A School's Guide to Implementation Guidance Report Evidence to Decision Framework

This guidance report draws from a comprehensive **realist evidence review** summarising the best available international evidence relevant to implementation in education, developed in consultation with a **panel** of expert practitioners and academics. The evidence review was led by Darren Moore at the University of Exeter, in collaboration with colleagues at Cardiff University and the University of Plymouth.

Realist reviews are a type of iterative research synthesis that focuses on understanding not just if an approach works in achieving desired outcomes, but also how it works, for whom, under what conditions, and why. As such, these are particularly suitable for explaining complexity - delving into the intricacies of how and why complex teaching methods produce specific effects. In realist terms, they aim to develop and test how 'causal mechanisms' lead to 'outcomes' in specific educational 'contexts'.

The evidence review underpinning the updated *School's Guide to Implementation* is a significant advancement, providing new perspectives and evidence on the existing knowledge and practice relating to implementation in education. It's the first review to integrate evidence from diverse research areas such as implementation science, behaviour change science, complexity science, leadership, school improvement, professional development, and research use and knowledge mobilisation.

The evidence review includes four parts:

- In Work Package 1, a system map was created to show important factors affecting implementation in schools. This was based on a systematic review of theories, models, and frameworks in the implementation field. 106 articles and reviews were included. 14 theories, models and frameworks were identified.
- Work Package 2 involved primary research with schools to better understand implementation in practice. It included a survey with 102 school leaders, 16 follow up individual interviews, and focus groups to gather feedback on the previous guidance report, which included 28 experienced users.
- Work Package 3 consisted of a systematic evidence map.
- In Work Package 4, a realist systematic review and a synthesis of implementation strategies were conducted. It built on the findings from the previous work packages to understand how and why implementation in schools might lead to specific outcomes. 293 studies, published from 1996-2023, were included and used to develop an evidence-based theory of implementation in education.

The realist methodology required the active and iterative involvement of a **guidance report panel of expert practitioners and academics** including Danielle D'Lima, Jon Eaton, Melanie Hooson, Jane Lewis, Daniel Miuijs, Angela O'Brien OBE, Corrinne Settle, Jamila Boughelaf and Jonathan Sharples.

Work Packages 1- 3, described above, contributed to building the ground for the systematic review undertaken in Work Package 4, by defining the review scope and informing the realist review programme theory development. Examination of implementation in education has historically received less attention in comparison to other fields. However, there are indications of a shifting trend, with concepts frequently originating from outside the education sector now influencing both practice and research within schools. As such, studies from fields such as implementation science, behaviour change, knowledge mobilisation, and school improvement were identified and included (Leeman et al., 2018).

Work package 4 drew on completed searches from Work Package 1 and Work Package 3. There were 32 empirical studies included from Work Package 1. These had applied a theory, model, or framework (TMF) of implementation to an evaluation of the implementation of a school-based intervention.

Work Package 3 analysed reviews and empirical studies on school implementation, exploring the effects of implementation factors and strategies. There were 57 reviews and 702 empirical studies to assess for relevance from WP3. Supplementary search was conducted to locate additional studies, including EEF evaluation reports and evidence recommended by members of the advisory panel.

293 studies, published from 1996-2023, including EEF evaluation reports, were included and used to develop a theory of implementation in education. The refined programme theory is an evidence-based model that shows several key constructs that can work together to improve implementation and pupil outcomes. The behaviours referred to in this recommendation are the 'mechanisms' identified as part of the programme theory.

Appraisal:

The evidence-review team used the Mixed-methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT, V.2018) for a standardised and transparent appraisal of empirical studies using qualitative, quantitative (randomised controlled trials, non-randomised, and descriptive) and mixed-study methodologies. To assess the quality of any included systematic reviews, the team used A Measurement Tool to Assess Systematic Reviews-2 (AMSTAR 2). During quality appraisal, the review team adhered to RAMESES guidance. To assess quality of the realist review findings, the team used the Confidence in the Evidence from Reviews of Qualitative research (CERQual) to assess final context and mechanism of the refined programme theory and in individual ICAMO (Implementation Strategy, Context, Actor, Mechanisms, Outcomes) configurations in relation to implementation strategies (Lewin et al., 2018).

The evidence review team followed the recommendation in the RAMESES guidance; for each example of relevant evidence identified, reviewers identified and made notes about any issues that might affect data quality or rigour. They drew upon a previous review by Ijaz et al. (2021) that categorises rigour at four levels according to whether the argument made in a study fit the data, and/or whether the relevant outcome is at low risk of bias. Because the synthesis involved close collaboration between reviewers, they had ongoing conversations to agree on levels of rigour rather than formally checking each decision. Whether theory is clear and convincing depended not only on the rigour of the data, because often circumstantial data or interpretations by study authors will still be useful in theory and triangulate evidence from different studies. Therefore quality of individual studies and reviews, as well as their relevance and rigour factored into which papers were used to evidence the review findings that inform each recommendation.

Evidence and exemplifications have also been drawn from a wider suite of EEF resources and projects, including the Regional Implementation Leads (RIL) pilot[1], the Developing Effective Leadership of Teaching Assistants (DELTA) programme, and ongoing work with the EEF Research School Network.

To support the production of the guidance report, and combine the findings from the evidence review and the professional expertise of the guidance panel, an evidence to decision framework was used. An 'Evidence to Decision' (EtD) framework is a structured and systematic approach used in evidence-based decision-making processes, particularly in the fields of healthcare and policy development. Its primary purpose is to guide decision-makers in evaluating and synthesizing available evidence to inform their decisions and recommendations. The EtD framework helps ensure that decisions are transparent, consistent, and based on the best available evidence. The following questions were considered for each recommendation:

[1] Regional Implemenation Leads (RIL) pilot: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/the-regional-implementation-leads-pilot-ril-pilot

	Question?
Priority of the problem	Does the recommendation deal with a schools'/teacher priorities?
Benefits and harms	What is the magnitude of potential benefits of following this guidance in comparison with current practice in schools?
	What is the magnitude of risks/potential harms of following this guidance in comparison with current practice in schools?
Certainty of the evidence	What is the overall certainty of the evidence: - Is it supported by a rigorous methodology (see taxonomy)? - Are there any threats to validity?
Transferability	Is the evidence relevant to the setting in question (English primary schools/secondary schools)?
Balance	Does the balance between desirable and undesirable effects favour the intervention or the comparison?

Resource use	How large are the resource requirements (costs)?
Equity	What would be the impact on disadvantaged pupils?
Acceptability	Is the intervention acceptable to school leaders, teachers, pupils and other stakeholders (parents/governors/policymakers)?
Feasibility	Is the approach feasible for schools?

