IMPROVING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Guidance Report

Education Endowment Foundation

EARLY INTERVENTION FOUNDATION

We would like to thank the many researchers and teachers who provided support and feedback on drafts of this guidance. In particular, we would like to thank the Advisory Panel and Evidence Review Team:

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About the Education Endowment Foundation

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

About the Early Intervention Foundation

The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) is a research charity and What Works centre established in 2013 to champion and support the use of effective early intervention to improve the lives of children and young people at risk of experiencing poor outcomes.

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FOREWORD

Ask any primary school teacher, and they will tell you that alongside the 'core business' of teaching literacy and numeracy, a large and often unrecognised part of their job, involves addressing children's emotional, social and behavioural needs. With the right support, children learn to articulate and manage their emotions, deal with conflict, solve problems, understand things from another person's perspective, and communicate in appropriate ways. These 'social and emotional skills' are essential for children's development, support effective learning, and are linked to positive outcomes in later life.

However, many schools feel that there's little time for developing such skills, given the pressure to improve attainment. Although all schools are expected to deliver Personal, Social, and Health Education (PSHE), it has not been a statutory requirement in the primary phase and in practice is often squeezed out. Few teachers receive support on how they can develop social and emotional skills in their mainstream teaching. This is a missed opportunity because, when carefully implemented, social and emotional learning can increase positive pupil behaviour, mental health and well-being, and academic performance. It is especially important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and other vulnerable groups, who on average have weaker social and emotional skills than their peers.

"The evidence suggests that how SEL is adopted and embedded really matters for children's outcomes."

That is why we have developed this guidance report. At a time when schools are reviewing their core vision and curriculum offer, and planning to implement statutory Relationships and Health education, this guidance offers six practical and evidence-based recommendations to support children's social and emotional development. It provides a starting point for schools to review their current approaches, and suggests practical ideas they can implement. Importantly, it argues that such approaches can be woven into everyday class teaching without creating burdensome new programmes of work.

To arrive at the recommendations, we reviewed the best available international research and consulted with teachers and other experts. We identified a group of core skills and strategies that occur frequently in social and emotional learning programmes that have good evidence of impact, and suggest ways of embedding these in the classroom and beyond.

The international evidence in this area is extensive but knowledge of how best to implement it in English schools is not yet as strong as we would like, so an over-arching recommendation focuses on the importance of implementing and monitoring progress carefully, and the requirement for school leaders to prioritise this work if it is to have an impact. Although some schools may feel social and emotional learning is 'what we do already', the evidence suggests that how SEL is adopted and embedded really matters for children's outcomes.

As with all our guidance reports, this publication is just the start. We will now be working with the sector, including through our colleagues in the Research Schools Network, to build on the recommendations with further training, resources, and guidance. And, as ever, we will be looking to support and test the most promising programmes that put the lessons from the research into practice.

Sir Kevan Collins
Chief Executive
Education Endowment Foundation

INTRODUCTION

What does this guidance cover?

This guidance report aims to help primary schools support children's social and emotional development. It draws on a recent review of the evidence about social and emotional learning conducted by the University of Manchester, which was funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF). It also draws on a wider body of evidence and expert input.

Currently, most of the evidence regarding Social and Emotional Learning ('SEL') is focused on intervention *programmes* with little guidance on the types of strategies or *practices* that teachers can integrate into their everyday teaching.* The evidence review aimed to summarise what is known about the former, and to conduct new analysis on the latter, in order that this guidance can provide recommendations on both structured programmes and everyday teaching practices.

In addition to the evidence review, the EEF and EIF commissioned a survey of what primary schools in England are currently doing to support children's social and emotional development. This information is used to provide context for the recommendations, and to identify where there are gaps between current practice and the evidence.

More information about the report and how it was produced is provided at the end of this guidance report. Some key references are included for those wishing to explore the subject in more depth. The full evidence review and survey will be published separately, and will contain more comprehensive methods and reference sections.

Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is intended for primary schools. It is aimed primarily at senior leaders who are thinking about their school's approach to social and emotional learning, and at Early Years, Key Stage 1, and Key Stage 2 class teachers. Further audiences who may find the guidance relevant include other staff within schools who are responsible for children's social and emotional development (for example, PSHE coordinators or inclusion leads), local authorities, multi-academy trusts, governors, parents, programme developers, and educational researchers.

