrition, and Fidelity.

The RIL competency framework, which underpinned RIL selection and training, is based on four pillars:

- knowledge of school context;
- knowledge, experience, and skills in implementation;
- knowledge, experience, and skills in TA deployment; and
- ability to support and guide leadership.

Details of the competencies included within each pillar are set out in Appendix 1.

The RIL 'Preparation, Induction and Accreditation' (PIA) process spanned one full day and two half-days in May 2021. As part of the PIA process, each RIL completed a competency audit based on the RIL competency framework. This was intended to provide RILs with a clear understanding of the role requirements as well as supporting their formative self-

reflection on their developing skills over the course of the project. RILs were given a copy of the framework for their own personal review at the end of the project but these were not collected by stakeholders for review.

The three training sessions during the PIA period were led by the EEF South West Regional Lead and the EEF Strategic Lead with support from the WSRS director and external experts. The training, supporting resources, and tasks within and before the sessions aimed to support RILs in:

- developing a deeper understanding of the context and purpose of the DELTA project;
- exploring the evidence underpinning the implementation guidance and TA guidance;
- considering and developing practical approaches for wraparound support;
- reflecting, practising, and inviting feedback on skills, attributes, and competencies for the role; and
- developing a community of practice.

A further aim of the training sessions was the co-production of approaches to wraparound support.

Ongoing support for RILs, led by EEF staff, was provided initially in preparation sessions for module delivery and, as the programme progressed, in 'wash-up' sessions after each DELTA module: these involved reflecting on the module delivery and any issues arising, which in turn informed the plans for the sense-making clinics, wraparound support, and the focus and delivery of the next module.

The WSRS director set up an informal WhatsApp support group for RILs to share and discuss issues at other points throughout the programme, as and when required.

The DELTA programme

The DELTA programme is a package of training, support, and resources that integrates approaches recommended in the implementation guidance and TA guidance. The aim was to enable schools to build the culture, capability and capacity necessary to successfully implement and sustain evidence-informed practices, by supporting them over time to use evidence-informed implementation processes to improve their approaches to TA deployment.

A diagrammatic representation of the core components of the DELTA programme and their sequencing is set out in Appendix 2. The main features are outlined below.

Workshops

A series of nine workshops, which included a warm-up event, a launch event, and ten modules, were delivered between March 2021 and September 2022. The structure of the modules followed the implementation stages in the implementation guidance to enable schools to improve their approaches to TA deployment while they were participating in the programme. Module 10 was an additional module, not in the original plan, which was delivered after the intended programme end date.

The warm-up event, launch events, and three modules were delivered online. Seven modules (across five workshops) were delivered face to face. While the original plan was to deliver the whole programme face to face, Covid-19 pandemic restrictions meant this was not always possible.

To foster senior leader engagement and support, the target participants for the warm-up, launch event (which incorporated Module 1), and Module 8 (Deliver—Piloting the Changes) were headteachers or another senior leader from each school. School implementation leads (SILs), whose role was to work with an in-school implementation team to implement change in schools, were identified by senior leaders after the launch event. The programme leaders specified that SILs should hold senior roles that enabled them to effect change across their schools. SILs were the target participants for Modules 2–10.

Table 1: DELTA workshops

Workshop	Focus	Date ³	Target participants	Mode of delivery
DELTA 'warm-up' event	Programme Information and Benefits	25 March 2021	Headteacher/senior leader	Online
Launch and Module 1	Foundations for Implementation	11 June 2021	Headteacher/senior leader	Online
Modules 2 and 3	Explore—The Case for Change	22 Sept 2021	SIL	F2F
Module 4	Prepare—A Shared Vision and Plan	11 Nov 2021	SIL	Online
Modules 5 and 6	Prepare—Bringing The Evidence to Life	26 Nov 2021	SIL	F2F
Module 7	Prepare—Preparing for Change	16 Feb 2022	SIL	Online
Module 8	Deliver—Piloting the Changes	28 March 2022	Headteacher/senior leader and SIL	F2F
Module 9	Sustain—Sustaining Success	16 June 2022	SIL	F2F
Module 10	Creating Lasting Change	30 Sept 2022	SIL	F2F

The DELTA workshops were led by the EEF South West Regional Lead and the EEF Strategic Lead with inputs from the WSRs director and external consultants. Sessions comprised expert inputs, discussions and group activities. All workshop resources (see below), together with recordings of most workshops, were made available to participants on the DELTA Padlet.

Gap tasks were set at the end of each workshop to keep the project on track, examples included staff audits, RAG ratings, and the drafting of implementation plans, all of which were reviewed in subsequent sessions. Completion of some tasks were supported further in sense-making clinics or through wraparound support.

Sense-making clinics

All participating schools (priority and non-priority) were invited to five sense-making clinics over the duration of the DELTA programme (see Appendix 2 for scheduling in relation to workshop delivery). The target participants for the first clinic were headteachers or senior leaders. The target participants for the subsequent four were SILs. Sense-making clinics were facilitated by a RIL and were intended to have a duration of one to two hours. Ten clusters, each with nine or ten schools, were initially identified and each RIL allocated to one cluster. Each cluster included two to four priority schools, for which the allocated RIL would provide wraparound support, as well as some non-priority schools which at the outset were not intended to receive wraparound support.

Sense-making clinics provided the opportunity for reflection on implementation progress in school and supported planning for the next steps as well as space to revisit some of the module content if needed.

Resources

A comprehensive set of resources on the DELTA Padlet was provided to all participants. These resources are listed below.

³ These are actual delivery dates. Modules 7 onwards were delivered later than the original schedule due to Covid-19 related issues—see Pilot Context below.

- 'Introduction to the project' video (nine minutes), filmed by WSRS, the regional delivery lead, and an external expert. Senior leaders were asked to share this with school staff to create a shared understanding of the DELTA programme and their involvement in it.
- Recordings of most workshops.
- All workshop PowerPoint slide packs.
- **Implementation guidance, recommendations poster, and supplementary tools.**
- **TA guidance, recommendations poster, and supplementary tools.**
- Links to the **Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants (MITA) staff surveys and audit** and associated RAG-rating self-assessment tool.
- Implementation plan pro-forma.
- DELTA 'pinch-point' workbook that identifies six potential implementation pinch points that schools can encounter when reframing the role of TAs: lack of implementation leadership, understanding what effective TA deployment is for your school, disconnect with high-quality teaching and learning for all pupils, variable workforce skills, misuse of TA-led interventions, and losing momentum and lack of sustainability. For each pinch-point issue, the workbook provides:
 - a description of the issues;
 - illustrations of how the issue can appear in practice;
 - a checklist of activities within the DELTA programme that can be completed to help address the issue;
 - questions to guide reflection; and
 - space for notes on current practice and changes as they occur.
- Additional training resources produced by WSRS and external consultants.

Wraparound support

The original plan (Appendix 2) included five wraparound in-school support sessions to be facilitated by a designated RIL and delivered in sequence with the DELTA modules and sense-making clinics. It was intended that there would be flexibility in the duration and frequency of support activity to be agreed by the RIL and the SIL. RILs were contracted for 19 days in total over the pilot to cover their training and other meetings, attendance at DELTA modules, organisation and facilitation of sense-making clinics, and the provision of wraparound support.

Initially each RIL provided wraparound support for between two and four schools. As noted earlier, as the project progressed, some non-priority schools also received additional support (see Findings 1: Wraparound Support: Dosage).

Although wraparound support was primarily intended to be delivered in schools, Covid-19 pandemic restrictions meant that the first support intervention in July 2021 was conducted by telephone and a significant number of the following support sessions were conducted online. Support was also provided by email.

Wraparound support was intended to be tailored to each school, taking account of the school context, ensuring that implementation was kept 'on track', and helping school leaders, SILs, and implementation teams to make, and act on, evidence-informed decisions as part of the DELTA project. Drawing on the resources provided for the project (see above), wraparound provision was likely to include support, as appropriate, in relation to:

- using the TA guidance to understand what effective TA deployment looks like in the schools;
- completing the implementation pinch-point workbook to reflect on and address any issues and gap tasks;
- developing an evidence-informed culture;
- analysing data to set priorities (for example, data on pupil outcomes, staff deployment);
- writing an implementation plan;

- designing professional development programmes; and
- monitoring and improving implementation.

Pilot context

The RIL pilot took place between March 2021 and September 2022, which included a substantial period during which Covid-19 pandemic restrictions were placed on schools and group gatherings and schools had to adapt teaching and manage high levels of staff absence. This impacted directly on the programme arrangements and on schools' progress in developing and progressing their implementation plans.

The main changes to the intended DELTA delivery plan due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic were:

- the launch event and two of the workshops were switched from face to face to online delivery;
- the timings of Modules 7, 8, and 9 were delayed and the intended programme end-date of July 2022 extended into September 2022;
- an additional tenth module was provided in September 2022 to provide further input for schools progressing or relaunching their implementation plans in the 2022/2023 academic year; and
- many of the intended RIL visits to schools to provide wraparound support were replaced by online communication.

The impacts of Covid-19 on programme delivery, school participation, and the achievement of intended outcomes are outlined in more detail in the Findings sections.

Evaluation aims

The overarching aims of the evaluation were to:

- advance understanding of knowledge mobilisation in relation to EEF regional delivery; and
- evaluate the RIL wraparound support model as a means of improving evidence-informed processes and practices in schools.

This mixed-methods, theory-based evaluation design had both formative and summative purposes. Theory-based evaluation is a methodological approach drawing on the seminal work of Weiss (1998), Rogers (2008) and Chen (1990) which places the articulation and explicit testing of causal theory at the heart of evaluation (see Belcher, Davel and Claus, 2020, for a recent review), in contrast with what is sometimes called 'Black Box' evaluation (Astbury and Leeuw, 2010) that focuses on impact and implementation and can underplay or ignore causal theory. Formative reports were shared with the EEF team in November 2021 and March 2022 to inform programme development.

Research questions

The research questions one to seven below, agreed with the EEF Strategic Lead and South West Regional Lead at the beginning of the pilot, were intended to be a frame for formative and summative research and reporting.

RQ1 What are participating schools' capabilities and capacities for implementing evidence-based processes and practices at the start of the project?

RQ2 How do schools perceive:

- a. RIL programme dosage?
- b. the nature of engagement with RILs?
- c. the nature of support provided by RILs?

RQ3 To what extent does implementation support, provided by a RIL, help schools develop processes for evidence-informed implementation (that is, as set out in the EEF implementation guidance)?

- RQ4** To what extent does the support provided by RILs help bring about the intended implementation outcomes in schools—in this project focusing on alignment of school practices with the recommendations in the EEF TA guidance?
- RQ5** Are RILs with prior experience of providing school-to-school support able to adhere to principles for effective implementation and evidence-informed practices with consistency and fidelity?
- RQ6** How does codified implementation support operate within the local school improvement infrastructure (including Research Schools)?
- RQ7** If shown to have promise, would the regional implementation lead role be feasible to expand to a larger scale as part of the EEF's approach to regional delivery?

This summative report addresses three overarching research questions which are linked to the initial research questions and form the framework for the presentation of the findings shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Summative report—overarching research questions

Overarching research questions	Link to initial research questions	Report section
A. What evidence is there to support the theory of change?	1,* 2, 3, 4, 6	Findings 1, 2
B. How feasible is it to deliver the pilot?	5, 6	Findings 3
C. Is the regional implementation lead role ready for scale-up as part of the EEF's approach to regional delivery?	7	Conclusion

*Research question 1 was addressed directly in formative reporting to inform pilot development and is subsumed into this report as the baseline measure for change over time.

Ethical review

Preliminary ethical approval for the first stages of the project including the development of a theory of change, initial observations, initial interviews with key stakeholders, and conduct of the baseline survey was given by Sheffield Hallam University on 4 January 2021. Ethical approval for the complete project was given on 5 July 2021 (SHU Ethics Review ID: ER34670347). It was recognised that some stakeholder interviewees, although anonymised, would be identifiable because of their role in the project. In these cases, consent was obtained on the basis that they may be identified.

Post-approval amendments were approved in March 2022 for additional fieldwork with schools with declining attendance or which were withdrawing from DELTA, and then in June 2022 to conduct face to face rather than remote case study visits following the relaxation of Covid-19 related restrictions. Updated information sheets were issued for school staff involved in case study visits in autumn 2022 (see Appendix 5 for the project information sheet and consent form).

Data protection

The legal basis for processing data in this study is 'public task', GDPR Article 6 (1) (a and e). The project data management plan was approved as part of the Sheffield Hallam University ethical approval process. Sheffield Hallam University was the data controller. All participants were provided with a project privacy notice (Appendix 5).

Project team

	Organisation	Title	Role
DELTA/RILs pilot—development and delivery team			
Jonathan Sharples	EEF	EEF Strategic Lead	DELTA development and delivery
Lorwyn Randall	EEF	EEF South West Regional Lead	DELTA development and delivery
Tom Colquhoun	WSRS	West Somerset Research School, Research School Director	DELTA development, delivery and coordination, RIL coordinator
Fiona Egerton	WSRS	WSRS Project Coordinator	DELTA schools' engagement coordinator
Laurence Pitt	Bristol City Council	Lead for School Partnerships	DELTA development, LA lead and coordination
Tommy Jarvis	Bristol City Council	Programme Manager and Strategic and Inclusive Leadership (SEND)	DELTA development, LA support
Sally Franklin	UCL	School Improvement Consultant, Associate Teaching Fellow	DELTA development, delivery and MPTA training

SHU evaluation team		
Ben Willis	Senior Research Fellow	Co-investigator and qualitative lead; project manager
Professor Bronwen Maxwell	Professor	Principal investigator until March 2022; consultant from April 2022
Bernadette Stiell	Senior Research Fellow	Co-investigator and qualitative lead—stakeholders and case study
Anna Stevens	Research Fellow	Survey and management information analysis
Lewis Clarke	Quantitative Researcher	Survey administration and analysis
Dr Claire Wolstenholme	Senior Research Fellow	Co-project manager and baseline survey manager until October 2021
Dr Dee Rutgers	Research Fellow	Case study fieldwork and analysis
Lisa Clarkson	Researcher	Transcription and qualitative analysis
Hongjuan (Sylvia) Zhu	Researcher	Observations and non-participating senior leader data collection

Methods

Evaluation overview and rationale

The RIL pilot was a complex project that operates at, and between, different systems levels—national, regional, school, and individual. To address this complexity, the evaluators worked with the EEF team, over a series of meetings, to develop nested evidence-based logic models linking inputs to intended short-, medium-, and longer-term outcomes and identifying potential modifiers of effects at the national and city levels (Appendix 3) and school and individual levels (Appendix 4). The logic models were grounded in existing research evidence on knowledge mobilisation, research use in schools, and system and school leadership.

The national and city-level logic model identifies the EEF as a national-level system broker that ‘translates’ evidence for practice via the implementation guidance and TA guidance and supporting resources. These documents and resources, together with learning and resources from the Cornwall ‘test and learn’ site, formed the key inputs for the RIL and DELTA development groups in Bristol. The interactions between different city-level partners, and between the city partners and the EEF regional delivery and strategic leads as system brokers, supported an iterative city-level development process which led to refinement of the intended RIL role and, in turn, supported RIL recruitment and development. The shorter-, medium-, and longer-term outcomes for RILs were intended to be achieved during the lifespan of the pilot. These outcomes are drawn from the four pillars in the RIL competency framework (see Appendix 1) and are listed in the Intended Pilot Outcomes section below. The development of the RIL role continued through feedback loops crossing both the city and school system levels throughout the pilot.

The national and city-level logic model also shows the intended progression of the city towards:

- further embedding the principles of effective implementation;
- further development of school improvement infrastructure;
- embedding an evidence ecosystem more deeply;
- increased trust in city school improvement mechanisms; and
- improved pupil progress and attainment.

These longer-term outcomes (depicted in light blue on the logic model) are unlikely to be achieved within the relatively short time span of the pilot. The medium-term outcomes, intended to be achieved during the project lifespan and listed in the Intended Pilot Outcomes section below, were identified by the EEF stakeholders as indicators of progress towards the longer-term outcomes.

Moderating factors were identified as likely to impact at the national and city level:

- the city’s school improvement culture and infrastructure and the characteristics and capability of the system leaders;
- senior leaders’ perceptions of city school improvement, the EEF, and the Research School;
- school culture and characteristics;
- capability of RILs and school leaders acting as implementation leads; and
- system-level moderators such as national policy, inspection, and responses to missed schooling due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

These moderators are dynamic and will be impacted on directly by the pilot. The national and city logic model also indicates where outputs and outcomes at the city level form inputs to the school-level logic model and includes feedback loops from the school-level logic model to illustrate the interaction between system levels.

The school-level logic model sets out the DELTA programme inputs at school level. It depicts the interactions between outcomes for senior leaders, the school implementation team, teachers, and TAs; it distinguishes medium-term mediating outcomes (shown in dark green) intended to be achieved during the pilot lifespan and the longer-term

outcomes beyond the pilot lifespan (shown in light green). The medium-term outcomes (listed in full in the Intended Outcomes section) focus on the increasing knowledge, understanding, skills, confidence, and commitment of senior leaders, the SIL, and the implementation team to implement the TA guidance effectively in their school context leading to practice change to align more closely with the implementation guidance and TA guidance. Medium-term outcomes for teachers and TAs are enhanced knowledge and understanding and increasingly confident use of evidence-informed TA practices. Longer-term outcomes for teachers are increased understanding of, mindset for, and engagement with, evidence-informed practices. For TAs, the longer-term outcomes involve enhanced professionalism. Longer-term outcomes at the whole-school level are distributed capacity and a thriving culture for evidence-informed practices and processes leading to improved pupil outcomes and the embedding of evidence-informed implementation processes and practices throughout the school.

Moderating factors identified as likely to impact at the school level span:

- school culture and characteristics;
- senior leader and implementation team characteristics, capability, and buy-in and motivation;
- the quality of teaching for all pupils;
- workforce capacity and willingness to embrace change;
- RIL characteristics, capability, and capacity; and
- the regional and national system moderators acting at school level, for example, the regional school improvement infrastructure, national policy, inspection, and responses to missed schooling.

A dynamic interaction was expected between these moderating factors and pilot inputs, mechanisms, and mediating outcomes resulting in changes in the nature of the moderating factors over time.

As noted in the Introduction, the pilot evaluation aimed to provide both formative and summative findings, with the emerging findings reported to the EEF team in November 2021 and March 2022 to inform further programme modifications. The findings in this report provide a summative evaluation of the effectiveness of the RIL pilot together with exploration of the causal mechanisms and the factors that supported and impeded the success of the RIL role within a city or regional school improvement context. In turn, this is intended to assess the promise and feasibility of expanding the RIL role to a larger scale as part of the EEF's approach to regional delivery.

Given that this was a pilot—and that development work was continuing throughout the evaluation period—it was inappropriate to deploy an experimental or quasi-experimental design. Instead, the evaluation aims and research questions (set out in the Introduction) are best addressed through a mixed-methods concurrent QUAL-quant (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017) theory-based evaluation design. The design incorporates:

- a baseline and follow-up survey conducted at the end of the pilot for headteachers and senior leaders;
- early interviews with headteachers and senior leaders;
- observations of DELTA module delivery;
- longitudinal interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders and RILs;
- midpoint SIL interviews and endpoint interviews with SILs not connected to a school case study;
- short interviews or email questions for school leaders in schools that registered but did not start the DELTA programme or whose attendance declined; and
- endpoint case studies of priority schools receiving wraparound support.

Table 3 provides an overview of data collection and analysis methods and their linkages to the research questions and the pilot theory of change.

Table 3: Methods overview

Research and data collection methods	Participants/data sources (type, number)	Data analysis methods	Overarching research questions addressed [original research questions]	Logic model relevance and outcomes
Survey: baseline and follow-up questionnaire	School leaders (26 priority schools and 53 other Bristol schools).	Descriptive statistics, analysis of baseline and outcome data including comparison of priority and non-priority schools.	RQA [RQ1—baseline] RQA [RQ3 and RQ4: baseline and follow-up comparison]	School-level baseline and outcomes. Perceptions and experiences of project inputs (post). <i>S1,3–6, R3</i>
Observations: virtual; structured field notes	RIL training sessions; DELTA training for headteachers; DELTA training for school implementation leads; DELTA sense-making workshops (total of 3 days).	Deductive and inductive thematic analysis.	RQA [RQ3] RQB [RQ5]	Nature and quality of school-level inputs and how they are received. Nature and quality of RIL training and how received.
Stakeholder interviews/focus groups: longitudinal semi-structured online interviews and focus groups	EEF leads (2 participants); Research School staff (2); Bristol City Council Schools Improvement Leaders (2); Other members of the RIL and DELTA development teams (2); Test and Learn Cornwall key stakeholders (3). ⁴ (Total of 16 data collection activities.)	Deductive and inductive thematic analysis.	RQA [RQ1: round 1] RQ A, B, and C [RQ 3–7: round 2 and 3]	Regional and national inputs, mechanisms and moderating factors. Regional outcomes. <i>C1–2, N1, R1-3</i>
Early school leader interviews: short semi-structured online or telephone interviews	Priority school senior leaders (10).	Thematic summary of responses captured in Excel response record.	RQ A [RQ1 and RQ2]	Perceptions of baseline school capabilities and capacity; early perceptions of project inputs and likely moderating factors; experiences of DELTA recruitment.

⁴ Focus groups only in round 1.

Research and data collection methods	Participants/data sources (type, number)	Data analysis methods	Overarching research questions addressed [original research questions]	Logic model relevance and outcomes
Midpoint school implementation lead interviews: semi-structured	Priority school implementation leads (9).	Deductive and inductive thematic analysis.	RQ A: [RQ 3–4] RQ B: [RQ 5] RQ C: [RQ 7]	School's engagement with, and experiences of, the DELTA programme and RIL support and progress of implementation in school. Enablers and barriers to engagement and implementation. <i>S1–4, R2 and 3 (emerging outcomes)</i>
Midpoint non-participant/ withdrawing schools: 10-minute online interviews or brief online survey	Senior leaders in a sample of 28 schools not participating in the DELTA programme. Achieved sample: 5.	Thematic summary of responses captured in Excel record.	RQ A: [RQ 1 and 3] RQ B and C: [RQ 5 and 7]	School's engagement with, and experiences of, the DELTA programme and RIL support. Contextual factors and barriers to engagement or continuation with the project.
RIL records of sense-making clinics and wraparound support	Retrospective spreadsheet completion by RILs recording the amount and nature of RIL contact; mode of support for priority and non-priority schools.	Descriptive statistics.	RQ A [RQ2]	Quantitative measures of RIL programme dosage, nature of RIL support and school engagement. ⁵

⁵ Due to the limitations in the dataset, only the sense-making clinics data was analysed quantitatively.

Research and data collection methods	Participants/data sources (type, number)	Data analysis methods	Overarching research questions addressed [original research questions]	Logic model relevance and outcomes
RIL interviews and focus groups: semi-structured telephone or online	Ten RILs at each timepoint: early—3 focus groups and one interview; mid and endpoint—all individual interviews.	Deductive and inductive thematic analysis.	<p>RQ A: [RQ 1—<i>early</i>]</p> <p>RQ B: [RQ 3–6—<i>mid and endpoint</i>]</p> <p>RQ C: [RQ 7—<i>mid and endpoint</i>]</p>	<p>Early</p> <p>RILs' characteristics, attitudes, experiences and skills. RILs' perceptions of regional-level recruitment and selection, training, and support. Early perceptions of school's capability and capacity. Mid and endpoint RILs' perceptions of school's engagement, progress in implementation, and school-level barriers and enablers.</p> <p>RILs' perceptions of ongoing support for their role; regional inputs, outcomes, moderating factors impinging on their role; and potential for scale-up.</p> <p><i>At endpoint: S1–7, R1–3, C1–2 and N1</i></p>

Research and data collection methods	Participants/data sources (type, number)	Data analysis methods	Overarching research questions addressed [original research questions]	Logic model relevance and outcomes
<p>School case studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Semi-structured interviews Endpoint semi-structured face to face interviews and/or focus groups Early SL and midpoint SIL interviews Survey: school-based survey Documentary analysis 	<p>Six RILs (longitudinal telephone/online semi-structured interviews or contribution to focus group as set out above).</p> <p>In 6 priority schools (1 per RIL). Participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> senior leaders school implementation team teachers TAs. <p>If conducted in the 6 case study schools.</p> <p>All teachers and TAs in the 6 priority schools.</p> <p>DELTA Implementation plan, school documents.</p>	<p>Construction of individual case reports using codes organised using deductive coding, followed by cross-case deductive and inductive thematic analysis.</p> <p>Descriptive statistics that were then incorporated qualitatively into individual case reports.</p> <p>Used to support the construction of the individual cases.</p>	<p>RQ A: [RQ 3–5] RQ C: [RQ 7]</p>	<p>RIL, SIL, school implementation team teachers and TAs experiences and perceptions of project inputs and their effectiveness, project outcomes and moderating factors.</p> <p>S1–7, R2–3</p>
Endpoint interviews	Non-case study SILs in 3 schools.	Deductive and inductive thematic analysis.	<p>RQ A: [RQ 3–4] RQ B: [RQ 5] RQ C: [RQ 7]</p>	<p>SILs' perceptions of project inputs and their effectiveness, project outcomes and moderating factors.</p> <p>S1–7, R2–3</p>

The nested evidence-based logic models were used to help structure the data collection tools, analysis methods, and synthesis of findings. This helps to mitigate the lack of quantitative causation testing as it allows exploration of the implementation pathways and causal mechanisms, enabling the underpinning theory of change to be tested. Using a theory-based evaluation approach also provides the opportunity to deepen knowledge of how, and in what contexts, mediating variables individually and together interact with inputs, outputs, and emerging outcomes and in turn are impacted on, and changed, by the pilot.

The evaluation (and most of the data collection) focused on priority schools, in line with the EEF's focus on projects that have the potential to impact positively on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. All qualitative interview and focus group data was generated from priority schools. The survey was sent to all participating schools (both priority and non-priority) at baseline with a follow up survey of all those responding at baseline. Survey analysis thus includes data from both priority and non-priority schools to assess any differences in changes over time in the use of evidence-informed implementation processes and evidence-informed TA deployment practices across the two groups. It should be noted here that the survey was completed by a different individual at follow-up for 17 of the 52 baseline responses. At the point of analysis, we considered this issue in full and concluded that the best approach would be to proceed with the full sample to allow the maximum possible sample size for priority schools and to permit an analysis of responses from these schools. If we had proceeded with individual matched responses only then we would have had just eight priority schools for analysis compared to the 15 in the existing analysis. A sample size of eight would have been too small to make any meaningful comparisons between priority and non-priority schools. These comparisons were important to allow comparison and synthesis with the qualitative findings (which focus on priority schools only). Not being able to make these comparisons would have significantly limited interpretation of the qualitative findings since we would have been unable to assess any changes in priority schools as a group. We did make every effort at the point of data collection to capture a response from the same individual at follow-up given that we had collected individual email addresses at baseline and were able to target follow up responses to that individual. However, despite this we found that there was a large turnover in staff and we did not want to exclude responses simply because a different individual was in post. As discussed in the report, the quantitative findings are only indicative and have multiple caveats, however, the fact that the qualitative findings largely support the quantitative findings allows us to have more confidence in the quantitative findings as they stand.

Intended pilot outcomes

Table 4 below sets out the intended national and city-level outcomes to be achieved by the end of the pilot. Table 5 sets out the school-level outcomes that were agreed with the EEF team at the start of the project and were included in the pilot logic models. Achievement of these outcomes was assessed using survey and qualitative data. Progress towards longer-term outcomes that are included in the logic models but were not expected to be achieved during the pilot lifespan was explored qualitatively.

Table 4: National and city-level pilot outcomes

National and city-level outcomes	
City-level outcomes—RILs	
R1	Knowledge of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> evidence-informed implementation processes; active implementation (wraparound) support; and school context.
R2	Skills in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> supporting evidence-informed implementation in context; recognising and supporting evidence-informed Making the Best Use of TAs practices; and providing contextualised wraparound support.
R3	Ability to support evidence-informed school improvement by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> applying evidence-informed implementation processes in context; identifying evidence-informed practices to address accurately diagnosed priorities; and selecting and using wraparound support tailored to context using regional data, local insights, and school information to support leaders to make, and act on, evidence-informed decisions.

	National and city-level outcomes
Other city-level outcomes	
C1	Influential and emerging voices in Bristol champion DELTA as an evidence-informed response to tackling disadvantage.
C2	DELTA integrates with Bristol City Council's wider strategy for meeting the needs of children at risk of underachieving.
National-level outcomes	
N1	Production of codified RIL role, principles, and practices.

Table 5: School-level pilot outcomes

	School-level outcomes
Senior leaders and school implementation teams	
S1	Increasing and deepening knowledge and understanding of evidence-informed implementation and TA deployment practices in context.
S2	Enhanced skills to implement evidence-informed TA deployment practices in context.
S3	Increasing confidence in the potential of the project for school improvement and in the implementation skills of school personnel.
S4	Stronger commitment to, and a mindset for, evidence-informed implementation and practices.
S5	Alignment of school conditions more closely with the Foundations for Effective Implementation in the EEF Implementation Guidance (see Table 6).
S6	Use of relevant evidence-informed implementation principles and activities to further enhance TA deployment practices in line with the EEF TA guidance.
Teachers and TAs	
S7	Enhanced knowledge, understanding, and increasingly confident use of evidence-informed TA practices.

Data collection

Survey

Design (research question A [RQ3 and 4])

A census of all participating schools (priority and non-priority) was conducted at the start of the DELTA programme with a senior leader responding on behalf of each school. A follow-up survey was administered at the end of the DELTA programme to all those who had responded at baseline (Appendix 7). The main purpose of the surveys was to assess change over time in senior leaders' knowledge, attitudes, skills, and approaches to evidence-informed implementation and TA deployment. In addition, the baseline survey collected data on senior leaders' motivations for engaging the school in the DELTA programme and their attitudes towards external school improvement. A formative report of the baseline survey findings was shared with the programme development team to inform ongoing development. In addition to repeating measures from the baseline survey in order to observe any change over time, the follow-up survey collected data from all schools on the perceived helpfulness of the components of the DELTA programme and data from priority schools on the perceived helpfulness of different forms of RIL support. The baseline and follow-up survey content are mapped to the research questions and intended school-level outcomes in Table 6.

Table 6: Baseline and follow-up pilot survey content

	Baseline	Follow-up	RQs and school-level outcomes
School phase and senior leaders' school role	✓	✓	N/A
Senior leaders' motivations for engaging the school in the DELTA programme and attitudes towards external school improvement support	✓	x	Overarching RQB
Senior leaders' knowledge, confidence, and commitment to leading school improvement in an evidence-informed way	✓	✓	Overarching RQA Outcomes S1, S3, S4
Senior leaders' approaches to leading and implementing school improvement—questions derived from the implementation guidance recommendations	✓	✓	Overarching RQA Specific RQs 3,4 Outcomes S2, S5, S6
Senior leaders' approaches to TA deployment—questions derived from the TA guidance recommendations	✓	✓	Overarching RQA Specific RQ 4 Outcome S6
Helpfulness of the components of the DELTA programme	x	✓	Overarching RQA and RQB
Helpfulness of different forms of RIL support (priority schools only)	x	✓	Overarching RQA and RQB Specific RQ3 and RQ4 Outcome RQ3

Senior leaders' motivations for engaging the school in the DELTA programme were captured using a ranking question. All other questions collected data using five-point Likert scales.

Designing a survey to assess change over time in relation to school implementation approaches becoming more aligned with the implementation guidance presented a number of challenges. First, the six guidance recommendations are each broken down into detailed sets of principles or practices which are not easily reducible to a short set of questions. Additional challenges were that there are some overlaps between the recommendations because the recommendations can have precise technical meanings that may not be apparent to senior leaders in schools, and some principles and practices are not measurable in a survey that is only completed by senior leaders. To address these issues, a small set of indicators were developed that broadly covered all the recommendations and focused most strongly on indicators that were most likely to show change over the course of the DELTA programme and could be implemented in a survey format and answerable by a senior leader (see Appendix 6). Developing the set of indicators involved consideration of the implementation guidance document, the National Professional Qualifications for senior leaders, which operationalise the guidance as outcomes, and discussion with the EEF team. Advice from a system leader with expertise in evidence-informed implementation was drawn on to ensure that the questions were clear, concise, and avoided technical language that may have been less easily understood in a school context. Short sets of questions were devised that focused on leadership and school improvement decision-making and on how leaders had prepared, rolled out, supported, and consolidated specific school improvement priorities. To capture 'business as usual' at baseline, senior leaders were asked to name a recent (non-Covid related) school improvement priority that they had implemented in the previous two years and then answer the implementation questions in relation to that priority. In the follow-up survey, senior leaders were asked to complete the same questions in relation to implementing the TA guidance over the period of the DELTA programme. The timespan of the pilot was too short to meaningfully capture broader changes in school implementation approaches.

The questions used to assess change over time in relation to TA deployment were selected from those used in two previous evaluations of EEF campaigns to scale-up the use of the TA guidance (Maxwell et al., 2019b, 2019c). To ensure that the survey was manageable in terms of length and time taken to complete, the full set of questions was not used. The subset of questions selected provided coverage across all seven TA recommendations and were ones that the previous evaluations had shown were most likely to identify change over time if this occurred.

A small number of the survey items relating to implementation and TA deployment were statements in opposition to the TA recommendations. These were included to avoid acquiescence bias. For ease of interpretation, the data for these statements has been reversed in reporting so that higher mean scores (as presented in the tables) for all items denotes stronger adherence to the TA guidance. Reverse statements are marked in the tables and figures.

The survey was piloted with five senior leaders who were not participating in DELTA to check intended understanding and appropriateness of the wording.

Mitigations at baseline and follow-up were put in place to reduce the risk of an underestimation of the pilot's effects due to response shift bias. It was possible that baseline survey respondents, due to a limited understanding of the implementation guidance or TA guidance, might over-estimate the extent to which their approaches aligned with the guidance documents. Then, as a result of learning from the programme, they might apply more rigorous standards of evaluation to assess their approaches in the follow-up survey. The use of any statistical technique to attempt to mitigate the bias was inappropriate due to the small sample size and lack of a validated self-report measure. Mitigations at baseline included clear and unambiguous question wording that was understandable in a school context and the piloting of the survey with senior leaders. In addition, prior to completion of the survey at the DELTA launch, the DELTA programme leaders assured participants that this was not an evaluation of their individual school and encouraged honest responses. A member of the evaluation team was also available to answer any queries about the survey questions while school leaders completed the survey. To provide a further check, senior leaders, SILs, and implementation teams taking part in the case studies were asked to self-assess progress in relation to adherence to the implementation guidance and all case study participants, including teachers and TAs, were asked to self-assess progress in relation to adherence to the TA guidance.

Administration and achieved sample

In June 2021, all 93 schools that had registered for the DELTA project prior to the launch event (29 of which were priority schools) were asked to complete the baseline survey either at the project launch, before receiving any programme input, or via email (if they were unable to attend the launch). Follow-up telephone calls and reminder emails were sent to boost response rates. Respondents were either headteachers or senior leaders with responsibility for teaching and learning. A total of 79 responses (88%) were received overall with 26 of these being from priority schools.

The follow-up survey was administered by the SHU team in November 2022 to the 79 schools that completed the baseline survey. Response rates were boosted through targeted follow-up emails and direct phone calls. This yielded a total of 52 follow-up survey responses (66% of those completing at baseline) that were later matched to the baseline survey responses; 15 of the matched responses were from priority schools and 37 from non-priority schools.

Where possible, surveys were matched at the individual level, however, there were instances where a staff member who completed the baseline survey had left the school. The final sample included 35 responses that were completed by the same staff member at both baseline and follow-up and 17 responses where the baseline and follow-up surveys were completed by a different senior leader from the same school. Although this approach somewhat reduces the robustness of the data, the decision was taken to prioritise a greater response rate at the school level rather than having a smaller response rate matched at the individual level.

As Table 7 illustrates, the majority of schools in the final matched sample were primary schools (45 primary; five secondary; two all-through). Nearly two-thirds of the surveys in the matched sample were completed by headteachers and the remainder by other senior leaders with responsibility for teaching and learning at both baseline and follow-up.

Table 7: Characteristics of the achieved baseline and follow-up samples

	Baseline			Follow-up		
	Priority	Non-priority	Overall	Priority	Non-priority	Overall
School type						
Primary (n)	18	42	60	13	32	45
Secondary (n)	6	6	12	2	3	5

	Baseline			Follow-up		
	Priority	Non-priority	Overall	Priority	Non-priority	Overall
All through (n)	2	5	7	0	2	2
Staff role						
Headteacher (n)	14	35	49	9	25	34
SL with responsibility for teaching and learning (n)	12	18	30	6	12	18
Total responses (n)	26	53	79	15	37	52

Qualitative data collection

This section summarises the data collection methods deployed. The foci of each research instrument deployed are presented in Appendix 8. The core qualitative research team comprised three researchers who co-constructed all the interview, focus group, and observation schedules and met regularly to standardise approaches and address any issues arising in data generation. Two additional researchers were briefed and supported by the core team, one to undertake two of the case study visits and another contributed to the observations and conducted the interviews and short online survey with non-participant or withdrawing senior leaders. Further details of all qualitative methods are below.