This document presents an overview of the individual evidence to decision frameworks for each of the three recommendations included in the '**A School's Guide to Implementation'** guidance report. The frameworks illustrate factors that were considered in the decision-making process and our transparency in demonstrating the evidence sources that inform each of the recommendations.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 1: Adopt the behaviours that drive effective implementation

- **Engage** people so they can shape what happens while also providing overall direction.
- **Unite** around what is being implemented, how it will be implemented, and why it matters.
- **Reflect**, monitor, and adapt to improve implementation.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
Certainty of the evidence	What is the overall certainty of the evidence: - Is it supported by a rigorous methodology (see taxonomy)? - Are there any threats to validity?	<u>Quality of evidence in relation to the behaviours (mechanisms) that drive effective implementation:</u> The review team identified three mechanisms (called 'behaviours' in the guidance report) that held true across different studies and contexts – they are derived from multiple studies conducted across different fields. The cross-cutting nature of the synthesis, and interconnected nature of implementation factors and activities, means single studies don't investigate or isolate individual mechanisms. Having identified mechanisms within a Programme Theory, further evidence was used to interrogate, attempt to falsify, and refine the concepts. The cumulative evidence from different studies, drawing on different research methods, adds weight collectively to the robustness of the findings. More evidence was found for behavioural mechanisms having an impact on implementation outcomes (e.g. fidelity) than directly upon pupil outcomes (e.g. attainment). 71 of the 293 included studies provided evidence about the mechanism 'reflect', 64 studies provided evidence about the mechanism 'unite' and a differing set of 64 included studies provided evidence about the mechanism 'engage'. To assess quality of the realist review findings, the team used the Confidence in the Evidence from Reviews of Qualitative research (CERQual) to assess final context and mechanism of the refined programme theory and in individual ICAMO (Implementation Strategy, Context, Actor, Mechanisms, Outcomes) configurations in relation to implementation strategies (Lewin et al., 2018). The team hold high confidence in relation to the mechanisms 'uniting' and 'reflecting', and moderate confidence for the mechanism of 'engaging'. This is due to slight concerns about the coherence of the 'engaging' mechanism review finding and the potential overlap with other constructs. Minor concerns are held about the distinction between 'engaging' that may involve reflection and for the purpose of 'uniting'

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation) **Recommendation 1: Adopt the behaviours that drive effective implementation** • **Engage** people so they can shape what happens while also providing overall direction. • **Unite** around what is being implemented, how it will be implemented, and why it matters. • **Reflect**, monitor, and adapt to improve implementation.		
	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		stakeholders. For instance, collaboration might involve reflection, and increased interest in an intervention could also contribute to aligning values about the intervention. In terms of individual included studies 119 out of 141 primary studies were rated high quality using MMAT and 29 out of 39 reviews were rated high quality using AMSTAR-2. Below we report evidence on the individual mechanisms (behaviours): **Engaging:** The mechanism of engaging refers to: • engaging voices; • engaging in co-operative and collaborative processes; and • engaging interest and investment in the intervention and implementation. The review found that 'Engaging voices' is associated with outcomes such as buy-in, readiness, and implementer wellbeing (Grossi et al., 2019; Guhn et al., 2009). The establishment of effective communication pathways was reported to allow diverse stakeholders to contribute to decision-making, fostering sustainability (Massey et al., 2021). Student involvement, particularly in defining priorities and planning interventions, was reported to be effective in enhancing buy-in and fidelity (Bonell et al., 2015; Frigge et al., 2019; Hudson et al., 2020), whilst neglecting student preferences may lead to resistance to change (Anselma et al., 2020; Giraldo-García et al., 2020). Involving students and families beyond mere consultation was also found to drive outcomes such as fidelity (Frigge et al., 2009; Leeman et al., 2018). The review found that the creation of co-operative processes, such as setting up implementation teams, seeking diverse perspectives and feedback, enhance buy-in, adoption, and sustainability (Bingham et al., 2018; Pearson et al., 2015). 'Engaging interest and

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation) **Recommendation 1: Adopt the behaviours that drive effective implementation** • **Engage** people so they can shape what happens while also providing overall direction. • **Unite** around what is being implemented, how it will be implemented, and why it matters. • **Reflect**, monitor, and adapt to improve implementation.		
	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		investment' in an approach can help to ensure that the school community understands the relevance of an approach and the reasoning behind changes in working styles or approaches (Beidas and Kendell, 2010; Blaine et al., 2017; Kennedy et al., 2021). This can sustain interest over time, open receptivity to professional development and the learning of new skills, and help to garner commitment and support (Evans et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2023). To sustain interest over time, the processing of engaging may need to be revisited with ongoing reminders and support provided to implementers (Freeman et al., 2014; Lohrman et al., 2008; Van Geel et al., 2017; Walker et al., 2022). Directives and top-down approaches showed mixed effectiveness, while leader modelling and demonstration of buy-in were found to be more impactful (Simmons and Martin, 2009; Leung et al., 2020). The review found strong evidence for core engagement elements like motivation, but less for directed approaches like mandated change or incentivized implementers. While confident in this overall finding, the review authors acknowledge some potential overlap between collaborative engagement and other mechanisms. Due to this overlap, they rate the confidence in this program theory element as moderate. Of the 64 included studies, MMAT and AMSTAR ratings were used to broadly categorise all 11 reviews as high quality, 45 studies as high quality and 8 studies as low quality. **Uniting:** The realist evidence synthesis showed that 'uniting' includes uniting: • views—e.g., about an intervention and implementation; • values—e.g., why is this important to staff and their school; • knowledge and understanding—e.g., about implementation and, in particular, the intervention; and • implementation practices—e.g. uses of data to inform decision-making.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 1: Adopt the behaviours that drive effective implementation

- **Engage** people so they can shape what happens while also providing overall direction.
- **Unite** around what is being implemented, how it will be implemented, and why it matters.
- **Reflect**, monitor, and adapt to improve implementation.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		The review found that acknowledging differences, exploring common aims, and evaluating the risks and benefits of new approaches versus established practices can help unite values. It aids feasibility by allowing stakeholders to weigh the pros and cons of different interventions (Frigge et al., 2019; Gee et al., 2012; Pearson et al., 2015). By incorporating diverse perspectives and encouraging the involvement of stakeholders such as staff, pupils, and families, uniting views fosters acceptability, buy-in, and long-term sustainability (Reezigt and Creemers, 2005; Ronto, 2020; Sadjadi et al., 2021; Tunks and Weller, 2019). 'Uniting knowledge and understanding' incorporates the processes which implementation teams and the wider school community undertake to exchange, disseminate, and make sense of an approach and its role within the school community (Burris and Ring, 2009; Samdal and Rowling; 2011; William et al, 2021). Uniting knowledge and understanding can elicit misconceptions and alleviate concerns by helping to communicate to implementers why and how implementation is thought to work, the evidence behind it, as well as the ways in which it might be delivered with a balance between fidelity and adaptability (Durand et al, 2016). Professional development is a key strategy used to unite knowledge and understanding about a new intervention. This can impact adoption, buy-in, and fidelity to the intervention. Evidence suggests that the underlying driver of this increased knowledge and understanding can differ, including expert instruction (Freeman et al.,2014), modelling the intervention in the relevant school context (McBride et al., 2002), a focus on overcoming likely barriers (McHale et al., 2022), and through reminders about key aspects of the intervention (Dariotis et al., 2017). 'Uniting practice' refers to the ways in which staff come together to deliver and reinforce an approach, this can be through implementation teams and key individuals sharing and disseminating data to inform decision-making and help cohere intervention delivery (Fletcher et al., 2014; Metz et al., 2020;