Acting on the guidance

The recommendations in this guidance report provide a starting point for school leaders to critically review how they support children's social and emotional development. This could include auditing their current approach to PSHE or Relationships and Health education and how it links to classroom teaching, their behaviour management or anti-bullying policies, or their training and support for staff. If schools have bought a SEL programme, it might prompt them to consider if it is as promising as hoped, and how it might be implemented more effectively—or replaced.

> *"This guidance provides recommendations on both structured programmes and everyday teaching practices."*

Additional resources to support the implementation of the recommendations made in this report will be developed. The EEF's guidance report, *Putting Evidence to Work—A School's Guide to Implementation*, can also support teachers and senior staff to apply the recommendations in a practical way in their own schools. The EEF's other guidance reports, particularly those on *Behaviour*, *Metacognition*, and *Working with Parents* are also relevant, and the *EIF Guidebook* provides assessments of evidence-based SEL programmes.

Schools may also want to seek support from the EEF's national network of Research Schools. Research Schools aim to lead the way in the use of evidence-based teaching, building affiliations with large numbers of schools in their region, and supporting the use of evidence at scale.

*** By 'programme' we mean a structured intervention or curriculum, usually supported by a manual, external training, resources, and timetabled delivery. By 'practice' we mean a flexible strategy that can be incorporated into everyday teaching or school life, with few external inputs or formal requirements.**

INTRODUCTION

What is Social and Emotional Learning?

Social and Emotional Learning refers to the process through which children learn to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.[1] There are a range of other terms that schools use that overlap with SEL (though have different emphases), including: supporting children's mental health and wellbeing; character education; development of children's resilience; bullying prevention; life skills; behaviour management; personal development; and Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development.

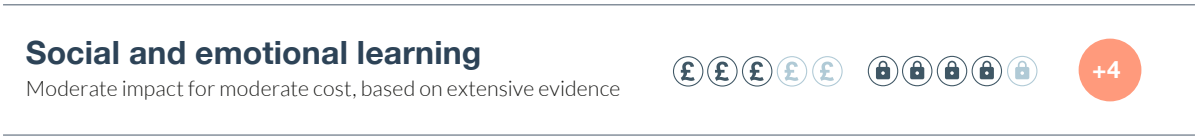
Throughout this report we refer to 'SEL', as defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), because this definition is widely used internationally. It consists of five core competencies (see Table 1).[2] These are skills that have been linked to a range of positive outcomes,[3] as explained in more detail in the section below.

Table 1: Core Skills at the heart of SEL

Core competency	Definition	Associated skills
Self-awareness	The ability to accurately recognise one's own emotions, thoughts and values and how they influence behaviour. The ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.	• Identifying emotions • Accurate self-perception • Recognising strengths • Self-confidence • Self-efficacy
Self-management	The ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts and behaviours in different situations – effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work towards personal and academic goals.	• Impulse control • Stress management • Self-discipline • Self-motivation • Goal setting • Organisational skills
Social awareness	The ability to take the perspective of and empathise with others. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behaviour and to recognise family, school and community resources and supports.	• Understanding emotions • Empathy/sympathy • Appreciating diversity • Respect for others
Relationship skills	The ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively and seek and offer help when needed.	• Communication • Social engagement • Relationship building • Teamwork
Responsible decision making	The ability to make constructive choices about personal behaviour and social interactions. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions and a consideration of the wellbeing of oneself and others.	• Identifying problems • Analysing solutions • Solving problems • Evaluating • Reflecting • Ethical responsibility

Diagram adapted from CASEL 2017

Figure 1: Evidence reviews including over 700 studies show that on average SEL has a positive impact on academic attainment, equivalent to 4 additional months' progress.



Why do social and emotional skills matter?

There is extensive evidence associating childhood social and emotional skills with improved outcomes at school and in later life, in relation to physical and mental health, school readiness and academic achievement, crime, employment and income.[4] For example, longitudinal research in the UK has shown that good social and emotional skills—including self-regulation, self-awareness, and social skills—developed by the age of ten, are predictors of a range of adult outcomes (age 42), such as life satisfaction and wellbeing, labour market success, and good overall health.[5]

There is also evidence that children's skills can be improved purposefully through school-based SEL programmes, and that these impacts can persist over time.[6] Numerous large evidence reviews[7] indicate that, when well implemented, SEL can have positive impacts on a range of outcomes, including:

- Improved social and emotional skills;
- improved academic performance (see Figure 1);
- improved attitudes, behaviour and relationships with peers;
- reduced emotional distress (student depression, anxiety, stress and social withdrawal);
- reduced levels of bullying;
- reduced conduct problems; and
- improved school connection.