Observations—research questions A [RQ 3] and B [RQ 5]

Observations were conducted over the duration of the RIL pilot and DELTA programme. A total of three days of observations were undertaken sampling initial RIL training sessions, the RIL pre-module/‘wash-up’ meetings throughout the programme, the DELTA launch event, and the workshops. With the exception of one DELTA workshop that was observed in person, there was a mix of observations undertaken ‘live’ (where the evaluator joined virtual sessions) and analysis of recordings of online or face to face sessions. The purpose of the observations was to capture data on the nature and quality of RIL training and how it was received by RILs and the nature and quality of school-level training inputs and how they were received by senior leaders and the schools’ implementation teams. The observations also provided contextual background to aid the design of research tools. Findings from the observations were recorded in note format using a semi-structured pro-forma (Appendix 13) designed to capture aspects such as the nature and quality of the content, delivery methods and resources, participant engagement with content and resources, questions raised by participants, and emerging plans for action.

Longitudinal stakeholder interviews and focus groups—research questions A [RQ1-4], B [RQ 5-6], and C [RQs 7]

Online semi-structured interviews or focus groups were conducted with key Bristol stakeholders and DELTA leads at three timepoints (July 2021, December 2021 and January 2022, and September and October 2022). Participants included EEF leads, WSRS staff, Bristol City Council school improvement leaders, and other members of the RIL and DELTA development team. Some stakeholders were interviewed or invited to a focus group at all three timepoints, others at one or two timepoints depending on their role on the pilot. Table A8_1, Appendix 8 outlines the foci of the interviews at each timepoint. The specific questions were tailored depending on the role of the interviewee or focus group attendees in the pilot. All the interviews were transcribed in preparation for analysis.

In addition, one focus group was conducted in July 2021 with three stakeholders involved in the ‘test and learn’ project in Cornwall, which had begun to pilot the deployment of RILs to support the implementation of evidence-informed processes and practices. The foci for this focus group are presented in Table A8_2, Appendix 8.

Early school leader interviews—research question A [RQ1 and RQ2]

Ten short semi-structured online or telephone interviews with senior leaders in participating priority schools were undertaken in September 2021. This followed the launch event and first sense-making clinic and the first telephone contact from their designated RIL. The purpose of these interviews was to gather data to answer research question A (RQs 1–2) for formative reporting in October 2021. The sample was drawn from the schools identified as potential participants in the RIL case studies (see Case Study School Sampling Method below). If subsequently the school agreed to participate in a case study, the senior leader data was incorporated into the individual case analysis. The foci for the

early school leader interviews are set out in Table A8_3, Appendix 8. Data from the interviews was recorded in an Excel spreadsheet.

Midpoint school implementation lead interviews—research question A [RQ2–4] and C [RQ7]

Online interviews with nine SILs in priority schools (one supported by each RIL active at the time of the interviews) were undertaken in February 2022. The sample was drawn from the schools identified as potential participants in the RIL case studies (see Case Study School Sampling Method below). If subsequently the school agreed to participate in a case study, the midpoint SIL data was incorporated into the individual case analysis. Foci for the interviews are set out in Table A8_4, Appendix 8. These interviews were transcribed in preparation for analysis.

Regional implementation lead interviews and focus groups—research questions A [RQs 1 and 3–4], B [RQs 5–6] and C [RQ7]

Early semi-structured online focus groups or interviews were conducted with all ten RILs in July 2021 following their initial training, the delivery of a sense-making workshop for senior leaders, and their initial contact with their designated priority schools. Midpoint interviews with all RILs were conducted over December 2021 and January 2022 and endpoint interviews from June to September 2022. The foci of each set of interviews are set out in Table A8_5, Appendix 8. All RIL interviews were transcribed.

Non-participant or withdrawing senior leaders: telephone and online interviews or brief online survey—research questions A [RQ1–2] and C [RQ7]

In consultation with WSRS, 28 schools that were not participating in the DELTA programme were identified. A named senior contact was invited to take part in either a brief ten-minute telephone or online interview or an equivalent short online survey. Irrespective of preferred data collection method, the same questions were posed for each of the categories (with questions subtly different to reflect the circumstances of each) and their responses inputted into an Excel spreadsheet and thematically analysed. Overall, the key aims of this strand were to understand the reasons for leaders either not participating—or ceasing to participate—in the programme, their reflections on the offer and recruitment process, to understand what (if anything) could have been done to assist schools in either signing up or staying on the programme, and, finally, ascertaining their level of interest in participating in similar programmes in the future. The achieved sample was five despite repeated follow-up requests for the data.

Endpoint school case studies—research questions A [RQs 3–4], B [RQs 5–6], and C [RQ7]

The original intention was to conduct ten endpoint school case studies in priority schools, each of which had received RIL wraparound support. Six priority schools agreed to participate, each of which was supported by a different RIL. These cases studies were conducted in September and October 2022. Each case study had a different RIL involved. Schools gave various reasons as to why they were unwilling to host a case study, including the departure of key personnel (such as the SIL), insufficient time to facilitate a case study visit, and, more commonly, a belief that their school had not sufficiently progressed with DELTA (particularly in relation to the Deliver stage) to warrant a visit. It should therefore be noted that case study schools are likely to disproportionately represent schools that engaged more fully with the wraparound support. In order to protect school and staff anonymity, we have limited the detail presented on case study school characteristics—providing a qualitative rather than quantitative overview of key characteristics. Table 8 presents these characteristics together with the numbers of participants who were interviewed or attended focus groups.

Table 8: Endpoint school case study visits

School case study code	Key characteristics*	Participants interviewed
Case A	Slightly larger than average sized community primary school. High proportion of Pupil Premium eligibility. Above national average proportion of pupils with SEN. Proportion of EAL pupils roughly in line with national average. 'Good' Ofsted rating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SIL interview School implementation team focus group including 2 teachers, 2 TAs and the SIL TA focus group (x3) Online interview with RIL
Case B	Smaller than average sized academy-sponsored secondary school. Significantly higher than average entitlement to Pupil Premium. Average proportion of pupils with SEN. Well above national average of EAL pupils. 'Good' Ofsted rating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School implementation team focus group including SIL, HLTA, assistant principal, assistant SENCO and TA (x5) TA focus group (x7) Teacher focus group (x4) Teacher interview Online interview with RIL
Case C	Larger than average sized community primary school. Well above average entitlement to Pupil Premium. Significantly higher than typical numbers of pupils with SEN. Starkly higher than average proportions of EAL pupils. 'Good' Ofsted rating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SIL interview School implementation team joint interview (SENCO and lead HLTA) Interview with TA Interview with teacher Online Interview with RIL
Case D	Larger than average sized academy converter primary school. Pupil Premium entitlement above average. Above average levels of SEN and EAL. 'Requires improvement' Ofsted rating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SIL interview School implementation team focus group (x3) TA focus group (x2) Teacher focus group (x2) Online interview with RIL
Case E	A below average sized secondary academy-sponsor led school. Entitlement to Pupil Premium above the national average. The proportion of SEN pupils is below the national average but EHCP entitlement significantly above it. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. 'Requires improvement' Ofsted rating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SIL interview School implementation team member interview (assistant SENCO) (x1) TAs joint interview (x2) Online interview with RIL
Case F	Significantly larger than average primary academy sponsor-led school. Entitlement to Pupil Premium above national average. The proportion of SEN pupils lower than average. Above average proportion of EAL students. 'Requires improvement' Ofsted Rating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online SIL interview Replacement SIL and SENCO interview (x2) Wider school implementation team focus group (x3) TA focus group (x3) Teacher focus group (x3)

* Ofsted ratings provided were correct at the time of recruitment to the DELTA programme.

Originally, the intention was to undertake these case study visits before the end of the 2022 summer term. Due to slight delays in the scheduling of the DELTA programme, alongside findings from previous SIL and RIL interviews that indicated schools were postponing their roll-out of the DELTA programme until the next academic year, it was decided, in consultation with EEF, to postpone the visits until the start of the new academic year. The evaluators recognised the potential implications of the delay for participants' recall as well as the impact on response rates if endpoint data was collected after the formal end of the programme. However, on balance, it was considered that obtaining data on actual implementation of changes to practice was preferable to asking participants about their future plans.

Information provided by the EEF and WSRS was initially intended to guide case study selection using a variation sample of RILs. In reality, it was necessary to use opportunistic sampling, although we were able to ensure that the six case study schools all had different RILs. To address the lower-than-intended number of case studies secured, additional interviews with three non-case study SILs were conducted from June to September 2022 using the same interview

schedule as for the case-study SILs. In addition, the RILs who were not involved in the case study schools provided data in their endpoint interviews on their work in other schools and their perspectives on implementation, outcomes, and modifiers of in those schools.

The dataset for each case study school comprised:

- data collected during the endpoint school visit—
 - semi-structured interviews or focus groups with senior leaders, the SIL, and the school implementation team;
 - semi-structured TA focus groups; and
 - semi-structured teacher focus groups;
- documentary analysis—DELTA implementation plan and other relevant school documents;
- a short survey of all teachers in the school and a separate survey of all TAs (Appendix 12) administered online via a key contact in the school: the surveys were designed to assess how well aligned with the TA recommendations the school's practices were at the end of the DELTA programme and to gather teachers' and TAs' perceptions of the changes in TA deployment and practices over the duration of the programme; the design of the surveys was adapted from the questions in the MITA teacher and TA surveys and to encourage participation, each school was provided with an anonymised summary of findings; and
- data relevant to the individual case obtained from other evaluation data collection activities—
 - RIL early, midpoint, and endpoint interviews and focus groups;
 - early senior leader interviews; and
 - midpoint SIL interviews.

All interviews and focus groups were professionally transcribed by a member of the team. Automated transcription software was not used. The foci of the qualitative data collection instruments used in the case studies are presented in Table A8_6, Appendix 8. The dataset for each case brought together in-depth insights into how the RIL role had been implemented and contextualised, how the school had responded to the DELTA programme and, more specifically, to RIL support, the ways it had gone about implementation, and its progress towards the intended school-level outcomes (S1–7), as well as the barriers and enablers to achieving those outcomes. The case studies also allowed capture of data on intended RIL outcomes (R1–3) and city-level outcomes (C1–2) as well as providing the opportunity to test the underpinning theory of change.

Data analysis and synthesis

Qualitative analyses

Early analysis, September and October 2021

This early analysis involved:

- identifying the key themes through close reading and producing a summary of these themes in a PowerPoint slide pack for each of the following data sources—
 - early senior leaders' interview data that had been summarised in an Excel spreadsheet;
 - early stakeholder interview transcripts; and
 - early RIL interview and focus group transcripts;
- summarising findings specific to RQ1 and the early emergent findings for RQ2, RQ5, and baseline findings related to RQs 3, 4, and 6—also informed by early observations of RIL training and workshop delivery; and

- testing key themes and summary findings for accuracy and consistency during a fieldworker team meeting.

This qualitative analysis was presented together with a report of the baseline survey findings to the EEF programme leads to inform programme development.

Midpoint analysis, February and March 2022

The midpoint analysis summarised emerging findings across all overarching and specific research questions. It was also presented to the EEF programme leads to inform programme development. It involved:

- identifying the key themes through close reading, and producing a summary of these themes in a PowerPoint slide pack for each of the following data sources—
 - midpoint stakeholder interviews;
 - midpoint RIL interviews (this also included some initial NVivo coding); and
 - midpoint SIL interviews; and
- testing key themes and summary findings for accuracy and consistency during a fieldworker team meeting.

Final qualitative analysis

An analytical framework was constructed to link both quantitative and qualitative data sources and methods—together with data reduction and analysis methods—to the presentation of key findings in relation to the overarching and specific RQs. Mirroring the construction of research instruments, it was informed by the intended pilot outcomes and the theory of change.

An initial NVivo coding frame for the main analysis of qualitative data was developed using the analytical framework. The coding frame presented in Appendix 9 represents the coding frame that was finalised following amendments made during initial piloting. The main amendments made following the piloting were to the school outcomes codes. The school-level outcome sub-codes S1–7 were revised to represent the data more meaningfully—see Table 16 (p. 46) for cross-referencing of school outcome codes in NVivo to the pilot S1–7 outcomes. All top-level codes were to be used deductively. Some sub-codes were developed inductively as data analysis was undertaken—these are identified in the coding list (Appendix 9).

The first phase of the main qualitative analysis involved constructing a detailed individual case analysis report for each case study school from all transcripts related to the case and the descriptive summary of the findings from teacher and TA surveys by the fieldworker responsible for the case study. These focused particularly on overarching research questions A [RQs 3 and 4] and B [RQ 5]. Each case was a narrative record with illustrative quotes recorded on a template comprising relevant fields from the analytical framework such as RIL characteristics and activity, school experiences and outcomes, and moderating variables. Each of the six templates were uploaded to NVivo for cross-case analysis and comparison with other data sources.

In addition to the individual case reports, the following data sources were coded using NVivo:

- endpoint stakeholder interview transcripts;
- endpoint RIL interview transcripts—full transcripts for those RILs who were not associated with a case study school and partial transcripts related to pilot design, overall implementation, and the wider context for RILs who were associated with a case study school;
- endpoint interviews with SILs who were in case study schools;
- structured observation field notes; and
- early and interim findings summaries—the interview and focus group transcripts used to construct these summaries were also revisited when more in-depth insights or further clarification was needed.

The final analysis involved reading across all the data sources relating to each code and drawing out key themes in relation to the codes. As noted earlier, to aid analysis, some sub-codes were developed inductively during this process. In the final stages of the analysis there was an exploration of the relationships between codes. Emergent findings and relationships were tested in a series of meetings of the fieldwork team throughout the analysis process. This included:

- core team members iteratively and inductively co-developing and agreeing the NVivo coding framework;
- clarification meetings to check coding decisions and interrogate interpretations to resolve differences across the team;
- cross-checking coding across other team members' case studies;
- dividing the analysis of NVivo outputs across themes to ensure all team members' deeper familiarity across cases; and
- frequent meetings during the report drafting process to check and clarify understanding, interpretations, and wording.

The final qualitative analysis addressed all overarching research questions and specific questions 2–7.

Synthesis of quantitative and qualitative findings

The comparison and synthesis of quantitative and qualitative findings took place after the follow-up survey analysis and completion of the qualitative analysis. Similarities and differences in findings were identified in relation to each overarching and specific research question and potential explanations for differences found in the qualitative data were explored. This involved an iterative process of comparison and synthesis by individual team members and meetings of the whole evaluation team to test the findings.

To address the research questions relating to RIL fidelity and dosage, the data provided by some RILs on the sense-making clinics and wraparound support that they had undertaken was also considered in this final stage of the analysis. As explained in Findings 1: Recruitment, Attendance, Attrition and Fidelity, this data had significant limitations and so was primarily used for qualitative insight. In Findings 1 we also present DELTA module and sense-making clinic attendance data collected by WSRS. It was agreed during the evaluation design stage that this MI data collection would be designed and managed by WSRS for the purposes of supporting programme development.

Timeline

The timeline for the delivery of the DELTA programme is summarised in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Timeline of evaluation-related activity

Date	Activity
May 2021	Online observation of initial RIL training sessions
June 2021	Administration of baseline senior lead survey—at the start of the launch event
June 2021	Online observation: DELTA launch event involving all participating SILs
July 2021	Online early stakeholder interviews
July 2021	Online focus group—with stakeholders involved in the ‘test and learn’ in Cornwall
July 2021	Online early RIL interviews and focus groups
September 2021 to April 2022	Online observations of DELTA module delivery (mix ‘live online’ and ‘recorded face to face and online’) and review of DELTA Padlet
September 2021	Online early school leader interviews
September/October 2021	Early analysis of survey and qualitative findings and summary PowerPoint presentation
December 2021 to January 2022	Online midpoint stakeholder Interviews
December 2021 to January 2022	Online midpoint RIL interviews
February 2022	Online midpoint SIL interviews
February/March 2022	Midpoint analysis of qualitative findings and summary PowerPoint presentation
May to June 2022	Non-starter and withdrawing senior leaders: telephone and online interviews or brief online survey
June to September 2022	RIL’s completion of recording proforma of sense-making clinic and wraparound support provided to schools
June to September 2022	Online endpoint RIL interviews
June to September 2022	Online endpoint SIL interviews for SILs leaving case study schools at the end of 2021/2022 and SILs not in a case study school
September to October 2022	Endpoint case study school visits—interviews, focus groups, and teacher and TA survey
September to October 2022	Online endpoint stakeholder interviews
November 2022	Administration of follow-up senior lead survey
December 2022 to May 2023	Survey and qualitative analysis

Findings 1: Recruitment, attendance, attrition, and fidelity

This section presents findings that contribute to addressing overarching RQB (How feasible is it to deliver the pilot?) in relation to:

- achieved recruitment, retention, and key characteristics of RILs, schools, and SILs, and school attendance on the DELTA programme modules: these findings are based on data provided by WSRS and supplemented by publicly available Department for Education (DfE) data on school characteristics;
- fidelity to the intended RIL, school, and SIL recruitment and selection criteria and processes, based on a review of the management information (MI) data and perceptual data from interviews; and
- fidelity to the intended nature and dosage of wraparound support provided by RILs, sense-making clinics led by RILs, and DELTA modules: these findings draw on MI data, interview data and, where appropriate, observation data; this includes addressing RQ5—Are RILs with prior experience of providing school-to-school support able to adhere to principles for effective implementation and evidence-informed practices with consistency and fidelity?

While the evaluation gathered data on fidelity to the intended RIL recruitment and selection processes and the DELTA programme inputs and dosage, it is important to note when interpreting the findings in this section that the pilot was intended to allow for adaptations in response to developers' and deliverers' experiences of implementation, feedback from participants, and formative evaluation findings as well as national and school regulations and conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Regional implementation lead recruitment, selection, and retention

Summary

- Ten RILs were successfully recruited through open advertising or signposting by a programme lead and all but one remained until the end of the programme. To varying degrees, all had senior educational leadership experience. Most, but not all, were based in Bristol. There were varying degrees of experience in deploying the implementation guidance and TA guidance.
- RILs' motivations for applying for the role included their confidence in and respect for the EEF as an organisation and for the individuals leading the programme, the opportunity to develop their careers, the desire to share or pass on their skills and experience, the opportunity to gain wider and deeper understanding of Bristol schools, and recognition of the importance of maximising the untapped potential of TAs in Bristol.
- There was high fidelity to the specified EEF recruitment and selection process. Selection decisions were based on the four pillars of the RIL competency framework (Appendix 1). RILs regarded the process as open and transparent.

Achieved recruitment, attrition, key characteristics, and regional implementation leads' motivations

Ten RILs were recruited. All were senior school leaders (headteachers or experienced deputy heads) or wider education system leaders (such as MAT leaders or research school leads) or other related professionals (for example, local authority school improvement leads or independent consultants). Most, but not all, were Bristol based. All recruited RILs occupied or had previously occupied senior positions related to school leadership and management, providing representation across primary, secondary, and special schools, although there was some variation in role seniority, scale of responsibility, and depth of related experience. All RILs were aware of the TA guidance prior to making an application and had been involved in its implementation. However, their experience of implementing the TA guidance in practice varied in scale (from a single setting to a whole region) and in the extent to which it was explicitly for a 'school improvement' purpose.

Around halfway through the programme one RIL left owing to a job change that did not permit enough flexibility to continue in the role. To preserve continuity as far as possible, one of the 'expert' RILs who had sufficient capacity and flexibility and who was also a member of one of the RIL pilot development teams took on an additional cluster of schools.

The RILs who were successfully recruited expressed a range of motivations for being involved. These largely aligned with the goals of the programme and included:

- confidence in and respect for the key individuals leading on the programme;
- opportunity to work with the EEF, a well-respected organisation;
- to further their own career development;
- the chance to gain a deeper and wider understanding of Bristol schools;
- to pass on their skills and experiences in relation to the TA guidance and school improvement (particularly for schools in disadvantaged circumstances); and
- the importance of maximising the untapped potential of the large TA resource in Bristol.

One RIL highlighted the appeal of being part of a largely 'apolitical' project, one which could act as a vehicle to improve collegiality, join up schools better, and provide an enduring legacy for Bristol.

'It's about the processes and the relationships and I think that is really powerful and I actually think for Bristol if we can harness the positives that arise out of the next year of this project, then it could become a way in which we try and work in the future on other city-wide priorities' (RIL A).

Fidelity and effectiveness of regional implementation lead recruitment and selection processes

The RIL recruitment and selection processes appeared to be successful in that ultimately ten committed RILs with appropriate skills and experience were selected to take part and all but one continued to the end of the pilot.

The data suggests a high level of fidelity to intended recruitment and selection processes, which comprised a full EEF application and interview process using objective scoring and agreed HR procedures. RILs referred to the open and transparent advertising of the opportunity to be a RIL, and some noted that they were signposted towards the advertised role by a personal contact with someone strategically involved in setting up the DELTA project.

'It was an ad hoc conversation with [named contact] to begin with that led me in this direction' (RIL F).

'From my perspective, [named contact] who was really instrumental in this whole project is my line manager, so even before I'd started the role he was talking about ... the DELTA project' (RIL C).

The application process was viewed by RILs as being 'fairly straightforward' involving an application and subsequent short interview. The EEF stakeholders reported that the four 'pillars' in the RIL competency framework (Appendix 1) were instrumental in shaping selection decisions, both for assessing individual candidates and with a view to building a team with complementary experience and expertise. RILs and stakeholders felt that the recruitment and selection processes resulted in the group of RILs collectively having a wide range of relevant skills, expertise, and experience in relation to the specific recommendations in the TA guidance, the implementation guidance more broadly, and delivering school improvement and professional development at scale. As one RIL noted, 'we all had different pillars of strength' (RIL G, non-case).

RILs reported having no direct influence on which priority schools they were assigned to.

School recruitment and attrition

Summary

- The programme was promoted to all Bristol schools via WSRS and Bristol City Council communication media. The communications focused on improving TA deployment, rather than evidence-informed implementation, and did not mention RIL support.
- Of the 93 schools that initially registered for the DELTA programme, 29 were priority schools that, overall, have higher proportions of students eligible for free school meals and SEN support and were more likely to be academies than the 64 non-priority schools registered. Priority schools were less likely to be graded 'outstanding' than non-priority schools, although they were more likely to be graded 'good'. There were similar proportions of priority and non-priority schools graded at 'requires improvement' or below.
- Eighteen schools were 'non-starters'—schools that registered but did not go on to attend any events. Formal records of withdrawals during the programme were not kept but attendance at DELTA modules indicate relatively low levels of attrition.

Recruitment methods

School recruitment was managed by WSRS. The DELTA programme was promoted to all schools in Bristol through WSRS and Bristol City Council communication media. In addition, Bristol City Council staff targeted priority schools and strongly recommended participation. A 'warm-up' event was held prior to the programme launch to generate interest. Promotional material presented DELTA primarily as a training programme to help improve TA deployment, with limited indication of the intended focus on evidence-informed implementation processes and no mention of RIL support.

Achieved recruitment and school characteristics

Data supplied by WSRS showed that a total of 93 schools originally registered for the DELTA programme. Of these, 29 were priority schools and 64 non-priority. The tables below show the characteristics of the schools originally registering compared with the latest available DfE data on school characteristics.⁶ This is broken down by priority schools and non-priority schools and compared with all schools in Bristol City Council. Please note there is a small amount of missing or unavailable DfE data.

Table 9 shows that priority schools had a lower proportion of pupils with English as their first language (69%) compared with non-priority schools and compared with all schools within the local authority (79% and 77% respectively). Further, priority schools had a higher proportion of pupils eligible for special educational needs (SEN) support (18%) compared with non-priority schools (15%) and the local authority as a whole (14%). In terms of the proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM), priority schools had an average of 41% FSM pupils compared with 32% for non-priority schools and 31% for the local authority as a whole.

Table 9: School characteristics of registered priority schools and non-priority schools compared with the local authority as a whole

	% pupils with English first language (mean)	% eligible pupils with SEN support (mean)	% pupils eligible for FSM (mean)	Total n*
Priority schools	69%	18%	41%	29
Non-priority schools	79%	15%	32%	58
LA level	77%	14%	31%	149

* Data was missing or unavailable for six of the schools.

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-information-about-schools>

Table 10 shows school type broken down by priority schools/non-priority schools and compared with the local authority as a whole. Priority schools had a higher proportion of academies (83%) compared with non-priority schools (46%) and at the local authority level (53%), whereas non-priority schools had higher proportions of LA maintained schools.

Table 10: School type compared with the local authority as a whole

	Academies	Colleges	Free schools	Local authority maintained schools	Special schools	Other	Total n
Priority schools	83%	0%	0%	17%	0%	0%	29
Non-priority schools	46%	0%	5%	43%	7%	0%	61
LA level	53%	2%	4%	36%	3%	1%	158

Table 11 shows Ofsted ratings (where available) for priority schools and non-priority schools compared with the local authority as a whole. Whereas fewer priority schools were rated as 'outstanding' (7%) compared with non-priority schools (13%) and the LA as a whole (19%), a higher proportion were rated as 'good' (79%) compared with 68% for both non-priority schools and the LA as a whole. It should be noted that the Ofsted ratings reported here are the latest available, rather than those at the time of recruitment, to enable a comparison with the current data on the LA as a whole. Ofsted ratings were, however, collected by WSRC for priority schools on recruitment: comparison with the current ratings for priority schools shows that six had a lower Ofsted rating at the time of recruitment than is reported here for current data.

Table 11: Ofsted ratings for priority and non-priority schools compared with the local authority as a whole

	Outstanding	Good	Requires improvement	Serious weaknesses	Special measures	Total n
Priority schools	7%	79%	14%	0%	0%	28
Non-priority schools	13%	68%	15%	2%	2%	53
LA level	19%	68%	11%	1%	1%	139

Attrition

As noted above, WSRC collected and managed the monitoring data for schools and shared the full dataset with SHU at the end of the project. The monitoring data included attendance data for the 29 priority and 64 non-priority schools originally registered for DELTA, for the launch event, and the ten modules (see Table 12). A total of 18 (4 priority and 14 non-priority) that originally registered did not go on to attend any events. Therefore, we can consider these 18 schools 'non-starters' or withdrawals. As there was no systematic process to record withdrawals across the duration of the pilot, we are unable to ascertain the number of on-programme withdrawals. However, the analysis of attendance data presented below appears to indicate that the number of schools remaining on-programme, particularly priority schools, was high.

Enablers and barriers to recruitment and retention are reported in Findings 3 (p. 82). This section of the report, together with the section in Findings 2, Perceptions of the Links Between Project Inputs and Outcomes (p. 45), also provides potential explanations for patterns in the participation and fidelity data presented below.

DELTA programme and regional implementation lead support: participation and fidelity

Summary

- Seventy-one schools (24 priority and 47 non-priority) attended the launch event and Module 1. Subsequent attendance at events was generally good with non-priority schools attending an average of six events and priority schools attending an average of seven events. At each event, the attendance rate was higher for priority schools compared with non-priority schools.
- RIL records indicate that sense-making clinics were attended by the majority of schools although attendance declined somewhat over time. Alternative methods of support were increasingly provided by RILs to schools not attending over time but these alternative forms of support remained in the minority.
- Priority school senior leaders' responses to the endpoint survey and RIL records indicate that nearly all priority schools received in-school and online support for the SIL and email communication from the RIL. Direct RIL support for implementation teams, provision of group activities for TAs and teachers, and communications with senior leaders outside of the school implementation team were more limited.
- RILs perceived that some non-priority schools were more in need of support than some priority schools or were more receptive to support. Over time RILs began to provide additional support to some non-priority schools but did not consider that this was to the detriment of any priority schools.
- Survey analyses of priority schools' reports of wraparound support and indications drawn from RIL records need to be treated with caution due to significant limitations in the data.

A compliance measure for the DELTA programme was not developed. In part this was because it was an evolving, developmental pilot and, consequently, the details of intended RIL activity in individual schools that were needed to develop a compliance measure were not specified by the programme leaders. In addition, it was agreed at the evaluation design stage that launch, module, and sense-making clinic attendance was not within scope of the external evaluation. However, to provide context for the main focus of the evaluation, RIL wraparound support, we summarise below the data provided by WSRS on school attendance at the DELTA launch, modules, and sense-making clinics.

School attendance at DELTA launch and modules

Overall, 71 schools attended the launch event and Module 1. Table 12 shows patterns of attendance at each event for priority and non-priority schools. At each event, the attendance rate was higher for priority schools (note that the percentages given here are out of the total 93 that originally registered). Of the 71 schools that attended the launch event and Module 1, 47 were non-priority and 24 were priority. Subsequent attendance at events was generally good, with non-priority schools attending an average of six events, and priority schools attending an average of seven events.

Table 12: Attendance at DELTA launch and modules—priority and non-priority schools

Event	Online/F2F	Date of event	Attendance at events				Total schools (n)
			Priority schools (n)	Priority schools (%)	Non-priority (n)	Non-priority (%)	
Launch and Module 1: Foundations for Implementation	Online	11/06/2021	24	83%	47	73%	71
Modules 2 and 3: Explore—The Case for Change	F2F	22/09/2021	25	86%	42	66%	67
Module 4: Prepare—A Shared Vision and Plan	Online	11/11/2021	23	79%	44	69%	67

Event	Online/F2F	Date of event	Attendance at events				Total schools (n)
			Priority schools (n)	Priority schools (%)	Non-priority (n)	Non-priority (%)	
Modules 5 and 6: Prepare—Bringing the Evidence to Life	Online	26/11/2021	20	69%	41	64%	61
Module 7: Prepare—Preparing for Change	Online	16/02/2022	22	76%	34	53%	56
Module 8: Deliver—Piloting the Changes	F2F	28/03/2022	18	62%	30	47%	48
Module 9: Sustain—Sustaining Success	F2F	16/06/2022	21	72%	30	47%	51
Module 10: Creating Lasting Change*	F2F	30/09/2022	19	66%	27	42%	46

* Module 10 was not part of the original programme.

Sense-making clinics: dosage and school participation

RILs recorded their engagement with the schools at sense-making clinics on an Excel spreadsheet. This data was amalgamated showing that a total of 72 schools received some form of sense-making clinic support from a RIL. Information on the use of the Padlet, slides, or other resources, such as recorded sessions, was not collected as part of the evaluation.

Table 13 shows the attendance of schools at sense-making clinics one to four, as reported by RILs (please note the percentages in Table 13 are given out of the total of 72 schools for which we had records of attendance). Data was not available for Clinic 5. It should be noted here that RILs reported that the clinics had varying durations—ranging from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours—and in some instances the RILs did not specify the duration.

In some instances, RILs recorded that they had given alternative support in place of an online sense-making clinic. These took the forms of telephone support, one to one sessions, in-person support, and email support. This became more prevalent later in the programme, although the provision of alternative forms of support remained in the minority.

The vast majority of schools attended the first two sense-making clinics (90% and 93% respectively of the 72 for which attendance data was collected). Fewer schools attended Clinic 3 although eight schools received some other form of support instead. Somewhat fewer schools received support in relation to Clinic 4, with nine recorded as not attending the clinic, however, ten were recorded as receiving alternative support.

'I felt like towards certainly the mid to end of the project, although we were still carrying out the sense-making clinics, actually what was happening was I was more often having one-on-one conversations with individual schools rather than those sense-making clinics. They felt a bit sterile. Only [certain] people came to them' (RIL G, non-case).

As we discuss in Findings 2—Perceptions of the Links Between Inputs and Outcomes—sense-making clinics were less well received by schools than other elements of the DELTA programme. This, together with the increase in alternative forms of support over time, may explain the reduction in Clinic 4 attendance.

Table 13: School attendance at sense-making clinics—recorded by RILs

	Schools	Online SMCs attended	Online SMC recorded as not attended	No answer given on attendance	Alternative support accessed	Total
SMC 1	n	65	0	5	2	72

	%	90%	0%	7%	3%	100%
SMC 2	n	67	0	5	0	72
	%	93%	0%	7%	0%	100%
SMC 3	n	45	1	18	8	72
	%	63%	1%	25%	11%	100%
SMC 4	n	42	9	11	10	72
	%	58%	13%	15%	14%	100%

Wraparound support: dosage

The follow-up survey asked senior leaders in priority schools to report on the different forms of RIL support that their school received with a total of 12 responding (Table 14). These findings should be interpreted with caution and not used as robust evidence due to the small number of priority schools in the follow-up survey. All respondents (12) indicated that the RIL had provided online support for the SIL, ten of whom also reported that the SIL had received in-school support. A total of 11 respondents indicated that they had received email support. Support for school implementation teams was more limited: six respondents reported that the school implementation team received in-school support and four reported receiving online support. RILs were reported to have provided group activities for TAs and teachers in half of the respondents' schools (six in each case). A total of six respondents indicated that the RILs had communicated with senior leaders outside of the school implementation team.

Table 14: Reported provision of different forms of RIL wraparound support

Statement (1, 'not helpful'; 5, 'very helpful')	Receiving support (N)	Not receiving support (N)	Don't know/missing (N)	Total N
Online support for implementation lead	12	0	0	12
In-school support for implementation lead	10	1	1	12
Email support	11	0	1	12
Online support for the implementation team	4	5	3	12
In-school support for implementation team	6	4	2	12
Communication with senior leaders outside of the implementation team	6	3	3	12
Group activity for TAs	6	5	1	12
Group activity for teachers	6	5	1	12

To at least some extent, the differential profile of RIL support for the SIL—beyond online, in-school, and email—is consistent with the programme theory that RILs would tailor their support to the individual school context. However, as we discuss further in Findings 3: Feasibility, there was some evidence that in some schools, particularly where the SIL was not a senior leader, the RILs' lack of engagement with the SLT meant that leadership barriers to school implementation were not overcome. It is also important to note that the survey does not capture the frequency of each mode of wraparound support.

RILs also recorded the duration and mode of delivery of their wraparound support on an Excel spreadsheet. This data was collected retrospectively. However, it was difficult to apply consistent categorisations due to missing data and the largely open nature of the recording form. Due to these limitations, it was inappropriate to undertake any quantitative

analysis on this dataset. Qualitative reading of this data suggested patterns of RIL wraparound support that were congruent with the survey and the interview findings.

Originally, the intention was that only priority schools would receive wraparound support from RILs. However, by the time of our interim qualitative data collection (early 2022), there was clear evidence of ‘RIL offer creep’ with several RILs confiding that they had extended their one to one ‘wraparound’ support beyond the designated priority schools. By the end of the project, the RILs’ spreadsheet records indicated that the nine RILs who had kept these records had provided support to 22 (of 24) priority schools and 13 (of 48) non-priority schools.

One of the rare areas where many RILs appeared to disagree with programme leads was in relation to the underlying selection criteria used to identify priority schools (see Introduction, footnote 2). Programme leads were sensitive to ensure that the terminology of ‘priority school’ did not become stigmatising and so this term was not used publicly. A consequence of this, however, was that the specific criteria used became somewhat couched and hidden, leaving many RILs admitting they did not know with certainty how such schools were identified, although most thought it was related to markers of disadvantage. A large number of RILs questioned the rationale of using disadvantage as the key recruitment criterion, claiming this was not a reliable means of identifying the schools most in need of priority support or best placed to benefit from that support relative to other considerations such as leadership structure and stability.

‘Obviously the priority schools are chosen from data—there’s a very specific reason why they’re a priority school. But that doesn’t take into account the context of the leadership, in a way, and actually that’s the bit that matters more than anything else, I think ... just because they’ve got high disadvantage, doesn’t mean they’re the ones who need the support, necessarily’ (RIL A).

Several RILs admitted to feeling uncomfortable about the lack of equity in access to the wraparound support. One stated they would have preferred a separated structure for delivery that did not make the two-tiered wraparound entitlement so visible.

‘The only thing I would change is having within one group the priority schools and the non-priority schools. I think maybe either have a smaller number of schools that are all priority or have everyone. Having that two levels of support to manage, I felt guilty about’ (RIL F).

There was some evidence to suggest that the amount and extent of RIL support for priority schools varied across RILs and between priority schools over time. Interviews with a few SILs suggested that RIL input tapered off or was not sought in the later stages of the DELTA programme when they were moving into the ‘deliver’ stage.

However, most RILs took matters into their own hands to some extent by providing support that went beyond the stated boundaries for non-priority schools. For some, this was just a matter of allowing further flexibility for ‘catching-up’ by offering one-off additional sessions when SILs were unable to attend a certain module or sense-making clinic.

‘I used the get-together sessions [sense-making clinics] following the CPD that we had. To be honest, sometimes I would deliver those on a one to one basis with a school’ (RIL F).

For other RILs, it was simply a case of optimising their available time by giving non-priority schools a little more of their capacity to compensate for a minority of priority schools that they perceived had elected not to utilise their full entitlement or were reluctant to accommodate the RIL on-site.