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation) **Recommendation 1: Adopt the behaviours that drive effective implementation** • **Engage** people so they can shape what happens while also providing overall direction. • **Unite** around what is being implemented, how it will be implemented, and why it matters. • **Reflect**, monitor, and adapt to improve implementation.		
	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		van Geel et al., 2017). This can also involve co-operation, collaboration, and peer mentoring and other support strategies which seek to align and strengthen consistency (Asada et al., 2020; McLoughlin et al., 2022; Wolfenden et al, 2017). The review found strong evidence supporting the core concept of uniting knowledge, understanding, and values. Although some evidence focused on views and practices, the overall finding is considered highly confident according to CERQual due to its coherence. Of the 64 relevant included studies, there were 14 high quality reviews and 2 low quality reviews. There were also 40 high quality studies and 8 low quality studies. **Reflecting:** The realist synthesis indicates that reflecting is a key mechanism in school-based implementation. Evidence suggests that reflecting underlies decision-making within implementation, the ways in which data is interpreted and used, and informs the ways in which staff understand progress. Reflecting on can take place in various ways throughout implementation, including reflecting on: • needs; • fit and feasibility; • facilitators and barriers; • implementation and intervention outcome data; and • feedback. Evidence indicates that 'Reflecting on needs' influences various implementation and pupil outcomes, including attainment, fidelity, adaptation, buy-in, and readiness (Austin et al., 2011; Bogiatzis-Gibbons et al., 2021; Crawford et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2021). School leaders' ability to assess not only

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation) **Recommendation 1: Adopt the behaviours that drive effective implementation** • **Engage** people so they can shape what happens while also providing overall direction. • **Unite** around what is being implemented, how it will be implemented, and why it matters. • **Reflect**, monitor, and adapt to improve implementation.		
	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		emerging priorities but also the factors contributing to their emergence is crucial in implementation (Moore et al., 2024). Reflecting on the "fit and feasibility" of interventions was found to support appropriateness of selection and secure buy-in (Silva et al., 2021). Adapting interventions based on stakeholder views was found to maintain reflective participation and enhance adoption and sustainability over time (Frigge et al., 2019; Connors et al., 2022; McBride et al., 2002; Merle et al., 2022). 'Reflecting on facilitators and barriers' by listening, observing, and considering the perspectives of the implementation team or wider school community, helps to acknowledge challenges and inform the development of effective support structures and strategies (Moore et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2021). 'Reflecting on implementation data' was also evidenced to be important to aid understanding both pupil progress and intervention fidelity (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2016; Robinson and Gray, 2019; Trapani and Annunziato, 2018). It was found to promote informed decision-making, autonomy, and buy-in among stakeholders (Martinez, 2016; van Geel et al., 2017). The review suggests that integrating reflection into implementation strategies improves fidelity and supports behaviour change (Larson et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2021). A range of studies also suggest that reflecting on feedback with a colleague or expert in a coaching role supports fidelity. Noell et al. (2013) in their meta-analysis identified that it was the review of data in particular that supported fidelity. The review identified strong evidence for reflection as a key behaviour. While there's less direct evidence for reflecting on needs specifically, the overall finding for reflection's importance was rated high confidence according to CERQual due to its coherence. Of the 71 included studies evidencing reflect as a behaviour, 45 studies were high quality, 10 were low quality, 8 reviews were rated high quality and 7 were low quality. Although there was more relevant evidence for this behaviour compared to others, the included evidence base is of slightly lower quality.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 1: Adopt the behaviours that drive effective implementation

- **Engage** people so they can shape what happens while also providing overall direction.
- **Unite** around what is being implemented, how it will be implemented, and why it matters.
- **Reflect**, monitor, and adapt to improve implementation.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		<u>Threats to validity</u> In this review, the team was interested in identifying what drives and influences effective implementation across different situations and contexts. This is necessary given the interconnected nature of implementation factors and activities in schools. Even though the programme theory was developed out of the interaction of mechanisms, contexts and outcomes, the strategy analysis seeks to evidence connection between contexts and mechanisms. Whilst there are some threats to validity linked to the nature of the realist review, overall, the methodology used to inform this recommendation was rigorous and robust. The realist review was conducted according to RAMESES guidelines, which helped ensure it was rigorous and robust. The nature of realist reviews seek evidence for connections between contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. Evidence for the connection with the contexts in recommendation 2 and implementation and intervention outcomes establish the behaviours as key to effective implementation. While the evidence review team also present evidence about how each behaviour is linked to outcomes, this is part of wider included evidence that link context to behaviours. The behaviours (mechanisms in a realist review) are underlying processes. Minor threats to validity should be acknowledged in relation to: Recommendation 1 does not stand alone. The evidence review finds more evidence that behaviours should be adopted but shaped by the contexts in recommendation 2. Much of the evidence for the behaviours does not refer to engaging, uniting and reflecting using that terminology, but interprets how a range of evidence across diverse studies shows these behaviours underpinning effective implementation.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation) **Recommendation 1: Adopt the behaviours that drive effective implementation** • **Engage** people so they can shape what happens while also providing overall direction. • **Unite** around what is being implemented, how it will be implemented, and why it matters. • **Reflect**, monitor, and adapt to improve implementation.		
	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
Priority of the problem	Does the recommendation deal with a schools'/teacher priorities?	The review of evidence shows how implementation is fundamentally a collaborative and social process driven by how people think, behave, and interact. By identifying the behaviours that drive effective implementation – engage, unite, reflect – the guidance helps schools foreground effective interactions when making and acting on evidence-informed decisions. This helps school leaders better manage change and lead to tangible changes in practices. The development of the guidance report involved a collaborative process with input from expert practitioners and academics, as well as independent testing with external schools, including Senior Leadership Teams and Middle Leaders. Feedback from these groups highlighted the resonance of Recommendation 1 (the behavioural mechanisms) with tacit knowledge of what is important within implementation. Importantly, the previous Implementation guidance report doesn't emphasise the nature of effective interactions and behaviours within implementation. Members of the Research School Network and Guidance Panel noted how Recommendation 1 now provides explicit support for the type of behaviours that they tacitly emphasise in their own schools, and training with other schools, transforming intuitive practices into a robust evidence-informed framework. Overall, the feedback from schools in Work Package 2 (Moore et al, 2024) underscores the significance of Recommendation 1 in addressing implementation challenges and the multifaceted nature of fostering effective relationships and interactions: • The former guidance was praised for its innovation but called for further simplification to navigate the complexity of implementation. • Discussion centred around proactively planning for implementation barriers and identifying potential 'pinch points'. • Clearer definitions, especially regarding climate, and practical strategies to explore implementation foundations in different contexts were deemed necessary.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation) **Recommendation 1: Adopt the behaviours that drive effective implementation** • **Engage** people so they can shape what happens while also providing overall direction. • **Unite** around what is being implemented, how it will be implemented, and why it matters. • **Reflect**, monitor, and adapt to improve implementation.		
	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		• The importance of defining and sustaining the 'right' implementation culture was highlighted. • Reflection emerged as crucial for both school leaders and staff, fostering a culture of critical thinking and self-improvement. • Encouraging staff to think independently, fostering peer correction, and promoting a reflective mindset were seen as pivotal in nurturing a thinking culture. • The evolving nature of relationships during implementation emphasised the importance of trust and alignment of vision among staff members. • Reduced dependency on frequent communication signalled the promotion of autonomy and decision-making capabilities. • The shifting dynamics of collaboration necessitated adaptive teamwork strategies. • The expansion of leadership roles highlighted the benefits and complexities of collaborative leadership models, particularly in shared headship arrangements.
Benefits and harms	What is the magnitude of potential benefits of following this guidance in comparison with current practice in schools?	EEF work with the Research School Network showed that current practices around implementation have improved since the existing Implementation Guidance Report was launched. Schools are more likely to take a structured approach to implementation and adopt effective strategies. For example, more schools are now planning implementation. Nevertheless, *how* these activities are being conducted varies significantly, with poor applications resulting in little difference in outcomes (Wills,et al., 2023). The focus on the behaviours that drive effective implementation increases the chances that schools will conduct implementation effectively. Given the importance of establishing the right interactions and behaviours, the potential benefits in adopting this recommendation are significant. For instance, the review found that:

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 1: Adopt the behaviours that drive effective implementation

- **Engage** people so they can shape what happens while also providing overall direction.
- **Unite** around what is being implemented, how it will be implemented, and why it matters.
- **Reflect**, monitor, and adapt to improve implementation.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		1) Cohering understanding of implementation plans can enhance staff buy-in by demonstrating how interventions address school needs (Veel and Bredhauer, 2009). This understanding is data-driven and involves assessing needs and monitoring outcomes. 2) Developing reflective processes can influence the sustainability of interventions, which is a dynamic process evolving over time (Shelton et al., 2018). Reflection fosters a depth of thinking, supporting sustainability by connecting interventions with various factors across school systems (Koh and Askell-Williams, 2021). 3) Reflecting on feedback aids intentionality and understanding of priorities, supporting buy-in and sustainability (Andreou et al., 2015; Gabby et al., 2017; Leung et al., 2020). Reviewing data with colleagues or experts and self-monitoring enhance fidelity (Noell et al., 2013; Oliver et al., 2015). For example, reorienting efforts based on feedback improved sustainability by addressing implementation challenges (Savage et al., 2011). 4) Interest and investment in an approach deepen engagement and improve outcomes (Gale et al., 2020; McLoughlin et al., 2021). The review reported school leaders to play a crucial role in facilitating active participation and fostering dialogue between stakeholders (Goldenthal et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2015). 5) Uniting understanding of an intervention through implementation planning has been shown to increase both fidelity and pupil outcomes (Monzalve & Horner, 2021; Sanetti et al., 2015). 6) Reinke et al. (2008) and Noell et al. (2013) show that when consultation for behavioural support interventions involved reflection on strengths and data that allowed decision-making there was decreased disruptive behaviour in teacher's classroom compared to when this consultation was not provided.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 1: Adopt the behaviours that drive effective implementation

- **Engage** people so they can shape what happens while also providing overall direction.
- **Unite** around what is being implemented, how it will be implemented, and why it matters.
- **Reflect**, monitor, and adapt to improve implementation.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
	What is the magnitude of risks/potential harms of following this guidance in comparison with current practice in schools?	A potential risk of emphasising the behaviours that drive implementation is the increased complexity it potentially creates. Superficial understanding of the behaviours could result in schools treating them as being detached form an implementation process. The guidance mitigates this risk by retaining an actionable implementation process and within this process showing how the behaviours can be used to optimise specific implementation strategies. A second risk is the potential for the behaviours to be misconstrued as already happening as part of the day to day of school improvement, if schools only superficially engage with the Guidance Report and related terminology. There is also an additional risk of schools seeing the behaviours in isolation and not understanding these are enabled by specific contextual factors that should be in place (Recommendation 2) to drive effective implementation. Once again, the guidance mitigates this by both outlining the contextual factors that may influence these behaviours and show how to address these through a phased process (Recommendation 3).
Transferability	Is the evidence relevant to the setting in question (English primary schools/secondary schools)?	Yes. The evidence base encompasses implementation from ages 3-18 across various settings, employing a variety of interventions and approaches within schools. The evidence primarily originates from the United States and the United Kingdom, inclusive of evaluations by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). This review focuses explicitly on evidence pertaining to implementation in education, thus the behaviours outlined in Recommendation 1 are particularly pertinent to schools. SISTER strategies have been tailored for an educational context and only those that are well evidenced were included in the review synthesis. The overarching nature of these mechanisms means they are applicable across diverse educational settings and implementation foci.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 1: Adopt the behaviours that drive effective implementation

- **Engage** people so they can shape what happens while also providing overall direction.
- **Unite** around what is being implemented, how it will be implemented, and why it matters.
- **Reflect**, monitor, and adapt to improve implementation.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
Balance	Does the balance between desirable and undesirable effects favour the intervention or the comparison?	See 'Threats to validity' under 'Certainty of the evidence' for further information on the methodology, its limitations and related evidence warrant. At a behaviors/contexts level, the review team looked for counter-evidence. When reviewing the implementation strategies, they included any evidence where strategies (linked to behaviors and contexts) did not improve outcomes. Based on this comprehensive analysis, the review team can confidently state that there is significantly more evidence supporting the effectiveness of recommendations 1 and 2 in improving outcomes than not. Part of the 'adjudicate' review method involves the review team looking for counter-examples and other explanations, therefore it favours desirable effects. The bespoke searching tests out whether the constructs hold in research using the terminology. So the review team ought to have found any competing evidence. While there are risks in emphasising interactions and collaboration through the mechanisms (e.g. increased complexity), evidence indicates that these interactions lead to positive gains in implementation outcomes (e.g. increased buy-in and fidelity) (Moore, et. al., 2024), to a degree where the benefits outweigh the risks.
Resource use	How large are the resource requirements (costs)?	The review did not look at cost of implementation. We do not estimate the need for large resource requirements, considering most resources would be already in place (e.g staff). Notably, the issue does not lie in the presence of individuals within schools, but rather in the imperative to utilise them with greater efficacy and efficiency in enacting powerful implementation behaviours.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 1: Adopt the behaviours that drive effective implementation

- **Engage** people so they can shape what happens while also providing overall direction.
- **Unite** around what is being implemented, how it will be implemented, and why it matters.
- **Reflect**, monitor, and adapt to improve implementation.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		The principal demand in terms of resources pertains to the establishment of requisite systems and structures (such as time allocation and collaborative teams) necessary for the enactment of behavioural mechanisms.
Equity	What would be the impact on disadvantaged pupils?	Based on evaluations of programmes conducted to date, it can be hypothesised that economically disadvantaged students stand to derive benefits from effectively implemented evidence-informed programmes and practices (Speckesser et Al., 2018). The particular outcomes are contingent upon the nature of what is being implemented (Moore et al., 2024). Since the evidence review did not include a subgroup analysis for pupils experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, we are unable to provide additional information on this (Moore et al., 2024). The EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit, however shows some evidence that: - collaborative learning approaches may benefit those with low prior attainment by providing opportunities for pupils to work with peers to articulate their thinking, share knowledge and skills and address misconceptions through peer support and discussion. - feedback involving metacognitive and self-regulatory approaches may have a greater impact on disadvantaged pupils and lower prior attainers than other pupils (EEF, Teaching and Learning Toolkit). Whilst these are teaching approaches, rather than strictly implementation approaches, they are built upon the key behaviours of Engaging, Uniting and Reflecting.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 1: Adopt the behaviours that drive effective implementation

- **Engage** people so they can shape what happens while also providing overall direction.
- **Unite** around what is being implemented, how it will be implemented, and why it matters.
- **Reflect**, monitor, and adapt to improve implementation.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
Acceptability	Is the intervention acceptable to school leaders, teachers, pupils and other stakeholders (parents/governors/policymakers)?	Drawing from feedback provided by members of the guidance report panel and user testing, schools expressed optimism regarding the heightened emphasis on individuals and their interactions within the new guidance report.
Feasibility	Is the approach feasible for schools?	Drawing from feedback provided by members of the guidance report panel and user testing, schools seemed to agree the approach outlined would be feasible. However, as Recommendation 1 steers schools towards adopting a more collaborative approach to implementation, it may necessitate prioritising fewer initiatives to achieve higher quality outcomes.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 2: Attend to the contextual factors that influence implementation