Efforts to promote SEL skills may be especially important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who on average have weaker SEL skills at all ages than their better off peers.[8] This matters for a range of outcomes, as lower levels of SEL skills are associated with poorer mental health and academic attainment.[9]

There is also evidence to suggest that the benefits of SEL may extend to teachers and to the school environment, including a less disruptive and more positive classroom climate, and teachers reporting lower stress levels, higher job satisfaction, better relationships with their children, and higher confidence in their teaching.[10] For example, in one survey, 72% of UK teachers said that teaching SEL had improved their own relationships with their students.[11]

However, it is important to note that most of the evidence to date is from the US, and how SEL is delivered is important.[12] So, schools should think carefully about how recommended approaches apply to their own contexts. This is discussed in the recommendations that follow.

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How does SEL relate to mental health?

Social and emotional skills are protective factors for mental health. They equip children with the tools and resources to address mental health challenges that interfere with life, learning and well-being (for example, difficulty regulating emotions, concentrating, and interacting with peers).[13] Indeed, recent research has shown that SEL skills at age nine predicted Key Stage 2 test scores at age 11 (controlling for prior attainment), via their influence on mental health difficulties in the interim.[14]

However, SEL does not replace the need for comprehensive systems and services for children with mental health difficulties; rather, SEL provides a foundation that promotes the development of competencies in all children and provides a framework to support early intervention and intensive interventions for children who need additional targeted help.[15]

What does SEL look like in English schools, and how does it relate to PSHE?

There are many approaches to developing social and emotional skills in primary schools, which can range from taught PSHE lessons, to whole school programmes, to less intensive practices that teachers integrate into their everyday teaching. These usually work at three levels:

- **whole-school** (for example, all-staff training, school-wide efforts to reduce bullying or improve school ethos);
- **whole-class** (for example, an explicitly taught weekly classroom curriculum, or integrated strategies); and
- **targeted** (for example, individual or group-based support for children with greater needs).

This guidance focuses on whole-school and whole-class approaches, because targeted approaches were outside the scope of the review, and are likely to require more specialist input. Recommendations 1–4 particularly focus on the classroom, whilst Recommendations 5 and 6 focus on the whole school, and implementing change. Schools interested in how SEL may apply to children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) should look out for EEF's forthcoming guidance report on SEND.

High quality PSHE education will aim to develop children's skills whilst also building knowledge about particular aspects of life, for example, physical health or safety. PSHE can therefore provide valuable contexts in which to teach social and emotional learning. However, it is important that:

- a SEL programme does not simply replace the wider PSHE curriculum; and
- SEL is not taught as an isolated programme only in PSHE time, without involvement or connection with the wider staff and school.

What do schools currently say about SEL?

A survey of over 400 primary schools conducted by the University of Manchester found that:[16]

- Many schools say that SEL is important: 46% said that SEL is their top priority and a further 49% believe it is important alongside a number of other priorities.
- Nearly half of schools (48%) say that they are devoting 'much more time' to SEL compared to five years ago, and further third (36%) 'somewhat more time', citing higher needs among children and families, including children 'struggling to cope'.
- However, only a third (36%) said that dedicated planning for SEL was central to their practice.
- Schools reported barriers to delivering SEL: time is the number one issue (71%), and the pressure to focus on other priorities was also commonly cited (68%).
- Half of schools (51%) reported that they have specific time-tabled slots for SEL; the other half did not. Of those that did, most spent 30–60 minutes per week on SEL. A separate survey of teachers suggested that less than one third have any class time dedicated for SEL.[17]
- School-wide approaches to supporting SEL (such as, school policies, assemblies, or dedicated staff groups with responsibility for SEL), were considered 'central to practice' in around half of schools (40–60%).
- Few schools reported using evidence-based programmes; the most commonly cited programmes were 'dot-b' mindfulness (27 schools) and FRIENDS for Life (15 schools).
- The most commonly used approach among schools was SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning), which was developed as part of the Primary National Strategies. 104 schools said they used SEAL resources, and a further 74 that they had used them previously.
- Many schools reported having had some training related to SEL, but in most cases this appears to have been a one-off workshop, rather than ongoing support.
- When asked what would help them deliver SEL more effectively, schools identified training as the greatest need. This was followed by the desire for a curriculum and resources on SEL including 'links to the core curriculum' and resources 'that don't require huge time commitments'.