‘But there are non-priority schools where I was more involved than one of the other priority schools. And actually that’s fine, we kind of went that way, and that was absolutely fine. But I think the priority schools get a little bit more ... like I say, either just a flexible approach where you don’t necessarily have a priority school ... but you can’t impose, I can’t impose myself on schools’ (RIL D).

However, a sizeable number of other RILs expressed feeling morally compelled to accommodate certain non-priority schools that they perceived to be at least as much in need of intensive support as priority schools. There was no direct evidence to suggest that the schools originally assigned priority status were disadvantaged by this extra support for non-priority schools. It was beyond the scope of the evaluation to ascertain if additional efforts to engage the priority schools that had elected not to use their wraparound entitlement would have led to enhanced outcomes. Many RILs

made the judgement that not to provide further assistance for non-priority schools would have resulted in a higher number of schools exiting the programme.

‘There was a couple of schools that were not priority schools and I gave additional wraparound support to—either in the terms of actual school visits or additional Teams meetings depending what worked best for them. And that was very similar to what I offered, maybe not as frequent but a similar offer to what I gave the priority schools as well. That wasn’t obviously part of the deal, but actually in order for those schools to be able to move forward with DELTA, I felt ... not compelled, because I could have said no, but it felt like it was the right thing to do, to support those schools’ (RIL C).

Although programme leads did not actively encourage RILs to move away from the agreed protocol, there seemed to be an element of pragmatism and acceptance of the need for this to happen. One of the programme leads explained that there was a sense that the programme evolved organically as RILs naturally recalibrated where they placed their emphasis.

Fidelity to the implementation guidance and TA guidance

Wherever possible, RILs sought to minimise pressure on schools and adopted a pragmatic approach in terms of their advice and responses throughout the DELTA programme. That is not to suggest that the integrity of evidence-based recommendations was ignored or compromised but to acknowledge that on occasion intelligent adaptation was a crucial strategy. For example, there was no evidence to suggest that RILs were pushing for full adherence to all the TA recommendations; instead, they were privileging the need for a context-informed approach, which was primarily directed by the principles of the implementation guidance, especially the Foundations and Explore stages.

‘I wouldn’t want to dilute the project because I think what we’re getting is something really high quality that’s going to have a really good impact. I just think we need to be aware that it drops different in different places and therefore perhaps our expectations we need to moderate a little bit with how successful we could potentially be’ (RIL G).

At times we detected a tension in schools between adherence to the general implementation guidance principles versus attempting to keeping pace with the programme timeframe and implementing the specific TA recommendations. This is where the involvement of effective RIL support was especially helpful in providing a reassuring note around intelligent adaptation.

Findings 2: Evidence to support the theory of change

This section reports on the overarching Research Question A, 'What evidence is there to support the theory of change?', presenting findings on outcomes and examining the extent to which the pilot inputs contributed to the achievement of RIL, school, city, and national outcomes.

- RIL outcome findings are drawn from perceptual data gathered in RIL, stakeholder, and SIL interviews.
- School-level outcomes are assessed using change-over-time analyses from pre and post surveys completed by SLs, alongside individual and cross-school case analyses and other interviews with senior leaders, SILs, and RILs.
- City and national education system outcomes findings are based on perceptual interview data from key stakeholders, RILs, senior leaders, and SILs.
- Exploration of the extent to which the pilot inputs contributed to outcomes draws on all the data sources identified above and the satisfaction data from the SL follow-up survey.

The school-level findings contribute to answering RQs 2, 3, and 4 and the city-level findings contribute to answering RQ6. Further findings in relation to the theory of change and RQs 3, 4, and 6 are presented in Findings 3: Feasibility, which focuses on factors (modifiers) found to enable or impede the effectiveness of project inputs and the subsequent achievement of intended outcomes.

Regional implementation lead outcomes

The intended RIL outcomes, set out in the national and regional level logic model (Appendix 3), relate to knowledge of, skills in, and the ability to support evidence-informed implementation in schools. The specific outcomes are set out in Table 15. The theory of change assumed that these outcomes would be achieved through the codification of the RIL role, principles, and practices followed by a recruitment and selection process and initial and ongoing training that was informed by the codified roles, principles, and practices.

Table 15: RIL outcomes summary

	Intended outcomes	Evidenced outcomes	Data analysis methods
R1	Knowledge of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evidence-informed implementation processes; • active implementation support; and • school context. 	Strong evidence of increased knowledge and understanding including RILs perceiving that they had gained a suitable language and structure for supporting evidence-informed implementation.	Interview data: RIL self-report and perceptions of key stakeholders, senior leaders and SILs.
R2	Skills in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting evidence-informed implementation in context; • recognising and supporting evidence-informed Making the Best Use of TAs practices; and • providing contextualised active implementation support. 	RILs reported that having the more 'tangible' improvement goals (the TA guidance) to base the implementation guidance on enhanced their confidence in being able to engage SILs with something concrete steeped in evidence.	

	Intended outcomes	Evidenced outcomes	Data analysis methods
R3	Ability to support evidence-informed school improvement by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • applying evidence-informed implementation processes in context; • identifying evidence-informed practices to address accurately diagnosed priorities; and • selecting and using wraparound support tailored to context using regional data, local insights, and school information to support leaders to make and act on evidence-informed decisions. 	RILs were able to augment knowledge gained in relation to the TA guidance and implementation guidance with their own experience and expertise, to tailor advice appropriate to the SIL's school context. However, more proactive engagement with senior leaders in schools that lacked senior leader 'buy-in' could have enhanced school-level outcomes. There were powerful examples of intelligent adaptation to individual schools' contexts. All RILs reported enhanced confidence in their ability and commitment to support evidence-informed school improvement beyond the pilot.	
N1*	Production of codified RIL role, principles, and practices.	The four pillars/RIL competency document was successfully produced during the development phase. EEF stakeholders and RILs indicated that this could be further enhanced in the light of the pilot experience.	Perceptual interview data from beginning/mid and end of programme stakeholder interviews.

* The national-level outcome related to the production of a codified RIL role, principles and practices has been included in this section as it relates closely to the RIL outcomes.

Overview

Overall, all the RILs were adamant that their experience of the RIL pilot and DELTA programme had been a profoundly positive one that they would be able to take forward into the future:

'I've learned and grown and developed myself individually, through doing the RIL work, definitely' (RIL B).

For some, the outcomes of their involvement had been transformative.

'So, there's a massive learning curve. As I said, I'm quite proud to have been part of it, if I'm honest. For me, it's definitely one of the highlights of my professional career' (RIL E).

Below, we present findings on the extent to which the specific intended RIL outcomes and the national outcome of producing a codified RIL role, principles, and practices were achieved.

R1. Knowledge of evidence-informed implementation processes, wraparound support, and school context

RILs were able to articulate how much they had grown in terms of their depth of understanding in relation to implementation theory and the implementation guidance. Several alluded to previously having been guilty of viewing implementation 'as a sort of bolt-on ... as sort of an extra "also consider this"' (RIL B), partly due to their own circumstances (that is, leading schools in a very busy and pressurised system). RILs reported that involvement in the RIL pilot had helped to equip them with a suitable language and infrastructure to convert implementation—which they had often previously perceived as a nebulous concept—into something much more concrete.

'To me, in terms of the evidence-informed implementation process, it's been transformational for me. My role has changed, the way in which we work as a school has changed. And in all honesty, I'm very eager to continue sharing that practice or working with [other] schools. It's been transformational. I can't understate it' (RIL D).

R2. Skills in supporting evidence-informed implementation in context, recognising and supporting evidence-informed Making the Best Use of TAs practices, and providing wraparound support

The RILs valued, and gained from, both dimensions of the programme—evidence-informed implementation and evidence-informed TA deployment and practice. Having the more 'tangible' improvement goals (the TA guidance) on which to hang the implementation guidance aided their confidence in being able to discuss something concrete steeped in evidence with SILs.

'When I did my own review ... at the start, the bit that I admitted I was less knowledgeable about ... was the TA guidance ... And so certainly for me that's the bit that really helped in that preparation and induction. And also ... working with the delivery team improved my knowledge, understanding, and confidence to talk about this kind of stuff to big groups of headteachers and senior leaders' (RIL B).

'The active implementation support—that, for me as a RIL, has been the bit which I've learnt most about and I've not done so much of before, and I've certainly improved myself. I think it would probably be the same for others ... I think it was important for us as RILs to develop our skills—knowing the context, understanding the context, learning as much as we could about the context, so that we could be sensible and appropriate in our advice and our guidance' (RIL B).

R3. Ability to support evidence-informed school improvement

RILs were able to utilise the bank of knowledge gained in relation to the TA guidance and the implementation guidance, in combination with their own experience and expertise, to tailor their dialogue with SILs to the school's context. Throughout the DELTA programme, RILs exercised their judgement as to the extent they were comfortable with schools deviating from strict adherence to specific recommendations or deferring from delivering whole-school roll-out before the Foundation and Prepare stages of the implementation guidance had been embedded.

RILs were able to mirror the 'professional humility' they experienced from the DELTA leads and to draw upon their own practice and awareness of contextual barriers (see Findings 3: Feasibility for more details on contextual barriers). In some instances, RILs needed to make a judgement on whether to prioritise the overarching implementation guidance or TA guidance. One example of this was when RILs advised schools to pull back from delivering their implementation plans (connected to how TAs were deployed) on a whole-school basis until they had more fully engaged with the Prepare stage. Similarly, some schools, in consultation with RILs, opted to implement only a comparatively small number of the TA recommendations.

'I'd like to say I was sticking to the letter of recommendations, but I think probably the reality is that it is a little bit of intelligent adaptation' (RIL C).

Many of the RILs referred to a mindset shift in their wider professional lives which was heavily influenced by their learning from the DELTA programme. Stakeholders also commented on the changes RILs reported in their practice as a result of the pilot. Unanimously, stakeholders reported that RILs found the project wholly positive and that it had significantly influenced their practices in their own settings.

'What all [the RILs] have said, unanimously really, is that this way of working has been eye-opening and had a significant influence on their own practice in their own settings, whether that's as a headteacher of a school or an executive role in a trust' (Bristol City Council Stakeholder).

Looking ahead, RILs were so confident about their ability to support evidence-informed school improvement that almost all signalled a desire and commitment to retain their role in the future. Irrespective of whether the RIL role is formally maintained in Bristol, there is significant evidence to suggest that the legacy of what RILs learned and gained through the programme will be retained in their everyday practices and contact with other educational professionals as they move forward.

'That ability to support that evidence ... school improvement, I think we're doing that now. The RILs are probably doing that without even thinking about that now. Hopefully it's become almost like second nature' (RIL C).

As outlined in Findings 3: Feasibility: School-Level Enablers and Barriers, SILs were limited in their ability to effect positive outcomes in schools that lacked senior leadership buy-in. Our data indicates that RILs generally did not address these issues directly with senior leaders, but we do not have sufficient evidence to ascertain whether this was due to limitations in RILs' confidence, skill, or abilities or due to the RIL role specification and training not addressing engagement with senior leaders adequately.

Perceptions of the links between project inputs and regional implementation lead outcomes

Summary

Achievement of positive RIL outcomes was perceived to be supported by:

- the collaborative approach to training design involving programme leads and RILs and the willingness of the programme leads to make adaptations in response to RILs' suggestions;
- the professional humility of the programme leads and their valuing of RILs;
- the quality and appropriateness of training inputs and ongoing support; and
- high-quality, easily accessible resources.

Several RILs praised the philosophy and ethos of programme. They welcomed the 'professional humility' of programme leads and also appreciated being included in EEF and WSRS discussions about the training as valued team players rather than having tasks imposed on them. Even though the training and modules remained true to the evidence throughout, it was noted that aspects were tweaked, where appropriate, to ensure they landed with maximum effect with participating schools. For example, in one instance it was noted that there needed to be more secondary-based examples, and this suggestion was acted upon. RILs also appreciated the ongoing intersessional support that entailed formal opportunities for troubleshooting and advice (for example, the collective running-through of each module before it was delivered) as well as informal opportunities for this (for example, programme leads being very responsive to email or phone requests for clarification) prior to and after delivery of the module content.

Overall, there was universally positive feedback from all the RILs about the programme in terms of the quality and appropriateness of the training inputs and the ongoing support received from the EEF and WSRS directly as well as the excellent administrative support accompanying it.

'It's the best professional development experience I've ever had' (RIL D).

One RIL explained how the training had supported their interactions with SILs:

'Just reminding, supporting, asking challenging questions, getting them to think it through, going into the detail, unpicking some of their comments and phrases and sentences that they'd written and saying, "What does that really mean?", "What are you actually saying here?", "What impact would that have?"—that sort of thing, which I felt was what we were more trained for on the RIL programme' (RIL A).

This was further enhanced by the high quality resources and videos of all sessions (especially helpful for RILs who experienced time or Covid-19 related pressures), which were accessible throughout the programme on the Padlet and helped RILs keep their DELTA work on track.

'It's an excellent repository for everything you need, so as a RIL you can go back and read that, refresh your memory, look at all the tools that we asked school leads to use—but also all the PowerPoints are on there' (RIL H).

Production of codified regional implementation lead role, principles, and practices (N1)

The RIL development team successfully produced the key competencies framework based on the four pillars (Appendix 1) that encompassed the key principles and practices of the RIL role. Further guidance on the role was provided in RIL training sessions. As discussed further in the Conclusions section, the post-programme reflections of EEF stakeholders and reports from RILs indicate that the four-pillar competency framework could usefully be further developed. Also noted was that the RIL documentation and training could include a greater focus on the system-level

context, a set of active ingredients for RILs, clearer identification of the activities that should fall within wraparound support, and matters of relationship-building including how to interact effectively to support and challenge, particularly where power differentials are involved. Although EEF stakeholders have raised concerns about the extent to which the RIL role could be codified, some RILs would have welcomed a little more direction and guidance.

School-level outcomes

The school-level logic model (Appendix 4) identifies a set of intended outcomes for senior leaders, SILs, and school implementation teams to be achieved by the end of the DELTA programme, which relate to their knowledge, skills, confidence and attitudes towards evidence-informed implementation processes and evidence-informed TA deployment, as well as aligning school conditions more closely with the Foundations in the implementation guidance (Recommendations 1 and 2) and applying evidence-informed TA deployment practices in their school (Table 6). A further intended school-level outcome was for TAs and teachers to have enhanced knowledge, understanding, and increasingly confident use of evidence-informed TA practices (Table 7).

Table 16 sets out a summary of school-level outcomes. In interpreting the achieved outcomes, particularly where there are discrepancies between the survey and qualitative findings, it is, first, important to note that the survey was completed by SLs and although the majority were SILs, this was not always the case. Second, the qualitative data was collected from schools that were willing to give their time to engage with the evaluation and, for the case studies schools, those considered to have made enough progress with implementation to make a school visit worthwhile. This may have led to a bias towards schools more strongly engaged with, and committed to, the DELTA programme.

Table 16: School-level outcome summary—senior leaders, school implementation leads, and implementation teams outcomes

Intended outcomes		Achieved outcomes	Data source/method
S1	Increasing or deepening knowledge and understanding of evidence-informed implementation and TA deployment practices in context.	Strong qualitative evidence of positive shifts in SILs' knowledge and understanding, even in settings where enactment was less successful. However, the survey findings, while positive, indicate small gains for SLs (majority SILs). The qualitative evidence supports more limited gains for SLs who were not SILs. Qualitative evidence indicates very limited knowledge or understanding gains for school implementation team members in relation to evidence-informed implementation, but more gains in relation to evidence-informed TA deployment and practices.	SL survey, case study data/report, non-case study RIL and SI interviews, and stakeholder interviews.
S2	Enhanced skills to implement evidence-informed TA deployment practices in context.	Good evidence across survey and qualitative data that leaders had enhanced their skills in implementing TA deployment practices. Some indicators in the survey of larger distance travelled for priority schools. Qualitative evidence of enhanced skills in making strategic and operational changes for most, but not all, SILs. Limited data on the development of skills in wider leadership teams. Some school implementation team members gained skills through active participation in SIL-led operational changes.	SL survey, case study data/report, non-case study RIL and SI interviews, and stakeholder interviews.
S3	Increasing confidence in the potential of the project for school improvement and in their implementation skills.	Good qualitative evidence that this outcome was achieved for SILs. SL (majority SILs) survey evidence was less positive and limited evidence in the qualitative data for this outcome being achieved by other senior leaders. Uneven, overall weak, evidence of changes in school implementation team members' confidence and skills in implementation.	SL survey, case study data/report, non-case study RIL and SI interviews, and stakeholder interviews
S4	Stronger commitment to, and mindset for, evidence-informed implementation and practices.	Strong qualitative evidence of SILs' greater commitment to evidence-informed implementation but more limited evidence for other senior leaders, especially on implementation processes (as opposed to TA deployment and practices). Weakly positive indicators of stronger commitment in the SL survey.	SL survey, case study data/report, non-case study RIL and SI interviews, and stakeholder interviews.

Intended outcomes		Achieved outcomes	Data source/method
		Mixed evidence for school implementation teams: overall weak to moderate commitment related to implementation guidance principles but larger mindset shift towards evidence-informed TA practice.	
S5	Closer alignment of school conditions with the Foundations for Good Implementation in the EEF implementation guidance (see Table 6).	Encouraging evidence from the survey, supported by the case study analysis, that conditions and culture shifted from the baseline to become moderately to strongly aligned with the Foundations. A more mixed picture was found in non-case study schools.	SL survey, case study data/report, non-case study RIL and SI interviews, and stakeholder interviews.
S6	Use of relevant evidence-informed implementation principles and activities to further enhance TA deployment practices in line with the EEF TA guidance.	<p>Good survey and qualitative evidence of progress in most schools in applying the principles of the implementation guidance Explore stage.</p> <p>No notable differences between baseline and follow-up survey in alignment with the principles of the Prepare, Deliver or Sustain stages.</p> <p>The qualitative data indicates uneven successful application of Prepare principles, particularly in relation to ensuring shared understanding of changes to TA practice.</p> <p>Delivery was generally at an early stage and promising signs for Sustain were only evident in schools with good Foundations and strong Explore and Prepare stages.</p> <p>The SL survey found large or moderate, statistically significant, positive changes in alignment to the TA guidance. This generally aligns with the qualitative findings. The most frequent changes reported were strategic and operational actions that enabled regular TA/teacher communication (Recommendation 4), training TAs and integration training and meetings with other staff groups (Recommendation 4), and the introduction of teacher/TA agreements to aid planning and ensure clarity of roles (TA Recommendations 1, 2, and 3). Implementation of these approaches supported shifts towards more evidence-informed practices more broadly across all recommendations.</p>	SL survey, case study data/report, non-case study RIL and SI interviews and stakeholder interviews.

Table 17: School-level outcome summary—teacher and TA outcomes

Intended outcomes		Achieved outcomes	Data source/method
S7	Enhanced knowledge and understanding and increasingly confident use of evidence-informed TA practices.	Good evidence across most schools of TAs' cognitive and attitudinal change. Behavioural change generally not fully embedded. More limited evidence of teacher change, which at times impeded TAs' opportunities to deploy evidence-informed practices.	Case study data/report, non-case study RIL and SI interviews.

To provide clarity for the reader and reflect the ways in which interviewees discussed school-level outcomes, we have organised the detailed presentation of school-level outcome findings by cognitive and attitudinal change, and behavioural change, in the order set out in Table 18. Table 18 also maps the presentation of outcomes in each subsection to the intended specific outcomes (S1–7) set out at the beginning of the pilot and shown in Tables 16 and 17 above.

Table 18: Presentation of school-level outcomes

Subsection	Mapping to intended outcomes
School leaders', SILs', and implementation teams' cognitive and attitudinal change—related to evidence-informed implementation processes and evidence-informed TA deployment practices.	S1, S3, S4
School leaders', SILs', and implementation teams' behavioural change related to evidence-informed implementation processes.	S2, S5, S6

Subsection	Mapping to intended outcomes
School leaders', SILs', and implementation teams' behavioural change related to evidence-informed TA deployment and practices.	S2, S6
TAs' cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural changes related to evidence-informed TA practices.	S7
Teachers' cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural changes related to evidence-informed TA deployment and practices.	S7

In interpreting the survey findings in the following subsections it is important to note that baseline ratings on Likert scales were generally high (that is, the majority of respondents considered each statement to be important or agreed with the statements at baseline) despite the mitigations that were put in place (see the Methods: Survey | Design section). This may be due to respondents not fully understanding aspects of the implementation guidance or TA guidance at baseline and so rating some items too highly. Thus 'room for improvement' from baseline to follow up was limited. An enhanced understanding by the time of the follow-up survey may have led to ratings that were more accurate, with the overall impact being that some changes may have been greater than it appears from the survey analysis. It is also important to take into account when reading the findings that the survey was completed by a senior leader: while the majority were SILs, a small minority did not undertake this role so—while the findings represent primarily the SILs' perceptions—they also reflect the perceptions of some other leaders with less involvement with the DELTA programme.

The cognitive and attitudinal change of school leaders, school implementation leads, and implementation teams related to evidence-informed implementation processes and evidence-informed TA deployment practices (intended outcomes S1, S3, and S4)

Summary

Cognitive and attitudinal outcomes relating to evidence-informed implementation processes

- Comparison of the baseline and follow-up survey results indicates that, overall, senior leaders' knowledge of, and confidence in, leading evidence-informed school improvement increased slightly over the duration of the pilot, although these increases were small and not statistically significant and there were no noteworthy differences between priority and non-priority schools.
- Analyses that found a large and statistically significant positive change in the influence of research evidence on senior leaders' decision-making indicate positive attitudinal change. A slightly larger increase in importance rating was observed in terms of 'research evidence and summaries' for non-priority schools, although priority schools did place more importance on this at baseline. With regard to 'research evidence about how to implement school improvement approaches', a slightly larger increase in importance rating was observed for priority schools compared with non-priority schools.
- The qualitative data presents a more nuanced picture and overall points to stronger cognitive and attitudinal outcomes for SILs than the survey. Most SILs reported substantially increased understanding of, and commitment to, the principles of the implementation guidance, particularly the importance of good Foundations and the Explore stage. A few SILs were advocating the approach to colleagues and intended to apply it to new projects. However, the extent of the SILs' mindset shifts varied, usually being weakest for SILs in schools that had an entrenched culture of seeking rapid improvement and had faced considerable barriers in school.
- Most SILs had misgivings initially about the slow staged approach to implementation but grew convinced of its value.
- For senior leaders who were not SILs, cognitive and attitudinal change was weaker. Where SILs were on the senior leadership team there was mixed but, overall, weak evidence of them explicitly sharing implementation expertise with senior colleagues. Where SILs were not on the SLT (small minority), there was even weaker or no such evidence.
- Cognitive and attitudinal outcomes were also mixed across school implementation teams. Where they were operational, SILs tended not to explicitly share learning on implementation leadership, although

some team members did gain some implicit understanding of good implementation practice through participation in the SIL-led stages.

Cognitive and attitudinal changes related to the TA deployment and practices

- This was not explored in the survey. The qualitative findings broadly followed the same pattern as the implementation guidance: overall the strongest outcomes were for SILs, with more limited and mixed evidence of shifts in other senior leaders. School implementation team members developed greater understanding of, and commitment to, the principles of evidence-informed TA practice than implementation processes as the dialogue on the TA guidance was strong.

The baseline and follow-up surveys included questions aimed at capturing senior leaders' perceptions of their knowledge and confidence in leading school improvement in an evidence-informed way. Evidence-informed practice was defined for respondents as 'integrating professional expertise and consideration of school-level evidence with the best external evidence from research to improve the quality of practice'. As Table 19 shows, both statements had relatively high mean scores at baseline, which increased slightly in the follow-up survey. The statement 'I have the knowledge to lead school improvement in an evidence-informed way' had a small effect size ($D = 0.22$) as did the statement 'I am confident to lead school improvement in an evidence-informed way' ($D = 0.3$). Significance testing revealed there was no significant change in mean scores from baseline to follow-up. There were no noteworthy differences in mean scores when comparing priority to non-priority schools (Appendix 10).

Table 19: Senior leaders' knowledge and confidence in leading evidence-informed school improvement

Statement on five-point Likert scale: 1, 'strongly disagree'; 5, 'strongly agree'	Baseline		Follow-up		p value (Wilcoxon)	Effect Size (D)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
I have the knowledge to lead school improvement in an evidence-informed way	3.98	0.67	4.12	0.58	0.16	0.22
I am confident to lead school improvement in an evidence-informed way	3.9	0.72	4.1	0.57	0.05	0.3

N at baseline: 52; at follow-up: 51.

Senior leaders were also asked to rate the importance of a set of influences on their leadership and school improvement decision-making in the baseline and follow-up surveys. Findings indicate that by the end of the pilot, research evidence and summaries and research evidence about how to implement school improvement approaches were more influential than at the start (see Table 20). Both findings were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) and had large effect sizes (research-evidence and summaries: $D = 0.79$; research evidence about how to implement school improvement approaches: $D = 0.93$). The influence of research evidence about how to implement school improvement approaches had the largest effect size of the 13 possible influences on decision-making tested in the question. Comparing priority and non-priority schools for these criteria, a slightly larger increase in importance rating was observed in terms of research evidence and summaries for non-priority schools, although priority schools did place more importance on this at baseline. With regard to research evidence about how to implement school improvement approaches, a slightly larger increase in importance rating was observed for priority schools (Table 20). Caution should be taken when interpreting these findings given the small number of priority schools and small descriptive differences observed, however, this self-reported change in leadership and school improvement decision-making appears to indicate a positive change in the attitudes of senior leaders towards research evidence-informed implementation.

The qualitative data presents a more nuanced picture of cognitive and attitudinal change in relation to implementation. In particular, it distinguishes differential effects for SILs, the majority of whom in our analyses were also senior leaders (in adherence to the guidance given when signing up for DELTA), and senior leaders who were not also SILs. The qualitative data indicates that all the interviewed SILs increased their knowledge of, and commitment to, the implementation guidance, to varying degrees. The perceptions of SILs suggest that the strongest cognitive shifts related to the foundational principles (gradual, systematic, evidence-based implementation—implementation guidance Recommendations 1 and 2) and the importance of the Explore stage (Recommendation 3). There was mixed evidence that other senior leaders in schools and members of the school implementation teams had developed their knowledge and understanding of evidence-informed implementation.

By the end of the DELTA programme, the large majority of interviewed SILs indicated that they had stronger knowledge of the principles and recommendations set out in the implementation guidance and this was supported by RILs' perceptions. One RIL's comment is representative, 'the concept of implementation and the process has landed well and been understood well', and also aligns with stakeholders' perceptions. For example, reflecting on a group exercise in the final DELTA module, one stakeholder reported:

'Honestly, it was amazing. It shows that actually it has sunk in and that people have taken on board that terminology, that way of thinking, and could quite confidently respond when challenged ... there were 40 or so school leaders who are confident—competent I suppose—in effective implementation practice' (WSRS Stakeholder).

Large mindset shifts were apparent in SILs who had previously been accustomed to the pursuit of 'reactionary' rapid change in school improvement projects, influenced by external pressures. These SILs reported feeling frustrated, initially, by the slow and gradual approach to implementation in DELTA but in the course of the programme came to understand and value the merits of the EEF approach, particularly the importance of solid foundations and a thorough exploratory stage prior to planning and preparing, and the 'bigger picture thinking'. As one RIL explained:

'[We've] had lots of comments [from SILs] ... along the lines of initially we were really keen to get going, we were really chomping at the bit, but then we've realised that just pausing and really reflecting at stages 1 and 2 has been really helpful for us. It's made us think a bit more deeply about what we want to do' (RIL G, non-case).

There was only one exception where the SIL (non-case) retained their judgement that the 'drawn out' approach in DELTA was inappropriate for their school and 'not really the way we work'. They were disappointed that DELTA involved just 'honing practice' and 'tweaking' rather than 'implementing new things'.

Most SILs reported increased confidence and commitment to apply the principles to other settings or initiatives: 'I feel I can take this on in another project in school or if I was to move schools ... it's really made me think about implementation and how that can be beneficial over time' (SIL A). In a few cases this commitment was reflected in their enthusiastic endorsement of the approach to trust leaders and school colleagues developing other projects:

'I'm never doing anything again without using [the implementation approach] as my foundation' (SIL F).

'The idea from the EEF about it being a two-year and taking more time to research—I think that's really positive and that's something I will take as a leader and something I'm really pushing back onto the trust ... Previously it's been, yes let's get quick bits of information, let's have this urgency, right, now we're going to implement this' (SIL D).

There are indications that the extent of SILs' cognitive and attitudinal change was dependent on how well embedded the existing culture of evidence-informed practice was in their school before they embarked on the DELTA programme. In one case, the SIL's 'complete overview of ideology and core steps' (RIL E) represented a shorter cognitive distance travelled than in other cases, given her reports that the school already espoused implementation that rested on adequate research, planning, and preparation.

For a minority of interviewed SILs, although their understanding and commitment to the principles of the implementation guidance had strengthened, the cognitive shift did not seem to be fully secure, particularly beyond the Explore stage. From the data, it is difficult to disentangle any lack of depth of understanding from difficulties overcoming specific pinch points and barriers in their contexts. It is cautiously suggested that these SILs would not yet be fully confident or committed to apply the implementation guidance faithfully to another improvement project in the absence of RIL-type support.

The question of whether senior leaders who were not also SILs gained better understanding and commitment to evidence-informed implementation hinged partly on whether the SIL was a member of the senior leadership team. For example, in one school where the SIL was a middle leader, the RIL perceived that engagement with the EEF implementation approach 'hasn't quite reached' the senior leadership team. In another case, there was little indication

that the principles of the implementation guidance had transmitted to other leaders in school, but an incoming headteacher was newly briefed by the RIL.

Across the case study schools where the SILs had deputy head or equivalent roles, there was mixed evidence that they were sharing their implementation expertise with other senior colleagues. In School C, the SIL was spreading this knowledge readily and in School D the SIL said her 'next step' was to disseminate the principles of Explore and Prepare more widely in school. In Schools A and E, there was limited information other than what might be inferred from strong senior leadership team backing for the project and DELTA being incorporated into the school improvement plan.

Turning to school implementation teams, it is important to note that in some schools the team became defunct early on and the reasons for this are addressed in Findings 3: Feasibility. Where the school implementation team did operate through the project, it was rare that SILs explicitly distilled and shared with team members their new learning about evidence-informed implementation leadership and processes. In contrast, the EEF TA guidance was discussed in depth. This was reported to be a pragmatic course of action by SILs, partly due to limited capacity:

'You can try to disseminate to people but actually the sessions are quite intense, aren't they, and there's a lot of information, so it's quite hard to distil key parts and what's relevant for a TA on the [implementation] team to know' (SIL A).

There are, however, indications in the case studies that team members in most functioning school implementation teams have developed, to varying degrees, some implicit knowledge of good practice in the staged implementation of change deriving from their participation in the SIL-led work, for example, exploratory audits, and exposure to the gradual approach, which contrasted with their previous experiences of school improvement initiatives. The strongest transfers of understanding in these ways occurred in Cases A, C, and D. For example, in Case D, two teachers in the school implementation team came to value the 'drip, drip, drip' slower pace and sustainability of change but were not closely involved in the development of the implementation plan themselves; instead, they focused on coordinating TA CPD.

The preceding discussion has focused on cognitive and attitudinal changes related to evidence-informed process as set out in the implementation guidance. The findings on cognitive and attitudinal change for SILs, other senior leaders, and school implementation teams related to evidence-informed TA deployment practices follow the same pattern. Given the nature of the DELTA programme, it is not surprising that the qualitative data strongly evidences that SILs were the primary beneficiaries in terms of cognitive and attitudinal change regarding both evidence-informed implementation processes and TA deployment practices. It was the SIL, usually on their own, who attended the comprehensive training provided by the DELTA programme. Also, the wraparound support from RILs was overwhelmingly weighted towards the SIL and not other senior leaders or the school implementation team. SILs also had varying amounts of timetabled time to implement their learning in school.

The behavioural change of school leaders, school implementation leads, and implementation teams related to evidence-informed implementation (intended outcomes S2, S5, and S6)

Summary

- Senior leaders' self-reports on the importance of a range of influences on their leadership and school improvement decision-making appear to indicate some positive changes in aligning more closely with the implementation guidance Foundations (1 and 2) and Explore (3) recommendations. There are some differences when comparing priority to non-priority schools as described below. In general, priority schools were more likely to place greater importance on these criteria at baseline.
- There were no notable or statistically significant associations between the baseline and follow-up surveys in senior leaders' reports of school practices in relation to implementation guidance Recommendations 4: Prepare, 5: Deliver, and 6: Sustain. This may be due in part to the high ratings recorded at baseline and senior leaders being more critical in their follow-up ratings due to a deeper understanding of the implementation guidance by the end of the programme. There were no notable differences between priority and non-priority schools.

- The qualitative findings suggest, overall, that schools' implementation processes were in partial to good alignment with the implementation guidance. Some stages were stronger than others—and broadly congruent with the survey findings on Foundations and Explore.
- In all case study schools, foundations for implementation moved in the right direction but there was great variation in distance travelled. Some achieved conditions that were very conducive to effective implementation: these schools had kernels of readiness from the start. Explore was the stage where behaviour adhered most strongly with the guidance.
- Enactment of subsequent stages was more uneven across schools—a finding which adds nuance to the survey data suggesting little or no change on Recommendations 4, 5, and 6. In the case study schools, there was systematic development of implementation plans in Prepare but in a few cases the preparatory work for whole-school shared understanding of the planned changes was poorly aligned with the implementation guidance. Most schools had a strong focus on TA CPD in the shift from Prepare to Deliver.
- At the time of endpoint interviews, almost all schools were early in the Deliver stage or on the cusp of this. Looking ahead to Sustain, some positive signs were emerging in schools with solid Foundations and robust Explore and Prepare enactment.
- By the programme end, the SILs were the main vessels of the new implementation leadership capacity, reflecting the pattern for cognitive and attitudinal shifts.

For clarity, we present the findings in this section in the sequence of the implementation guidance Recommendations: Foundations first, followed by each of the stages in the guidance—Explore, Prepare, Deliver, and Sustain. However, it is important to note that the qualitative findings indicate that enactment of these stages was not necessarily linear, especially in schools which trialled or piloted changes in selected classes early in the project; also, there are overlaps in the guidance between the Foundations and the four implementation stages as well as across the recommendations for each stage.

Tables 20 to 24 present survey findings on change over time in relation to the Foundations and each of the implementation stages. The analyses are of senior leaders' ratings of statements that relate to the recommendations on five-point Likert scales. The tables display both the baseline and follow-up means with standard deviations, along with p values and standardised effect sizes calculated using Cohens d (D) for each statement. Most statements adhered to the implementation guidance; the scales of the few statements that went against the suggested guidance have been reversed and marked as such. While the analyses take account of random variation through the use of tests of statistical significance, a statistically significant finding does not necessarily indicate that the programme has had a causal impact on the school's culture and practices becoming more closely aligned with the implementation guidance. Statistically significant change over time may have occurred regardless of the impact of the programme. Such claims of direct causal evidence should only be made when an intervention group is compared against a control group. It should also be noted that at baseline respondents, in general, already regarded most of the statements to be important (Table 20: baseline mean scores varied from 3.29 to 4.25) or agreed with the statements (Table 22: baseline mean score 3.76 to 4.2; Table 23: one score of 2.41 and the remainder ranging from 3.59 to 3.96; Table 24: mean scores 2.92-3.63). The changes observed in general therefore show an increase in importance or agreement rather than moving from 'not important' to 'important' or from disagreement to agreement.

Foundations (Recommendations 1 and 2)

Findings on senior leaders' perceptions of the importance of a range of different influences on their leadership and school-improvement decisions provide some tentative indications of positive change over time in relation to adhering to implementation guidance Recommendations 1 and 2: Foundations and Recommendation 3: Explore (Table 20). It was beyond the scope of this study to undertake a full assessment of changes in the leadership environment and school climate, which would have provided a more comprehensive picture of changes-over-time in relation to the Foundations.

Table 20 shows that in terms of influences on senior leaders' leadership and school improvement decision-making, the mean scores of nine of the 13 statements increased over time—they were considered more important at follow-up compared to baseline indicating positive change. As noted earlier, the largest change was observed for 'research evidence about how to implement school improvement approaches' (D = 0.93) and a large change was observed for 'research evidence and summaries' (D = 0.79). These shifts appear to indicate some progress in developing the

Foundations of leadership and school climate that underpin evidence-informed school improvement. Large changes in ‘the availability of staff with the capacity to lead change’ ($D = 0.73$) and ‘the acceptability of new ideas and strategies for staff’ ($D = 0.72$) together with the moderate change in ‘the availability of the training and materials that will help’ ($D = 0.58$) may reflect a deeper understanding of the factors that impinge on successful implementation and greater attention to these in decision-making in the Explore and later stages of implementation. Moderate changes were also observed for ‘the value for money of different approaches’ ($D = 0.46$), which may reflect the changing external context. These changes over time were all observed to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). For the remaining statements, little change over time was observed.

