

A systematic approach to effective school self-evaluation: Eliot Bank Primary School

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Brief description

At the heart of this school's consistently outstanding performance is astute, evidence-based self-evaluation, rooted in systematic monitoring and insightful analysis of data.

Overview – the school's message

'We have developed a consistent and synchronised cycle of monitoring and evaluation which gives the school a rhythm and a structure. The cycle has gradually been broadened to include a wide range of stakeholders and strategies, but it has always remained focused on pupils achieving the highest possible outcomes. We recognise that monitoring and evaluation are only as effective as the resulting actions, so we balance our time accordingly. We use the outcomes to challenge ourselves and each other and we are insistent on judging ourselves against the highest standards.'



Kathy Palmer, Executive Headteacher

The good practice in detail

Eliot Bank has been an outstanding school for a number of years. [Inspectors](#) have consistently identified that the school has robust systems for monitoring and evaluation so that it knows what works well and what can be improved further. The way that the school uses this information to modify provision has also been [identified](#) as making a strong contribution to narrowing the attainment gap for those pupils at risk of not attaining the levels expected for their age. Kathy Palmer, the executive headteacher, explains that: 'Monitoring is a key driver for improvement. Self-evaluation is about being analytical. It gives us a sharp focus to our work so we can make sure our children get what they need to

achieve as well as they can. If we don't accurately understand what our children need, how can we help them?' What is clear from the [overview](#) of the school's approach to monitoring and evaluation is that it involves everyone.

The senior leadership perspective

The key features of the school's effective monitoring and evaluation are identified by the senior leadership team as:

- having high expectations of staff and pupils and communicating this message consistently
- involving all staff in the process, so that they feel ownership and accountability
- involving, pupils, parents, carers and governors and acting on their feedback
- being confident about what information, data and approaches to use
- monitoring and evaluating in teams to develop skills and moderate outcomes
- challenging each other in teams, across teams and at different levels of leadership
- analysing and using information, but knowing when to stop and take action
- acknowledging the outcomes and acting on them quickly
- allowing time for actions to have an impact
- customising the approach so that it is fit for purpose.

The approach to self-evaluation is underpinned by high expectations at all levels and is modified and refined over time. Phillip Hollis, Head of School, identifies the three essential components as consistency, persistence and flexibility. He says, 'We try not to waste our time on things that aren't going to make a difference to children in the classroom, so not a moment or conversation is wasted. We constantly ask, "what is the impact on the children?" If there is no impact on the children then it is of no value.'

Robust monitoring and evaluation are not always plain sailing. Kathy explains that it is important to strike a balance between giving positive and hard messages from monitoring and evaluation. She goes on to say that in any situation some stakeholders are more articulate than others and leaders need to be aware of this and ensure that the views of all groups are heard. There is also the danger of important messages being lost through information overload. Senior leaders are selective about the information they use. For example, in 'Raise online' the focus is on the performance of groups, conversion and trend data. But of more relevance is the school's own pupil tracking and progress data. 'The key is to understand what information is needed, why it is needed, and how it will be used,' says Kathy. 'Once priorities are identified, limited resources are used efficiently to have the highest impact.'

Planning and synchronising

Monitoring and evaluation are a [continuous process](#) that is carefully planned through a calendar of activities. It works at three interrelated levels:

1. Strategic

The cycle begins in July with a summer of analysis by everyone. Senior leaders, team leaders, subject leaders and teachers analyse different elements of data and monitoring information. 'We expect everyone, at whatever level, to be self-critical,' says Kathy. Views are collected from pupils, parents, carers, governors and support staff. The contribution that each individual makes to school self-evaluation, planning for improvement and delivering results is made explicit. Consequently, everyone knows what they are responsible for analysing and why.

At the beginning of September two development days, involving all staff, are used to bring this analysis together. By the end of the first week in September:

- the improvement priorities are established
- it is agreed how they will be developed
- the contributions of different teams and individuals to achieving the whole-school priorities are identified
- resources are allocated.

A programme of professional development meetings (PDM) for the year is also established and linked specifically to the whole-school priorities. Team leaders bid for PDM time, so they have to be clear how it is going to be used to support the priorities.

A lot of time is committed to developing a good [improvement plan](#) which staff see as essential to the success of their work. At the end of every term the improvement plan is reviewed and modified. The plan is a dynamic document that is pivotal to the school remaining focused on a manageable number of key priorities. These are small in number and are prominent in every team, subject and individual's improvement plan.

2. Teaching and learning

A schedule of monitoring and evaluation activities includes lesson observations, work scrutiny and reviewing teachers' planning. One team leader says, 'We know why we are doing what we are doing. But we also know why others are doing what they are doing. Nothing comes as a shock because we have been involved.'

3. Pupils

Assessment weeks take place towards the end of each term when outcomes are moderated and entered on the school's data tracker. In the first week of every term, pupil progress meetings identify individuals and groups of pupils who are underachieving, and agree actions to ensure that they make the progress they should.

All these various activities are synchronised throughout the year. This keeps the cycle moving. Everyone understands what is happening well in advance so they are able to gather and prepare information in time. It also ensures that monitoring is linked to when activities are actually taking place.

A team approach

Every member of staff is part of a team which in turn is part of the decision making process. Monitoring and evaluation are carried out together so that team members can challenge each other and moderate judgements. They see this as making a significant contribution to the rigour of the school's procedures. It also provides flexibility and opportunities to support and train team members. Team leaders understand their roles and responsibilities and develop team plans which support the whole school priorities as well as discrete team priorities. The team approach to monitoring and review reinforces the culture of collective responsibility that pervades the school.

Governors are involved in the team approach too. They choose three priorities a year on which to focus their interest. Each governor team includes the priority team leader and a member of the senior leadership team. The teams meet once a term to share monitoring and evaluation information and to review progress with the plan. The benefits to governors are that:

- the work of the governing body is more manageable
- visits by governors have a meaningful focus
- governors' skills are used more effectively
- governors develop an in-depth understanding of a key area of development for the school.

Pupils' views

Pupils are at the heart of the school's approach to monitoring and evaluation so their views are important. Kathy says, 'Children are increasingly reviewing what is happening to them on a day to day basis.' Regular reviews of learning by the children have an impact on future planning. One of the many approaches used is to hold school council meetings for half a day every half term. The focus of each meeting is linked specifically to the key school priorities. At the first council meeting in the autumn term, the school improvement priorities are shared. The council reviews these and shares their ideas with the senior leaders and governors. They also prepare an eye-catching [booklet](#) which is shared and displayed prominently in the school. The council members understand that their role is to help the school improve. One pupil says, 'We tell the teachers what we think we need to do even better and the teachers listen to what we have to say.'

The school's background

[Eliot Bank](#) is a large primary school in the London borough of Lewisham. It serves an ethnically diverse community and has a higher proportion of pupils than average who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs



and/or disabilities is also above average. The school is designated as a National Support School and is led by a National Leader of Education. It is federated with another local primary school.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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