These findings suggest several key areas where schools might benefit from additional support, including: strategies and resources that can support SEL teaching (ideally without requiring large blocks of dedicated time); information on evidence-based programmes and curricula; and ideas for improving whole-school approaches and planning for SEL, including staff development.

The guidance that follows aims to support schools in integrating high quality SEL throughout the school, considering the priorities and challenges that schools have identified.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Teaching strategies

1

Teach SEL skills explicitly

- Use a range of strategies to teach key skills, both in dedicated time, and in everyday teaching.
- Self-awareness: expand children's emotional vocabulary and support them to express emotions.
- Self-regulation: teach children to use self-calming strategies and positive self-talk to help deal with intense emotions.
- Social awareness: use stories to discuss others' emotions and perspectives.
- Relationship skills: role play good communication and listening skills.
- Responsible decision-making: teach and practise problem-solving strategies.

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2

Integrate and model SEL skills through everyday teaching

- Model the social and emotional behaviours you want children to adopt.
- Give specific and focused praise when children display SEL skills.
- Do not rely on 'crisis moments' for teaching skills.
- Embed SEL teaching across a range of subject areas: literacy, history, drama and PE all provide good opportunities to link to SEL.
- Use simple ground-rules in groupwork and classroom discussion to reinforce SEL skills.

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Curriculum

3

Plan carefully for adopting a SEL programme

- Use a planned series of lessons to teach skills in dedicated time.
- Adopting an evidence-based programme is likely to be a better bet than developing your own from scratch.
- Explore and prepare carefully before adopting a programme—review what is required to deliver it, and whether it is suitable for your needs and context.
- Use evidence summaries (such as those from EIF and EEF) as a quick way of assessing the evidence for programmes.
- Once underway, regularly review progress, and adapt with care.

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Whole-school

Implementation

4

Use a SAFE curriculum: Sequential, Active, Focused and Explicit

- Ensure your curriculum builds skills sequentially across lessons and year groups. Start early and think long term.
- Balance teacher-led activities with active forms of learning, such as: role-play, discussion and small group work, to practise skills.
- Focus your time: quality matters more than quantity. Brief regular instruction appears more effective than infrequent long sessions.
- Be explicit: clearly identify the skills that are being taught and why they are important.

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5

Reinforce SEL skills through whole-school ethos and activities

- Establish schoolwide norms, expectations and routines that support children's social and emotional development.
- Align your school's behaviour and anti-bullying policies with SEL.
- Seek ideas and support from staff and pupils in how the school environment can be improved.
- Actively engage with parents to reinforce skills in the home environment.

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6

Plan, support, and monitor SEL implementation

- Establish a shared vision for SEL: ensure it is *connected to* rather than *competing with* other school priorities.
- Involve teachers and school staff in planning for SEL.
- Provide training and support to all school staff, covering: readiness for change; development of skills and knowledge; and support for embedding change.
- Prioritise implementation quality: teacher preparedness and enthusiasm for SEL are associated with better outcomes.
- Monitor implementation and evaluate the impact of your approaches.

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1 Teach SEL skills explicitly

This recommendation describes simple activities, routines, and strategies that teachers can use to develop particular social and emotional skills. Recent research suggests that supporting teachers to develop and use a repertoire of such strategies is likely to be an efficient way of improving SEL provision without requiring large blocks of dedicated curriculum time.[18] The strategies in this chapter have been identified from evidence-based programmes, and can be used flexibly:

- as part of planned time dedicated to SEL;
- integrated into everyday class teaching; and
- to complement a more structured programme (see Recommendation 3).

Some strategies (e.g. the use of stories) may feel familiar to teachers, but the key element is in making the teaching of SEL skills more frequent, purposeful and explicit.[19] Some strategies will be easier to align with everyday class teaching; others will fit more naturally into standalone PSHE sessions.

The recommendation is focused around the five core SEL skills described in the introduction to this guidance. In each case we describe what is meant by the skill, why it matters, and strategies and examples that could be used for developing the skill.