Table 20: Influences on senior leaders’ leadership and school improvement decision-making

Statement ⁽ⁱ⁾ (1, ‘not important’; 5, ‘extremely important’)	Baseline Mean	Baseline SD	Follow-up Mean	Follow-up SD	p value (Wilcoxon)	Effect Size (D)
Past experience of what has and has not worked	3.87	0.62	3.92	0.65	0.64	0.07
Analysis of local and school-based/trust priorities and directives	3.47	0.73	3.63	0.88	0.17	0.19
Research evidence and summaries	3.56	0.82	4.15	0.66	<0.01 ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾	0.79
The value for money of different approaches	3.73	0.77	4.08	0.74	<0.05 ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾	0.46
National priorities and directives	3.4	0.74	3.49	0.7	0.5	0.12
The need to tackle immediate pressing concerns or issues ⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾	1.85	0.57	1.9	0.77	0.56	-0.07
Research evidence about how to implement school improvement approaches	3.42	0.87	4.12	0.61	<0.01 ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾	0.93
External evaluations of school performance (for example, Ofsted, SATs/exam performance, peer review)	4.13	0.71	3.88	0.8	0.1	-0.33
Internal school data	4.25	0.65	4.17	0.64	0.52	-0.12
The acceptability of new ideas and strategies for staff	3.29	0.84	3.86	0.72	<0.01 ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾	0.72
The availability of the training and materials that will help	3.48	0.85	3.92	0.65	<0.01 ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾	0.58
The availability of staff with the capacity to lead change	3.81	0.74	4.31	0.61	<0.01 ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾	0.73

(i) The statement ‘advice from other colleagues’ was originally in the questionnaire, however this has been removed due to the ambiguous nature of the question.

(ii) Significant at the 0.05 level.

(iii) Reverse item showing the reversed score (higher scores mean greater adherence to the guidance).

N range: baseline, 51–52; follow-up, 51–52.

Descriptive analyses of priority and non-priority schools should be treated with caution (as discussed above) given the small number of priority schools. At the outset it should be noted that priority schools, in general, were more likely to cite higher ratings for each of the criteria compared with non-priority schools. While there are few notable differences between priority schools and non-priority schools, it is worth mentioning ‘internal school data’, where priority schools reported a slight decrease in importance while there was very little change for non-priority schools. Further, with regards to ‘the availability of the training and materials that will help’ and ‘the availability of staff with the capacity to lead change’, non-priority schools were more likely to report an increase in importance in these factors. A slightly larger increase in importance was observed in non-priority schools’ ratings of ‘research evidence and summaries’, although priority schools did place more importance on this at baseline. With regard to ‘research evidence about how to implement school improvement approaches’, a slightly larger increase in importance rating was observed for priority schools compared with non-priority schools.

Table 21: Influences on senior leaders' leadership and school improvement decision-making—priority versus non-priority schools

Statement (1, 'not important'; 5, 'extremely important')	Priority Schools			Non-Priority Schools		
	Baseline (mean)	Follow-up (mean)	MD	Baseline (mean)	Follow-up (mean)	MD
Past experience of what has and has not worked	4.0	4.13	0.13	3.81	3.84	0.03
Analysis of local and school-based/trust priorities and directives	3.47	3.6	0.13	3.47	3.65	0.18
Research evidence and summaries	3.87	4.27	0.4	3.43	4.11	0.68
The value for money of different approaches	3.93	4.4	0.47	3.64	3.94	0.29
National priorities and directives	3.67	3.7	0.03	3.3	3.39	0.09
The need to tackle immediate pressing concerns or issues ⁽ⁱ⁾	4.27	4.07	-0.2	4.11	4.11	0
Research evidence about how to implement school improvement approaches	3.47	4.33	0.86	3.41	4.03	0.62
External evaluations of school performance (for example, Ofsted, SATs/exam performance, peer review)	4.33	4.0	-0.33	4.05	3.84	-0.21
Internal school data	4.33	4.0	-0.33	4.22	4.24	0.02
The acceptability of new ideas and strategies for staff	3.47	4.0	0.53	3.22	3.81	0.59
The availability of the training and materials that will help	3.67	3.8	0.13	3.41	3.97	0.56
The availability of staff with the capacity to lead change	3.8	4.0	0.2	3.81	4.43	0.62

⁽ⁱ⁾ Reverse item showing the reversed score (higher scores mean greater adherence to the guidance).

N range: priority schools, 15; non-priority schools, 36–37.

Turning to the qualitative findings, the perceptions of SILs and other leaders were analysed with regard to the two central tenets of good foundations found in the implementation guidance: treating implementation as a staged process not an event (Recommendation 1) and creating a conducive leadership environment and school climate (Recommendation 2), including the use of research evidence to inform implementation. By the endpoint interviews, four of the six case study schools (Cases A, C, D, E) were moderately to strongly aligned with the foundations for good implementation. All these settings began as receptive seedbeds with an orientation towards evidence-based practice and SLT support for the project. The progression in foundations was more mixed in the other case study schools and across the non-case study schools where only partial profiles could be drawn from a SIL or RIL interview.

All case study and non-case study schools engaged with implementation as a staged process rather than a set of events. Nearly all of the interviewed SILs came to espouse this principle during the course of enactment, and the data suggests that this led to some cultural changes, moving away from an entrenched school culture of rapid, outcomes-focused change. (Refer to the previous section for more detail on cognitive and attitudinal change regarding slow, staged implementation.)

There was uneven progress across the cases in paving the way for building implementation leadership capacity. All case study schools and non-case study schools identified a SIL and in most this was a senior leader, as recommended by the DELTA programme. Each SIL proceeded to set up an implementation team. In a minority of cases, the team did not operate beyond an initial meeting or two and the SIL was in effect the sole implementer; reasons for this are discussed in Findings 3: Feasibility. In the teams that ran the course, the data suggests that some engaged in genuine co-construction of some stages and steps. Others fell short of distributed leadership for implementation but did constructive work in feeding back on the SIL's plans and proposals, coordinating specific plans such as TA CPD, and providing a conduit for informal communications with wider TA teams.

Most school interviewees reported that their senior leadership backed and prioritised the DELTA project. Schools were expected to ensure that they were in the right place to start the project and the RAG-rating tools provided included a 'capacity checker' intended to help schools ensure that DELTA could be appropriately prioritised. In the few cases where this prioritisation was lacking, the knock-on effects could be observed in difficulties enacting the Explore, Prepare, and

Deliver stages. These insecure foundations were apparent in thwarted efforts to set the stage for implementation through school policies, routines, and communications. In at least one case study, it was reported that leadership had prioritised another project. Finally, it should be noted that schools' overall capacity was affected by various external factors including the Covid-19 context (explored in Findings 3: Feasibility and the Conclusions).

In relation to embedding an evidence-informed school culture, the qualitative findings largely align with the survey findings, suggesting that the influence of research evidence on leaders' decision making on school improvement increased over the course of the project. Data from the case studies points to increased understanding of the importance of research evidence:

*'I'm now more aware of the EEF and their research out there on other aspects of teaching' (SIL F)
[larger distance travelled].*

'We're quite good and getting better at using research-based interventions, which is part of the guidance, and that's very much part of our ethos now. ... That very much has been on our radar for the last few years, certainly. I would say that's something we do reasonably well but could improve' (SIL C) [shorter distance travelled].

Explore—Recommendation 3

As noted above, Tables 20 and 21 provided some insights into the Explore stage. In relation to identifying approaches to 'problems' of TA deployment, these tables indicate that, overall, school practices became more closely aligned with the Explore guidance than at baseline. Specific baseline questions on processes relating to Recommendation 3: Explore were used formatively to inform programme development. They were not repeated in the follow-up survey because the area for exploration (TA deployment) was prescribed by the DELTA programme, and the relevant evidence and recommendations on TA practices and programmes were presented to schools in the DELTA modules, so a fair comparison was not possible.

The qualitative data supported the survey in finding that there was progress in adopting evidence-informed processes at the Explore stage. Overall, in the participating schools that provided qualitative data, reports of enactment of Explore point to greater alignment with the implementation guidance than at subsequent stages.

All case study and non-case study schools where data was collected carried out audits of TA deployment and practice to produce data to inform their decisions on areas to change, with reference to the TA guidance. The depth of exploration and analysis of collected data varied. At minimum, the SIL used the self-assessment RAG-rating tool and conducted and analysed the MITA survey of teachers and TAs. Some SILs involved their implementation teams in the analysis, and some coordinated observations of TAs and teachers in class or peer-to-peer TA observations. In one of the most successful case study schools (C), the SIL gathered TAs together to talk openly about their roles, a process which informed the SIL's detailed 'unpicking' of TA attitudes and concerns. This information-gathering was facilitated by existing TA staff structures where a trusted lead TA was an intermediary. SIL C used the audit stage to begin embedding a DELTA culture of collaboration and joint ownership right from the start:

'I got the implementation team together and using the survey results and the audit we came up with that. Everyone came up with the idea of improving communication and I tagged on to the end to build high-quality teaching teams ... Then we had buy-in from LSAs and teachers and stuff—OK, we're going to work on communication, that's fab, that feels comfortable, that's our school, that's where we wanted to go anyway, so that's all good' (SIL C).

Where the SILs' skilful communications helped to generate a sense among wider staff that they were collectively identifying problems in the audit, this was perceived to generate buy-in for the required changes to practice and culture.

The case study data suggests that schools found the Explore phase valuable for testing their prior assumptions of strengths and weaknesses in their teaching and learning practices. Where the audit results were as predicted, for example, showing that communication between teachers and TAs was poor, the process was useful for stimulating ideas for potential strategies to tackle the problem. Where unexpected results emerged, this highlighted that evidence-gathering was vital for implementation. Surprising findings in the Explore stage could also prompt SILs to respond in ways that led to immediate benefits prior to implementation planning. For example, in a school which discovered that

teachers did not value TAs, an all-staff meeting was convened to raise the profile of TAs, after which ‘you could see the difference in the relationship between LSAs and the teachers’ (SIL D).

Exploratory data collection supported not only the schools’ decisions on where to implement *change*, but also gave it the confidence to expand on existing good practice before moving to plan substantial improvements in other areas: ‘the whole first year was just exploring where we are and making us better at what we already do. Then we’re ready to move on’ (SIL C). Some SILs, with RIL guidance, identified ‘quick wins’—evidence-informed changes which could be implemented rapidly and easily such as stopping taking pupils out of lessons—in contrast to other practices where more fine-grained exploration was needed before proceeding to the next stage. These quick wins highlight the non-linear way that implementation might be enacted.

In some settings (for example, Cases C and F), the data from the Explore stage supported some pragmatic decisions that it was feasible in their contexts only to tackle a subset of the TA recommendations over the project period.

Before presenting the findings on the enactment of the remaining implementation stages, it must be emphasised that the schools achieving the greatest levels of authentic whole-school buy-in appeared to be those that invested significant resource, time, and energy into ensuring that the Foundations and Explore stages of implementation were firmly established, as opposed to becoming overly fixated upon meeting all the different TA recommendations at a more superficial level. SIL D’s comment is illustrative: ‘Because the foundations are so strong, it will keep moving forward ... I think it will be a whole-school thing.’

Prepare—Recommendation 4

The baseline and follow-up surveys asked senior leaders to rate their agreement or disagreement with sets of statements related to the practices in the implementation guidance Recommendations: 4, Prepare; 5, Deliver; and 6, Sustain (Table 22, Table 23, Table 24).⁷ For the baseline survey, participants were asked to identify and answer questions about a school improvement priority (not related to Covid-19) that had recently been rolled out. The examples given included improving oracy, metacognition, developing early literacy, and mathematics pedagogy. For the follow-up survey, participants answered the same questions, but this time reporting specifically about how they had implemented the changes in TA deployment and practices as they progressed through the DELTA programme.

There were no notable changes in mean scores from baseline to follow-up on all the survey items related to the implementation guidance Recommendation 4: Prepare (Table 22). This may be because the mean scores at baseline were already relatively high, ranging from 3.76 to 4.2. The statements ‘the leadership team oversaw the delivery plan and all changes’ ($D = -0.29$) and ‘all staff were clear about what was being implemented and the improvements this would lead to’ ($D = -0.17$) had small effect sizes. The remaining two statements had effect sizes less than 0.05. None of these associations were found to be statistically significant. Descriptive analysis shows no noticeable differences between priority and non-priority schools (Appendix 10).

Table 22: Implementation guidance Recommendation 4: Prepare—change-over-time

Statement (1, ‘strongly disagree’; 5, ‘strongly agree’)	Baseline mean	Baseline SD	Follow- up mean	Follow-up SD	p value (Wilcoxon)	Effect size (D)
A clear strategic delivery plan was developed	4.04	0.69	4.08	0.69	0.64	0.05
All staff were clear about what was being implemented and the improvements this would lead to	3.9	0.64	3.78	0.73	0.33	-0.17
Staff were regularly updated about the progress of the plan and any changes over time	3.76	0.68	3.74	0.72	0.98	-0.02
The leadership team oversaw the delivery plan and all changes	4.2	0.66	3.98	0.82	0.11	-0.29

N at baseline, 51; at follow-up, 50.

⁷ Some practices appear in more than one implementation guidance Recommendation. Findings are reported in relation to the recommendation they are most closely aligned with.

The qualitative data shows good overall adherence to the implementation guidance in how SILs gradually developed their implementation plans, but with different degrees of school implementation team participation. All SILs who took part in interviews described their active engagement with the implementation plan document introduced in the DELTA modules. They identified the 'why', 'what', 'how', 'how well', and 'so' elements and progressed their draft plans with guidance from their RILs. Some SILs approached their plans in a more deeply reflective and iterative way than others. In two cases, the SILs' developmental learning through DELTA led them to substantially redraft their plans to make improvements.

A minority of SILs involved school implementation team members in genuine co-construction of implementation plans, for example: 'Very much the plan came about from what we'd discussed as an implementation team at the start ... [SIL] had ideas but then it's all our different contributions and areas as well' (school implementation team, Case C). In contrast, some SILs produced the plan and then obtained team feedback, or they wrote it without any team input at all. For example, SIL F, who was originally on the school implementation team but took over as SIL at a late stage, had not seen the implementation plan until her predecessor emailed it for handover.

In the Prepare stage, schools were also expected to communicate the aims, objectives, and process of DELTA to staff, including TAs, by sharing DELTA information with school implementation teams and other senior leaders. The data shows that schools did this via the school implementation teams (where they were operational), whole-school INSET days, or staff briefings where DELTA was introduced. SILs used video and other resources from the DELTA Padlet to guide this communication. A mixed picture emerged across the case study and non-case study schools in terms of how well these DELTA communications served to create shared understanding in schools about the changes ahead.

There were some exemplary cases of highly effective whole-school communication to ensure that staff were clearly informed and regularly updated about what was being implemented, the reasons why, and what improvements this would lead to. This helped to achieve staff buy-in and commitment to the changes. Looking across the case studies, the schools where TAs felt most invested and comfortable with the changes were those that had committed to consistent transparency throughout, with 'drip-fed' realistic and clear messages about why and how they were implementing different interventions, support, and expectations. Successful SILs and senior leaders were able to reassuringly convey to staff that they were on a collaborative journey, based on the evidence, and the intention was not to impose a solely top-down approach:

'I think our way of doing it, the staff felt really involved and understanding it' (RIL D).

In the cases where creating shared understanding was patchy, a crucial issue was SILs' lack of leverage to use timetable spaces for DELTA communications to staff, for example, in staff meetings and INSETs. This factor is closely linked to the SIL's role in school and degree of active senior leadership support. The most successful SILs (typically a senior leader) could readily obtain space in the school calendar. For the small minority of SILs who could not do so, either their plans went on pause or there was a premature jump to delivery of changes without sufficient notice to key staff and affected students.

TA-teacher agreements, based on a template shared through DELTA, were a key strategy used by most schools to help create shared understanding, clarity, and consistency of expectations among TAs and teachers about their respective roles. The use of this tool further illustrates the non-linear nature of the implementation process and the overlap between implementation recommendations: the agreements were a component of the Prepare stage but also potentially fed into foundations and were integral to the delivery of changes to TA deployment and practice in the classroom.

The extent to which schools adapted the DELTA template TA-teacher agreement varied and there were differences across SILs in the extent to which they worked collaboratively on the drafts with their school implementation teams. Overall, however, the strategy of developing TA-teacher agreements was reported as a success: 'Overwhelmingly that's been really positive to get that clarity of expectation at the beginning of the year, and that's something that I absolutely suggest happens ongoing' (SIL C). The agreements provided a subject, class, or year group with a tangible focus for meaningful discussions in relation to responsibilities. They also helped to reduce the need for 'unnecessary communication' in busy school contexts where inevitably there is a finite amount of time or resource that can be designated for communication. Having more clarity on classroom expectations allowed windows of opportunity for communication to be optimised.

Nevertheless, even successful settings acknowledged that the impact of the agreements was not universal. For instance, certain schools flagged that not all agreements were as effective as others across different teachers, year groups, or subject departments. The scope of individual TAs' roles was also contingent on wider factors such as Pupil Premium funding, levels of SEND, TAs' readiness to change, and personal relationships. In a minority of schools, including a large secondary school, certain pinch points hindered staff engagement with the draft agreements:

'It's hit a wall because we've got no time and no way to get it out to all staff. The solution was to put it in an email. So I sent it out to programme leaders saying please can you share this with your teams' (SIL B).

Other than these TA-teacher agreements, there was generally less attention paid to preparing teachers for delivery of the changes than to preparing the TAs. In at least one school, issues of teacher readiness meant that TAs in Key Stage 2 struggled to enact certain practice changes in line with the TA recommendations.

A related component of the Prepare recommendation is the need for thorough assessment of school readiness for the implementation of new practices. Most SILs made appropriate assessments of readiness for rollout and in some cases made prudent adjustments to their plans, for example, in Case A formal delivery was postponed due to the impacts of increasing turnover of TA staff. In the interim, they focused on evidence-aligned induction for new TAs. In some case study schools there were indications that RIL support tapered off in the summer term: as noted above, in one (see Appendix 11), changes to deployment were launched in the summer even though some affected staff and pupils were not well informed or ready.

The qualitative findings on schools' approaches to training for staff and scheduling TA-teacher communication time are reported below under Deliver, although these actions typically began at the cusp of the Prepare and Deliver stages.

Deliver—Recommendation 5

Survey participants were asked to indicate if, after preparing to implement changes in TA deployment and practices in their school, they had gone on to make these changes: 90% (n = 45) responded 'yes'. Of these, 14 were priority schools and 31 were non-priority schools. Ten percent (n = 5) responded 'no': one was a priority school and four were non-priority schools. Those that answered 'no' were directed straight to the TA deployment section of the survey (Table 14 in this report).

All five statements relating to implementation guidance Recommendation 5, Deliver, had a negative MD, meaning that the mean scores decreased slightly from baseline to follow-up, however, this decrease was not found to be statistically significant (Table 23). The statements 'a monitoring system was developed to ensure the impacts (positive and negative) of the new approaches were understood' (D = -0.35) and 'when problems arose, staff were encouraged to persevere and further supported with ongoing training' (D = -0.23) had small effect sizes. The remaining three statements had small effect sizes. Descriptive analysis shows no noticeable differences between priority and non-priority schools (Appendix 10).

Table 23: Implementation guidance Recommendation 5: Deliver

Statement (1, 'strongly disagree'; 5, 'strongly agree')	Baseline Mean	Baseline SD	Follow- up Mean	Follow- up SD	p value (Wilcoxon)	Effect Size (D)
All staff had a clear understanding of the essential features that were necessary for the new approaches to be successful	3.78	0.64	3.73	0.72	0.85	-0.07
Most training was delivered up front and then staff were allowed to develop the approaches their own way ⁽ⁱ⁾	2.41	0.85	2.38	0.74	0.46	-0.03
A monitoring system was developed to ensure the impacts (positive and negative) of the new approaches were understood	3.71	0.78	3.44	0.75	0.11	-0.35
Staff were free to apply their own professional judgement on how to tailor the approaches to their subject of phase	3.59	0.69	3.53	0.72	0.78	-0.08
When problems arose, staff were encouraged to persevere and further supported with ongoing training	3.96	0.52	3.82	0.65	0.2	-0.23

⁽ⁱ⁾ Reverse item showing the reversed score (higher scores mean greater adherence to the guidance).
N at baseline, 51; at follow-up, 45.

The endpoint qualitative data also indicated that most schools had begun to deliver, albeit for many at an early stage: 'We have got there [to Deliver], and we do have the staff. It's now just fine-tuning to make sure that they're working most beneficially' (SIL A). Only in one school (non-case study, where the SIL was due to move schools) was DELTA stalled mid-way through Prepare, with a thorough plan but no firm estimate of when the journey might resume under new leadership.

It is important to note that in case study schools where SILs reported being only on the verge of formal launch, they were in fact already observing positive classroom practice outcomes in relation to the TA guidance. In one case this was attributed to the staff's shared understanding of the new expectations, following effective, staged, whole-school messaging: 'A lot of people [said] we're doing this already because we've had all these other steps to it' (SIL D). Similarly, schools which opted to trial practice changes in selected classes during the project, akin to experimental mini-delivery stages, were already seeing some evidence-aligned shifts in TA deployment and practice.

Given that, generally, delivery was in its initial phases across schools, there was limited qualitative data on the alignment of delivery processes with all the points specified under Deliver, Recommendation 5 of the implementation guidance. The main topics addressed in the Deliver stage related to:

- (a) implementing structural changes (TA Recommendation 1) to enable implementation of TA-teacher communication time for lesson preparation and feedback (TA Recommendation 4);
- (b) delivery of training and CPD for staff (TA Recommendation 4), which as noted above occurred on the cusp of the Prepare and Deliver stages; and
- (c) more limited monitoring of changes.

Note that leaders' use of teacher-TA agreements as an implementation strategy was reported above (in the Prepare section) but they also impinge on delivery and the outcomes for TAs and teachers. There was little or no evidence on the delivery of some elements of the implementation guidance Recommendation 5. In particular, coaching and mentoring were not mentioned by interviewees as part of their delivery approach but peer-to-peer support and collaboration was a theme in some schools.

(a) Implementation of structural changes to enable TA-teacher communication time

Across most of the case studies, SILs led structural changes seeking to ensure that teachers and TAs had regular and adequate communication time for lesson preparation and feedback. Typically, interviewees reported timetable shifts and in some cases TA contractual changes to accommodate 10 to 15 minutes of daily discussion between TAs and teachers, usually at the start of the day, to ensure clarity on the planning for the day and their respective roles. Some SILs indicated that the process of finding workable timeslots was effortful. In a minority of cases, the SILs were able to capitalise on pre-DELTA changes to TA contracts and already-designated time for regular TA-teacher communication or staff development. Some settings augmented their commitment to improved TA-teacher communication by setting up WhatsApp (or similar) groups that enabled communication throughout the day.

There are indications that the planning and enactment of these structural changes in schools to provide for better communication between teachers and TAs may have been among the most pivotal steps in the implementation process. In fact, one RIL (not attached to a case study school) attributed much of the improvements in the alignment of schools' TA practices to the TA guidance to the greater investment in effective communication between TAs and teachers and making expectations more transparent.

'I think it's down to the time for TAs to communicate with teachers, and also the time for them to receive training. So fairly early on [in the] implementation plan, there was a consultation with TAs and teachers and that was looking at the time TAs started and finished... So that was quite a quick win. They were drafting up the teacher-TA agreement as well: having consultations supported that. They made a few adjustments to the time that teaching assistants were employed, to extend the day slightly on one day of the week and shorten the day on others, so there was a chunk of time after school on one day, and to negotiate with some of the TAs who had childcare' (RIL H).

(b) Training and CPD for staff

There was a strong emphasis on providing CPD for TAs to support them to align their practices more closely with the recommendations. Initial training in most case study schools took place in INSETs and staff meetings where the SIL (and in a few cases also the RIL) instilled key principles and expectations. Across most case study schools, it was apparent that the use and embedding of catchphrases was an effective strategy in SILs' communication with TAs, helping to crystallise understanding of the changes to TA deployment and practice: for example, 'supplement not replace', the TA-teacher 'dance', and 'least amount of help first'.

Looking beyond this initial training and instruction, some schools intended to provide follow-up internal CPD as delivery continued, for example, SIL A planned to have meetings with TAs to remind them of the DELTA active ingredients so that 'they've got that vision and they're reminded and they've got chances to feedback'. Some schools were also prioritising CPD for TAs to improve or fill gaps in their subject knowledge.

To supplement the internal training for their TA workforces, many SILs recognised the value of expert input to help their TAs deepen their understanding and improve their skills working with pupils. As part of their approach to delivery, the majority of leaders in case study and non-case study schools who provided qualitative data for the evaluation enthusiastically took up an external training programme for TAs, **Maximising the Practice of Teaching Assistants (MPTA)**, having become aware of MPTA during the DELTA programme. MPTA was led by one of the DELTA programme leaders (who was also a RIL). The training was reported to be very well received: 'Really good and really clear ... a full day, going in depth. The participation was really great as well. We were getting quite involved' (TA FG, Case F).

The qualitative data also points to shifts in schools' ethos and wider approaches to training for TAs. Many participating schools set about greater investment in TAs' CPD as a priority extending beyond the training on the TA recommendations. Several SILs and senior leaders acknowledged that the work done through DELTA had exposed that TA CPD had been neglected compared to that for teachers and leaders. Efforts to reduce this inequity included a strategy commonly reported by senior leaders to create the conditions to enable TAs to attend INSETs and meetings (for example, whole-staff, departmental, or year group) and to include TAs routinely in email updates. In a minority of schools, it was also reported that TAs had some autonomy in the form of self-directed CPD time to study areas of special interest to them (in negotiation with the CPD lead); one school had surveyed TAs to ascertain which evidence-based interventions they were most interested in or best placed to deliver, to inform school training plans. There was also recognition of the importance of TA CPD generally being integrated with teacher CPD, and class-based TAs joining with SEN TAs in CPD in order to guard against silo effects in practices, as illustrated below:

'We have phase lunches—with their class teachers from the phase that they're working in. One day a week, they'll all join together. Also, TAs joining PPA sessions on rotation. Lots of these kinds of smaller changes have happened. And then we've also had a TA joining the inclusion team meetings each month to get that communication really, to combat the communication issue' (SIL I, non-case).

Turning to DELTA training for teachers: generally, this was confined to the staff meetings and INSETs where SILs (and RILs in a few instances) led sessions introducing the DELTA programme and explaining the TA recommendations and practice changes to be implemented. In a small minority of schools where data was collected there were no teacher briefings or training as such (other than by email). In some, where teachers engaged closely in developing teacher-TA agreements for their class contexts, the process generated professional development dialogue and understanding. Beyond these sessions and activities, schools did not arrange additional teacher-specific CPD or specialist guidance to help teachers develop their own practice and planning in ways that accommodated the TA recommendations. There was no equivalent of the MPTA offer for teachers. The disparity between teachers and TAs in terms of the provision of training reflects the pattern for Prepare in some schools where teacher buy-in and readiness was less of a priority.

(c) Monitoring of changes

Evidence of monitoring implemented changes varied widely across the case study schools which had commenced delivery. In some cases, monitoring had been built into delivery plans from the outset (for example, Case E's quality assurance cycle whereby the SIL and SENCO would monitor TA practice long-term) or DELTA was incorporated into the wider school improvement plan. In other cases, monitoring was more informal, including 'talking to staff' and encouraging peers to supportively hold each other to account, for example, if a staff member noticed that 'a TA is working with lower attainers two weeks running' (SIL D). In that school (D), the effectiveness of structural changes

(timeslots for TA/teacher communication) had also been monitored and adjusted. Only in one case (B) did the SIL state that they were not yet monitoring changes.

The approach in some schools of trialling specific practice changes in selected classes is of note. These approaches involved assessment and review by SILs and colleagues of how well a new strategy or behaviour was working to inform decisions on what adjustments might be made or to treat the staff in successful pilot groups as models of practice for others.

'It's Year 5, Year 2, Year 1 where we've had specific things trialled, pulling it all together. Knowing that we've got buy-in from those people because the impact has been positive ... We'll be asking those staff that have been involved in this project so far to talk about why, what the impact was, so that it's almost lived and shared' (SIL F).

A final point to make about the case study schools' journeys to the Deliver stage is that SILs, senior leaders, and RILs tended to suggest that compromises were reached between rigid adherence to all the EEF guidance and the practical constraints schools were operating under (see Findings 3: Feasibility—School-Level Enablers and Barriers). Our data illuminates a largely pragmatic approach from RILs when guiding SILs and discussing school-specific aims in context.

Sustain—Recommendation 6

Mean scores on both statements in the senior leader survey related to implementation guidance Recommendation 6, Sustain, increased slightly from baseline to follow-up (Table 24). The statement 'sustainability was planned for from the beginning' had an effect size of 0.3. The statement 'plans were put in place to cover any unexpected changes such as staff absence or changes in employment' had a smaller effect size of 0.12. None of these associations were found to be statistically significant. Descriptive analysis shows no noticeable differences between priority and non-priority schools (Appendix 10).

Table 24: Implementation guidance Recommendation 6: Sustain

Statement (1, 'strongly disagree'; 5, 'strongly agree')	Mean (baseline)	SD (baseline)	Mean (follow-up)	SD (follow-up)	Wilcoxon (p value)	Effect size (D)
Sustainability was planned for from the beginning	3.63	0.87	3.87	0.72	0.06	0.3
Plans were put in place to cover any unexpected changes such as staff absence or changes in employment	2.92	0.93	3.04	0.95	0.5	0.12

N at baseline, 51; at follow-up, 45.

The qualitative data suggests that while delivery was at an early stage in most participating schools, in cases where enactment of implementation stages one to five was broadly well aligned with the implementation guidance there were promising indicators that the changes would be sustained. In the best exemplar, Case C, the SIL reported that a new implementation team is in place for the long-term oversight of development of evidence-informed TA practice. Their RIL is confident in the school's capacity to sustain the changes: 'They'll go from strength to strength' (RIL C). In schools where foundations are uneven or where delivery was compromised by barriers to readiness at the Prepare stage, the prospects for embedding and sustaining the implemented changes are less clear.

It is also worth noting a more far-reaching school outcome. Bristol City Council stakeholders reported seeing the implementation concepts being applied beyond the deployment of TAs in the development of high-quality middle and subject leadership in the LA-maintained primary schools they were continuing to work with: 'We've seen some real shifts in practice and leadership thinking' (EEF stakeholder).

The behavioural change of school leaders, school implementation leads, and implementation teams related to TA deployment and practices (intended outcomes S2 and S6)

Summary

- Senior leaders' self-reports on TA deployment and practices in the baseline and follow-up surveys mostly show large or moderate statistically significant, positive changes in alignment with the TA guidance.
- These findings largely align with the qualitative findings. The survey indicated some variation between priority and non-priority schools in the extent of the changes, but there was no consistent pattern across the individual TA recommendations. Only priority schools are included in the qualitative analyses.
- Qualitative analyses found that the most frequently reported changes made by senior leaders, SILs, and school implementation teams (where they were operational) were strategic and operational actions that enabled regular TA/teacher communication (TA Recommendation 4), increased training available for TAs and its integration with training for other staff groups (TA Recommendation 4), and the introduction of teacher/TA agreements to aid planning and ensure clarity of roles (TA Recommendations 1, 2, and 3). Targeting these approaches also supported shifts towards more evidence-informed practices more broadly across all the TA recommendations.

This section, which focuses on the actions taken by senior leaders, SILs, and school implementation teams to align school practices with the TA guidance (specific school outcomes S2 and S6), together with the next two sections focusing on TA and teacher cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural changes (outcome S7), provide important insights into how successful the RIL pilot was in enabling schools to successfully implement evidence-informed practices—in this pilot, the recommendations in the TA guidance.

Table 25 presents an analysis of how much senior leaders (in both priority and non-priority schools) agreed or disagreed with a set of statements related to the TA guidance at baseline and follow-up. Respondents were advised that the term 'TA' included any staff whose main role was to directly support students' learning in classroom settings or outside the classroom. Significance tests indicate there was a statistically significant change in scores from baseline to follow-up for all statements except the statement 'TAs work closely with a limited number of children' ($p = 0.13$), which was a reverse statement. Further exploration using Cohen's D as a measure of effect size showed the statement 'TAs regularly participate in training to help them undertake their role' ($D = 1.17$) and 'teachers are trained in how to deploy TAs effectively in their classes' ($D = 1.54$) had the largest effect sizes, indicating the impact of the pilot was greatest on TA and teacher training. The remaining significant statements had medium to large effect sizes. As mentioned previously, these findings must be seen as an indication of impact rather than direct causal evidence that the intervention was primarily responsible for the change over time.

Table 25: Senior leader survey—TA deployment

TA Rec	Statement (1, 'strongly disagree'; 5, 'strongly agree')	Baseline Mean	Baseline SD	Follow-up Mean	Follow-up SD	Wilcoxon (p)	Effect Size (D)
1	Senior leaders take strategic responsibility for the deployment of TAs	4.26	0.85	4.66	0.51	<0.01 ⁽ⁱ⁾	0.57
1, 2	TAs work closely with a limited number of children ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾	2.78	1.18	3.12	1.04	0.13	0.3
1, 2	TAs regularly teach specific pupils different content from the rest of the class during lessons ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾	2.98	1.02	2.58	0.9	0.02 ⁽ⁱ⁾	0.41
1, 2	TAs spend at least as much time working with lower-attaining pupils as other pupils ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾	2.88	1.17	2.4	0.99	0.03 ⁽ⁱ⁾	-0.44
3	TAs are skilled at fostering independence in pupil learning	3.22	1	3.78	0.79	<0.01 ⁽ⁱ⁾	0.62
4	Senior leaders ensure there is time for teachers to brief TAs prior to lessons	3.38	1.12	4.1	0.88	<0.01 ⁽ⁱ⁾	0.71
4	Teachers are trained in how to deploy TAs effectively in their classes	2.48	0.7	3.6	0.75	<0.01 ⁽ⁱ⁾	1.54

TA Rec	Statement (1, 'strongly disagree'; 5, 'strongly agree')	Baseline Mean	Baseline SD	Follow-up Mean	Follow-up SD	Wilcoxon (p)	Effect Size (D)
4, 6	TAs regularly participate in training to help them undertake their role	3.38	0.98	4.36	0.66	<0.01 ⁽ⁱ⁾	1.17
4, 7	Teachers and TAs regularly discuss pupil progress	3.58	1.09	4.06	0.76	<0.01 ⁽ⁱ⁾	0.51
7	Out of class support provided by TAs is carefully planned and monitored	3.54	0.97	4.12	0.68	<0.01 ⁽ⁱ⁾	0.69

⁽ⁱ⁾ Significant at the 0.05 level.

⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ Reverse item showing the reversed score (higher scores mean greater adherence to the guidance)

N at baseline and follow-up, 50.

Comparing priority schools with non-priority schools (Table 26), priority schools had a larger increase in mean score than non-priority schools with regard to 'TAs are skilled at fostering independence in pupil learning' (TA Recommendation 3); it should be noted here that priority schools were less likely to agree with this statement at baseline. Priority schools also had a higher increase in mean score for 'senior leaders take strategic responsibility for the deployment of TAs' (TA Recommendation 1) although again priority schools were less likely to agree with this at baseline. Priority schools also had a higher increase in mean score for 'TAs regularly participate in training to help them undertake their role' (TA Recommendations 4 and 6) compared with non-priority schools, with both priority and non-priority schools giving similar ratings at baseline. The converse was true for 'TAs spend at least as much time working with lower-attaining pupils as other pupils' and 'teachers and TAs regularly discuss pupil progress' where in both instances non-priority schools had higher increases in mean scores.

Table 26: Senior leader survey, TA deployment—comparison of priority and non-priority schools

TA Rec	Statement (1, 'strongly disagree'; 5, 'strongly agree')	Priority Schools			Non-priority schools		
		Baseline	Follow-up	MD	Baseline	Follow-up	MD
1	Senior leaders take strategic responsibility for the deployment of TAs	4.07	4.73	0.66	4.34	4.63	0.29
1, 2	TAs work closely with a limited number of children ⁽ⁱ⁾	2.6	2.93	0.33	2.86	3.2	0.34
1, 2	TAs regularly teach specific pupils different content from the rest of the class during lessons ⁽ⁱ⁾	2.73	2.4	-0.33	3.09	2.66	-0.43
1, 2	TAs spend at least as much time working with lower-attaining pupils as other pupils ⁽ⁱ⁾	3.4	3.6	0.2	3.17	3.77	0.6
3	TAs are skilled at fostering independence in pupil learning	2.87	3.73	0.86	3.38	3.8	0.42
4	Senior leaders ensure there is time for teachers to brief TAs prior to lessons	3.33	4.13	0.8	3.4	4.09	0.69
4	Teachers are trained in how to deploy TAs effectively in their classes	2.4	3.67	1.27	2.51	3.57	1.06
4, 6	TAs regularly participate in training to help them undertake their role	3.33	4.53	1.2	3.4	4.29	0.89
4, 7	Teachers and TAs regularly discuss pupil progress	3.47	3.6	0.13	3.63	4.26	0.63
7	Out of class support provided by TAs is carefully planned and monitored	3.27	4	0.73	3.66	4.17	0.51

⁽ⁱ⁾ Reverse item showing the reversed score (higher scores mean greater adherence to the guidance).