- Consider whether **what is being implemented** is evidence-informed, suitable for the setting, and feasible to implement.
- Develop **systems and structures** that support implementation, for example, time allocation or data systems.
- Ensure **people who enable change** can support, lead, and positively influence implementation.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
Certainty of the evidence	What is the overall certainty of the evidence: - Is it supported by a rigorous methodology (see taxonomy)? - Are there any threats to validity?	<u>Quality of evidence in relation to the contextual factors that influence implementation:</u> The realist review developed a programme theory that shows the intertwined nature of behaviours and context. The review team identified three contexts (called contextual factors in the guidance report) that held true across different studies and in relation to the aforementioned mechanisms – they are derived from multiple studies conducted across different fields. This means single studies don't investigate or isolate individual contextual factors. Having identified an initial Programme Theory, further evidence was used to interrogate, attempt to falsify, and refine the concepts. The cumulative evidence from different studies, drawing on different research methods, adds weight collectively to the robustness of the findings. In panel discussions it was agreed to present a recommendation on contextual factors for clarity. 95 of the 293 included studies provided evidence for 'enabling structures' as a context. 107 included studies evidenced 'agents for change' as a context. Finally, 85 included studies provided evidence that 'intervention features' was a key context in implementation in schools. The review team hold high confidence in the contextual factor 'enabling structures', whilst they hold moderate confidence for the other constructs. The team have slight concerns over the coherence of the context 'agents for change', due to the difficulty distinguishing between 'agents for change' as a condition that supports implementation and the actions of agents for change that can be considered under each mechanism (reflecting, uniting and engaging). The team also holds minor concerns in relation to the adequacy of the evidence available and used to specify the context 'intervention features'. These minor

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation) **Recommendation 2: Attend to the contextual factors that influence implementation** • Consider whether **what is being implemented** is evidence-informed, suitable for the setting, and feasible to implement. • Develop **systems and structures** that support implementation, for example, time allocation or data systems. • Ensure **people who enable change** can support, lead, and positively influence implementation.		
	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		concerns are about the volume of research that establishes each example of an intervention feature, e.g. core components, complexity, resources and adaptability. The team also stressed a fundamental difference in nature between the contextual factors 'intervention features', and the other two constructs. The former representing a set of varying factors related to the intervention that may (or may not) fit a school's needs, and the latter being conditions that schools can potentially identify and put in place to support implementation. In terms of individual included studies 152 out of 187 primary studies were rated high quality using MMAT and 39 out of 48 reviews were rated high quality using AMSTAR-2. Below we report evidence on the individual contextual factors: **Systems and structures (Enabling Structures):** the review found that effective implementation, characterised by high fidelity and sustainability, hinges upon supportive organisational cultures and structures enacted by school leaders (Fixsen et al., 2005; Herlitz et al., 2020; Leung et al., 2020). Logistics and processes were found to significantly influence pupil and implementation outcomes across various domains (van Geel et al, 2017). Structured data collection was found to aid needs assessments, informing adaptive implementation and enhancing sustainability over time (Durand et al., 2016; Hudson et al., 2020; Koh and Askell-Williams, 2021; Maxwell et al, 2019). Comprehensive insights garnered from data collection enable intelligent adaptation and sustainability (Herlitz et al., 2020), thereby shaping implementation trajectories (Gale, 2020).

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 2: Attend to the contextual factors that influence implementation

- Consider whether **what is being implemented** is evidence-informed, suitable for the setting, and feasible to implement.
- Develop **systems and structures** that support implementation, for example, time allocation or data systems.
- Ensure **people who enable change** can support, lead, and positively influence implementation.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		The evidence review team do not have concerns about the relevance, rigour, and adequacy of the evidence used to develop their conceptualisation of enabling structures. They are also confident in the coherence of this review finding, rating this element of the programme theory as high confidence according to the CERQual rating. In terms of included study quality, MMAT and AMSTAR ratings were used to broadly categorise the 95 included studies. 61 studies were rated as high quality, 13 as low quality. 16 included reviews were high quality and 5 included reviews were rated as low quality. **People who enable change (Agents for Change):** Evidence suggests that fostering different individuals to assume active leadership roles, supported by transformative or distributed leadership cultures, enhances implementation effectiveness (Grissom et al., 2021; Kong, 2019; Patterson et al., 2021). Leaders' capacity to empower themselves and others, foster trust, and facilitate collective ownership plays a crucial role in shaping the acceptability, feasibility, and sustainability of interventions (Frigge et al, 2019; Gee et al, 2012; Pearson et al, 2015; Shoesmith et al, 2021). The review also found that the degree of agency held by implementation team members and stakeholders significantly influences implementation and pupil outcomes (Hall, 2013; Icel et al, 2018; Leeman et al, 2018). The review identified the most evidence compared to other contexts for the "agents for change" element, though more evidence was qualitative than for other review constructs. However, differentiating between agents as a supportive condition and specific actions by agents within each mechanism proved challenging. This ambiguity lowers confidence in the finding, resulting in a moderate CERQual rating. Of the 107 studies included, 65

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 2: Attend to the contextual factors that influence implementation

- Consider whether **what is being implemented** is evidence-informed, suitable for the setting, and feasible to implement.
- Develop **systems and structures** that support implementation, for example, time allocation or data systems.
- Ensure **people who enable change** can support, lead, and positively influence implementation.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		primary studies were rated high quality versus 18 as low quality; 19 reviews were of high quality and the remaining 4 were low quality. **What is being implemented (intervention features):** Evidence suggests that intervention features play a crucial role in facilitating or hindering the implementation of evidence-based practices. Core components of an approach are vital for achieving positive outcomes and enhancing engagement (Austin et al., 2011; Fixsen et al., 2005; Leung et al., 2020). When interventions have clear core components, schools can better assess where fidelity is needed while allowing flexibility for tailoring to diverse pupil needs (Dusenbury et al., 2003; Pearson et al., 2015; Shoesmith et al., 2021). The review identified strong evidence supporting the context intervention features and found the overall finding to be coherent. However, the comprehensiveness of the evidence regarding the specific range of features (identifiable core components, capacity needs, and measurable outcomes) would ideally be greater so this element of the programme theory was rated as moderate confidence according to CERQual. Of the 85 included studies contributing to this context, 52 primary studies were rated high quality through MMAT, with eight rated low quality. 23 reviews were rated as high quality as per AMSTAR-2 and two reviews were rated low quality. Threats to Validity

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 2: Attend to the contextual factors that influence implementation

- Consider whether **what is being implemented** is evidence-informed, suitable for the setting, and feasible to implement.
- Develop **systems and structures** that support implementation, for example, time allocation or data systems.
- Ensure **people who enable change** can support, lead, and positively influence implementation.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		In this review, the team was interested in identifying what drives and influences effective implementation across different situations and contexts. This is necessary given the interconnected nature of implementation factors and activities in schools. Even though the programme theory was developed out of the interaction of mechanisms, contexts and outcomes, the strategy analysis seeks to evidence connection between contexts and mechanisms. Whilst there are some threats to validity linked to the nature of the realist review, overall, the methodology used to inform this recommendation was rigorous and robust. The realist review was conducted according to RAMESES guidelines, which helped ensure it was rigorous and robust. The nature of realist reviews seek evidence for connections between contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. Evidence for the connection with the behaviours in recommendation 1 and implementation and intervention outcomes establish the contextual factors as essential enablers of they key behaviours. Minor threats to validity should be acknowledged in relation to: Recommendation 2 does not stand alone. The evidence review finds more evidence that when contextual factors are in place they are more likely to shape and support enactment of the behaviours in recommendation 1.
Priority of the problem	Does the recommendation deal with a schools'/teacher priorities?	Schools recognise how the behaviours that drive effective implementation rely on having an appropriate context for implementation. Schools have indicated that contextual factors can act as significant barriers to implementation e.g. lack of time to discuss implementation, misalignment of school and MAT policies.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 2: Attend to the contextual factors that influence implementation