It is important to note that whilst there is growing research promoting such strategies, and they have been drawn from evidence-based approaches, they have not been evaluated as standalone strategies, so schools need to judge which approaches are suitable for them and are effective in their contexts.

A. Strategies to enhance children's self-awareness

What do we mean by self-awareness?

Self-awareness is concerned with the ability to recognise our emotions and thoughts, and to understand how they influence our behaviour. It also means being aware of our strengths and having a belief in oneself ('self efficacy'). Good self-awareness is associated with reduced difficulties in social functioning and fewer externalising problems, in particular aggression.[20] Two areas that teachers can support are children's knowledge of emotions, and ability to express emotions.

Examples of activities used to develop children's self-awareness

Knowledge of emotions

Teachers can help children label and recognise emotions through explicit vocabulary teaching ('putting feelings into words'), and activities that give children the opportunity to practise using this language in real contexts through games, stories, and other activities. For example:

- using story books to discuss how characters feel and why;
- using games to develop children's vocabulary e.g. miming activities where children guess a feeling that is being portrayed ('emotional charades'); and
- using mirrors, photographs and pictures to talk about what happens to people's faces and bodies when they are experiencing particular emotions: for example, children might match photographs displaying different emotions with emotion labels and scenario labels.

Emotional expression

Children's ability to recognise and express emotions can be supported with a class display, which is regularly referenced (see Box 1). Teachers can also develop children's ability to tell others how they are feeling by, for example:

- teaching them to use 'I' messages (articulating how you feel and why): 'I feel x because…'
- providing supportive prompts to children who have difficulty talking about their emotions, such as: 'It looks like you might be feeling sad, can you tell me what happened?'. The simple act of naming the emotion can help children understand it more clearly.
- explaining to children that all feelings are okay, but the behaviours they lead to may not be okay. It is okay to feel angry, for example, but not okay to act in ways that hurt others.

Box 1: Feelings display

Create a 'feelings display' in the classroom (for example, feelings tree with the leaves as different feelings words, emoticon board, feelings wheel, poster or dictionary). The teacher can introduce the vocabulary in the display, and then use the display in many ways on an ongoing basis, for example:

- *'You feel happy? Is there another word on our feelings tree that you could use?'*
- *'We have learned a new feelings word today– What does it mean to feel frustrated? Can you think of a time you might feel frustrated?'*

Teachers can also use the display to support emotional expression, for example, by having children place their name or photo on a relevant emotion within the feelings display to indicate how they are feeling when they come into the classroom in the morning, or at the start of the afternoon.[21] Teachers may also make reference to the display in describing their own emotions: *'This is beginning to make me frustrated, because you're talking whilst I am trying to explain something important to you.'*

Feelings wheel: to support explicit teaching and practice of new vocabulary

B. Strategies to enhance children's self-management

What do we mean by self-management and emotional self-regulation?

The terms 'self-management' and 'self-regulation' refer to the ability to understand and regulate our emotions, thoughts, and behaviours in different situations. It includes being able to:

- regulate or manage reactions to emotions like frustration, anxiety, or excitement;
- calm down after something exciting or upsetting;
- focus on a task; and
- control impulses.

The development of self-regulation skills enables children to behave in socially acceptable ways by, for example, giving them the ability to take turns, share, and express emotions (such as anger or frustration) in appropriate ways.[22] Self regulation of emotions complements self-regulated learning, which is discussed in EEF guidance reports on *Metacognition* and *Preparing for Literacy*.

Examples of activities used to develop children's self-regulation skills

- Brainstorm together ways in which children might deal with strong emotions, for example, by counting to ten, walking away, telling someone how you feel and why, asking someone for help.
- Teach children self-calming strategies. For example: show children how they can use deep breathing to calm themselves (see Box 2 for an example).
- Teach children positive self-talk. When children experience a strong emotion such as anger, often there is an underlying thought (self-talk) accompanying this emotion which intensifies how they are feeling ("I've been left out…no one likes me"). When self-talk is negative, children can get angry, frustrated, or anxious more easily. Teach children to use positive-self talk (helpful thoughts) to calm their emotions.
- Recognise body cues. Help children to become aware of early physiological signs of strong emotions and encourage them to talk about how they are feeling. Examples of physiological signs include: heart beating, face getting hot, sweaty palms, knees or hands shaking, tone of voice, facial expression, and rapid breathing.
- Use images and metaphors to help children's understanding (see Box 2). For example, children might watch a balloon blown up until it bursts, or learn about volcanic eruptions, then discuss how they might notice angry feelings building up inside themselves, and make a class poster of steps they can take to avoid an 'anger explosion'.