N of priority schools, 15; non-priority schools, 35.

The qualitative findings largely align with those of the survey. There was good evidence to support the survey findings (see Table 14), which indicated that senior leaders, SILs, and school implementation teams (where they were operational) across participating schools had aligned their schools' practices more closely with TA guidance by the end of the DELTA programme. While there are some similarities between the survey and qualitative findings in relation to the aspects of the TA recommendations that were subject to the most change over the course of the programme, the qualitative findings indicate stronger outcomes in relation to senior leaders taking strategic responsibility for the deployment of TAs than the survey indicated. The strength of this outcome as well as the connection between strategic leadership and other outcomes that had higher effect sizes in the survey analysis is illustrated below. There is complexity

due to some SILs not being senior leaders, together with variable support from senior leaders when this was the case, which may partly explain the discrepancies in survey and qualitative findings.

In the qualitative data, the most commonly reported measures implemented by SILs (with explicit or tacit approval of the headteacher or other senior leaders) to support enactment of the TA guidance were those connected to (i) structural changes (TA Recommendation 1) ensuring that TAs and teachers had more regular opportunities to meet or connect out of class to enable lesson preparation and feedback (Recommendation 4) and (ii) the planning and delivery of training for TAs and to a lesser extent teachers (Recommendation 4). The approaches taken by SILs, senior leaders, and, in some cases, school implementation teams to implement these changes were reported in the previous section on enactment of the implementation guidance, under Deliver. The qualitative data indicated that these measures also provide the substrate for staff's enactment of other TA recommendations, depending on the content of training and the nature of TA-teacher communication.

Overall, the qualitative data gathered from SILs, senior leaders, and school implementation teams indicated that time for TA/teacher communication was now more systematic, consistent, and embedded within most schools, in line with TA Recommendation 4. In the majority of cases, the TAs' time was fully costed and not just contingent on TAs' goodwill. However, it was acknowledged that there was some variation in the feasibility or usefulness of the allocated time, depending on how each TA was deployed. For example, TAs whose roles were split across two or more teachers found it less useful. In Case C, unlike some other schools, the SIL and their team made provision for SEN TAs to attend the class-based TA-teacher meetings, thus bringing the needs of SEN children more centrally within teacher oversight and planning (TA Recommendations 1 and 2). This finding illustrates the point made above about how leadership action on TA Recommendation 4 has positive impacts on other recommendations.

'Before, it was just the class-based [TAs] in their morning meetings but now the SEN [TA] who works with that year group to be in those morning meetings. So that's kind of new to bring those SEN children more to be part of the teacher's responsibility as well—because particularly with the very high-needs children, the [TAs] spend so much time with them that actually there's that "leave it to them" approach rather than "actually, they're part of this class". I think we've seen some real movement in some year groups around that' (SIL C).

As to the outcomes of the staff training implemented by leaders, these are reflected in the next section, which reports changes in TAs' and teachers' understanding of, and enactment of, classroom practices.

The creation of teacher/TA agreements or 'contracts' was another common implementation strategy, reported earlier under Prepare, adopted by SILs and senior leaders to promote evidence-aligned TA deployment and practice in school. As these agreements sought to make the roles and expectations of teachers and TAs more explicit and they had the potential to support change across all the recommendations in the TA guidance.

Across the case study schools generally, staff reported greater consistency and clearer expectations about how TAs are deployed, which were largely attributed to the leadership strategies described above. Despite the generally positive findings concerning behavioural change by SILs and other leaders to align their schools more closely with the TA guidance, there were pockets of unevenness reported—including instances of frustration for a minority of SILs that they had not managed to get the senior leader buy-in required to properly translate and enact their vision for DELTA into school practice. This barrier is discussed in Findings 3: Feasibility.

TAs' cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural changes related to evidence-informed TA practices (S7)

Summary

- In most case study schools there was strong evidence that TAs' cognition and attitudes became more strongly aligned with the evidence-informed principles by the end of the DELTA programme. However, in all case study schools, staff and SILs reported that these positive cognitive and attitudinal changes had not been fully embedded in TAs' practices (that is, at the behavioural level). At all three levels—cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural—there were differences observed between schools: the data suggests that TAs in secondary schools in our sample may have faced greater barriers to

implementing behavioural change than TAs in primary schools and outcomes were more likely to be achieved where approaches to implementation aligned well with implementation guidance.

- The main focus of the reported cognitive and attitudinal changes in relation to TA Recommendations 1 to 4 (the effective use of TAs under everyday classroom conditions) with the greatest behaviour-level change related to practices advocated in Recommendations 1 and 2.

In all case study schools, the TAs reported that the focus for change had been primarily on the TA recommendations associated with the effective use of TAs under everyday classroom conditions (TA Recommendations 1-4). This was evidenced by a reported decrease in the number of out-of-class interventions that TAs delivered so that more time was spent in the classroom. It was also apparent in the reported sharpening of TAs' understanding of their role alongside the teacher in the classroom. Schools varied in the extent to which this new understanding of the TAs' role in the classroom was found to be enacted in practice.

Evidence of changes to practice concerning TAs delivering structured interventions out of class (TA Recommendations 5 to 7) was reported less frequently and by fewer case study schools (three of six). Where changes to TA Recommendations 5 to 7 were reported, they concerned (a) a focus on shorter, more targeted interventions in response to gaps that were observed by TAs and teachers while working with the students in class (described as a 'pre- and post-teaching approach' to interventions) and (b) a stricter stance on the use of evidence-based interventions only.

The strongest cognitive changes were reported in relation to TAs' understanding of the importance of moving away from a 'Velcro approach' (TA Recommendations 1 and 2) whereby TAs would be attached to learners that are most in need, often working with them outside the normal lesson or classroom. It was found that Recommendations 1 and 2 precipitated the most change at the behavioural, practice level:

'I used to remove either the lower or the high attaining ones, so they used to come out. Whereas now I am in class. I think that's different. So, I'm in there during the input, supporting the teacher, going around making sure that children are focused. Making sure they've got what they need to learn. So that's all changed and that's all come from DELTA and that training' (TA FG, Case F).

While TAs had knowledge of TA Recommendations 3 and 4—with some progress being reported in these areas in terms of schools providing ways for TAs and teachers to meet out of class and TAs reporting 'stepping back' rather than 'doing the work for learners'—they nevertheless revealed areas where TAs required further development and training in order to secure behavioural change:

'I find some TAs still slip back to other practices that they would have used before, so we're still making sure we invest the time ... in the induction programmes for new TAs—[and] other things with MITA/MPTA. It's really important that we keep using evidence-informed programmes for them because—yes TAs have an enhanced knowledge and understanding but I don't know how much...' (SIL A).

TAs' enhanced understanding of the TA guidance was often accompanied by important attitudinal changes. Commonly, they reported that the most important thing the DELTA programme gave them was 'more of a voice' (TA Case C) and 'feeling more confident' (TA Case E) as the expectations for their role became clearer and more codified. Leaders also reported TAs' positive attitudinal change noting that their confidence in, and sense of value for, their role within the overall teaching team had grown over the duration of the pilot:

'I don't know if it is less threatening or if they felt they could be themselves a bit more. All the clever teachers around us—we are what we are, we know that, yes we are what we are, but we're also part of that team, and we are a valuable member of that team and don't ever forget it' (SENCO, Case C).

Across all schools, the nature and extent of TAs' behavioural changes were found to be more limited than the cognitive and attitudinal changes. In part this was perceived to be because TAs needed more understanding of the actual skills and strategies they could employ in the classroom to meet the DELTA recommendations, with the need for further training for TAs being identified in many schools. TAs also reported on a range of practical issues that prevented them from putting into practice what they had learned about the effective use of TAs. These included insufficient TA staff

numbers in schools to enable appropriate support to students in class, with TAs being called out regularly to provide emergency support elsewhere. Interviewees also cited the impact of highly variable needs of students and statutory EHCP provisions that required TAs to give one to one support to individual students.

Some TAs reported that implementing evidence-informed approaches with Year 6 pupils was more challenging, suggesting that TA behavioural change may not have been consistent across all year groups.

In addition, it was apparent across the case study data that the attitudinal changes required to support changes in TA behaviour would involve a cultural shift that required time and trust-building among colleagues. All schools reported on the length of time it took to establish this cultural shift and to build relationships between TAs and teachers that would support long-term behavioural change. The majority of schools reported that they were working on this, or that this foundational work had meant they had not yet implemented many of the changes in TA practice that they envisioned for the school, which aligns with the findings presented in earlier school-level outcome sections. Establishing this cultural shift was found to be more challenging in the participating secondary schools, where staff reported tensions in the teacher-TA relationship that constrained TAs' behavioural change in practice. The data suggests that this was due to the practical realities of secondary schools: they are larger and more compartmentalised into subject areas, both factors that make it harder to find time for communication between TAs and teachers. TAs working in secondary schools reported on historic distrust between TAs and teachers combined with increased confusion about the role of TAs in the classroom and insufficient focus on training the teachers on the TA guidance as part of the implementation process. In secondary schools there was greater variability in teacher behavioural change to enact the TA recommendations, as explained in the next section, leading to 'pockets of good practice' but overall greater inconsistency in implementation.

There is some evidence to indicate that attitudinal and behavioural change was also moderated by the extent to which there was fidelity to the implementation guidance as changes to TA deployment were rolled out. In Case B, which differed markedly in nature from the other case study schools, there was less authentic 'buy-in' by TAs to the principles and practices of the TA guidance. TAs perceived that there had been insufficient consultation, preparation, and lead-in time ahead of shifting to departmental as opposed to year group deployment of TAs. This led to TAs expressing profound concerns about the impact this could have on their often carefully crafted relationships with students they worked with, especially those with attachment-related issues:

'And this idea of having all [TAs] throughout all these different schools doing the same thing—that's what I've taken away from it. That's how it's been explained to me. It hasn't been explained very well. It just feels like a lot of big words, a lot of strategies and implementation and feedback. And it's just so much nonsense—I don't get it, and it feels ... I just don't understand it at all. It doesn't make sense ... I'm not alone' (TA FG, Case B).

'And these kids have attachment issues and they're attached to us. Suddenly we're not there and they don't know why and it's just heart-breaking' (TA FG, Case B).

TAs in this case also reported feeling disillusioned and questioned what their role was truly trying to achieve.

Teachers' cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural changes related to evidence-informed TA deployment and practices (S7)

Summary

- The impacts of the pilot on teachers' cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural changes relating to evidence-informed TA deployment and practices were more mixed than the impacts on TAs.
- Teachers gained knowledge and understanding of the TA guidance and indicated different levels of confidence and commitment to the changes. Primary teachers in our case studies were reported to value TAs highly.
- Primary teachers translated their cognitive and attitudinal gains to a range of positive changes to their practice in line with the TA guidance but barriers in school prevented greater, more consistent alignment. Secondary teachers' behavioural changes were weaker and very uneven across staff.

- Where teachers were not meeting expectations, TAs had limited opportunities to enact the desired behavioural change.

Overall, teachers reported greater knowledge of evidence-informed TA deployment and practice as a result of the DELTA programme, a finding that aligns with the large effect size found for the statement ‘teachers are trained in how to deploy TAs effectively in their classes’ in the senior leader survey. In their interviews, teachers commonly described their understanding of the principles of TA Recommendations 1, 2, and 4 (and, less prominently, 3) on effective use of TAs under everyday classroom conditions. They recognised the importance of teachers giving focused attention to lower-attaining pupils (and other groups) rather than always relying on TAs to support them:

‘The main message that’s been disseminated is the children who are furthest behind need the most experienced teacher ... we need [TAs] to be with different groups. [TA Recommendation] number 1 on the list has been our number 1. ... We have a large percentage of SEN children, so it’s not just low-attainers—who we can catch up quite easily with some quality-first teaching’ (Teacher FG, Case D).

Teachers also understood the guidance on deploying TAs to deliver out-of-class interventions (Recommendations 5 to 7), although referred to these less often in interviews. Some were ‘much more aware’ that ‘structured interventions led by TAs are really powerful if they’re done properly’ (Assistant SENCO, school implementation team, Case E).

Turning to attitudinal impacts, teachers in primary schools where data was collected had a greater appreciation of the value that TAs bring to teaching and learning, consistent with reports that teacher-TA relationships were stronger. In some cases, this appreciation was linked to teachers’ increased confidence to enact the changes.

‘The teachers are feeling more confident to be able to leave the class and ... work specifically with the children who need them, whilst knowing that a [TA] will keep the other children learning, that they don’t have to be spinning all of those plates on their own, that there’s somebody else in the room with them who’s a skilled practitioner, who is able to support them’ (SIL, non-case).

Some primary teachers’ confidence and commitment to the DELTA changes were tempered by remarks on how difficult it was for them to orchestrate TA deployment in their lesson planning and practice. Uncertainty or gaps in confidence could be inferred from requests for more practical guidance on how to do this.

Impacts on secondary teachers’ attitudes were weaker. Teachers who valued TAs more highly since DELTA appeared to be the exception not the rule, and teacher-TA relationships were less strong than in primary. However, some secondary teachers welcomed having defined expectations about TAs and said this had helped to get traction for problematic teacher/TA relationships. There was scant data on secondary teachers’ confidence and commitment to the DELTA changes other than some interviewees emphasising the importance of deploying TAs more widely in class.

As for practice impacts, the findings suggest that primary school teachers’ behaviours were more aligned with the TA guidance than they were before DELTA but did not reflect the extent of the cognitive gains. Teachers who took part in a focus group commonly described some marked shifts in their practice: making more effort to communicate with TAs to prepare them for their roles, working more with lower-attaining pupils while TAs were ‘helicoptering’ around class, team-teaching more with TAs and ‘getting quite good’ at the teacher-TA ‘dance’ (see p. 60), involving TAs in assessment and feedback, and not sending groups of pupils out of class with TAs in the mornings during core learning, so ‘you can get the whole class really learning together’ (Teacher FG, Case F). However, there was variability across classes and schools.

‘Deployment of [TAs] has improved massively over the last year since starting DELTA. ... We’ve been working quite hard on developing the independence of those children who often ended up with the [TA], and [so] we’ve been able to more successfully get that [TA] [in line with TA Recommendation 1]—being around and about, instead of always with one static group’ (Teacher FG, Case D).

The barriers to practice change (especially time and TA recruitment and retention) are addressed in Findings 3: Feasibility, but low levels of TA resourcing should be highlighted here. In many primary schools, class TAs were spread

thinly, for example, where a teacher had a TA in class for one hour, three afternoons a week: 'It's really hard to set up a rhythm between you both.' Some teachers also described the challenge of quality-first teaching across a very wide range of pupil needs, from SEND to greater depth, and 'juggling' the attention and differentiation required. This was consistent with reports by some primary TAs that their teachers were not differentiating work for the lower-attainment groups the TAs sometimes worked with (Case F) and with observations by RIL I (non-case): 'There were some teachers who understood their SEND responsibilities better than others.' However, the impact of rising numbers of pupils with additional needs may have been a large factor in teachers' capacity.

In secondary schools, the findings on teachers' behavioural changes regarding TA deployment are tentative given the limited quantity of available data and the tendency of interviewees to revert to descriptions of TAs' rather than teachers' behaviours. Teachers' enactment of the TA guidance appeared to be weaker and more inconsistent in secondary than in primary, with greater disparity between teachers' cognitive gains and the pockets of change in the classroom. Practice improvements seemed largely contingent on individual teachers' willingness and capacity rather than on whole-school policy since DELTA.

'It's a mixed bag. Some teachers are [open to change]. Other people are just very set in their ways ... Some people won't change unless they're told to and then made sure that they are' (TA FG, Case E).

The most notable practice shifts by these 'open' teachers were to work more with lower-attainers and deploy TAs more fluidly, but the teacher-TA 'dance' was challenging: 'The [TAs] have the steps and they're trying to do it, the teachers [have] got two left feet and aren't really always sure' (SIL B).

Time for teachers to communicate with TAs regularly about lessons was an even greater stumbling block in secondaries. Additionally, mainstream secondary TAs reported that many teachers were disinclined to engage with solutions suggested by TAs (for example, access to uploaded lesson plans) and unreceptive to their feedback about pupil progress at the end of lessons.

These emerging findings for the secondary schools might suggest that secondary SILs paid insufficient attention to teacher buy-in and the monitoring of teachers' progress that might have achieved teacher behavioural change across school.

Where teachers were not adhering to the TA recommendations this limited opportunities for TAs to enact their own practice changes. For example, primary TAs in Key Stage 2 reported struggling to support lower-attaining pupils with independent learning strategies because the work was not accessible for those pupils and the teacher did not have time to set it differently ('I find that tricky because I am not a teacher and I think teachers need to give more input', TA FG, Case F.) In secondary, some TAs expressed frustration that DELTA messages were not getting through to teachers' practice. They described negative consequences when they were unprepared for lesson content if teachers could not brief them—'that's the worst thing ever' (TA FG, Case E). TAs felt they could not support pupils as effectively as they wished, and there was a risk they would lose the respect and confidence of higher-attaining pupils.

Perceptions of the links between project inputs and school-level outcomes

Summary

- Overall, the component parts of the DELTA programme cohered well and were praised highly by participants. The established reputation of the EEF as experts on evidence across the education sector further assisted staff buy-in and commitment toward achieving medium and longer term outcomes.
- Most senior leaders responding to the follow-up surveys found the workshops and resources most helpful. The qualitative findings from interviews with SILs and RILs revealed that the workshops were integral to expanding their skillsets and understanding in context to implement DELTA. This was attributed to the clarity and evidence-based persuasiveness of the two EEF guidance documents, particularly the TA guidance, alongside the tailored and accessible programme resources delivered by confident, engaging experts in their field.

- Both the quantitative and qualitative findings were more mixed, but still positive, in relation to the launch event and sense-making clinics. The launch event was compromised to some extent by having to shift to online delivery due to Covid-19 restrictions. The sense-making clinics were viewed as relatively less critical by priority schools receiving one to one wraparound support.
- Generally, the qualitative case study visits suggest that school staff had greater engagement with, and understanding of, the TA guidance than with the more macro-level implementation guidance. Across the RILs, there was evidence of heightened understanding and confidence to promote the principles of both the implementation guidance and TA guidance across their strategically influential wider roles in education.
- Some SILs felt that the core programme would benefit from more implementation support in building and strengthening the 'teacher-TA dance'. In addition, other school staff felt that a more formal offer of training for TAs and teachers, integrated into the core offer, would have strengthened it further. EEF programme leads asserted that they provided appropriate signposting to a range of appropriate training inputs such as MPTA, which they saw as 'onward pathways'.

Senior leaders in the follow-up survey rated the helpfulness of the key components of the DELTA programme on a scale from 'not helpful' (1) to 'very helpful' (5) (Table 27). Respondents rating the four components as 'helpful' or 'very helpful' were as follows:

- the DELTA launch event: 32 of 48 (M = 3.79);
- the DELTA workshops: 41 of 49 (M = 4.31);
- the sense-making clinics: 31 of 48 (M = 3.79); and
- the resources: 41 of 48 (M = 4.23).

For each of the four components, no more than two respondents per component said they were 'unhelpful', which suggests the majority found the components of the programme beneficial.

Table 27: Perceived helpfulness of the DELTA programme—all respondents

DELTA programme component	N	Mean (SD)
DELTA launch event	48	3.79 (1.07)
DELTA workshops	49	4.31 (0.87)
Sense-making clinics	48	3.79 (1.14)
Resources	48	4.23 (0.88)

Non-priority schools found the DELTA launch event, workshops, and resources slightly more helpful than priority schools. However, priority schools found the sense-making clinics more helpful. Overall, each programme component had a mean score of 3.34 or higher, which suggests both priority and non-priority schools found them helpful (Table 28).

Table 28: Perceived helpfulness of DELTA programme—by priority and non-priority schools

DELTA programme component	Priority school N/ non-priority school N	Priority school mean (SD)	Non-priority school mean (SD)
DELTA launch event	14/34	3.34 (1.15)	3.94 (1.01)
DELTA workshops	15/34	4.2 (0.86)	4.35 (0.88)
Sense-making clinics	14/34	4.21 (0.97)	3.62 (1.18)
Resources	14/34	4.14 (0.77)	4.26 (0.93)

The qualitative data largely aligned with the quantitative findings although there were aspects that did not reconcile, particularly in relation to the sense-making clinics. Overall, the component parts of the DELTA programme cohered well, alongside excellent administrative support from WSRS throughout: it was typically viewed very favourably by the schools receiving the programme and the RILs delivering it.

‘I have to say that the EEF and the research school ... are probably one of the most professional groups I’ve ever worked with’ (RIL E).

A cornerstone of this was the positive reputation the EEF has across the educational sector—a national-level input. As we have noted in Findings 1: Recruitment, Attrition, Fidelity and Dosage, there was an inherent trust in the rigour and quality of the evidence underlying the programme, which reassured school leaders to sign up to such a large commitment of staff time over a sustained period. EEF reputational reach also aided the within-school ‘sell’, with most leads and SILs reporting that their staff broadly accepted the basis on which the guidance was founded—meaning that most did not have to overly justify the basis for the proposed changes being sought.

Turning to programme inputs: as has been outlined elsewhere, due to the pandemic the DELTA launch event (see Introduction: Pilot Context) was unable to be delivered face to face as originally intended. This meant that while the launch event’s core aim of awareness-raising and ensuring SLT and governors were appropriately onboarded with the programme’s aims and core philosophy, it nevertheless did not land as effectively as other aspects of the programme—the majority of which were delivered face to face.

Soon afterwards there was a momentum shift, with opportunities for the DELTA project to be made more visible and promoted within the school. This occurred in various ways, such as through whole-school messaging—for example, a twilight or INSET and the formation of the school implementation team, although as noted elsewhere their relative importance tended to dissipate quite quickly (see Findings 2: Evidence to Support the Theory of Change | School Outcomes)—as well as audits, surveys, and observations, which were implemented throughout the programme. In most instances, the latter afforded opportunities for awareness-raising as a wider group of staff contributed to shaping the approach to TA deployment in ways that took account of the individual school context. The results from these initiatives were then thoughtfully considered, analysed, and discussed through the different components of the programme. Sometimes the results largely validated existing interpretations by SILs and SLT but in other instances challenged them. These baseline exercises included in the DELTA programme and led by SILs in their own schools were a critical part of the Foundations and Explore stages of the programme and enabled SILs to gain insight that helped inform their respective implementation plans.

‘The actual audit and all the different bits [the SIL] did in terms of that Explore phase, I think gave [the SIL] a clear understanding of where things were working well and where things weren’t working so well ... [and I think that] it is true of all of the schools that have been involved in DELTA, because the audits and the staff surveys and the classroom observations ... were done collectively ... When you find and identify the problems, it made it easier for people to hopefully get on board about changing that practice and that culture ... that seemed to be a really powerful tool for them, in order to identify that and move things along’ (Case C RIL).

The clarity and evidence-based persuasiveness of the two EEF guidance documents, alongside tailored and accessible programme resources that were delivered by confident, engaging experts in their field, meant that the workshops were consistently perceived by participants to be excellent. Most qualitative data supported the interpretation that this was the most critical dimension for influencing cognitive and attitudinal shifts in the SILs and beyond. However, one area for potential refinement across workshop sessions, noted by an EEF Stakeholder, was the potential to incorporate more school-led exemplification.

'We had a bit more school-led exemplification [at the June module] ... That felt really rich, the idea of using the work on the ground to not just exemplify—it was much more active than exemplification—but to model and to steer and to share insights. [With] hindsight, we probably could have made more of that' (EEF Stakeholder 1).

However, it should be noted that the TA guidance documentation was much more frequently referred to by SILs and wider school staff, with evidence suggesting this was more critically engaged with than the more generic implementation guidance. This observation accords with the relatively stronger medium and longer term outcomes achieved pertaining to TA practices, whereas in relation to the implementation guidance there was fundamental understanding of the processes but typically any meaningful or demonstrable outcomes were largely confined to the SIL who had experienced the programme more intensively. This finding broadly reflects the limited 'bandwidth' non-SIL staff had for this programme within the context of a busy school environment with multiple competing priorities. Clearly the operational focus of the DELTA programme was on the TA guidance, and the growth in more tacit understanding of the implementation guidance might not have been reflected on fully until after the DELTA programme.

By contrast, in relation to RIL outcomes and the city-level outcome of increasing capacity, there was evidence that the implementation guidance was far more influential than the TA guidance in informing and influencing the RILs' thinking and approaches in profound and consistent ways (see Findings 2: Evidence To Support the Theory of Change | RIL Outcomes and City-Level Outcomes for illustrations of these changes).

At least two RILs achieved promotions during the course of the DELTA programme and both regarded the CPD they had experienced as contributory factors in this. RILs also reported that their involvement in the DELTA programme had greatly informed how they interacted with schools in other school improvement work contexts.

The sense-making clinics were intended to be an important resource between modules, assisting schools to keep on task, and were reported by SILs and RILs to function quite well in maintaining momentum and engagement. However, the relative importance ascribed to them varied between priority and non-priority schools. There were examples of peer support within the sense-making clinics and some SILs valued the comparison of practices across different settings. For example, there were instances reported where RILs had skilfully made use of opportunities to compare challenges and solutions being worked through across their cluster of schools. RILs also signposted SILs to other SILs, and in certain instances other RILs who were school leaders, to share common issues and solutions. Furthermore, there was evidence that some RILs rescheduled or re-ran a sense-making clinic if some SILs were unable to attend and on occasion this blurred the function of the sense-making clinics with one to one wraparound support.

However, for priority schools, sense-making clinics were perceived as a relatively less-valued feature. Priority school SILs stated that the wraparound support was more tailored to their setting, meaning that at times they felt that the clinics overlapped with the wraparound support they were already getting and so it was more difficult to justify attending. In keeping with some concerns raised about the modular content being more primary-focused, despite RILs' best efforts to balance out discussions, there remained a sense from some secondary SILs that they would have found the discussions more relatable had there been secondary-only sense-making clinics. Also, evidence from interviews with RILs and SILs suggests that the clinics tended to recap on module content and were experienced as less helpful in providing individual SIL support and addressing specific implementation issues. As one RIL commented:

'I'm not sure the sense-making clinics were always as valuable as they could be because we'd go over what was happening, we'd go over what the task was at the end, but most of my team knew what they were doing. So they dropped [out] quite quickly from those—thank you, I don't need any more, I'm fine ... To have a secondary sitting in listening to what primaries were doing was not

helpful. So I ended up doing one-to-ones with all of them at some point ... their needs became more and more diverse as we got towards the end of the project' (RIL H, non-case).

The limitations on TA and teacher outcomes reported in Findings 2: Evidence to Support the Theory of Change (school outcomes) appear to indicate that SILs would have benefited from more implementation support in building and strengthening the teacher-TA relationship, which includes but also extends beyond the 'teacher-TA dance' that is ultimately performed in the classroom. Related to this point, as outlined in the subsection on training and CPD for staff in Findings 2: Evidence to Support the Theory of Change, there was a perceived need among many schools for the programme to have a formal offer of training for TAs and teachers integrated into the core DELTA programme or RIL support. However, from the programme leaders' perspective, training opportunities such as the MPTA programme were 'onward pathways' (EEF Stakeholder 2) and only suitable after the appropriate foundations for implementation had been established. The EEF's intention was 'actively steering away from offering low-hanging fruit' without the appropriate foundations in place. Nevertheless, perhaps there is an argument for either being more explicit with schools from the start that TA and teacher training is an 'onward pathway' after the end of the DELTA programme or integrating it into the later stages of the programme. Looking ahead, without the delays and constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic, if there is to be a continuing intention that the DELTA programme should run alongside the stages of the implementation process then it may be helpful to consider what on-programme or external support may be required in the Deliver stage for the specific aspects of the evidence-informed practices that are being implemented.

By the end of the DELTA programme, there was evidence of greater understanding and valuing of the TA role across school staff. However, in many instances there was ambiguity as to the extent to which this enhanced confidence stemmed from the inputs of the DELTA programme and the changes this led to in school (for example, dedicated allocations of CPD, routine involvement in school meetings and INSETs, and dedicated time on the timetable for conversations with teachers) versus providing staff with the independently delivered **MPTA** training.

Perceived helpfulness of regional implementation lead wraparound support

Summary

- Nearly all senior leaders in priority schools responding to the follow-up survey were positive about the effectiveness of the RIL support in aiding them to understand the implementation guidance and applying this and the TA guidance in their school. Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the types of support that they received, although only around half of respondents reported receiving some forms of support.
- A recurrent message from SILs in the qualitative data was that wraparound support helped to reassure and motivate them to persist and fully engage with the programme. Without support of this type, in the context of very busy school environments, it was sometimes felt that appropriate implementation of the evidence-based guidance was more vulnerable to misinterpretation or failure to be delivered.
- Most SILs were competent and well placed to move the programme forwards in keeping with the core principles of the implementation guidance, even if full delivery was delayed. In these cases, the SILs valued RILs as an important feature of the DELTA programme but characterised the RILs' inputs as mostly confirmatory or supplementary—however, the impact on SILs' confidence should not be underestimated.
- The qualitative evidence suggests that even highly committed and skilled RILs were less able to meaningfully intervene in some instances where the SIL was encountering significant difficulties, often beyond their control—for example, lack of authority, capacity, or wider senior leadership backing. Here, a more proactive brokerage approach from the RIL with senior school leads might have been fruitful.
- Priority schools valued the wraparound support offered by RILs but the provision differed in frequency, intensity, and format (online or face to face). Priority schools varied in their levels of engagement with RIL support, in part due to SILs' differing levels of confidence, capacity, and progress. There was also some variation detected in the extent to which RILs were proactive, with the onus sometimes on the SIL to drive what the RIL provided.
- There is some evidence to suggest that the bulk of the RIL inputs were frontloaded in most cases. RIL inputs were especially valued for assisting the SILs to interpret audit findings and inform thinking about the design and refinement of their implementation plans. However, due in part to Covid-related delays to the programme, many schools in consultation with RILs deferred the substantive Deliver phase of their implementation until the academic term after the formal conclusion of the programme. Lack of access to formal RIL wraparound support at such a crucial part of the implementation cycle was not ideal and could potentially have jeopardised SILs' longer-term confidence in leading the Deliver and Sustain stages of implementation beyond the end of the DELTA programme. We note that some RILs continued to provide such support out of goodwill.

Senior leaders in priority schools were asked about the nature and helpfulness of the support that had been received in their school (Table 29). Due to the small sample of priority schools in the follow-up survey (N = 15), findings in this section should be interpreted with caution and not used as robust evidence but rather as qualitative summaries. Of the 15 survey respondents from priority schools, 12 answered the questions presented in Table 29 (with the remaining three respondents not providing any answer to these statements).

The statements 'aiding schools understanding of how to apply the EEF implementation guidance' and 'aiding schools' understanding of the content of the EEF implementation guidance' had 11 of 12 respondents state that it was 'effective' or 'very effective'. The statement 'aiding schools' understanding of how to apply the EEF "making best use of TA guidance" in your school' had 10 of 12 respondents state that it was effective or very effective. These findings suggest that priority schools that completed the surveys perceived the RIL support they received to be effective.

Key findings on the frequency of the provision of different types of support by RILs are reported in the Implementation and Dosage section in Findings 1. Respondents from priority schools who answered the questions on the helpfulness of the different types of RIL support were very positive overall, but it is important to note that findings may be skewed, particularly for those types of support that were reported as being provided by fewer schools. In-school support for the SIL was rated 'very helpful' by eight of the 10 schools that had received it (M = 4.7), 'helpful' by one school, and 'neither

helpful nor unhelpful' in another. Online support for the SIL was reported to be very helpful for seven of the 12 schools that reported receiving it ($M = 4.5$), helpful for four, and neither helpful nor unhelpful in one. Email support, online or in-school support for the implementation team, communication with senior leaders outside the implementation team, and group activities for teachers or TAs were each rated as helpful or very helpful by the schools that received them.

Table 29: Helpfulness of RILs support in priority schools

Statement (1, 'not helpful'; 5, 'very helpful')	N (for those who received the support)	Mean (SD)	N (This support was not provided)	Don't know
Online support for implementation lead	12	4.5 (0.67)	0	0
In-school support for implementation lead	10	4.7 (0.67)	1	1
Email support	11	4.64 (0.5)	0	1
Online support for the implementation team	4	5 (0)	5	3
In-school support for implementation team	6	4.83 (0.4)	4	2
Communication with senior leaders outside of the implementation team	6	4.83 (0.4)	3	3
Group activity for TAs	6	4.67 (0.51)	5	1
Group activity for teachers	6	4.5 (0.54)	5	1

While the survey captured the provision or absence of different modes of wraparound support in priority schools and senior leaders' perceptions of the helpfulness of each mode, it did not capture the frequency with which these modes of support were deployed. The qualitative data suggests the frequency differed across the schools and this, in turn, impacted on outcomes for the school. For example, the degree to which RILs were able, or willing, to visit schools face to face was noted as a key factor determining the extent to which they were able to get a full understanding of a school's context and to connect with a wider group of staff beyond the SIL. At a project level, recruiting RILs with a range of expertise and experience was seen as a key enabler but this meant their locations also varied, with four of the RILs originally recruited (one subsequently withdrew) based at some distance from Bristol. This presented some barriers in terms of visiting their schools and understanding their specific contexts in person—an intended aspect of the wraparound support. As of these RILs explained:

'I think that being able to visit the schools is a big part of the RIL role that my schools didn't get from me ... I don't think it's impacted on the relationship but I guess it's impacted on my connection, how I feel in terms of my connection with the schools' (RIL I, non-case).

Barriers to visiting schools were not just down to geography: the impacts of the pandemic were also identified as barriers by RILs, especially during the early stages of the pilot.

'I think the big thing that Covid did was to delay the relationship-building process a bit. I couldn't get into schools as much as I wanted. As soon as you walk into a school, you begin to pick up on a lot more than just the DELTA project—a school, its life, its challenges' (RIL F).

There was also some variation detected in the levels of proactivity across the RILs, with the onus often placed on the SIL to drive the relationship.

'I think that I could probably get more from [RIL] and I know when I sort that out, [the RIL] will be very supportive. So I think possibly I could get more out of it' (SIL midpoint interview).

‘To be honest, I was responding to the requests of the school really’ (RIL B).

As we discuss in the conclusions relating to the readiness to expand the RIL role as part of the EEF’s approach to regional delivery, a more explicit code of expectations may be helpful to ensure consistent RIL support across all schools.

Overall, a recurrent message received from SILs was that the addition of the RIL was a welcomed and empowering feature of the programme that helped motivate and reassure them to persist with the programme. One SIL reflected that the DELTA programme, particularly with the accompanying ongoing RIL support, filled a frequently neglected dimension in the external CPD offer because it focused on leadership mentoring. Without support of this type in the context of extremely busy school environments it was felt that appropriate implementation of the evidence-based guidance promoted by the EEF was vulnerable to misinterpretation or failure to be delivered.

‘As leaders you don’t always have that support in leadership in education ... You get told lots of stuff and then you’re supposed to go away and do it ... Just make that work in these incredibly complex environments. And that’s really hard ... you can be faced with a lot more barriers and I think without that kind of mentoring—or whatever you want to call it—for leaders, you’re just crossing your fingers. When it seems so important, that seems flimsy’ (SIL C).

RILs were referred to in various positive ways but a common thread was that they were able to develop a meaningful relationship with the SIL which allowed the SIL to feel confident that the RIL was not there to judge them but instead to support them. This was especially important for schools experiencing accountability or implementation challenges. This garnered the necessary trust for the RIL to take on a critical friend or ally-type role, allowing them to challenge and clarify decision-making in a respectful and productive manner.

‘As a RIL, I have found out things about the school that perhaps if I’d been there to categorise the school or judge it, I wouldn’t have picked up on. So I think that’s quite an important distinction to make—I’m not here to judge you, I’m here to support you and deliver this in your school’ (RIL F).

One SIL felt that the conversations engaged in with the RIL helped give a clearer picture of what DELTA was seeking to achieve and clarified the more macro-level intentions of the programme to influence implementation beyond just TA deployment.

‘I think [the RIL] definitely helped us all to have that shared understanding of what we needed to do moving forward ... [it’s helped my understand that] the DELTA project is bigger than TA changes, it’s how we implement, and don’t want to make changes just for changes’ sake ... Not that [the RIL] told me to do that—but if I hadn’t had the input from [the RIL] and just bouncing ideas and having a chat, I don’t think I’d necessarily have thought in-depth about how to get people’s buy-in at the start’ (SIL Case A).