- Consider whether **what is being implemented** is evidence-informed, suitable for the setting, and feasible to implement.
- Develop **systems and structures** that support implementation, for example, time allocation or data systems.
- Ensure **people who enable change** can support, lead, and positively influence implementation.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		Work package 2 revealed significant feedback from practitioners regarding the impact of contextual factors on their implementation practices, suggesting additional support and guidance would be useful. Respondents highlighted: • The existing tension between the desire for rapid outcomes and the former guidance report's emphasis on thorough process planning. • External or policy pressures conflicting with the former guidance's call for careful planning and consideration of implementation climate. Respondents stressed that additional resources are required to aid time management and planning as integral components of an ongoing cycle. • The multifaceted nature of decision-making processes in selecting interventions. Leaders relied on diverse data sources beyond internal discussions, considering factors such as alignment with research evidence, suitability for the school, feasibility, and resource availability. • The evolving role of leaders, transitioning from sole responsibility to supporting champions, is important to underscore the dynamic nature of implementation planning. • The need for clearer guidance on establishing and maintaining implementation teams, including defining roles and responsibilities and identifying skill gaps. While the former guidance often seems directed towards leaders or implementers, the pivotal role of school leaders in supporting implementation teams was acknowledged.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation) **Recommendation 2: Attend to the contextual factors that influence implementation** • Consider whether **what is being implemented** is evidence-informed, suitable for the setting, and feasible to implement. • Develop **systems and structures** that support implementation, for example, time allocation or data systems. • Ensure **people who enable change** can support, lead, and positively influence implementation.		
	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		Recommendation 2 responds to these needs by clearly defining the key contextual factors that enable effective implementation, and outlines ways to ensure these are attended to in a complex system.
Benefits and harms	What is the magnitude of potential benefits of following this guidance in comparison with current practice in schools?	By attending to the contextual factors, schools will be empowered to enact the behaviours that drive effective implementation. For instance, active engagement in implementation becomes feasible with the provision of appropriate time and structures. When given due attention, contextual factors transition from being obstacles to facilitators of implementation. For instance, the evidence review highlighted that: • The evidence underscores the pivotal role of school structures, encompassing timetables and organisational tools, in facilitating evidence-based practice implementation (Blaine et al., 2017; Cane and Oland, 2015; Edwards et al, 2014). • The alignment of roles, policies, and structures within professional development frameworks contributes to successful implementation and fosters engagement, feasibility, and fidelity (Cane and Oland, 2015; Walker et al, 2022). • The manner in which facilitation occurs, encompassing data gathering, training, and support, significantly influences buy-in and shared responsibilities (Reezigt and Creemers, 2005; Tunks and Weller, 2009). • Engaging with evidence underpinning an approach increases fidelity and staff buy-in (Albers et al., 2021; Koh and Askell-Williams, 2021). Pre-empting intervention-specific barriers and addressing them through adaptation or resource provision is crucial for successful implementation (Dyssegaard et al., 2017). • Zhang et al. (2021) found that time allocated for purposes of staff reflection, collaboration, and planning of a behaviour intervention (an example of systems

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation) **Recommendation 2: Attend to the contextual factors that influence implementation** • Consider whether **what is being implemented** is evidence-informed, suitable for the setting, and feasible to implement. • Develop **systems and structures** that support implementation, for example, time allocation or data systems. • Ensure **people who enable change** can support, lead, and positively influence implementation.		
	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		and structures) demonstrated strong positive associations with pupil outcomes of school-level suspension rates. • Van Geel et al. (2017) evidence how agents for change in the form of teacher leaders who acted as role models for teaching colleagues and supported and encouraged the changes in practice were more likely to be found in schools with stronger scores on a combined assessment of fidelity, reach, and teaching performance after using a data-based decision-making intervention and sustaining the intervention after two years. • Gale et al. (2020) show how utilising a range of data sources helped monitoring and awareness of how fidelity translated into pupil outcomes. Neglecting these contextual factors may lead to constraints rather than facilitation of implementation. For instance, failing to consider the specific approach being implemented and its features can result in underestimating the requirements for implementation and involvement of relevant parties. This explicit emphasis on the implemented approach as a contextual factor signifies a noteworthy departure from the previous Implementation guidance report.
	What is the magnitude of risks/potential harms of following this guidance in comparison with current practice in schools?	There is a risk that schools may approach contextual factors in isolation, neglecting their role as foundational elements for the behaviours that underpin effective implementation. Additionally, schools might focus solely on individual contextual factors, failing to comprehend their interrelations and mutual support. For instance, the review reported that while champions can drive early enthusiasm and coordination, over-reliance on a few

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation) **Recommendation 2: Attend to the contextual factors that influence implementation** • Consider whether **what is being implemented** is evidence-informed, suitable for the setting, and feasible to implement. • Develop **systems and structures** that support implementation, for example, time allocation or data systems. • Ensure **people who enable change** can support, lead, and positively influence implementation.		
	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		individuals may hinder long-term sustainability (Probart, 1997; Crane et al., 2021). Developing a shared responsibility among multiple 'people who enable change' is vital for mitigating individual workload and ensuring sustainability (Cheung Kong, 2019; Grissom et al., 2021). To mitigate this risk, we address the importance of demonstrating how contextual factors operate together to support behavioural mechanisms throughout the implementation process, as outlined in Recommendation 3.
Transferability	Is the evidence relevant to the setting in question (English primary schools/secondary schools)?	'Transferability' answer under Recommendation 1 applies.
Balance	Does the balance between desirable and undesirable effects favour the intervention or the comparison?	Balance answer under Recommendation 1 applies. While there are risks in emphasising specific contextual factors, evidence indicates that attending to these contextual factors comprehensively allows to enact the behaviours and the interactions that lead to positive gains in implementation outcomes (e.g. increased buy-in and fidelity) (Moore, et. al., 2024), to a degree where the benefits outweigh the risks.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 2: Attend to the contextual factors that influence implementation

- Consider whether **what is being implemented** is evidence-informed, suitable for the setting, and feasible to implement.
- Develop **systems and structures** that support implementation, for example, time allocation or data systems.
- Ensure **people who enable change** can support, lead, and positively influence implementation.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
Resource use	How large are the resource requirements (costs)?	The review did not look at cost of implementation. We do not estimate the need for large resource requirements, considering most resources would be already in place (e.g staff). The principal resource implication will be linked to the role of the leadership team. To ensure the establishment of appropriate systems and structures (such as time management), leadership plays a pivotal role by empowering the appropriate individuals and investing in making evidence-informed decisions. The resource demands will also be shaped by the nature of the implementation.
Equity	What would be the impact on disadvantaged pupils?	Based on evaluations of programmes conducted to date, it can be hypothesised that economically disadvantaged students stand to derive benefits from effectively implemented evidence-informed programmes and practices (Speckesser et Al., 2018).. The particular outcomes are contingent upon the nature of what is being implemented (Moore et al. 2024). Since the evidence review did not include a subgroup analysis for pupils experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, we are unable to provide additional information on this. The EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit, however shows some evidence that: - Pupils require clear and actionable feedback to employ metacognitive strategies as they learn, as this information informs their understanding of their specific strengths and areas for improvement, thereby indicating which learning strategies have been effective for them in previously completed work. Whilst this is evidence from teaching approaches, rather than strictly implementation approaches, it builds upon the need of effective systems and structures.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 2: Attend to the contextual factors that influence implementation