Box 2: Self-calming strategy

The 'Turtle Technique' is a strategy that is taught formally in evidence-based prevention programs such as the Incredible Years and PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies). The aim is to help children calm themselves when they feel angry. It is based on empirical observations of the relationship among physiological measures, behaviour, and children's emotional states.[23] It involves the teacher explaining to children how a turtle can retreat into its shell, and suggest they can do this too when they are angry (perhaps putting their head down, or holding themselves). In their shell, they can take three deep breaths and think calming thoughts, such as: 'I can calm down.' They come out of their shell when calm and ready to think of solutions to the problem. An adaptation for older children (Key Stage 2) has been called 'Fingers Linked, Time to Think'.

C. Strategies to enhance children's social awareness

What do we mean by social awareness?

Social awareness refers to the ability to understand the perspective of others and empathise. In the early years of life, children are naturally more egocentric and more inclined to think about themselves and their own needs. Understanding the perspectives of others and developing a sense of empathy are considered fundamental building blocks for the positive development and mental health of children.[24] Longitudinal research has shown that good social skills—including high levels of empathy—developed by the age of ten, are predictors of a range of adult outcomes (age 42), such as life satisfaction and wellbeing, labour market success, and good overall health.[25]

Examples of activities and strategies used to develop children's social awareness

Identifying another person's emotions and perspective

- Use 'hot seating', in which one child plays a character and the rest of the class asks them questions about their feelings and how those feelings influence the choices they make.
- Circle time. Use everyday classroom scenarios during circle time to explore how awareness of the feelings of others can help to develop children's empathy skills e.g. 'Paul forgot his lunch today, how does this make him feel?'; 'I (the teacher) was running late for school this morning, how do you think this made me feel? How could you tell I was flustered?'
- Use literature, poetry, film and real-life accounts to help children understand the feelings of those who feel bullied, or different, or lonely, or what it feels like to experience difficult events. Ask if they have ever felt the same way.[26] (See Box 3 for an example.)
- Encourage self-reflective questioning—such as, 'What would I have done in that situation?' This is a metacognitive technique that allows children to evaluate actions, promotes self-reflection, and develops their use of self-talk. This is commonly taught in evidence-based SEL programmes.[27]

Box 3: Discuss what it means to be an ally

Ask children to each write about a situation where they have experienced a strong emotion. After doing this, ask children to swap accounts and write a brief summary of what emotion the other child was feeling. Working together, they then record three things an ally could do to help someone in that situation. To draw connections with other subjects, in a follow-up history lesson, they could consider what it means to be an ally to another nation, and how this is different or similar to being an ally to someone in school. This example is drawn from the Second Step programme.[28]

D. Strategies to enhance children's relationship skills

What do we mean by relationship skills?

Relationship skills are concerned with our ability to interact positively with peers and adults, and to effectively navigate social situations.[29] It is important that children learn to recognise, express and regulate their emotions before they can be expected to interact successfully with others.

Examples of activities and strategies used to develop children's relationship skills

Communication skills

- The teacher can begin by demonstrating poor communication techniques and the class can discuss some of the issues with the teacher's form of communication—for example, arms folded, not looking at the person they are speaking to, being distracted while talking, shouting at the person, interrupting them, rolling eyes, mumbling, shrugging shoulders, and so on.
- Children can brainstorm and model good communication techniques—for example, appropriate eye contact, not distracted, using facial expressions or nodding to demonstrate you're listening, not interrupting the person when they are speaking, seeking clarification, asking a question or giving an opinion when the other person has finished speaking, and summarising what they have said and checking you have got it right.
- Children in pairs can role-play scenarios and identify ways in which they can improve their communication skills. Sample scenarios include trying to join in a game out in the playground, trying to get the teacher's attention in class, or talking to a parent whilst playing on a phone.
- Children can identify and practise the skills needed for working in groups and teams—such as building on one another's contributions, making sure everyone can contribute, probing to check understanding, and trying to reach a shared agreement. They can use sentence stems —such as 'I agree because...', 'I disagree because…'—to support their discussions.