RILs appeared to be particularly influential and important in the early stages of the programme—for example, in making space to go through and interpret the audit findings or reviewing, discussing, and shaping implementation plans.

‘Sharing challenging audit data with the RIL could be a critical juncture for the school, prompting deep questions which were “not pleasant to ask” but also “understanding that this is good, we’re finding out what is the real—what your staff believe at the moment”’ (RIL F).

‘I think a key part of it, really, was earlier on we spent a long time looking at the implementation plan and making sense of that, because that’s something that schools found really really tricky’ (RIL D).

There is some evidence, reported in Findings 1: Recruitment, Attrition, Fidelity and Dosage, that establishing these strong and trusted relationships was highly influential in retaining the engagement of priority schools (and those non-priority schools for which RILs also began to provide wraparound support as the programme progressed. In part, at least, this was supported through the pragmatic approach of the RILs. RILs supported SILs to make intelligent adaptations to the TA guidance or postponement of delivery to consolidate an earlier stage of implementation. In this way the RIL was often able to intervene to ensure that SILs were not feeling overly pressured to rush through the delivery of the TA recommendations at the expense of only superficial adherence to the wider principles of implementation

outlined in the implementation guidance. RILs were able to reiterate and reassure schools that it was entirely valid to start small and build through and beyond the duration of the programme.

‘So that’s where [RIL] really came into play. Yeah, we’re still researching and if you haven’t got anything ready, that’s fine—you need to have your plan, you need to have your idea firmly set before you start doing something. Don’t go into it with 90% vision. You need 100%’ (SIL D).

‘I was trying to be as reassuring as I could ... I think a lot of the role was, look, if you can’t implement right now, then it’s better to implement properly rather than try to force something through when the staffing structure isn’t as regular as it should be. And that’s where a lot of schools said we’re trying little parts of this out but actually this will be re-rolled out in September’ (RIL E).

It should be noted that delays to the programme delivery and the reluctance of schools to roll out the Deliver stage across the whole school until the following academic year, both of which were partly due to effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, impeded full achievement of the medium term school-level outcomes (which were intended to be achieved by the end of the pilot). It was unfortunate that formal access to RIL wraparound support was not available as schools moved to a full Deliver stage as it was beyond the timespan of the pilot. We do note, however, that many RILs continued to provide support out of goodwill into the 2022 autumn term.

Most SILs were well placed to move the programme forwards in keeping with the core principles of the implementation guidance, even if full delivery was delayed. In such instances, RILs reported that their inputs were mostly confirmatory or supplementary as opposed to a significant overhaul. However, the impact of this form of support and the confidence it generated should not be underestimated.

‘So for me it was strengthening and reassuring me about my plan ... I felt I had more authority to deliver it because [the RIL] was saying “yes that’s right, OK this is the right track” ... And that’s really important because otherwise I wouldn’t have driven it as much’ (SIL C).

However, an area where RILs appeared to be less successful was in being able to meaningfully intervene where the SIL was encountering significant difficulties, often beyond their control, for example, due to lack of authority, capacity, or wider senior leadership backing. In Case B, for example, the SIL, despite their commitment and persistence, struggled to get the buy-in from their SLT to provide access to staff meetings or INSETs to fully prepare staff for the delivery of the significant changes being proposed in the implementation plan. In this case, perhaps their RIL might have adopted a brokerage role and more proactively intervened to approach the school SLT or MAT CEO and advocate on behalf of the SIL. This might have helped avoid some of the negative consequences for TAs and pupils arising from the ‘rushed’ delivery of a major shift in TA deployment before all staff groups were fully aware and prepared.

‘[The teacher-TA agreement] hasn’t got to teachers—yet ... I hadn’t been given any time to explain and share any of this with teachers. There will be teachers in the school who don’t even know what DELTA is’ (SIL B).

In Appendix 11, we present vignettes of two case studies where there were contrasting styles of implementation to give a sense of how different circumstances and contextual factors can combine to influence how effectively and smoothly the TA Implementation is delivered.

City-level outcomes

Table 30: Summary of city-level outcomes

Intended outcomes		Achieved outcomes	Data sources/method
C1	Influential and emerging voices in Bristol champion DELTA as an evidence-informed response to tackling disadvantage.	Emerging evidence that stakeholders and RILs are championing and sharing the implementation principles of the DELTA programme and leading other evidence-informed responses. There is limited evidence that DELTA participants (primarily SILs) were championing the approaches beyond their own settings. More data from across all Bristol schools would be required to substantiate the extent of the impact.	Endpoint interviews with stakeholders and RILs.

Intended outcomes		Achieved outcomes	Data sources/method
C2	DELTA integrates with Bristol City Council's wider strategy for meeting the needs of children at risk of underachieving.	Moderate evidence of a higher profile of DELTA and its implementation principles informing Bristol City Council's wider strategies. Bristol City Council are supporting further initiatives for evidence-informed processes and practices to meet the needs of children at risk of disadvantage. Bristol City Council education leadership instability (at director level) and funding constraints have limited the full potential of the project at city level and the development of follow-on large-scale initiatives.	Endpoint interviews with stakeholders.

The national- and city-level logic model (Appendix 3) identified two intended medium term outcomes that were to be achieved during the project lifespan: influential and emerging voices in Bristol championing DELTA as an evidence-informed response to tackling disadvantage and DELTA becoming integrated into Bristol City Council's wider strategy for meeting the needs of children at risk of underachieving. These were identified as indicators of progress towards the longer term outcomes: further embedding the principles of effective implementation, further development of school improvement infrastructure to embed an evidence ecosystem more deeply, increased trust in city school improvement mechanisms, as well as improved pupil progress and attainment.

As outlined in the Introduction, the RIL pilot was designed to help overcome some of the issues and challenges posed by the educational context in Bristol, including the high numbers of disadvantaged pupils with below average attainment (2016–2019) and a large disadvantage gap. The Bristol school system was described as 'fragmented' by stakeholders, given the increasing number of large MATs and other school designations that were operating competitively, with limited trust and collaboration across the city's schools and education stakeholders. The shift towards academisation has meant the local authority has reduced influence in this complex school improvement system. Stakeholder interviewees described the LA as having decreased reach, influence, resource, and funding and yet still responsible for outcomes for children. The issue of TA deployment was therefore seen as a critical project to 'get everyone rowing in same direction'.

Influential and emerging voices in Bristol champion DELTA as an evidence-informed response to tackling disadvantage (outcome C1)

There is emerging evidence that stakeholders and RILs were promoting the approaches and outcomes of the pilot across Bristol (and beyond—see Wider Outcomes below). There was a sense among stakeholders that the project had delivered this outcome, creating keen and committed champions of the implementation approaches and effective TA deployment. Across Bristol's LA and schools, the DELTA project approaches were reported as being discussed more widely at all levels:

'If you look at Bristol's [Bristol City Council's] engagement with schools around what schools are going to do now, what they're going to do next, DELTA is being spoken about' (EEF stakeholder).

From their overview perspective, LA stakeholders reported that RILs were among the new emerging voices:

'Three or four (RILs) that I know quite well have become more prominent in the system since this programme' (Bristol City Council stakeholder).

RILs highly valued the professional learning and support (see Findings 2: RIL Outcomes) and reported taking their new school improvement and implementation skills from the pilot back to their own schools and beyond, sharing their learning and experience with wider clusters and networks across the city and through other leadership programmes they are involved with. This included further seeding and transmission of concepts and approaches to Bristol schools that had not engaged with or understood what DELTA was about:

'I chair at the group of schools and I was interested in getting some feedback there ... I did a cluster talk. They're keen that I lead some RIL-like work with them next year, which I'm really happy to do' (RIL D).

'[I'm] a governor of a primary school that wasn't in my cluster. For example, in every governors' meeting—I don't know if it's just for my benefit, I'm sure it's not—they very clearly bring up, "So how

is the DELTA implementation going? What's the effect?" In every meeting. Which is really interesting to see' (RIL E).

One RIL explained how championing the approaches and principles of the DELTA programme had become embedded in their work across schools:

'The number of times I've said in the past year something like, "If you think of DELTA ..." and then finish the sentence in any potential way possible! Yeah, I guess championing the approach and the principles as much as the nitty-gritty of the project itself, if you like. That's become part and parcel of conversations with schools' (RIL A).

One EEF stakeholder reported that the majority of the RILs from Bristol said they were keen to be involved in the next EEF or Bristol City Council project to follow on from DELTA. One RIL was reported to have left the LA and taken up a post in a large trust (where DELTA may not have reached), taking new skills around inclusion and school improvement into the trust where the principles could be applied across a broader group of schools. Other stakeholders (WSRS) suggested that one RIL was already applying principles and processes of effective implementation to metacognition and literacy interventions.

One stakeholder reported their perception that the impact of DELTA across the city has been significant in terms of teachers working together, building a network of schools that are aligned in their thinking, that understand the process of change, and have useful tools that they can continue to apply to future school improvement. This stakeholder also reported evidence of schools collaborating more as a result of DELTA: schools joining up for MPTA training together and furthering 'invaluable' networking on TA deployment, as well as sharing costs and TAs visiting and working across schools 'in a way they might not have done before'—suggesting that the pilot has broken down some of the barriers between schools.

DELTA integrates with Bristol City Council's wider strategy for meeting the needs of children at risk of underachieving (C2)

At city level, there is moderate evidence from Bristol City Council stakeholders that implementation planning approaches are being applied strategically across the council's new and future educational projects and direct work with schools—wherever limited opportunities exist. Stakeholders were initially optimistic that the new Director of Education could spearhead DELTA as a strategic unifying initiative across Bristol, but this aspiration was not fully realised despite the strong commitment and strenuous efforts of the Council stakeholders and DELTA partners. The new Director of Education left before the end of the project and there was another interim head in post and related fiscal uncertainty. The Council stakeholders who were interviewed at endpoint indicated that these leadership and funding constraints and other systemic issues have affected the potential of the project to lead to embedded, sustainable change across the city, at scale, going forwards (see Section 3: Feasibility).

From the development stages of the pilot, Bristol City Council stakeholders have been using and applying evidence-based language and mantras to their wider school improvement work, for example, using the EEF rubrics and tools more widely and “doing fewer things better” and “active ingredients” are used as common currency in the way that we speak with schools’.

In their role leading school partnerships, one Bristol City Council stakeholder has a range of ‘strategic audiences’ within education services. He had identified potential for implementation planning to be incorporated into training, for example, around ordinarily available provision, and was attempting to secure funding to make a key strategic SEND post permanent, which would further embed this potential. In addition, he had been able to influence four key education teams in developing their approaches to working with schools using implementation planning. In so doing, the Bristol City Council stakeholder is continuing to co-construct ways that school leaders and practitioners might work together, for example, by being more explicit in identifying ‘pinch points’ at systems levels across the city in relation to SEND. He evidenced a recent LA SEND re-inspection visit which identified that ‘sufficient action and progress’ had been made in four of the five areas identified for improvement in a particularly challenging period for local authorities and schools. Although there was no direct evidence of a link, the Bristol City Council stakeholder believed that DELTA was a good model of practice that was reflected in the positive inspection findings.

The RIL who was also a Bristol City Council school improvement officer shared the implementation planning approach with the rest of the LA school improvement team. They have since adjusted the way school improvement officers work with schools across the city, from what was described as a ‘scattergun approach’ to one now based on schools aligned in locality areas with dedicated school improvement officers. This is intended to engender a ‘sense of belonging’ between schools—akin to clusters of schools working with their RIL. Schools in locality areas have an opportunity to contribute and collaborate on joint school improvement priority projects using an implementation planning approach which takes time to identify the issues using relevant data ‘before they try to leap into any sort of action’ (EEF stakeholder).

WSRS and Bristol City Council are also working together through teaching school hubs—another conduit or seeding mechanism for continuing to build upon DELTA—using implementation planning approaches with Bristol schools across wider curriculum hubs and spokes of transmission, further building capacity and expertise, reinforcing and embedding evidence-informed concepts and approaches. Conversations and engagement with groups of maintained schools and single academies and trusts about mergers (for example, through the South West Regional Director’s office) also operate as a mechanism for seeding DELTA and implementation planning approaches more widely.

While Bristol City Council stakeholders are highly committed to building on the learning and capacity developed at city level through DELTA, the funding challenges faced by the local authority were the major barrier to maximising this potential (see: Findings 3: Feasibility). Nonetheless, building on the upskilling capacity generated by DELTA, Council stakeholders were able to propose a ‘spin-off project’ called ‘Belonging in SEND’ to sit alongside the city’s existing Belonging in Education strategy. Funding of £900,000 was top-sliced from the local authority’s education transformation budget to support high-needs inclusion. This provided a funding pot for Bristol schools, over two academic years, to collaborate on bids for evidence-informed interventions to support inclusion and outcomes for pupils with SEND. Funding programme components allowed groups of schools to bid for testing new interventions, scaling up proven interventions, or covering staff training for specific interventions across schools. Applicants were asked about their involvement in DELTA and any professional learning gained from it. System collaboration and evidence-informed implementation were at the heart of the programme design, with some EEF Regional Lead input and support continuing from the strategic partnership, albeit on a much reduced scale compared to DELTA. One EEF stakeholder reflected that while this was a positive and promising Bristol City Council transition project, it had developed towards the end of DELTA. It was felt that stronger traction for transition would have been possible if higher system-level commitment had been formalised and clearly planned from the beginning so DELTA schools were aware of further project opportunities to sustain the momentum earlier in the process.

‘I think this is the first step in what should be a number of steps on this journey to creating that evidence-informed ecosystem across the city ... but I think every week and month that passes since September when DELTA finished, there’s a risk of momentum and memory fading’ (EEF stakeholder).

Ongoing discussions about ‘the next DELTA project in Bristol’ that could utilise RILs were continuing between the EEF and Council stakeholders and partners. At the time of the endpoint interviews, stakeholders referenced the EEF plans to add six new Research Schools to the national network in 2023. This was seen as an opportunity for DELTA schools in Bristol to apply and further support the local evidence ecosystem. Bristol schools were not among those **announced on 26 April 2023**.

Other city-level outcomes

Strengthening of the evidence-informed school improvement infrastructure

Stakeholders identified that DELTA was a significant project for Bristol City Council in raising their profile as leading evidence-informed school improvement and partnership working across the city. The good level of engagement from a large number of schools over three challenging academic years was seen as significant in terms of bringing in—

‘a consistent narrative, a consistent understanding and a consistent way of thinking, into the system, which I don’t think was there before’ (WSRS stakeholder).

Enhanced leadership capacity for evidence-informed school improvement

While staff churn was a significant issue impacting the implementation process in many schools, stakeholders also identified that a number of middle leaders who experienced the pilot and stepped into leadership roles in other schools took the knowledge and skills with them—‘so it’s almost like two schools are benefiting’. This indicates wider transmission of DELTA beyond participating schools, through leaders who were seeding concepts and practices to their new schools.

Wider outcomes

There is some evidence from the stakeholder and RIL endpoint interviews that regional voices were also promoting and widening the scale of the impacts. RILs based in surrounding local authorities, such as Wiltshire, and the WSRS commented on the changes they were making to their school improvement practice when returning to their substantive roles, indicating a potential impact on the school system in the wider region where they will have ongoing influence. One example of this was WSRS’s deployment of their subject specialist ELEs (Evidence Leads in Education), based on the RIL model, who provided follow-up support for schools after a blended ‘DELTA-like’ Effective Learning Behaviours CPD programme. WSRS was also extending sustained, bespoke, post-INSET follow-up support provided by ELEs to other programmes across the county. This was reported to be already showing benefits. In addition, stakeholders were also spreading the word nationally about DELTA, highlighting the benefits and learning from the pilot to inform school improvement in other parts of the country:

‘I often talk about Bristol when I’m working in other schools—to talk about the extent of the project and how helpful I think teachers have found that working together’ (WSRS stakeholder).

Findings 3: Feasibility

This section presents findings on the factors that were found to enable or impede the implementation of the pilot and the achievement of intended outcomes. In doing so, we illuminate the feasibility and practicality of the pilot, contributing to answering overarching RQB—How feasible is it to deliver the pilot?—and the school- and city-level factors that modified the potential pilot effects, contributing to answering overarching Research Question A—What evidence is there to support the theory of change? RQs 3, 4, and 6 are specifically addressed. We also draw on the findings presented in this section to contribute to answering overarching RQC—Is the Regional Implementation Lead role ready for scale-up as part of the EEF’s approach to regional delivery?—in the Conclusion.

Recruiting and retaining schools

Summary

- The baseline survey found that, overwhelmingly, the main motivation for senior leaders engaging their school in the DELTA programme was to improve approaches to TA deployment and maximise TAs’ impact. Accessing support to implement school improvement priorities, new approaches, and interventions more effectively was also an important motivator. These findings were supported by the qualitative data, which also revealed that the desire of senior leaders to collaborate with the EEF on something meaningful and over a sustained period was an additional motivation.
- Factors that supported the recruitment and retention of schools included the strong reputation of the EEF, the free and locally accessible nature of the CPD, the recognition of the need to make the best use of TA staff (a significant resource), and the authenticity and pragmatism of RILs and programme leads that afforded enough flexibility for context-informed intelligent adaptation of the guidance.
- Despite the significant efforts by programme leaders to be transparent about the DELTA programme, a perceived lack of clarity about it and misperceptions about its focus did lead to some attrition. In some instances, this was due to the tension between schools wanting to see a plan of action from the start and the need for the programme to adhere to the implementation guidance, which requires a process of exploration and work in school before proceeding to an action plan. In a few other instances, schools joined the DELTA programme because they thought it would provide practical training for TAs.
- Other factors that were found to impede recruitment and retention were:
 - the scale and duration of time commitment, especially for the SILs (predominantly senior-level staff), particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic;
 - for some schools (particularly those in challenging circumstances that were required to demonstrate rapid improvement), the programme’s deliberately reflective, methodical, and slow-paced approach to implementation;
 - the lack of direct dialogue with some of the larger trusts; and
 - having to deliver the DELTA launch online, which to some extent was detrimental to levels of enthusiasm, relationship building, and school commitment.

Motivations for joining the DELTA programme

In the baseline survey, senior leaders were asked to rank their first, second, and third most important reasons for engaging their school in the DELTA project from a list of eight statements. As Table 31 shows, overwhelmingly the most important reason senior leaders gave was ‘to support the school to review and develop their approaches to TA deployment to maximise their impact’. Of the 79 respondents, 53 named this as their most important reason, 12 as their second most important reason, and five ranked it third. The second most important reason given was ‘to support the school in implementing school improvement priorities, new approaches, or interventions more effectively’ (ten ranked this first, 35 second, and eight third). Some senior leaders were motivated by the opportunity to support the learning and development of school staff and to engage in research evidence-informed school improvement, however, these reasons were most frequently ranked as the third most important. Much more limited importance was placed on accessing external support, supporting the school’s response to issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, and the

opportunity for networking or working with other schools. Bristol LA and other colleagues had some influence on senior leaders' decisions to join the DELTA programme: three ranked this as the most important reason for joining, four ranked this second, and eight ranked it third.

Table 31: Senior leaders' ranked reasons for engagement in DELTA project

Reasons for engagement	Ranked first	Ranked second	Ranked third
To support the school to review and develop their approaches to TA deployment to maximise their impact	53	12	5
To support the school in implementing school improvement priorities, new approaches and/or interventions more effectively	10	35	8
To support the learning and development of school staff	7	17	24
To engage in research evidence-informed school improvement	4	5	21
Recommended to take part by Bristol Local Authority colleagues or other colleagues.	3	4	8
To access external support for school improvement	0	2	5
To support the school's response to issues that have resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic	0	2	4
To network and/or work directly with other schools	0	0	2

N = 79. The ordering of the items has been changed from the presentation in the survey (Appendix 7) for ease of interpretation.

Senior leaders and SILs in priority schools reported a variety of motivations for engaging in the DELTA programme that largely accord with the survey data outlined in Table 31. Online interviews with senior leaders (September 2021) revealed that just over half of them (six of the ten interviewed) voluntarily or proactively sought out the programme, whereas the others (four) were invited or instructed by Bristol City Council to attend. Senior leaders referred to being interested in extending their expertise in relation to implementation processes and particularly the substantive focus on TAs (although primary leaders tended to see the TA focus as being a higher priority issue than secondary leaders).

The motivation to support the school's response to issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, while not highly ranked in the survey, was reported in one case study school, which sought to use the DELTA programme as a vehicle to recalibrate relationships, communication protocols, and role definitions between teachers, TAs, and leaders, which had eroded throughout the course of the pandemic.

Factors enabling and impeding recruitment and retention

As the data presented in Findings 1: Recruitment, Attendance, Attrition and Fidelity suggests, overall, on-programme recruitment and retention were good, particularly for priority schools, which is especially impressive when considering the time commitment involved and the challenging context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Pragmatic advantages, such as the programme being free and face to face workshops being run at schools or leisure facilities across Bristol, were attractive to schools, especially within the context of stretched school budgets. In addition, senior leader and SIL interviewees reported that the opportunity to collaborate with the EEF on something meaningful over a sustained period was appealing and reassuring.

RILs, especially in the case of priority schools, were perceived to be very influential in ensuring that most schools stayed with the programme. RILs in general were praised for their sensitivity to tensions that schools were experiencing, something many attributed to their existing roles within the educational sector, either as MAT leaders, headteachers, or other senior education positions.

'I think we're needing to show huge sensitivity to pressures in schools and we're being as reactive and responsive as we can be because I appreciate the time they're giving to try and make this change happen' (RIL A).

Several school leaders mentioned that their RIL's understanding of the school's context made them more authentic and relatable. As discussed in Findings 1: Recruitment, Attendance, Attrition and Fidelity, wherever possible RILs sought to minimise pressure on schools and take a pragmatic approach to providing advice on school implementation plans. The

decision of some RILs to divert and extend support to non-priority schools when they judged it was needed was also perceived to retain some schools that otherwise may have left the programme.

Programme leads in conjunction with Bristol City Council made a very conscious effort to engage senior leaders, executive leads and governors at the launch event. Central to this effort was trying to impart that the programme was a 'process' and 'not an event', with a very deliberate focus on leadership as opposed to training for TAs. As the following quotation outlines, this pitch tended to be well received, ensuring that senior leadership decision-makers were sufficiently briefed to make an informed judgement about whether to sign up or not.

'There was quite a lot of work done on the messaging. We felt it was important at first at the launch session ... to have headteachers, CEOs, chairs of governors etc., to try and make sure we were really clear that this wasn't just about training for TAs, this was about leadership and effective deployment of the workforce. What we would be talking about would be a whole-school teaching and learning issue, not just about schedules of staffing etc. on a more day-to-day basis. So, I would say I'm pretty confident that people did understand and if they had misconceptions about the programme, I think we did quite a good job in that launch session to iron those out effectively. I think then we had on the whole the right kind of people with the right kind of mindset arriving for the first face to face day in September' (WSRS stakeholder).

However, despite the best efforts of programme leads to be transparent about the programme's focus, data from a range of sources (non-participants, early senior leader telephone interviews, email responses from a few senior leaders who had ceased participating in the programme, as well as wider qualitative data) indicates that some participants remained confused and frustrated. Several participants (and some RILs) reported a lack of transparency, particularly at the outset, in clearly mapping out the structure of the programme from the beginning to the end. To some extent, this was deliberate and designed to be in keeping with some of the principles of implementation theory and privileging the importance of using the audit findings and feedback to shape actions. Nevertheless, in some cases this perceived lack of clarity contributed to some schools electing to leave the programme prematurely.

'I think lots of people struggled with not knowing the journey at the beginning. They got the key principles of what we were trying to achieve, and the kind of overarching learning journey we'd go on, but people in schools like to have a plan and I think they struggled with not knowing the plan. Having gone through it, talking to various people in the schools in my group, I think they understand at the end more why that was the case than at the beginning. This idea that it needs to evolve based on the findings and what the feedback is and what schools themselves have found to be what they're working on' (RIL A - Interim report).

Although the responses to our non-participant school survey and requests for interviews with schools that had withdrawn early in the programme were limited (hence some caution needed), those that did provide information on their experience and reasons highlighted a range of factors, listed below, that had affected their engagement and, therefore, DELTA recruitment and retention.

- A project of DELTA's scope, scale, and duration was seen as *'too broad and substantial a time commitment'* with SLT focused on other pressing staff and TA priorities.
- Launch attendees expressed their need for TA training to support classroom strategies: *'I thought it was training sessions for TAs providing SENCO strategies etc., I was hoping for something short and practical.'*
- Schools that only or mostly had TAs employed to support high-needs pupils *'for inclusion rather than for educational progress'*, did not see DELTA as appropriate.
- The strategic change management and evidence-informed goals of DELTA overlapped with NPQ training that senior colleagues were already committed to, limiting capacity for more development programmes.
- Covid-19 related staff absence and instability, including SIL churn, made the commitment unviable.
- School leaders were unable to attend in-person modules due to distance and additional travel time.

Many of the impeding factors were directly related to, or further exacerbated by, the Covid-19 pandemic, as expressed by this RIL:

'I think they understood the purpose and the underlying intention. I don't think probably any of them quite appreciated the commitment ... that would be needed. I do think that some of the difficulties we had this time last year when Covid was on the rise again and schools were really struggling with staff and pupil attendance ... I think if we'd had a clear year and we'd done this in a year when we hadn't had a pandemic it would have been easier for schools to really get to grips with this. But I think there was quite a lot of stuff this time last year that maybe became blockers or barriers to people's ability to commit to DELTA' (RIL C).

Connected to the time commitment and duration issue was the programme's deliberately reflective, methodical, and slow-paced approach to implementation. While most school leaders reported finding this new way of working a bit disorientating initially, it was felt that some types of school found it more challenging than others, and harder to justify continuing. Schools in challenging circumstances such as those facing Ofsted accountability pressures or undergoing leadership changes may have been relatively less suited. The context of many priority schools and the perceived imperative to demonstrate rapid change or improvement could be seen to be in tension to the go-slow principles of the programme.

'I think being a head of a school with the challenges she has, she's used to the Ofsted turnaround timeframe of rapid change and I think she's finding it hard to put the brakes on a little bit and work at the projects pace' (RIL F).

Some stakeholders highlighted that some of the larger academy trusts were more unpredictable in terms of their receptiveness to initial recruitment or continuing participation. There was a sense that decisions made at trust level did not always cohere with individual schools' preferences or motivations. Therefore, programme leads might wish to seek to engage in more dialogue with trust leads prior to recruitment and throughout the course of the programme.

'Certainly we had one academy trust, one of the national chains, that had a good number of schools at the start of the programme but then almost all of them withdrew. I presume that's due to other pressures. We weren't ever told explicitly. Other pressures, other demands, other priorities that were emerging through the trust. That was disappointing and a shame ... trusts do have that additional layer where you need to pull that lever to effect the change. So, possibly, if we were redesigning it, we might do more there, but I'd have to give that further thought' (WSRS Stakeholder).

Although the launch event was regarded as successful, there was acknowledgement by EEF stakeholders that the necessity to launch the DELTA programme virtually (in keeping with social distancing guidance) did impede relationship-building and levels of enthusiasm to some extent and may have affected schools' perceptions of, and commitment to, the DELTA programme.

School-level enablers and barriers

This section identifies enablers and barriers to implementing the evidence-informed processes and practices advocated in the RIL pilot in schools and, ultimately, the realisation of intended outcomes. It does so by drawing on the six detailed cross-school case studies and wider SIL and RIL interview data analysis. Some of the barriers and enablers were specific to implementing the TA guidance whereas others impacted on evidence-informed implementation processes more generally.

Enablers and barriers related to the DELTA programme design and its implementation at the school level have been presented in Findings 2: Perceptions of the Links Between Project Inputs and Outcomes.

Summary

A range of enablers and barriers were encountered at the school level that impacted specifically on the implementation of the TA guidance or the implementation of evidence-informed processes more generally. These included:

- the disjunction between the universal nature of the TA guidance and the specific nature and context of the TA workforce in individual schools;
- the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on TA deployment and increasing pupil needs;
- difficulties in recruiting and retaining TAs;
- school leadership 'buy-in' and the provision of time;
- teachers' underlying attitudes, capacity, and skills;
- accountability pressures; and
- challenges that impacted on establishing the school implementation team and enacting its intended role.

The disjunction between the universal nature of the TA guidance and the specific nature and context of the TA workforce in individual schools

The universal language of the TA guidance—for example, not taking account of variation in TA roles (such as distinctions between SEND TAs and class TAs) and the lack of explicit scaffolding to take account of on-the-ground variation and contextual differences in schools—was reported as a key barrier to implementation in some schools. The specific impediments reported by school interviewees included:

- differential contractual terms, pay rates, and role specifications that sometimes stipulated that TAs worked with named pupils, for example those with an EHCP or within a specialist integrated provision attached to the school. Sometimes this made fidelity to the TA guidance.
- TAs supporting a range of additional on-site provision including speech and language, autism services, nurture bases, and wider SEN services;
- EHCP funding for 'SEND' TAs, which meant that despite a school's commitment to move away from a 'Velcro' model, some contracts required that named TAs worked with individual high-needs pupils—'They have to be one-to-ones because that's what the funding is for' (Teacher FG, Case D).
- redeploying SEND TAs to work across the class or with other pupils was reported to be problematic: for example, if parents complained about a change from one-to-one support for their child, this necessitated additional work by staff explaining to parents that less support is beneficial for their independence; however, parents wanted their child to have their entitlement, irrespective of what the evidence suggests;
- high-needs SEND pupils with severe SEMH or emotional and behaviour difficulties (EBD) were frequently dysregulated, unable to access classroom teaching and learning, or were unsafe without one-to-one 'Velcro' support; some were also non-verbal—the TA guidance does not always align with this reality in classrooms;
- conflicts and confusion for some SEND pupils when their TA had multiple roles, for example, providing one to one pastoral or therapeutic interventions in one session then applying sanctions as class TA (Case E, TAs); and
- as budgets, roll numbers, and entitlements to Pupil Premium were factors influencing TA workforce size, there were large disparities in TA numbers across different schools and even across year groups in the same setting, for example, Case F had on average only one TA across four classes.

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on TA deployment

The DELTA programme leads could not have foreseen the emergence of a global pandemic and the unprecedented effects this had upon pupils and the wider education sector. In terms of theory of change, the impact of missed schooling was identified as a potential modifier of effect but this does not fully encompass the range of potential modifiers that were triggered in schools by the pandemic.

In practical terms, the pandemic had a host of impacts for the project, not least on the ways TAs were typically deployed. With increased staff absence it was frequently necessary for TAs to be responsible for whole classes and there were restrictions still in force around the extent to which staff could interact, which inevitably hampered communication between teachers and TAs. Often teachers and TAs were ‘fighting’ Covid-19 related issues in response to staff illness, absences, and shortages—and there was greater reliance on temporary agency TAs for emergency cover. Frequent disruptions and discontinuity were widely reported to have negatively impacted implementation due to TAs being spread thinly in school, covering classes, and absences.

‘They were in extraordinary war-like conditions, and we were fighting for their attention ... working with schools through a pandemic and coming out of the pandemic where TA practices had changed significantly in that period. One of the things that TAs were doing throughout the pandemic was taking whole classes, etc. So it wasn’t really the clean crack at it that we might have had based on the evidence base from which we were working, where it was, like, we want to make tweaks and changes to the ways that TAs are interacting with teachers in the classroom, etc. In many ways, it came at the right time because it was like a reset around TA practices, but it was also not necessarily business as usual’ (EEF stakeholder).

Difficulties in recruiting and retaining TAs

The pandemic and the associated inflationary pressures schools were also experiencing compounded pre-existing challenges concerning recruitment and retention of enough TAs. Across all schools, staff churn and TA capacity were major barriers that compromised the extent to which DELTA could be prioritised and implemented with fidelity. Increased expectations and pressures on TAs, poor pay, restrictive hours and contracts, and the rising cost of living all led to high levels of TA dissatisfaction and attrition. Some of the TAs who left had gained valuable DELTA experience. For example, in Case F, they had taken part in trials of practice change and were intended to model new practice for roll-out in September 2022, so the losses meant it was ‘back to square one’. Unlike the DELTA-experienced teachers leaving settings to work in other schools and ‘seeding’ DELTA knowledge, the departing TAs were often leaving the education sector. In addition to the knowledge ‘drain’, this inevitably meant that many schools struggled to replace TAs, a serious challenge that added to the instability of staffing and cover: ‘We’ve lost a lot of TAs, so the project hasn’t gone to plan. I think we’ve lost seven or eight since September (until March)’ (RIL A).

Increasing pupil needs due to the Covid-19 pandemic

In the aftermath of the pandemic during which staff had been required to ‘step up’, they were confronted with an educational landscape where pupils’ wellbeing had significantly worsened in terms of safeguarding issues, undiagnosed or unmet SEND needs, and heightened behavioural issues. The prevailing pressures on schools were to ensure that pupils ‘recover’ academically and socially as quickly as possible.

‘We’re in a situation, particularly post-Covid, where there’s a lot more dysregulation in schools, from children dysregulating in classrooms ... behaviour. There’s a huge challenge there. You can look at the statistics around SEMH needs, SEN needs, the explosion of EHCPs ... and waiting lists for all that’ (EEF Stakeholder).

Such factors led to some TA staff feeling uneasy and suspicious about a new initiative (DELTA) that seemed to require them to upskill when schools were short-staffed. In Case E, the RIL quoted a TA’s comment: ‘So I’m now a teacher on less money.’ Furthermore, in some settings SEND TAs were on lower pay rates than the class TAs. The unwillingness of MATs and the local authority to change TA contracts and pay grades represented a significant barrier in some schools (for example, in Case F). In effect, schools were asking their lowest paid staff to upskill for no additional financial incentive. There was acknowledgment by RILs, SILs, staff, and stakeholders that TAs—

‘aren’t paid in ways that some people would argue are aligned to what you’re asking them to do ... Staffing issues, not enough TAs, TAs not being paid enough to warrant doing some of this stuff with them. There were contractual issues. It’s a very challenging landscape’ (EEF Stakeholder).

However, there were instances where TAs were grateful for being ‘invested in’ in other ways such as through CPD entitlement, inclusion in whole-school meetings, and generally being more valued in school (for example, Case C). This

greater esteeming of TAs acted as an enabler. In addition, staff flux and the arrival of new TAs enabled a timely reset in some schools, particularly valuable in cases where the departing TAs had been resistant to practice change.

Senior leadership buy-in

There were instances in the case studies where senior leadership teams were said to have prioritised other initiatives above DELTA, for example, a city-led programme around behaviour management. One might make a judgement about the weight of importance a school placed on DELTA by considering the seniority of the SIL appointed, the composition of the school implementation team (if it was operational), and the extent to which schools were able to make room for DELTA on the whole-school agenda.

Schools approached selection of their SIL and school implementation team in different ways. In most instances, the SIL was a senior leader as instructed by the DELTA programme. Having this scope of authority enabled them to make executive decisions, keep the DELTA programme on the whole-school agenda, and ensure it dovetailed appropriately with other school improvement projects. The balance between authority on the one hand, and time and capacity to commit to the SIL role on the other, appeared to be optimised where SILs were deputy or assistant heads without a full teaching load.

In the rare instances where someone not on the senior leadership team was appointed as SIL (for example, a HLTA, middle leader, or SENCO), they tended to struggle to allocate sufficient time to do justice to the role and lacked the authority to drive decision-making for implementing change across school. In these cases, shortfalls in senior leadership support and whole-school prominence for the project tended to stymie progress. In a school with these stumbling blocks, the SIL recounted her frustrations and disappointment at the lost potential of DELTA.

'It's frustrating because I think the reason that I wanted to engage with this project is because I saw that there was a real need for this approach in this school ... there were so many initiatives that have been launched with a lot of enthusiasm and then just never followed through. I felt that having something as structured as DELTA could be the thing that showed people that actually this is a really, really good way to work. So, I'm really sad about the fact that DELTA just seems to have joined the ever-growing pile of things that were tried and launched with enthusiasm and didn't work. It's obviously made me look at my leadership of it ... I think if you look at all of the pinch points, I could tick them all off ... I don't know what impact there will be, and that's why I'm leaving, because it's horrible to work somewhere where you don't feel like you're having any impact' (SIL H, non-case).

Accountability pressures

There was evidence to suggest that schools facing Ofsted accountability pressures or in 'challenging circumstances' were more likely than others to be drawn into an unhelpful cycle:

'A key barrier is the accountability system ... one thing that I think was really, really positive that the EEF were getting across ... the fact that the guidance from the government, supported and driven by the EEF, is that the Pupil Premium support plan should be a three-year plan ... But the problem is, if the leaders that really drive and make those strategic decisions don't understand that, and they're awaiting an inspection, they will not prioritise it because they'll be prioritising things that they think Ofsted need to look at when there's an inspection. I'm afraid that does skew things' (EEF Stakeholder).

With the benefit of hindsight, one RIL conjectured that some of the schools that had been identified for wraparound support were simply not able to engage with it, such was the state of flux they were in.