- Consider whether **what is being implemented** is evidence-informed, suitable for the setting, and feasible to implement.
- Develop **systems and structures** that support implementation, for example, time allocation or data systems.
- Ensure **people who enable change** can support, lead, and positively influence implementation.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
Acceptability	Is the intervention acceptable to school leaders, teachers, pupils and other stakeholders (parents/governors/policymakers)?	Feedback from school leaders on the guidance suggests they find the emphasis on 'systems and structures', 'people who enable change' and 'what is being implemented' are appealing. They appreciate how these contextual factors address the practicalities necessary for implementation. However, this focus highlights influencing factors that may not necessarily be within their control, such as overarching multi-academy trusts (MATs) or national policies. Policy frameworks exert a significant influence on implementation outcomes, shaping decisions and actions at both inner and outer school levels (Desimone, 2002).
Feasibility	Is the approach feasible for schools?	Whilst school leaders and teachers recognise the inherent value in the contextual factors, attending to these factors does have potential implications for staff workload, if not managed appropriately.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 3: Use a structured but flexible implementation process

- Use a **structured process** to apply the behaviours and contextual factors to your day to day work.
- Adopt a practical and tailored set of **implementation strategies** organised into manageable phases: Explore, Prepare, Deliver, and Sustain.
- Treat implementation as a process of **ongoing learning and improvement**.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
Certainty of the evidence	What is the overall certainty of the evidence: - Is it supported by a rigorous methodology (see taxonomy)? - Are there any threats to validity?	The realist evidence synthesis produced a refined Programme Theory for implementation in schools. While this theory detailed the key contexts, mechanisms, and implementation outcomes of effective implementation, it did not encompass a process for implementation nor embed these constructs within a temporal framework. To address this issue, the review team evaluated evidence for 34 implementation strategies, based on the SISTER taxonomy of implementation strategies (Cook et al., 2019). This taxonomy offers a comprehensive, evidence-informed collection of school-based implementation strategies, albeit with limited usage in school implementation investigations thus far. The review team employing the refined programme theory to elucidate the contexts and mechanisms underlying the strategies' effectiveness. Sometimes, multiple strategies were combined for the analysis, where connected thematically. This additional analysis added more practical evidence about implementation actions and considering where these strategies fit with the phases of implementation (often prepare and/or deliver). Subsequent discussions with the guidance report panel and feedback from external practitioners highlighted the value in having an implementation process to help operationalise the programme theory effectively. It was unanimously agreed that retaining the original phased process from the previous guidance report (Explore, Prepare, Deliver, and Sustain), and integrating it with the new programme theory, would be beneficial. Panel members stressed that this process provides a practical system and structure to enact implementation. It was agreed, with members of the Guidance Report panel, that it would be useful to have a separate recommendation (Recommendation 3) focused on the process.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation) **Recommendation 3: Use a structured but flexible implementation process** • Use a **structured process** to apply the behaviours and contextual factors to your day to day work. • Adopt a practical and tailored set of **implementation strategies** organised into manageable phases: Explore, Prepare, Deliver, and Sustain. • Treat implementation as a process of **ongoing learning and improvement**.		
	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		<u>Quality of evidence in relation to the implementation strategies:</u> The reliance on the SISTER taxonomy presents certain challenges. Firstly, existing studies utilising the taxonomy predominantly categorise strategies into preparation or delivery phases, leaving a scarcity of strategies related to exploration and sustainability of implementation. Particularly lacking are strategies aiding in the identification of needs and selection of appropriate interventions. Some strategies weren't analysed in depth due to lack of evidence in school settings (Moore et.al, 2024). Eleven out of the 34 strategies have a confidence rating of moderate indicating there are minor concerns about the quality of evidence applying the programme theory to that implementation strategy. The remaining strategies are rated as low. This is typically in relation to the amount of literature that focuses on that strategy or specified links to outcomes across multiple papers (Moore et al., 2024). Below we report evidence for some of the key implementation strategies – please note we do not include the full list of strategies, rather we report key ones identified for each phase of the implementation process (Explore, Prepare, Deliver, and Sustain): **Assess for readiness and identify barriers and facilitators:** The review of evidence reveals a collection of studies showcasing the positive effects of assessing readiness within schools, impacting various outcomes such as adoption, buy-in, acceptability, feasibility, and pupil outcomes including resilience and attainment (Moore et al., 2024). Flaspohler et al. (2012) evaluated a support system for implementing prevention interventions, highlighting the role of readiness assessment in planning and problem-solving, contributing to sustained intervention over time. Moore et al. (2021) identified

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation) **Recommendation 3: Use a structured but flexible implementation process** • Use a **structured process** to apply the behaviours and contextual factors to your day to day work. • Adopt a practical and tailored set of **implementation strategies** organised into manageable phases: Explore, Prepare, Deliver, and Sustain. • Treat implementation as a process of **ongoing learning and improvement**.		
	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		readiness assessment as one of many implementation strategies used to support trauma-informed prevention programmes, emphasising its simplicity and efficacy in addressing anticipated barriers. **Develop an implementation plan or blueprint:** The evidence review found several studies highlighting the positive effects of developing and implementing an implementation plan as a strategy within schools, impacting outcomes such as fidelity, sustainability, adoption, and pupil behaviour outcomes (Moore, et al., 2024). A strong correlation was demonstrated between time allocated for planning and consultation, and improved pupil outcomes in positive behaviour support programmes (Zhang et al., 2021). Merle et al. (2022) highlighted the effectiveness of action planning in enhancing teacher adherence to evidence-based practices, while Cooper et al. (2015) identified planning as crucial for intervention sustainability. **Monitor and evaluate core components of the approach:** several quantitative and mixed-methods studies, albeit often small scale, underscore the positive impact of fidelity monitoring tools on outcomes such as fidelity and buy-in. Providing means to measure fidelity was found to encourage implementers to gather and utilise this data for fidelity improvement (Moore et al., 2024). The review found that online platform incorporating performance feedback loops, facilitating real-time fidelity tracking and student progress monitoring enhanced accountability and rectified missed activities Livet et al. (2018). **Organise school personnel implementation team meetings:** the evidence review found that regular team meetings among practitioners can positively influence intervention outcomes, including adoption, fidelity, and sustainability, potentially