Box 4: Class rules

There is evidence that when students are actively involved in developing the class rules and norms, they are likely to take greater responsibility for following them.[30] Teachers can draft class rules together with the children, which set out the behaviours and expectations that are important for the class—for example, listening when others are speaking, taking turns, being willing to work together, and respecting different opinions. This might include getting children to generate ideas and discussing the pros and cons of different rules and why they are important. This is a good activity to do at the start of the year with a new class, but can also be re-visited during the year, particularly to address issues that arise. This activity is used in a programme called Incredible Years—Teacher Classroom Management.

Relationship building

- Role play can be used to demonstrate ways to interact with friends in different circumstances—for example, introducing yourself, taking turns, asking to share, or dealing with conflict. Scenarios involving joining a new class, or club, and welcoming newcomers to such a group, can also be explored.
- Circle time is a useful means to discuss relationship-building and accepting difference with children. The class could, for example, discuss a) ways in which we can make new friends; b) what makes a good friend and how we can show we are being a good friend to someone else; c) how can we be a friend to someone who is left out, ignored, or teased; and d) what are the things we do that can damage a friendship?
- Group work can be used to practise skills in a new context. For example, have students partner up and work on projects together, assign them a task, and remind them about good communication and listening skills.
- Discussing the rules of the classroom can be a useful way for developing communication and relationship skills, as well as wider SEL skills (see Box 4).

E. Strategies to enhance children's responsible decision making

What do we mean by responsible decision making?

Responsible decision making is concerned with children's ability to problem solve and make constructive choices. In order to do this, children need to learn how to evaluate a situation, think about possible solutions and consider the potential consequences of these options for themselves and others.

Children who employ appropriate problem-solving strategies play more constructively, have better relationships with peers and are more cooperative at home and school.[31] Children can be taught to use appropriate problem-solving strategies that improve their decision-making processes.[32]

Problem-solving strategy

Problem solving involves using the emotional identification and communication strategies discussed earlier. Here are steps to problem-solving that you can teach children, drawn from a range of evidence-based SEL programmes:[33]

1. **Identify the problem.** Help children to articulate the problem out loud—for example, *'You don't have anyone to play with?'*. Help children to think about how this is making them feel, and to understand the feelings of other people involved in the situation.

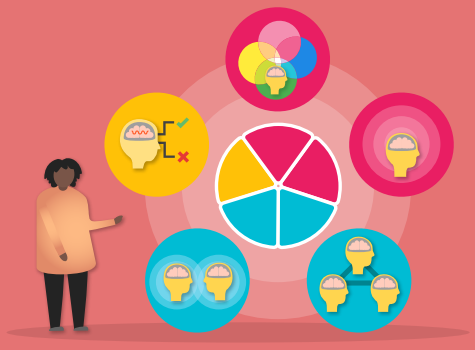
2. **Brainstorm solutions.** Help children to generate solutions to the problem situation. Young children may not be able to come up with their own solutions, but teachers can support their thinking with questions such as *'What could we do to make the situation better? / What kinds of things could you do that would help you and the other people involved to feel better?'* With practice, children will gradually be able to come up with more of their own solutions.

3. **Identify the pros and cons of each solution.** Help children identify potential positive and negative consequences for each potential solution they identified.

4. **Pick a solution.** Encourage children to pick a solution. When thinking about a good solution, ask questions such as: *'Is this a safe solution? Is it fair? Does it lead to good feelings?'* It might be helpful to create some solution cards that you can discuss with them, such as: *'Ask someone for help'; 'Shout'; 'Say sorry'; 'Walk away'; 'Tell the other person how you are feeling and why'; 'Ask nicely'* and so on.

5. **Test it out.** Encourage children to try out their solution and see what happens. If it doesn't work out, they can try another solution from the list developed. Give children lots of support if the solution does not work.

It is best to begin problem solving when children are calm and relaxed. If a child is very anxious or angry, help them to calm down first (quiet time, taking deep breaths) or leave problem-solving for another day when you know the child is ready to participate. When you encounter behavioural issues in your classroom, try to resolve them together using a problem-solving approach. Where a child has behaved inappropriately, re-run the scenario with them later to help them identify alternative courses of action. Box 5 provides an example related to problem solving and goal setting.