'My point was I think that we targeted the wrong schools for wraparound ... I think some of my other schools were still in crisis. And you don't have changes of heads, deputies, assistant heads, and SENCOs unless you're in a level of crisis. You cannot take on, in my view, a project like this when you are in crisis' (RIL H, non-case).

However, in the case of a priority school not in crisis, a good Ofsted report during the course of the programme served to affirm the value of the DELTA changes. The SIL used the favourable report to praise and motivate staff. Teachers recognised the freedom they now had to trial and evaluate new practice without pressure to show instant results.

'We were in the window for Ofsted so we were under another umbrella of pressure and needing to show ... but our Ofsted went really well. You could see the impact of what we've done through our Ofsted report as well ... it's quoted that staff benefit from the levels of professional development, so that shows that what we've been doing has had an impact and [the feedback] was really positive about the [TAs] and how they were integrated and the impact that they're having ... and actually I've used that for our staff to say this is what we've got, let's keep going, let's keep implementing, and everybody is really on board with it, so it's really positive' (SIL D).

'We recently had our Ofsted and we got "good". That's a real weight off that you can now start focusing truly on—OK, let's trial this, if it doesn't work, there's no one breathing down your throat needing to see it work instantaneously. You can assess ... that didn't work, let's try this' (Teacher FG, Case D).

Challenges that impacted on establishing and enacting the intended role of the school implementation team

The composition of the school implementation team and how it functioned also varied. In general, across cases and in interviews, it appeared that the school implementation team was not as powerful a factor or component of the programme as originally intended—this was at least partially due to Covid-19 and the insufficient time referenced elsewhere. Logistically, getting a large group of staff together, with competing timetable pressures, was, in most instances, simply not possible. And where it was, such meetings tended to be infrequent and insufficiently long. Furthermore, because the programme was predominantly leadership-led (and, as noted earlier this section, there was a lack of understanding about the overall trajectory of the programme), SILs and senior leaders sometimes felt uncomfortable asking for the involvement of wider staff when their role, function, and value in the school implementation team was not always fully understood or easily justified. Instead, most school implementation teams operated more informally rather than holding frequent scheduled meetings where everyone's physical presence was required. Typically, the SIL, having attended the formal DELTA sessions and in consultation with the RIL and through the audits, would lead the drafting of the implementation plan and check in with the wider school implementation team. In some cases, this involved collaborative input from team members and in others it was looser—such as in Case B where the SIL described the liaising as a 'vibe check':

'I can't think of anything more professional to [describe it]. Yes, just to gauge their response to it, how much of the language that they're starting to use, how are they feeling about it, and does that link in with where we're at, do we need to adapt it based on what they're saying, that kind of thing' (SIL B).

This approach to school implementation team engagement, alongside the audits undertaken, still enabled the team members to be conduits for TAs and wider staff to inform the direction of the TA study but in a less time-consuming way.

'So, for me, it was nice to be a part of the team but then also be a mouthpiece, if you like, for other TAs and other LSAs—to say, if decisions were being made, or if things were going on, then I was going to be the person saying no, it doesn't work like that, this is how it works. As a TA doing the job, this is how it happens' (School implementation team, Case C).

However, the way the school implementation teams tended to operate meant that the leadership of the implementation process was concentrated in the SIL, so there was limited potential for wider capacity-building within schools for leadership of evidence-informed implementation processes in the future.

Creating the space for teacher and TA communication and readiness to enact the principles of the TA guidance

As explored in Findings 2: Evidence to Support the Theory of Change | SIL, Senior Leader and School Implementation Team Outcomes, some schools, especially secondaries, struggled to schedule time to get across DELTA messaging at a whole-school, strategic level. It was also challenging to make regular time for teacher-TA communications to support enactment of the teacher-TA agreements and the 'TA-teacher dance', and generally prepare TAs for their daily roles. These barriers negatively impacted school-level outcomes. Linked to the lack of communication was a lack of clarity about responsibility for different pupils, classes, and interventions, which was further blurred in situations where a

specific EHCP had been assigned to a TA or there was a specialised resource unit attached to a school (for example, for speech and language, autism, or nurture provision).

Teachers' underlying capacity, skills, and attitudes

A possible factor influencing teacher readiness to enact behavioural change as a result of DELTA concerns their capacity, commitment, and underlying skills and experience in practising quality-first teaching that caters for all levels of attainment in class, including differentiation (where appropriate) for SEND or other groups, which previously may have been the responsibility of TAs. Developing such capacity and skill was not a core feature of the DELTA programme. While the data informing this conjectured barrier emerged in some of the primary school case studies, a larger sample of secondary case studies may have also identified this factor. It is difficult to separate the impact of this specific factor on outcomes from the broader impacts of time and increasing additional needs in pupils in the post-Covid context.

A notable example was Case D where implementation processes were largely in line with the implementation guidance. The teachers interviewed were knowledgeable about the TA recommendations and were making shifts in their deployment of TAs to align with the recommendations but said that integrating the guidance into their own teaching practice was challenging: 'Some adults who are out of class can lose perspective on how difficult it is to do this in reality. And I would really like a bit more practical guidance' (Teacher FG, Case D). TAs' perspectives in the case studies also shed some light on the capacity or commitment of teachers to quality-first teaching: 'The teachers, they need to differentiate so much, actually you can't differentiate that much—I have five groups in my class ... It's just the work is too difficult, I guess'; the TA reported that following their suggestion for differentiated lesson objectives, the teacher's response was 'too much with too little resource' (TA FG, Case F).

In the secondary schools where data was collected, it appeared that teachers' esteem for TAs was not as high as in primary schools, both before and since DELTA, and there were reports that some teacher-TA relationships were problematic. It is hard to disentangle teachers' underlying attitudes from the pressures on them due to shortage of time and capacity, the challenges of TA staff churn, or indeed resistance to change generally. However, there was a sense emerging across the secondary schools' teacher and TA focus group data that teacher mindset about the value of the TA role was potentially a moderator of outcomes. This is consistent with TAs' reports: for example, in Case E, that teachers' willingness to enact DELTA practice was down to the attitude of individual teachers, resulting in patchy behavioural change across school. This factor is closely linked to the question of teacher buy-in for DELTA, especially in secondary schools, which is also influenced by the nature of the SIL's communications to teachers from the outset—how DELTA was pitched to teachers and whether the rationale for the programme, and the evidence base for the TA guidance, was conveyed clearly.

City-level enablers and barriers

Summary

- The two main enablers of city-level outcomes, as perceived by stakeholders, were (a) the EEF's reputation and status which heightened the standing of Bristol City Council in relation to school improvement and (b) DELTA's focus on TA deployment, which was an apolitical priority and relevant to all schools across the city.
- The Bristol context, which included instability in local authority strategic leadership, financial constraints, academisation, and MAT and school competition, was perceived to impede the achievement of intended city-level outcomes.
- While the Bristol case is typical of many fragmented local authorities and reflects the heterogeneous MAT-led school system, deeper engagement by the EEF with a broader range of key stakeholder in the city may be needed to support stronger city-level outcomes.

The EEF's reputation and status

Stakeholders perceived that the high-profile nature of the pilot partnership between the EEF and Bristol City Council encourage schools to buy-in. The local authority was seen as 'pulling all the stops out' and the EEF's reputation and status nationally served to heighten Bristol City Council's standing in leading school improvement.

Focus of the DELTA programme on TA deployment

Another enabler cited by the stakeholders was the focus on TA deployment and SEND, intentionally chosen because it was an apolitical priority and relevant to all schools across the city, including MATs perceived to be more challenging to engage. The appeal of additional, targeted support for priority schools was also mentioned as a contributory factor in helping to garner widespread, cross-city engagement and buy-in from schools.

Bristol context

Instability in local authority strategic leadership

In terms of city-level barriers, stakeholders referred to several years of turbulence at the level of director of education and senior levels of strategic leadership of education within Bristol City Council. The local authority had a weak track record of school performance and improvement, particularly for the most disadvantaged pupils across the city. This was in part attributed to educational leadership issues. As outlined in Findings 2: Evidence to Support the Theory of Change | City-Level Outcomes, Bristol City Council educational leadership instability at director level continued to be a major structural barrier to the optimisation of DELTA. This hampered the commitment to and early development of a follow-on project, according to stakeholders.

'What I wanted the Director to do was to message loud and clear to all schools at every opportunity across the city that this project was doing something that was quite unique. But to be quite honest we just didn't get that' (EEF stakeholder).

Financial constraints

Various stakeholders, including those at the Council who were highly committed to the pilot, were disappointed that ongoing local authority investment was not realisable at the scale required to develop the architecture necessary to keep system support roles (RILs) and the latent capacity in many school leaders going strongly beyond the end of the pilot. Bristol City Council and EEF stakeholders were not optimistic that these intended longer-term outcomes could be met, given the Council's multimillion-pound budget deficit and continuing leadership and strategic instability. With several senior posts unfilled, the funding of future projects was likely to be small-scale and challenging.

In previous years, the Council had accessed additional annual DfE grant funding to enable project development but 'that's just disappeared and there's nothing to replace it', adding to the paucity of funding at local level.

Academisation

Stakeholders pointed out that the government's current academisation agenda means that maintained schools or those in smaller MATs perceive that it is just a matter of time before they are forced to academise or merge. Coupled with increasing school and LA funding constraints, the academisation pressures were seen as longer term structural barriers likely to further increase fragmentation in the system. Despite the progress made by DELTA in building relationships and collaboration locally, Bristol City Council stakeholders acknowledged that the local authority's reduced role, influence, and budget going forwards will place it in a more distant position from schools. Also, despite its increasingly limited influence, the LA will continue to have statutory responsibility—unless reviewed by the DfE—for the outcomes of disadvantaged and SEND pupils and for supporting schools with those pupils. Stakeholders were aware of schools' anxieties about meeting the growing needs of pupils (and the complexity of those needs) as well as the ongoing variability in engagement of some MATs on these issues:

'I think the fractured nature of the [SEND] provision generally makes consistent, coherent conversations more of a challenge that it would have been otherwise' (EEF Stakeholder).

MAT and school competition

While the LA stakeholders felt that DELTA did 'exceptionally well to maintain that level of parity across the landscape', they noted that falling birth-rates across the city meant that primary schools are now competing for pupils. Where schools have specific skills, knowledge, or interventions that are selling points for that school, they are less likely to share that

knowledge or want to collaborate with other schools as much in future—again adding to the systemic barriers to building on the DELTA outcomes at city level.

Stakeholders contrasted the barriers and enablers in Bristol with those of the (more successful) EEF Lincolnshire TA deployment scale-up pilot. In that project, stakeholders reported that there was top-down strategy as well as energy from the bottom up, and coherent messaging and incentives from the local authority. This was described as ‘alignment of efforts at different levels of the system’ to maintain and sustain engagement longer term. Stakeholders considered that there were unique enabling factors at play in Lincolnshire, in contrast to the more varied, ‘messy’ school improvement landscape in Bristol, which was considered to be more typical of English educational contexts. While the Lincolnshire evaluation report (Maxwell et al., 2019c) identifies these unique enabling factors in Lincolnshire, it is important to note two other factors emerging in that evaluation. The first was the role played by the EEF consultant, a highly regarded and experienced former Director of Children’s Services who prior to the project undertook a significant amount of groundwork. The consultant brought together all the educational ‘movers and shakers’ in the county, built consensus among them, and continued to work with them formally and informally during the project by providing steering and challenge and troubleshooting when momentum was waning. Second, the project was led by an equal partnership between schools—including MATs—and the LA. Clearly, implementing such approaches would be much more challenging in the Bristol context, but if there had been deeper engagement by the EEF with a broader range of key stakeholders in the city, this may have supported stronger city-level outcomes.

Conclusion

Table 32: Summary of pilot findings

Research question	Finding
What evidence was there to support the theory of change?	<p>The intended pilot outcomes were partially achieved as detailed below. Some outcomes were delayed or impeded due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School implementation leads' knowledge and understanding of, commitment to, and skills in using evidence-informed processes and practices increased considerably in most schools. There was limited evidence of gains for other senior leaders not directly involved in the DELTA programme. There were modest gains for members of school implementation teams (where they functioned) in relation to evidence-informed TA deployment practices. In most schools some progress was made in aligning culture and processes with the implementation guidance, particularly in relation to the Foundations and Explore recommendations. Despite initial concerns, many school implementation leads now recognise that effective implementation is a gradual process, in line with the implementation guidance recommendations. Most schools made progress in aligning TA deployment with the TA guidance. Strong cognitive and attitudinal gains were reported for TAs, together with greater recognition of their roles and TA 'voice', but practice change was variable across schools. Changes for teachers were more mixed and more modest overall than for TAs and where teachers did not make the required practice changes it impeded TA practice change. There were some indications of evidence-informed processes and practices being championed and shared across Bristol and embedded in the Council's educational strategies and practices. <p>There was evidence, in some schools, to suggest that providing a sustained, integrated programme of training and support focused on using evidence-informed implementation processes to embed evidence-based practices is effective. The evaluation methodology does not allow causal claims to be made and cannot isolate the relative impacts of individual inputs, such as RIL support.</p>
How feasible was it to deliver the pilot?	<p>Suitably experienced and skilled RILs were recruited and retained and their support was valued by participants. RILs highly valued their own training and the support provided by the programme leaders.</p> <p>Overall, recruitment and retention of schools, particularly priority schools, was good. Recruitment and retention were challenging in some multi-academy trusts.</p> <p>There were high levels of participant satisfaction with the DELTA modules and wraparound support provided by RILs. Sense-making clinics were less well received.</p> <p>Limited progress was made in schools where there was a lack of senior leader support or where the school implementation lead did not have the authority to implement change. Challenging school conditions due to accountability pressures or the significant rise in pupils with additional and more severe needs during and following the Covid-19 pandemic also limited progress.</p> <p>Challenges in TA recruitment, retention, and resourcing were frequently reported to impede in-school implementation, as did perceptions in some schools that the TA guidance was not wholly appropriate to their context.</p> <p>Stakeholders perceived that Bristol City Council's diminishing influence across the city—in the context of academisation and resource constraints (reflecting the changing role of local authorities nationally) exacerbated by the flux in the leadership of education at the Council—was a barrier to establishing a city-wide evidence-informed ecosystem.</p>
Is the regional implementation lead role ready for scale-up as part of the EEF's approach to regional delivery?	<p>The RIL role has the potential for scale-up, with refinement, codification and extension to the role, enhanced oversight and steering of RILs' engagement with schools, and the support of key regional influencers who can bring all schools on board.</p> <p>Schools in particularly challenging circumstances may require a period of preparation support before they are able to engage effectively with the demands of an ambitious integrated programme such as DELTA.</p>

Formative findings

Outcomes

The DELTA programme was ambitious, requiring schools to deploy evidence-informed processes as set out in the implementation guidance to implement evidence-informed TA deployment practices. Despite it being delivered during a period of unprecedented challenge and disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, it was, with the exception of schools in some MATs, successful in securing school engagement and mostly maintaining a high level of school buy-in and commitment. The intended pilot outcomes were partially achieved. They were not fully achieved due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which we discuss later in this section, and a range of other factors discussed in the next section, Feasibility.

The main beneficiaries of the pilot were school implementation leads who gained knowledge and understanding of, commitment to, and skills in, evidence-informed school improvement. This reflects the emphasis placed on SILs in DELTA training and wraparound support. Limited gains were evidenced for senior leaders who were not SILs. Gains for school implementation teams (in schools that maintained such teams) were modest and mostly related to evidence-informed TA deployment. There was very limited evidence of team members' cognitive, attitudinal, or practice change related to the implementation guidance, which reflects the rather limited remit of the implementation teams in many schools.

Some progress was made in most schools in aligning their culture, processes, and practices with the implementation and TA recommendations. Progress was strongest for alignment with the TA guidance, as evidenced by the senior leader survey, which found large or moderate, statistically significant, positive changes in alignment. Qualitative evidence also indicated strong cognitive and attitudinal gains for TAs together with greater recognition of TA 'voice', although changes to practice were more modest. There was a more mixed picture for teacher changes, and when teachers did not make the required practice changes it impeded TAs trying to implement evidence-informed practices. It is unclear the extent to which the positive outcomes for TAs can be attributed to this pilot as many schools that we collected data from also provided MPTA training for TAs. However, it should be noted that schools' awareness of MPTA training and its potential benefits was due to the DELTA programme.

Survey and qualitative evidence indicated that progress in alignment with the implementation guidance was less advanced. Most schools increased, at least to some extent, their alignment with the evidence of Foundations for Effective Implementation and applied the principles of the Explore stage of implementation. However, there was significantly less evidence of progress in applying the principles of the Prepare, Deliver, and Sustain stages during the timeframe of the evaluation, in part due to delays resulting from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, most SILs who participated in qualitative data collection were keen to continue their role, and despite being hesitant at the start, valued the slower approach to school improvement and intended to continue this way of working.

There was some progress in achieving the intended city-level outcomes. Stakeholders and RILs were championing and sharing implementation principles and leading other evidence-informed responses; implementation principles were also informing Bristol City Council's wider strategies and practices. However, stakeholders considered that the longer term objective of implementing a city-wide evidence-informed ecosystem may not be achievable.

Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the achievement of intended outcomes

The pandemic presented specific challenges for participating schools that impacted on their engagement in the pilot and its outcomes. Senior leaders had to reprioritise resources, including staffing, in response to illness and staff shortages, in some cases compromising schools' capacity for longer term strategic objectives. This is likely to have contributed to the challenges in some schools associated with limited senior leader 'buy-in' to the DELTA programme.

The impact of the pandemic also contributed to the limited operation of school implementation teams and impeded the implementation of some of the TA recommendations, such as ensuring time and opportunities for establishing regular meetings and communications between teachers and TAs. However, regardless of the pandemic, the nature of TAs' roles and contracts, and lack of clarity on the purpose and expectations of school implementation teams, also played a part in the limited operation and effectiveness of these teams.

On a positive note, some schools saw the many disruptions and changes wrought by Covid-19 as an opportunity to reset TA practices, so the timing of DELTA was also welcomed by some.

While most SILs and RILs valued the affordances offered by the switch to more online, often hybrid delivery and support, there was also evidence that restrictions on face to face delivery and in-person wraparound visits were not optimal. RILs who could visit schools gained deeper understanding of school contexts and were better able to develop relationships with SILs and staff and tailor support better to meet schools' needs, which supported the achievement of intended outcomes. Greater reliance on online delivery also reduced the opportunities for schools to network and learn from each other, which may have impacted city-level outcomes.

There was evidence that some leaders were strongly committed to the implementation guidance principles, irrespective of the Covid-19 context, while others conflated the need for slower implementation pacing with the pandemic-related delays and disruptions. It is possible that post-pandemic, without having RILs to 'apply the brakes', some leaders may revert to the 'quick wins' culture of rapid school improvement—something the DELTA programme had sought to counteract.

The Covid-19 pandemic also had wider impacts on city-level outcomes, with Bristol City Council urgently switching to supporting schools in dealing with the pandemic rather than strategic school improvement projects, which may have affected director-level buy-in and capacity to promote DELTA.

In the view of the evaluators, the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic inevitably meant that progress towards outcomes was slower. This partly explains why many of the pilot's intended outcomes were not fully realised. It is not possible to precisely isolate the impact of the pandemic on DELTA outcomes nor to predict how it might have operated differently had it not been altered by Covid-19. However, there are some tentative indications of unexpected beneficial outcomes for schools participating in a supportive project like DELTA during this period of extreme challenge and disruption: having a slower, structured, longer term approach to change processes may provide leaders with useful learning and new skillsets for addressing pupils' changing needs in the context of ongoing severe staffing and budgetary challenges.

Although the pandemic had a marked impact on the DELTA programme and its outcomes, the evaluation also identified a set of additional factors that are likely to have had similar impacts irrespective of the Covid-19 pandemic. These are presented in the next section.

Feasibility

Regional implementation lead recruitment, selection, training, and support

The application of EEF processes for RIL recruitment and selection was successful in establishing a highly experienced team with the necessary characteristics and skills for success. Some RILs were based in the Bristol area and others further afield. Drawing on experts outside Bristol had benefits in terms of providing a high level of expertise and supporting dissemination of the pilot approach beyond the city. However, where RILs were located further afield their knowledge of the school context and provision of in-school support (which was found to be the most effective way for RILs to foster trust-based relationships and to gain deeper understanding of the school) were more limited.

RILs were very positive about their participation in the DELTA programme and judged their training to be of a very high quality. They felt that the collaborative approach, which engaged them in the ongoing development of the programme, had supported their work in schools. However, while recognising the iterative nature of programme development, they would have valued a more transparent indication of where the DELTA programme was going at the beginning and more emphasis on what to do in school, and how—including how to support schools to get over pinch-points. EEF stakeholders also recognised the need for a stronger focus on relationship-building in RIL training.

Securing and sustaining school engagement

Overall, the recruitment of priority and non-priority schools was successful, with a total of 93 initial registrations, including 29 of the 36 priority schools in the city. Of the 93 registered schools, 18 were 'non-starters' (that is, registered but did not go on to attend any events). Attendance records indicate relatively low levels of attrition for the remaining 71 schools (24 priority; 47 non-priority), a notable achievement given the demands on schools in the Covid-19 context. However, engaging and retaining schools in some MATs was problematic.

Recruitment was aided by the EEF's reputation as evidence experts and providers of high quality CPD, and Bristol City Council and WSRS provided direct support for the recruitment of priority schools. Most schools were primarily motivated to engage with DELTA because of the TA deployment element of the programme. The wider aims of the programme were not emphasised in publicity material and despite the programme leaders' emphasis on developing implementation leadership capacity, some participants had persisting misperceptions about the focus of the programme. Evidence suggests that some schools ceased participating in the programme because they were primarily looking for immediate, practical TA training.

RILs played an important role in keeping schools on board with the programme by encouraging module attendance and helping SILs schedule implementation to fit their context.

Schools are accustomed to rapid change processes and many had initial misgivings about the slow and gradual pace of the project. Although over time DELTA was largely successful in supporting schools to see the value of this approach, it was particularly challenging for schools required to demonstrate rapid improvement to address poor Ofsted gradings. A few ceased participation because of dissatisfaction with the slow pace of change.

DELTA modules and sense-making clinics

Since the RIL role was integrated within the DELTA programme, we first summarise general findings on the feasibility of the DELTA programme before moving on to findings related to the wraparound support and the RIL role.

Module workshops were the major component of the DELTA programme and were generally regarded as the most critical element. They were highly valued by participants for providing high-quality CPD led by experts. Associated resources such as proformas for an implementation plan and teacher-TA agreements were also valued, as was the Padlet, which provided easy access to all the programme resources. More use of school-led exemplification through SILs presenting their progress and practice would have been welcomed, as would engaging more participating school staff. It was perceived that the latter would have enabled enhanced collaboration, discussion, and mutual support back in school as well as ensure the building of broader capacity within schools for implementing evidence-informed processes and practices. This would help offset the negative impacts of SIL illness, absence, and staff churn. A stronger focus on how to gain buy-in from teachers and support them to make the necessary behavioural changes, together with signposting to training for quality-first teaching, may have helped SILs secure stronger teacher buy-in and support teachers to work more effectively with TAs.

Sense-making clinics were reported to vary in length, focus, and effectiveness and were generally regarded as a less critical input, particularly by some SILs who were receiving more tailored one to one support from RILs. We discuss wraparound support below in relation to the RIL role. Some SILs reported that the sense-making clinics focused on recapping module information, leaving insufficient time for RILs to respond to their specific implementation challenges. This issue was particularly marked for secondary SILs in primary-dominated sense-making clinics.

Wraparound support and the regional implementation lead role

The wraparound support provided by RILs was valued by SILs but varied in frequency, dosage, and mode of delivery (face to face or online). Face to face support was generally considered preferable as it fostered deeper engagement. Some RILs went 'above and beyond', especially in terms of their flexibility in the timing of support.

RILs were most effective in contexts where the SIL had the authority to lead change across their school. In these contexts, they were able to help lay the ground for effective implementation and provide reassurance to the SIL. Effective approaches included:

- supporting SILs to interpret audit findings and shape their implementation plans;
- providing pragmatic advice to SILs making intelligent adaptations to implementation processes, practices, and timescales in response to the school context; and
- acting as a critical friend to supportively challenge the SILs' thinking and actions.

However, in settings where the SIL did not have the requisite authority, skills, and capacity to lead the project as they wished, even highly committed and skilled RILs were unable to fully compensate for this barrier. School-level barriers are discussed further in the section below, Impact of School Conditions.

RILs' primary and sometimes exclusive focus was on providing support for the SIL. This appeared to reduce opportunities for wider capacity-building across the school. A stronger focus on early and continuing relationship-building, direct communication with headteachers and MAT CEOs, and a more proactive approach to troubleshooting may have helped overcome many potential barriers, for example, those linked to a lack of leadership buy-in. Enhanced support for school implementation teams may also have been beneficial. There was evidence that RIL support waned towards the end of the project in a few of the schools where qualitative data was collected. Stronger support at that time, when schools were making changes that directly impacted on TAs' and teachers' work, may have enabled SILs to reflect on and adapt their intended actions. In the absence of a steer from a RIL, these actions provoked some frustration and resistance to evidence-informed change by TAs and teachers.

Not all priority schools were aware of the scope and scale of the support that could be provided by their RIL. While EEF stakeholders were unsure whether a prescriptive, fixed blueprint of the RIL role would be helpful, evidence from the EEF, other stakeholders, RILs, and schools pointed to the need for greater clarification of the role and 'offer' to schools. Developing a set of active ingredients necessary for effective wraparound support was suggested by an EEF stakeholder in order to better capture the key driving mechanisms for what good wraparound support means in practice.

Many schools delayed the Deliver and Sustain stages of implementation until the autumn term, after RIL support had officially ended. Where RILs went 'above and beyond', extending their support into the autumn term, there was evidence that this was much needed, highly valued, and contributed to successful implementation—all indicating the benefit of RIL support extending right through into the Sustain stage. As noted earlier, there was evidence that the absence of RIL support at critical points in the implementation process could impede the achievement of intended outcomes.

There was very limited monitoring or steering of RILs in relation to the time spent and the focus of engagement with individual schools. This may be a missed opportunity for programme leaders and the Research School to ensure that RILs' time is being used most effectively and identify where RILs require additional support.

The school implementation lead role

There was clear evidence that the SIL role could only be fully effective if they had the authority to lead whole-school change. A further consideration for the SIL role is ensuring that they work with all staff who need to be brought on board and support them to make the necessary changes for potential outcomes to be realised. Generally, SILs paid less attention to securing teachers' buy-in and commitment than they did to TAs' engagement. Most SILs also did not provide any detailed guidance to teachers on quality-first teaching or how to work with TAs, yet the evaluation found that some teachers wanted this support. Overall, the more limited approach to gaining teacher buy-in and omission of specific support for teachers' behavioural change appeared to impede some TAs from making evidence-informed changes to their practices. It is important to note that the SIL's approach is not indicative of a shortcoming in their skillset, rather it reflects the limited information on how teachers should work with TAs in the guidance and the associated limited focus of RILs on guiding SILs on how to support teachers.

There is also scope for the SIL, supported by the RIL and wider SLT, to identify potential school conditions that are likely to impede the achievement of outcomes before embarking on implementation and to proactively try to minimise their impact. For example, strategies and actions could have been developed to improve the poor relationships between teachers and TAs in secondary schools where this was evident from the start.

Impact of school conditions

In a few schools, particularly where the SIL was not a member of the SLT, school-level barriers meant that little progress was made in implementing evidence-informed processes and practices. In other schools, school-level barriers impeded the full realisation of potential outcomes.

Senior leadership support remained a challenge in some schools despite the early messaging and consistent efforts by the programme leaders to engage senior leaders, for example, through the launch event and emphasising the critical role they have in supporting effective implementation. A lack of senior leader support exacerbated other barriers, such

as the provision of time for SILs, school implementation teams, teachers, and TAs to engage with the DELTA programme.

The main school-level barrier hindering the functioning of school implementation teams was lack of time and cover for all members to meet at regular intervals. A few teams were also demotivated at an early stage by uncertainty about what they would be doing and frustrated by the lack of concrete action and immediate training for TAs.

Workforce constraints, due to difficulties in recruiting and retaining TAs driven by low pay and disparities in pay rates for different types of TAs in Bristol, had a negative impact on progress in implementing the TA guidance. A further challenge to implementing the TA guidance was the rising numbers of pupils with additional (and more severe) needs, including with new EHCPs (in the post-Covid context), which often stipulated one to one support. Combined with TA understaffing, this stretched schools' resources for SEND pupils even more thinly and posed challenges for SILs trying to plan, prepare, and deliver changes to TA deployment and practice.

More broadly, in some schools, particularly those addressing poor Ofsted gradings, accountability pressures created some tensions between demonstrating rapid improvement and adhering to the slow approach to school improvement advocated in the implementation guidance.

The challenges faced by Bristol City Council and their effect on the pilot

The fragmented nature of schooling across Bristol, the limited engagement of some large MATs in the DELTA programme, leadership instability, and more limited influence of the LA combined to impede the pilot realising its full potential at city level. In addition, the impact of the Covid-19 related pressures and the subsequent national and LA education funding cuts have further reduced the resource available to build on DELTA's momentum and outcomes. The challenges faced by Bristol City Council are similar to those present in many other local authorities.

More specifically, with regard to implementing the TA guidance, Bristol City Council's pay structure for different types of TA appeared to impede the willingness of some TAs to engage with the desired changes to their roles and practices. In addition, EHCPs produced by the LA that specified support by a sole named TA were also perceived as a barrier, as was resourcing to support pupils with SEND.

Readiness for scale-up of the regional implementation lead role

Given the integrated nature of the DELTA programme, with the DELTA modules and (to a lesser extent) the sense-making clinics providing the key content, resources, and structure for the implementation of the RIL role, it was only possible, in this evaluation, to assess readiness for scale-up of the RIL role in the context of it being situated within a comprehensive sustained programme of workshops and supporting resources. It should be noted that scaling up this type of approach would require significant investment.

The DELTA programme was not able to achieve all its intended outcomes in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and other barriers to success that were discussed in the Feasibility section above. However, this ambitious programme did realise important outcomes related to developing a cadre of experts able to support evidence-informed school improvement and advancing this across a significant number of Bristol schools. This points to the resilience of the programme design and execution, which might bode well for application to other projects, particularly in the context of ongoing social and economic crises that are impacting education. The framework developed for the programme integrates training and in-school support and evidence-informed processes and practices. These features, together with the programme being sustained over time, appears to offer a useful framework that with some refinement can inform the design of similar programmes in the future as well as programmes that focus on establishing evidence-informed practices advocated in other EEF guidance documents. In addition, a bank of high-quality training materials and supporting resources were developed during the pilot that could be used in future programmes.

The pilot also made considerable progress in developing a framework for the RIL role that can support schools with the highest levels of disadvantage, together with establishing RIL recruitment and selection processes and a valued training programme for RILs. The evaluation evidence indicates that further refinement, codification and extension of the role, and associated changes to RIL training have the potential to address some of the barriers to success encountered in the pilot and more fully realise potential outcomes.

A final consideration in relation to readiness to scale-up is consideration of what is required at a city or regional level to support the achievement of intended outcomes. As indicated earlier, there were significant city-level barriers in Bristol that impeded the achievement of some outcomes during the pilot and so the opportunities for more significant longer-term change appeared limited. This suggests that some changes in how the EEF works in a city or region—and who they engage with—would need to be made for scale-up to be successful.

The issues raised in this section and associated suggestions for the future development of programmes that seek to deploy RILs to support evidence-informed school improvement are discussed in the Interpretation and Lessons Learned sections below. Overall, the evaluators consider that this pilot has the potential for scale-up as part of EEF regional delivery if the lessons learned presented in Figures 4 to 7 are taken on board in the future development of DELTA or similar programmes that focus on other evidence-informed practices.

Interpretation

As set out in the Introduction, the design of the RIL pilot was predicated on the premise that evidence-informed practice in schools relied on the interaction and alignment of four factors (Sharples, 2019):

- the quality and usefulness of the evidence;
- the presence of skilled research intermediaries;
- the receptiveness and capacity of schools as evidence users; and
- the alignment with the wider school system.

In this section we consider these aspects in relation to the findings of the RIL pilot to inform suggestions for the further development of DELTA and similar future programmes that deploy RILs to support evidence-informed school improvement. Since the DELTA RILs acted as research intermediaries operating at the interface between the city authorities and schools, we also draw out some more general observations about the role and practice of research intermediaries in such a context that may have wider application.

Quality and usefulness of the evidence

The implementation and TA guidance were central in shaping the DELTA programme including the nature and pattern of RIL wraparound support. Mirroring the findings of other evaluations (for example, Maxwell et al., 2019c), most participants were very positive about the clarity, usefulness, and accessibility of the guidance documents. The simplified, one-page graphic summaries were particularly valued.

However, there were perceptions in some schools that the TA guidance was not fully appropriate or applicable in their context. In relation to the TA guidance, some interviewees referred to a disjunction between the universality of the guidance and the specific characteristics of their own TA workforce and different categories of TAs (for example, class-based TAs versus TAs who work in specialist centres with particular groups of pupils). A few schools that had ceased to participate judged the TA guidance to be inapplicable because they only had SEND TAs who could not be redeployed at class level. Some secondary school participants were concerned that the TA guidance did not acknowledge that there are marked differences in TA deployment between secondary and primary schools relating to, for example, departmental structures and subject teaching.

In relation to the implementation guidance, some interviewees suggested its relevance and applicability was compromised by the challenges they were facing in the post Covid-period (see the section Impact of School Conditions).

While we are not suggesting that the evidence base presented in the guidance documents is flawed, the EEF may wish to consider how best to address these perceptions and how to achieve a better ‘contextual fit’ between the evidence presented in guidance documents and schools’ current contexts. While the RIL has a central role to play in bridging this gap, this may be further supported by actions such as developing additional contextualised resources that more visibly acknowledge specific contextual differences and challenges. For example, the TA guidance could make more explicit reference to the particular structures and challenges in secondary schools. The additional barriers faced by schools in a worsening national socio-economic crisis could also be acknowledged in revised pinch-points documents.

Presence of skilled research intermediaries

As noted, the RILs undertook the role of research intermediaries. The findings of this evaluation broadly align with prior evidence about the necessary characteristics and capacities of research intermediaries that enable them to engage and support schools to deploy evidence-informed practices (see for example, Maxwell et al., 2022). In addition, this pilot has further advanced the evidence base on research brokerage by piloting an integrated approach that provides support for using evidence-informed implementation processes to embed evidence-informed practices. This approach was central to the overall DELTA programme design as well as being advanced through the four pillars of the RIL competency framework (Appendix 1) and RIL training. RILs played a pivotal role in ensuring that the integrated approach advocated in DELTA modules and sense-making clinics was enacted in schools. There was good qualitative evidence to suggest that the following characteristics and capabilities would be required for a RIL, or other research intermediary role, when considering integrated approaches in other contexts:

- deep understanding, expertise, and experience of implementation processes and experience of implementing the specific evidence-informed practices that are the focus of the training programme;
- strong leadership track-record and respected for their knowledge, skills, and hands-on experience of school improvement and the current realities of school life and contexts;
- high levels of interpersonal and communication skills, including the ability to engender trust, build and maintain effective relationships, offer a responsive balance of support and challenge as a 'critical friend' to SILs, and confidently influence and challenge school and MAT leaders;
- skilled in assessing needs, co-designing and tailoring support, deploying directive and non-directive support approaches, intelligently adapting advice and support to the school context, and helping school staff identify linkages across policy and practice;
- proactive, empathic, curious, committed to the aims of the programme, invested in equity, and able to address power differentials;
- able to commit sufficient time to the role and adopt a flexible approach to delivering support; and
- awareness of the wider system-level context and ability to link schools into system-level opportunities and networks.

While the presence of skilled research intermediaries is crucial, we suggest that this premise for embedding evidence-informed school improvement needs to be extended to encompass the 'what' and 'how' of providing effective support. The RIL competency framework was valued by RILs and captures many of the characteristics of effective research intermediaries that are set out above. However, it does not offer guidance on *how* these competencies should be operationalised in wraparound support and RILs would have welcomed more guidance on conducting their work in school.

We concur with the EEF stakeholders' view that it would be beneficial to identify the active ingredients necessary to trigger the underlying mechanisms that lead to the intended outcomes of wraparound support.

While EEF stakeholders were unsure whether a prescriptive, fixed blueprint for the RIL role would be helpful, evidence from this study clearly points to the need for greater clarification and codification of the role. This would include clear expectations about the time RILs should spend in individual schools as well as the range of support approaches and specific activities they should draw from in tailoring support, the modality of support, and how their work will be monitored. The evaluation also identified areas where there is a need to refine the RIL role to engage schools more effectively and to fully realise potential outcomes, for example, by focusing more strongly on building and sustaining relationships, engaging with headteachers and MAT CEOs, and supporting the school implementation team. Table 33 presents a list of lessons learned about the RIL role, RIL recruitment, and training and support based on our evaluation evidence. The list may provide a useful basis for the further development of the DELTA programme and of other similar programmes as well as contributing to illuminating the *how* of wraparound support.