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation) **Recommendation 3: Use a structured but flexible implementation process** • Use a **structured process** to apply the behaviours and contextual factors to your day to day work. • Adopt a practical and tailored set of **implementation strategies** organised into manageable phases: Explore, Prepare, Deliver, and Sustain. • Treat implementation as a process of **ongoing learning and improvement**.		
	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		enhancing buy-in (Duhon et al. 2009; Andreou et al. 2015). Some studies emphasised the impact of process elements, such as effective decision-making, on meeting quality and intervention fidelity (Judkins et al. 2019).
Priority of the problem	Does the recommendation deal with a schools'/teacher priorities?	The feedback from schools in Work Package 2 (Moore et al., 2024) underscores the significance of Recommendation 3 and the value in showing how to use implementation strategies and resources effectively at various stages of the implementation process: • Schools liked how the previous guidance report breaks down implementation into clear, consecutive stages, making it accessible for those new to implementation or tasked with selecting and introducing a new intervention in their schools. However, it was recognised that implementation is more fluid than depicted, and that strategies may be relevant at several points throughout the implementation process. • Respondents highlighted the need to focus on identifying implementation barriers and how to overcome them. Common pitfalls and misconceptions to be made more explicit, with recommendations focusing on exemplifying potential barriers for schools to consider in advance and explore in-depth when necessary. • Tensions in evaluating change were acknowledged, with pressure to measure outcomes quickly rather than measuring the implementation and carefully considering potential barriers and adaptations. • Respondents highlighted that the lack of tools for schools to measure implementation often led to a default focus on measuring impact on pupils early.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation) **Recommendation 3: Use a structured but flexible implementation process** • Use a **structured process** to apply the behaviours and contextual factors to your day to day work. • Adopt a practical and tailored set of **implementation strategies** organised into manageable phases: Explore, Prepare, Deliver, and Sustain. • Treat implementation as a process of **ongoing learning and improvement**.		
	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		• There was a perception of misconceptions around implementation, with a need to shift mindsets towards viewing it as a lengthy process rather than a destination. • 'Active ingredients' were mentioned as having great potential when understood correctly, but often misunderstood. Therefore, respondents highlighted a need for more precision and exemplification around this concept to ensure effective understanding and application. Recommendation 2 responds to these needs by clearly presenting a structured but flexible process, which highlights the definition of a school's needs and priorities, exemplifies ways to identify barriers and facilitators, as well as selecting the right approaches to respond to specific needs. It also puts additional weight to the 'Active ingredients' – currently referred as 'core components' of an intervention.
Benefits and harms	What is the magnitude of potential benefits of following this guidance in comparison with current practice in schools?	The guidance maintains the phased process (Explore-Prepare-Deliver-Sustain) from the previous report while introducing several potential advantages: • It adopts a more iterative, flexible, and responsive approach to address individual settings' needs and barriers effectively as well as selecting appropriate strategies. The evidence review highlighted the iterative nature of implementation (Moore et al., 2024). For instance, the concept of 'Develop evaluative and iterative strategies' (Cook et al., 2019), which entails crafting an implementation plan or blueprint, includes strategies aimed at fostering collective comprehension of objectives and aims that will steer the implementation process over time (Durand et al., 2016; Savage, 2011; Stewart et al., 2008).

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 3: Use a structured but flexible implementation process

- Use a **structured process** to apply the behaviours and contextual factors to your day to day work.
- Adopt a practical and tailored set of **implementation strategies** organised into manageable phases: Explore, Prepare, Deliver, and Sustain.
- Treat implementation as a process of **ongoing learning and improvement**.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		• It guides schools to implement behaviours and contexts with an emphasis on achieving excellence, implicitly acknowledging schools as complex adaptive systems (Koh and Askell-Williams, 2021). • The number of elements is reduced, resulting in reduced cognitive load compared to the previous guidance; each phase comprises two subsections. The evidence review located 228 primary studies evidencing the use of implementation strategies and 59 reviews that also evidenced the use of implementation strategies. The evidence review considers and reports any risks and potential harms in relation to the strategies assessed. However, this kind of evidence was very rare. Therefore, most evidence suggests the benefit of implementation strategies, particularly in relation to fidelity, acceptability and adoption implementation outcomes, but also across 78 primary studies and 20 reviews in relation to pupil outcomes.
	What is the magnitude of risks/potential harms of following this guidance in comparison with current practice in schools?	There is a potential risk that the structured process outlined in Recommendation 3 may overshadow Recommendations 1 and 2, particularly due to its perceived familiarity to individuals who used the former guidance report. To mitigate this risk, we have endeavoured to ensure that the process translates the concepts outlined in Recommendations 1 and 2 into operational practices. For instance, at the heart of the Explore phase, lies the key contextual factors and behaviours that drive effective implementation. An additional risk to take into account is the time required to set up and implement the right implementation strategies. For instance, evidence from the review suggests that among the main obstacles to data collection are teachers not returning data and group leaders lacking time to collect data. Time plays a crucial role in shaping the viability and

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 3: Use a structured but flexible implementation process

- Use a **structured process** to apply the behaviours and contextual factors to your day to day work.
- Adopt a practical and tailored set of **implementation strategies** organised into manageable phases: Explore, Prepare, Deliver, and Sustain.
- Treat implementation as a process of **ongoing learning and improvement**.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
		acceptability and efficiency of monitoring and evaluation instruments and measures. Simplifying data collection instruments and streamlining data collection processes can enhance staff engagement (Smith and Engelsen, 2013; Moore et al., 2024).
Transferability	Is the evidence relevant to the setting in question (English primary schools/secondary schools)?	'Transferability' answer under Recommendation 1 applies. There is already evidence from the previous guidance report that schools have found the process model relevant and helpful in educational contexts (EEF, Research School Network). The review focused on 34 implementation strategies that were well evidenced across literature that itself was relevant to the English school system.
Balance	Does the balance between desirable and undesirable effects favour the intervention or the comparison?	'Balance' answer under Recommendation 1 applied. Discussion with guidance report panel members, and user testing, identified the potential risks of emphasising *only* the behaviours and contextual factors. As a result, and in conjunction with evidence drawn from the SISTER strategies, the decision was taken to retain the phased process (Explore-Prepare-Deliver-Sustain) from the previous implementation guidance report. This reduces potential harms (e.g. complexity, acceptability) by situating the behaviours and contexts within a manageable scaffold. Undesirable effects are therefore mitigated by retain a process model to help schools operationalise the contexts and behaviours.

Evidence to Decision Framework (completed for each key recommendation)
Recommendation 3: Use a structured but flexible implementation process

- Use a **structured process** to apply the behaviours and contextual factors to your day to day work.
- Adopt a practical and tailored set of **implementation strategies** organised into manageable phases: Explore, Prepare, Deliver, and Sustain.
- Treat implementation as a process of **ongoing learning and improvement**.

	Question?	Evidence to substantiate
Resource use	How large are the resource requirements (costs)?	In the context of the implementation guidance report, resource requirements are tied directly to what is being implemented; application of the process (e.g. time spent on the Explore phase) will vary greatly in response to that. Technically, the process model *is* a system and structure (separated in the guidance for clarity's sake). As a result, it will require time, capacity and development of a suitable infrastructure.
Equity	What would be the impact on disadvantaged pupils?	'Equity' answer under Recommendation 1 applies.
Acceptability	Is the intervention acceptable to school leaders, teachers, pupils and other stakeholders (parents/governors/policymakers)?	There is evidence that the process model from the previous guidance report is acceptable. WP2 from the evidence review reports that: "Many users shared enthusiasm for the circular graphic which visualises the key stages. This was used successfully as a training and planning prompt." (Moore et al, 2024). However, feedback also indicated a need to make this more reflective of the complexity of implementation as experienced by schools. WP2 also reports that: "Despite the positive comments about the process diagram as a hook, some felt the need to make it more reflective of complexity and an iterative process." (Moore et al, 2024). As a result, Recommendation 3 unpacks and expands on the iterative nature of implementation.
Feasibility	Is the approach feasible for schools?	Drawing from feedback from the Guidance Report Panel and user tested, we concluded that the phased process helps to make implementation more feasible by providing a scaffold for applying implementation strategies. In addition, the concept of feasibility is addressed directly in the Guidance Report, for instance in the Explore phase decision making tool and when discussing implementation outcomes in the Prepare phase.