A further finding from this evaluation was that the duration of RIL support was crucial: potential outcomes are unlikely to be fully realised unless RIL support to embed the Foundations for evidence-informed school improvement is followed by further support at all four of the implementation stages: Explore, Prepare, Deliver, and Sustain.

The receptiveness and capacity of schools as evidence users

This evaluation, like many other studies of evidence-informed school improvement, found that the receptiveness and capacity of schools as evidence users was critical to success. In a few instances, school conditions were such that little progress was made. This tended to be schools where the SIL was not a senior leader and senior leadership support was lacking. Difficulties in recruiting and retaining TAs were also a key impediment to realising the potential of the DELTA programme. As discussed, the particular context for DELTA of the Covid-19 pandemic followed by increased pupil needs in the post-Covid context have all negatively impacted on schools' receptiveness and capacity to commit to complex long-term change projects.

Two key questions that the evaluation findings illuminate are, first, how should schools be selected for inclusion in programmes such as DELTA? Second, while we acknowledge that RILs have provided stronger support for building receptiveness and capacity in schools than is the case in many other programmes, can further adaptations to the RIL role have a stronger impact on mitigating the effects of school-level barriers?

Focusing on the first question, RILs perceived that some schools in most need of their support were not designated as 'priority schools', which indicates the importance of using local intelligence to supplement national data on disadvantage when identifying schools to target for support. Perhaps a more surprising finding was that RILs considered that some schools were unsuitable or not ready for RIL support. They pointed to schools with a 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' Ofsted grading, which required them to demonstrate rapid improvement, and to schools where leadership was unstable. They also pointed to schools where the SIL was not a senior leader or had been unable to gain access to school structures, leaders, and the wider school community. While there may be a small minority of schools that are not at the point of being able to engage meaningfully with an ambitious programme such as DELTA, the evaluation findings indicate that codifying, refining, and extending the RIL role has the potential to enable engagement of at least some harder-to-reach schools. For example, schools in the most challenging circumstances could be provided with a period of RIL support prior to the programme that prepares and equips them to commit and fully participate once enrolled. This preparatory RIL support could include establishing trusting relationships with headteachers and MAT CEOs, gaining a deeper understanding of the school context, and agreeing the most appropriate package of tailored support.

Across all participating schools, establishing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the programme leaders, RILs, and school or MAT leaders could help all parties to formalise their respective roles and responsibilities and confirm their commitment to undertaking those responsibilities. This could include a commitment from a senior leader to undertake the SIL role.

The evaluation evidence suggests that a RIL role that incorporates a stronger focus on working directly with headteachers (where they are not the SILs) and MAT CEOs has the potential to reduce the impact of at least some school-level barriers to evidence use. This may helpfully include proactive troubleshooting where school-level barriers are impeding implementation. Enhanced support for the establishment and work of the school implementation team would also be beneficial.

There is also evidence to suggest that the potential of the RIL role in supporting the contextualisation of the evidence may not have been fully realised in all schools. In schools where SILs or other staff perceive that the EEF guidance is not relevant or applicable, there could be more focus on the RIL offering challenge as well as making explicit links between the evidence and the school context. It appears that secondary schools may particularly benefit from this approach.

A further point for reflection in relation to school receptiveness to evidence-informed TA deployment was the enthusiasm shown by schools for TA training. This was evident in the initial misconceptions that DELTA would provide TA training and the later uptake of MPTA training for TAs. The DELTA programme maintains fidelity to the evidence by focusing on establishing the conditions necessary for effective evidence-informed implementation in schools and the changes senior leaders need to put in place to secure effective TA deployment. To support recruitment and retention, while maintaining

fidelity to the evidence, in any future delivery of DELTA it may be helpful to explicitly signpost at the outset the stage in the implementation journey when it is appropriate for schools to provide TA training. When this stage is reached, links to appropriate training (such as MPTA) should be provided, and programme leaders may wish to consider providing workshops for TAs or tasking RILs to work with SILs to facilitate in-school TA training.

Alignment with the wider school system

As noted in the Introduction, supporting individual schools to implement evidence-informed practices and processes is insufficient, on its own, to bring about substantial and sustainable change. It is also necessary for the wider education system to support the desired changes. A very effective and productive partnership between EEF leaders, Bristol City Council, and the Research School was established for the DELTA project which had success in supporting individual schools. However, in the context of a fragmented education system, this partnership did not have the influence or resource to bring about transformative change in evidence-use across the city. This finding indicates the need in Bristol, as in any other cities or regions that implement a similar approach, to build strong partnerships that encompass all the key influencers, including regional commissioners and teaching school hub directors, and recognise that MATs, rather than individual schools or LAs, are becoming the established unit of change in the education system. Including MAT CEOs as equal partners would appear necessary to realise such an ambition and to bring insights, leverage, and influence to the partnerships.

This has implications for the EEF's work at the national level, which could include the EEF establishing system-level partnerships with large MATs and other organisations such as the National Institute for Teaching, and possibly jointly badged programmes, to benefit a much wider set of schools and bridge some of the fragmentation at the regional system level. This type of partnership working at national level as well as city or regional partnerships would require acknowledgement of, and integration with, existing work being done by partners to embed evidence-informed school improvement.

Lessons learned

We summarise in Table 33 to

Table 36 the key learning from this pilot that the EEF may wish to draw on when considering any future delivery of the DELTA programme or if the RIL role is to be scaled up as part of regional delivery.

Table 33: RIL recruitment, training and role—lessons learned

RIL recruitment

Generally, applicants from the city or region in which the programme is located should be prioritised—to maximise the opportunities for in-school support and build a cadre of experts that contribute to enhancing the city or regional ecosystem for evidence-informed processes and practice.

RIL training and support

Would be enhanced by:

- a transparent overview of programme direction and RIL offer from outset;
- a very strong focus on:
 - building and maintaining relationships;
 - how RILs can address the major challenges that schools face at each point in the implementation process; and
 - a pinch points document with guidance for how best to tailor wraparound support at each pinch point may be helpful;
- incorporating specific training on:
 - brokering headteacher and MAT CEO support—including, where appropriate, how to address power differentials;
 - supporting school implementation teams;
 - co-designing and tailoring support for an individual school;
 - intelligent adaptation and 'hands-on' approaches to steering fidelity to the evidence;
 - a wider range of approaches to providing support—including directive as well as non-directive support; and
 - helping staff identify linkages across policies and practices.

Refining and codifying the RIL role

Clarifying what effective wraparound support means in practice could be supported by drawing out a set of the active ingredients that this pilot and other research on research intermediaries identify as necessary to trigger the underlying mechanisms that lead to the intended outcomes of wraparound support.

The majority of wraparound support should be provided in-school rather than online as this was found to be the most effective way for RILs to foster trust-based relationships and to gain deeper understanding of the school.

RIL support is required over the full duration of implementation in school to enable schools to address critical pinch points, particularly in the Prepare and Deliver stages, and to plan for the Sustain stage.

Incorporating more directive support, which includes focused guidance and challenge in addition to more non-directive approaches to support, may be more effective in realising intended outcomes.

Enhanced codification of the RIL role and offer would help RILs better understand what is required of them and help schools better understand what support they can access. Such codification may usefully include:

- identifying the methods, types of activities, and modality of support that fall within wraparound support and creating a menu of support options—which is made available to SILs;
- a clear set of expectations about the amount of time they should spend providing wraparound support (as opposed to a total time allocation for any programme-related work), with particular emphasis on providing in-school rather than online support; and
- guidance on who, beyond the SIL, the RIL should work directly with in schools, for example, the headteacher or MAT CEO and the school implementation team; this could also clarify the purpose of engaging with these staff and the types of approaches to be taken.

Enhanced monitoring and oversight of RIL activity in schools by programme leaders could ensure that all schools receive appropriate support, that any additional training or support needs for RILs are identified, and resources are deployed where they are most needed.

Extending the RIL role

Attrition and potential barriers to schools implementing evidence-informed school improvement may be minimised by:

- RILs brokering the support of headteachers and MAT CEOs—and ongoing engagement with them—to troubleshoot any issues that require their intervention;
- deeper engagement and stronger relationship-building at the outset of the programme, ideally beginning during the recruitment and onboarding stage, to build trust and discuss the schools' needs, priorities, and context before negotiating the most appropriate tailored support the RIL can offer throughout the programme; and
- increasing support for school implementation teams.

To make the programme accessible to schools that are the target for EEF support, it may be beneficial to:

- provide a period of support prior to the programme for schools in the most challenging circumstances that prepares and equips them to commit to and fully participate in an ambitious programme such as DELTA.

Extending the focus of the RIL role and competency framework to incorporate awareness of the wider system-level context, and RILs' engagement with system-level opportunities and linkages could enhance the support they provide to schools

Table 34: School engagement at the programme level—lessons learned

Establishing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the programme leaders, RILs, and school or MAT leaders could help all parties to formalise their respective roles and responsibilities and confirm their commitment to undertake those responsibilities. This should include a commitment of a senior leader to undertake the SIL role.

Retention of schools could be aided by:

- a stronger emphasis—in publicity and pre-launch, launch, and early workshops—of the programme's intention to support the development of leadership capability and capacity to deploy evidence-informed process, in addition to the well-publicised focus on the specific practices to be implemented;
- programme leaders and RILs being more explicit with senior leaders and SILs at the start that their implementation plan, as the basis for action, would not be finalised until well into the programme; and
- ongoing liaison with MAT leaders and other key influencers to troubleshoot issues as they arise.

Codifying the purpose of school implementation teams and a set of expectations about what the team should be doing, and appropriate methods to use, may help realise the potential of such teams to support implementation in schools as well as building wider school capacity for evidence-informed school improvement.

Providing support from the RIL and in modules to enable SILs to secure buy-in and the necessary behavioural change from all staff (in DELTA this relates to teachers and well as TAs) and to identify and proactively minimise school-level barriers that are likely to impede positive effects would enhance outcomes.

Using local intelligence to supplement national school data to:

- ensure resources are targeted at the appropriate schools; and
- assess whether schools need additional support prior to embarking on DELTA or a similar programme, and whether this is best provided by a RIL or other provider, or if the school conditions are such that it would not be able to benefit from RIL support.

Table 35: DELTA modules and sense-making clinics and EEF guidance—lessons learned

Learning on the DELTA programme could be enhanced by:

- the inclusion of more school-led exemplification in DELTA modules, including SILs presenting their progress;
- more time in sense-making clinics being dedicated to addressing specific issues in schools rather than recapping module content; and
- including content on gaining buy-in from teachers and supporting them in working with TAs.

Engaging more participating school staff in the DELTA modules could enable enhanced collaboration, discussion, and mutual support back in school and increase capacity within schools for evidence-informed improvement. This would require additional staff commitment, which may not be feasible in all schools.

EEF guidance may be perceived by schools as more relevant and applicable to their context by:

- acknowledging the varying contexts in schools in guidance documents and the development of more contextually specific supporting resources: for the TA guidance, this includes recognising the differing roles of TAs, varying numbers of TAs in schools, the requirements of many ECHPs for one to one support from a TA, as well as the differences in secondary school settings.

Table 36: City, regional, and national system-levels—lessons learned

A more extended scoping phase—which includes building relationships with a broader range of key influencers in a city or region prior to launching DELTA or a similar programme, sustaining those relationships, and taking a proactive approach to troubleshooting—is likely to engage a wider group of schools and reduce attrition.

A stronger focus on developing partnerships with MATs is of increasing importance as MATs, rather than individual schools or LAs, are becoming the established unit of change in the system. This may include, at city or regional level:

- including MAT CEOs as part of a steering partnership to bring insights, leverage, and influence and to support buy-in; and at a national level,
- the EEF establishing system-level partnerships with large MATs and other organisations such as the National Institute for Teaching, possibly launching jointly badged programmes and projects, to benefit a much wider set of schools and bridge some of the fragmentation at the regional system level.

A more coordinated approach to support evidence-informed school improvement—at city, regional, and national levels—that acknowledges existing support from MATs, LAs, and others. Support that seeks to either integrate EEF work with other provision or informs the development of additional and complementary support may be a more sustainable approach in the longer term as well as enhancing buy-in to EEF-led initiatives.

There is a need to identify city-wide, regional, or national system-level pinch points at the outset and plan how these will be addressed as well as adapt plans in response to new crises and unforeseen obstacles.

System-wide pressures and constraints are a major impediment to implementing evidence-informed school improvement that need to be considered in programme design and which the EEF may wish to influence at national level. These include:

- accountability pressures, particularly meeting the Ofsted requirements in general and specifically for rapid change when a poor grade has been given;
- financial pressures that impact on staffing levels and the time that can be made available for evidence-informed improvement; and
- post-Covid-19 pressures that include increased numbers of pupils with additional needs.

Evaluation limitations

Since this was a pilot, the evaluation aimed to provide both formative feedback to inform programme development and a summative assessment of impact to contribute to informing the further development of the EEF's approach to regional delivery. There was inevitably some tension between the formative and summative aims. Programme leads would have preferred a stronger emphasis on the formative aspects of the evaluation and the validity of the summative assessment of impact was limited, to some extent, by the ongoing changes as the pilot was developed. We note, however, that RILs reported finding the research interviews at different timepoints to be helpful opportunities for reflection on their role.

Since this was a developmental pilot, an experimental design was inappropriate. However, this meant that it was not possible to identify any causal impact of the wraparound support provided by RILs by means of comparison with a control group participating solely in the DELTA modules and sense-making clinics.

Turning to the specific data collection methods, the senior leader survey had a number of limitations as discussed in the Methods section. The design of Likert scale questions for the 'implementation recommendations' questions was particularly problematic as the six recommendations are each broken down into detailed sets of principles or practices that are not easily reducible to a short set of questions. Also, there are overlaps between the recommendations and some have precise technical meanings that may not be apparent to senior leaders in schools. Further, it was not possible to widely test the validity and reliability of the survey measures prior to survey distribution, which brings limitations as to the level of confidence we can have that the survey is measuring the intended concepts. We also note that the baseline ratings on the Likert scales were generally high—the majority of respondents considered each statement to be important or agreed with the statements—despite the mitigations that were put in place. This may be due to respondents not fully understanding aspects of the implementation guidance or TA guidance at baseline and so rating some items too highly or due to the subjective self-report nature of Likert scales. Thus 'room for improvement' from baseline to follow-up was limited. An enhanced understanding by respondents at the time of the follow-up survey may have led to ratings that were more accurate, with the overall impact being that some changes may have been greater than it appears from the survey analysis.

It is also important to note that the survey was completed by a headteacher or other senior leader. While the majority of these were SILs, a small minority did not undertake this role. It was not possible to target SILs as they were not identified until after the start of programme delivery. Further, in a number of cases (17), the member of staff who completed the follow-up survey was different to the individual completing at baseline due to issues such as staff leaving their posts or changes in roles. This is often the case in 'institutional level' surveys rather than individual level surveys, bringing with it the risk of varying interpretations of questions between baseline and follow-up.

At the point of analysis this issue was considered in full and we concluded that the best approach would be to proceed with the full sample to allow the maximum possible sample size for priority schools and to permit an analysis of responses from these schools. If we had proceeded with individual matched responses only then we would have had just eight priority schools for analysis compared to the 15 in the existing analysis. A sample size of eight would have been too small to make any meaningful comparisons between priority and non-priority schools. These comparisons were important to allow comparison and synthesis with the qualitative findings, which focus on priority schools only. Not being able to make these comparisons would have significantly limited interpretation of the qualitative findings since we would have been unable to assess any changes in priority schools as a group. We make every effort at the point of data collection to capture a response from the same individual at follow up given that we had collected individual email addresses at baseline, however, despite this we found that there was a large turnover in staff and we did not want to exclude responses simply because a different individual was in post. As discussed in the report, the quantitative findings are only indicative and have multiple caveats, however the fact that the qualitative findings largely support the quantitative findings allows us to have more confidence in the quantitative findings as they stand.

While the qualitative data has provided useful in-depth insights at different stages in the pilot, it is likely that the case studies may over-represent perspectives from schools that were positive about the DELTA programme and had progressed furthest with in-school implementation. Schools contacted for case studies that perceived that they had not made sufficient progress with in-school implementation declined to take part.

As agreed with the EEF at the start of the pilot, recording and analysing management information data such as recruitment, attendance, and withdrawal data and details of RIL activity was out of scope for the external evaluation. However, it became clear as the pilot progressed that this information was essential to provide the context for other evaluation findings, thus the evaluators drew on administrative data held by WSRS for the purposes of this report. Our analyses should be treated with some caution. While accurate records of the schools attending each module were kept by WSRS, moving forward this could be implemented in a more systematic way with a process in place for recording official withdrawal over the duration of the whole programme and reasons for withdrawal. The data collected on sense-making clinics and on wraparound support should also be treated with caution. Going forward, it would be helpful if the RILs recorded details of in-school activity regularly as the programme progressed rather than retrospectively as was the case in the pilot. Also, for future studies it would be helpful to agree a set of categories to capture the different activities that RILs undertake in schools to ensure greater consistency of measurement collection across respondents.

Finally, given that the pilot was evolving and developmental, ‘compliance’ was not defined for this evaluation and therefore not probed or analysed. While it could have been possible, and to some extent helpful, to define compliance in relation to attendance at DELTA modules and sense-making clinics, the main focus of the pilot was the RIL role, not module delivery and attendance. What RILs were expected to do in schools and how they were to go about this was not sufficiently developed to agree a compliance measure at the start of the pilot. However, this would be valuable in any future research.

Future research and publications

We recommend that any scale-up of the pilot is accompanied by further research to address several questions. The most critical to be answered is, ‘Does the RIL role bring any added value to evidence-informed school improvement in schools with the highest levels of disadvantage?’ This may be addressed through an experimental design (potentially three-armed) comparing:

- a sustained programme of workshops and sense-making clinics plus wraparound support from a RIL;
- a sustained programme of workshops and sense-making clinics only; and
- business as usual—for this research this may be a short course led by a Research School focusing on the same evidence-informed practices as the more sustained programmes.

We suggest that such evaluations should develop validated scales if the main outcome measures are based on alignment with EEF recommendations. Alternatively, the evaluation could have a longer duration and measure the intended final outcome of improved pupil attainment. We consider it important that the RIL role is further codified to enable future evaluations to provide rigorous findings on what works and what doesn’t, and in what context. This would include making methods of in-school support more explicit and setting out who is expected to receive this support if it is to be extended beyond the SIL.

As advocated by the programme leads, developing DELTA and similar programmes would be aided by identifying the active ingredients of the RIL role. This could be advanced by conducting a rapid conceptual review of the key features of the support provided by research intermediaries and the associated impacts. Such a study may also be helpful in supporting the development of a categorical framework for describing methods of support.

This study also raised some broader questions that would benefit from further research, including:

- What are the most effective methods for engaging schools with a high level of disadvantaged pupils in evidence-improved school improvement? And a related sub-question:
 - What forms of evidence-informed support are most effective to support schools with a ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’ Ofsted grading?
- How can the EEF guidance and supporting resources be adapted to ensure that all schools and staff groups perceive them as relevant and applicable in their own context?

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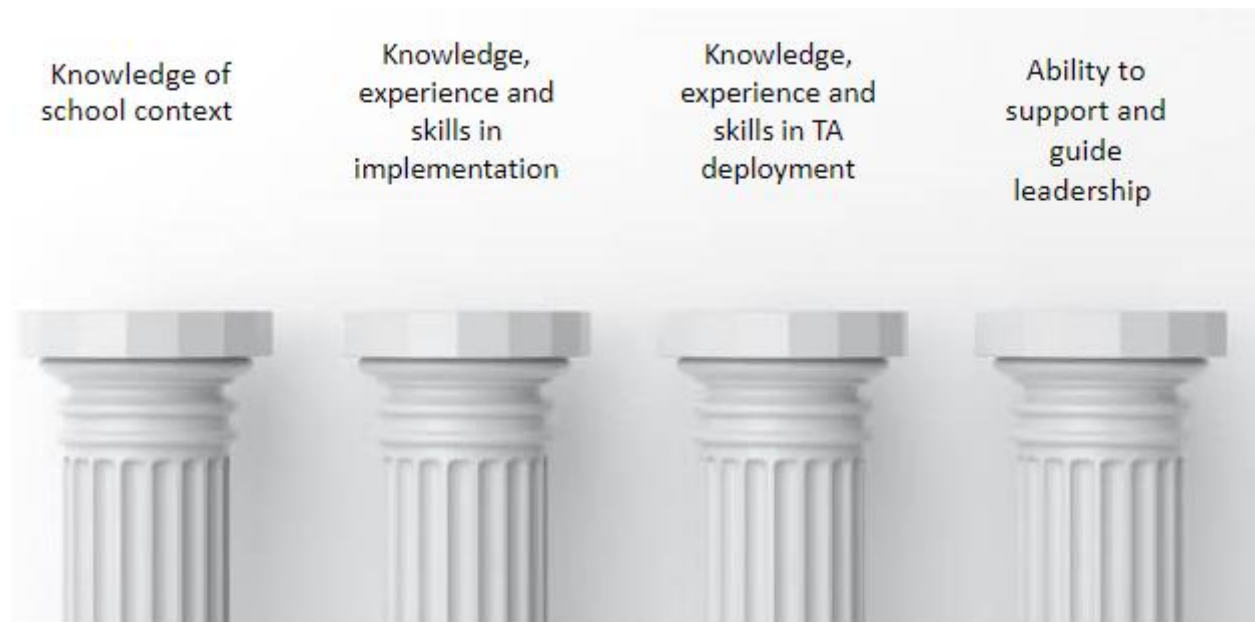
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Appendices

Appendix 1: EEF Regional Implementation Leads – Competency framework



RILs are education professionals with relevant experience of supporting evidence use and implementation in schools. As a RIL, you will help school leaders and Implementation Teams make, and act on, evidence-informed decisions as part of the Bristol DELTA project. There are four pillars to the competencies for the RIL role:

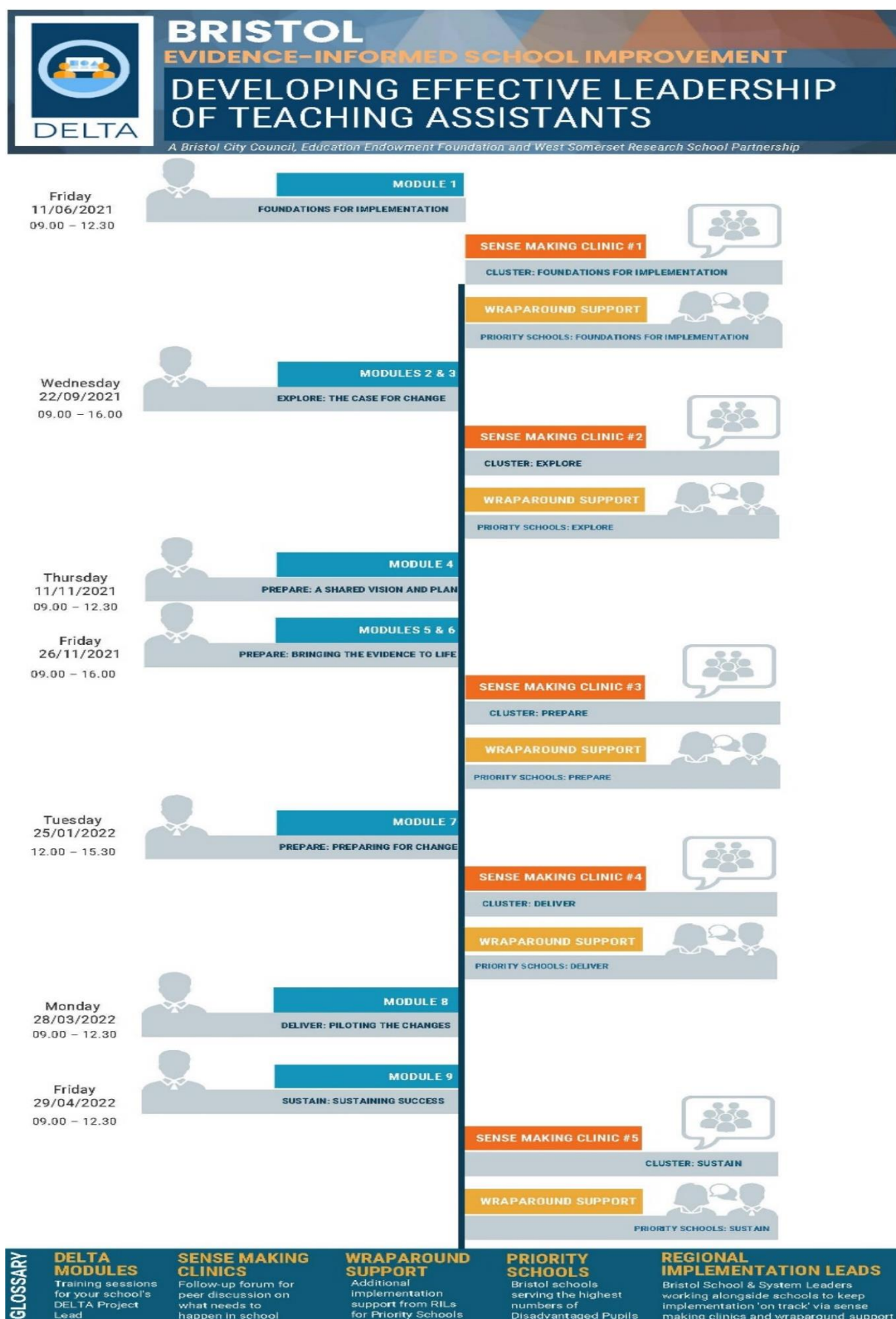
- Knowledge of school context
- Knowledge, experience and skills in implementation
- Knowledge, experience and skills in TA deployment
- Ability to support and guide leadership

Table A1_1: Competency framework

<p>Pillar 1. Knowledge of the school context</p>	<p>a. Knowledge of how family income impacts on educational attainment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to identify determinants of the education disadvantage gap • Understanding of the challenges associated with improving the attainment of disadvantaged pupils • Understanding the 'Tiered Approach' as a framework for effective spending of Pupil Premium funding <p>b. Understanding the school context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the school's recent history e.g., Ofsted 'journey' • Knowledge of the school's contextual challenges e.g., parental engagement, community, etc • Knowledge of the school's character and relationship with the wider system e.g., maintained, academised, federated <p>c. Understanding the DELTA project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the aims (why), programme (what), activities (how) and intended outcomes (impact) of the project • Knowledge of the different roles and responsibilities across the project and where to seek appropriate support • Knowledge of the project infrastructure e.g., online platform
<p>Pillar 2. Knowledge, experience and skills in implementation</p>	<p>a. Theoretical knowledge regarding evidence-informed implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the evidence base on implementation, research use and professional development • Theoretical understanding of the principles, phases and activities that make up the <i>School's Guide to Implementation</i> <p>b. Applied understanding of evidence-informed implementation in practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A working understanding of how to conduct implementation as a process, not an event, where changes are actively planned, prepared, delivered and sustained • A working understanding of how to apply key implementation principles in practice e.g., active ingredients, monitoring implementation. Experience of doing so across a range of different implementation challenges and topics • Lived experience of building a culture and mindset of evidence-informed school improvement, working with schools in different contexts <p>c. Supporting schools to develop evidence-informed implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to support schools through an evidence-informed implementation process • Confident in using the tools, templates and resources in the <i>School's Guide to Implementation</i> (e.g., implementation planning) • Knowledge of common 'pinch points' that schools face when using the <i>School's Guide to Implementation</i>, and an ability to guide schools through those challenging moments
<p>Pillar 3. Knowledge, experience and skills in TA deployment</p>	<p>a. Theoretical knowledge regarding effective TA deployment and practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of issues around the impact of current TA deployment and practice, and the evidence for this. • Understanding of the principles and recommendations within the Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants guidance report • Understanding of the relevance of TA deployment to the context of COVID recovery, including the 'tiered approach' in EEF's <i>School Planning Guide</i> <p>b. Applied understanding of evidence in practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to articulate and exemplify what the principles of effective TA deployment look like in practice

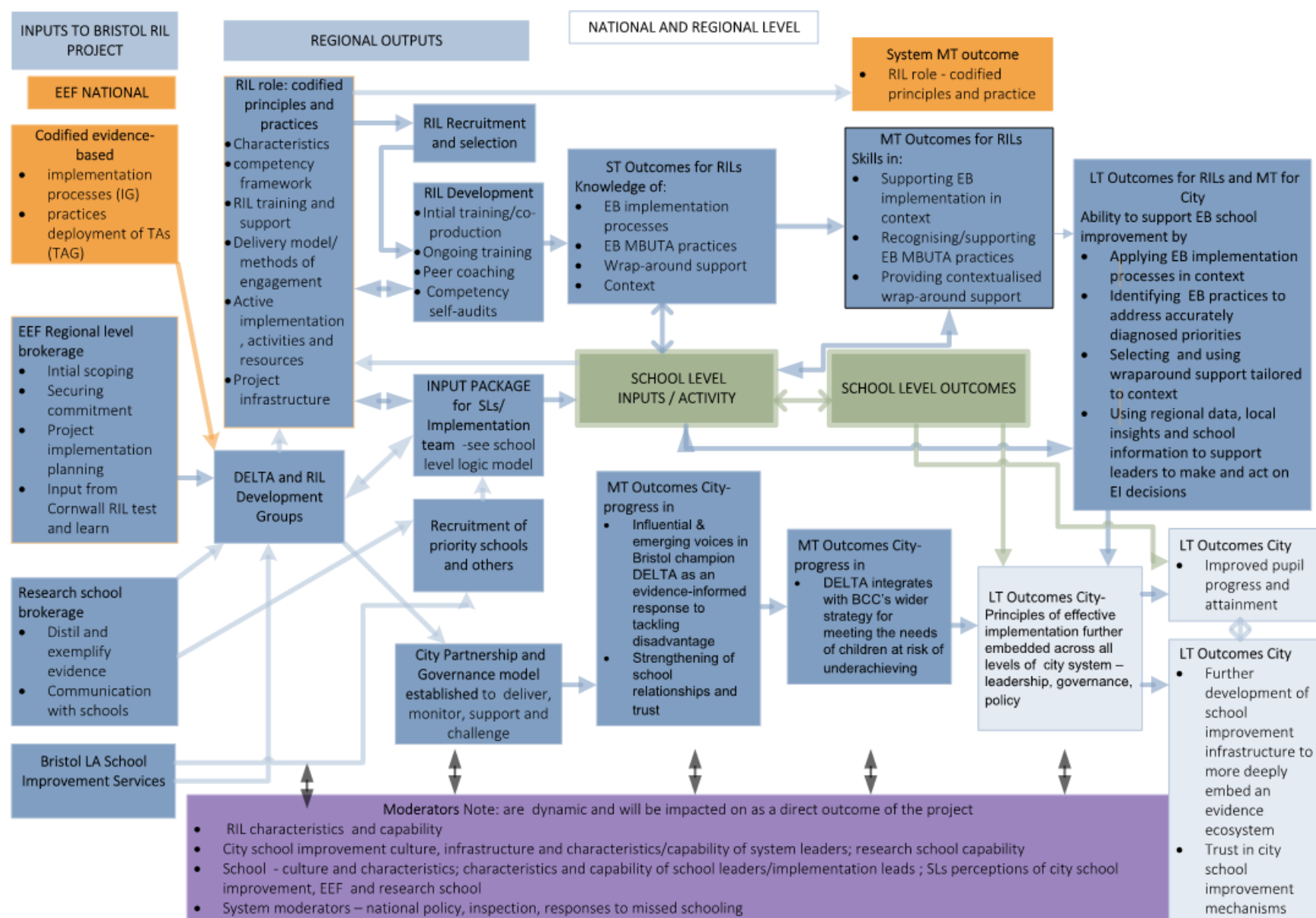
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to do that exemplification in different school contexts e.g., secondary vs primary <p>c. Support schools in implementation of TA guidance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of, and confidence in, addressing implementation 'pinch points' for effective TA deployment, in a range of school contexts • Confident in using the tools, templates and resources relating to the Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants guidance report (e.g., RAG audit, TA review tools)
Pillar 4. Ability to support and guide leadership	<p>a. Developing and maintaining trusted relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to develop an ethos of co-design and co-learning with schools, which integrates knowledge of the local context • Demonstrate the principles of effective implementation support – curious, empathic, responsive, motivating, embracing diverse voices • Manage the operational responsibilities of the RIL role so that schools receive efficient support e.g., prompt task completion, clear working processes <p>b. Cultivating leaders of implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure and sustain commitment from school leaders so they provide a clear vision for the project and model good implementation practices • Build distributed leadership and collective efficacy through implementation teams <p>c. Developing coaching and facilitation skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide quality conversations that keep people on track with implementation e.g., messages that are aligned with the evidence, active listening, questioning to raise awareness etc • Able to give, and receive feedback, and support leaders and implementation teams to act on that feedback

Appendix 2: DELTA programme

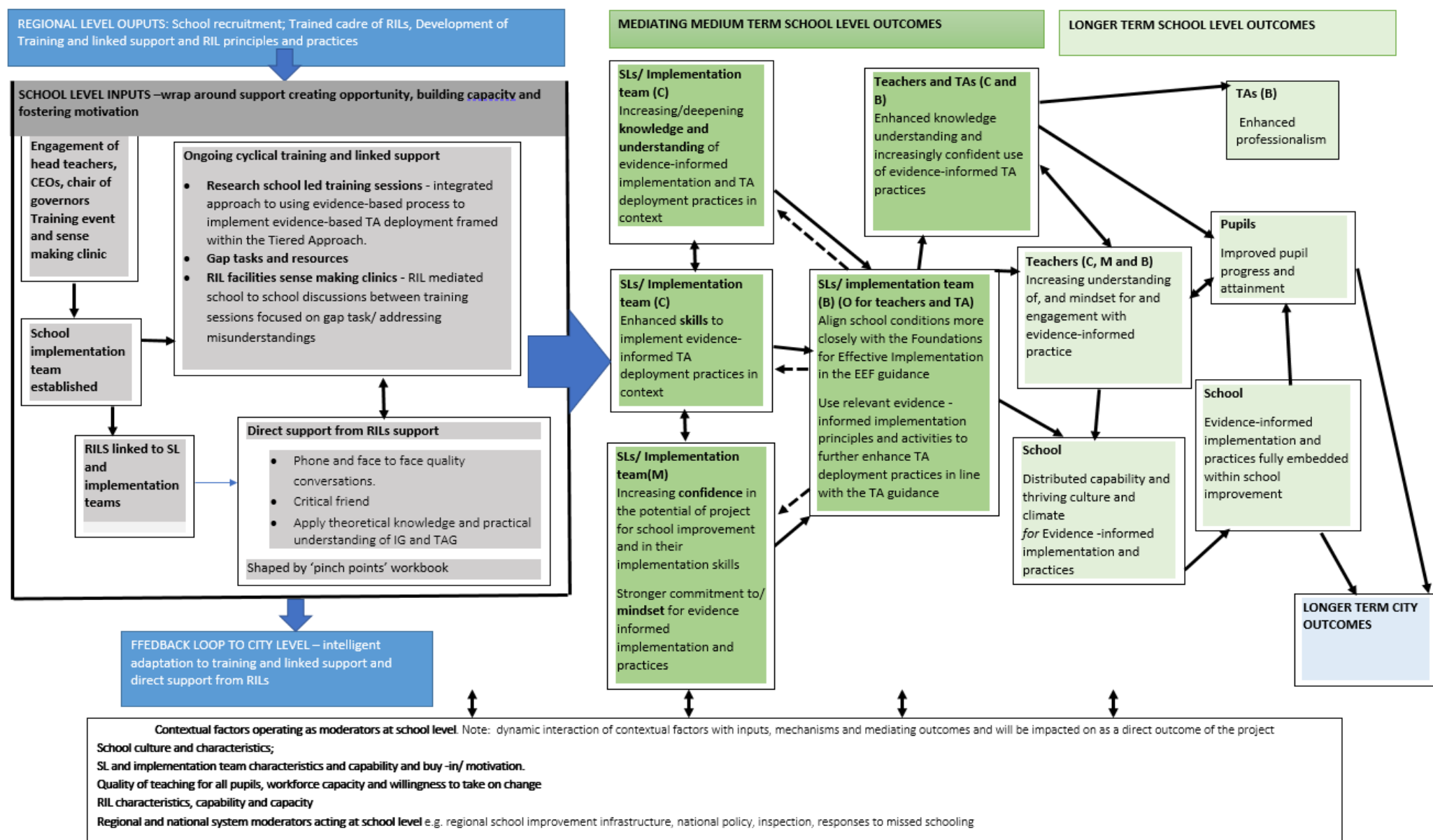


Note: amendments were made to the scheduling of activities in response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic – see actual delivery dates in the Introduction: Pilot approach section.

Appendix 3: National and City-level logic model



Appendix 4: School-level logic model



Further appendices

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