Box 5: Identifying barriers to goals, and how to overcome them

This activity starts with the teacher providing a written vignette detailing a goal and a problem preventing the goal from being reached. Children then work together to identify the goal, identify the barrier and identify how the character is feeling.[34] They may also brainstorm potential solutions.

The approach can then be extended to apply to the children themselves, and a goal they have at school:

1) children start by identifying a feasible goal they wish to achieve in the coming weeks;

2) they then reflect on achieving the outcome;

3) they then identify a likely barrier to them achieving it; and

4) plan for what they would do if that barrier arose – 'if x obstacle arises, then I will do y'.

This framework has been described as 'Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan' ('WOOP'). There is evidence from small trials that helping children to set goals, identify potential barriers, and anticipate 'if…then…' solutions in this way can lead to better outcomes than a comparison group who are encouraged simply to think positively about achieving goals.[35]

2 Integrate and model SEL skills through everyday teaching

Recommendation 1 provided example strategies that schools can use to develop social and emotional skills through explicit teaching—explaining the strategies themselves. This Recommendation provides ideas on how to embed such skills in the course of everyday teaching. The end goal of SEL is that children use the knowledge and skills they are taught as part of their daily interactions with peers and adults. The teaching of skills is therefore likely to have greater and longer-term impacts when it is integrated into everyday classroom interactions, and across subjects, than when skills are taught in isolation.[36] Teachers and other school staff can support children's skill development by purposefully seeking out opportunities to model, recognise, and practise SEL skills.

Model the behaviours you want children to adopt

In addition to explicit teaching, children learn by observing other people, getting ideas about how new behaviours are formed, and using the ideas to guide their actions.[37] Teachers navigate stressful situations nearly every day, and children are watching, and learning from the way teachers manage frustration, maintain control of themselves and the classroom, and stay focused in the face of distractions.[38] Modelling—or demonstrating appropriate behaviours—teaches and enhances children's social and emotional skills.[39] How teachers and other adults in school speak to each other, to parents and to children—demonstrating attentive listening, for example, or how to speak to someone who is upset—can model a respectful relationship.

The EEF's guidance report on *Metacognition and Self-Regulated Learning* provides examples of how teachers can use modelling to reveal the thinking processes of an expert learner. Similarly, teachers can model their own thinking and feelings explicitly as they approach a task or respond to a situation to reveal the processes that support effective decision-making and interaction. For example, when faced with a problem—classroom IT that is needed for an activity but isn't functioning correctly—the teacher might model aloud the immediate response of frustration, and demonstrate the problem-solving approach, staying calm, taking a deep breathe, thinking through the options aloud, and coming up with a solution for a new activity.

Use 'teachable moments' for embedding skills

Even more than academic skills, social and emotional skills develop in the context of daily life as social challenges and other teaching opportunities arise.[40] School staff can use real life classroom and playground situations to apply SEL strategies and skills in 'real-time', providing opportunities for using the example strategies set out in Recommendation 1. For example, a teacher or other adult might:

- support children to think through others' perspectives and use specific problem-solving skills during a disagreement in the playground;
- encourage the class to discuss and try to solve ongoing problems that are affecting the whole group—for example, some children feeling excluded or ignored; or
- give specific and focused praise on seeing children applying SEL learning—for example, *'I noticed that you managed to calm yourself in a difficult situation....Well done!'*. Using language that builds children's self-efficacy draws their attention to strategies they have used to help themselves.

Paying attention to positive behaviours is an effective strategy for reinforcing skills,[41] and it is relatively easy to build into the everyday classroom environment. This can be supplemented by recognition and rewards related to positive social and emotional behaviour.[42]

Do not rely on 'crisis moments' for teaching skills

In busy schools we often do not think explicitly about children's social and emotional skills until a problem arises (such as an incident of bullying). While such problems can provide important contexts for teaching and reinforcing skills, if they are the only time that skills are discussed, children may perceive skills to be solely about avoiding poor behaviour. Such individual incidents can also be sensitive and difficult for communicating broader lessons.

Although it can be difficult to make time, taking a preventative approach—discussing issues such as bullying before they arise, and providing children with strategies they can draw on —is likely to make crisis moments easier to deal with when they do arise, and lead to more effective resolutions.

Embed SEL teaching across subject areas

Teaching SEL skills in the context of the wider curriculum is engaging and helps children to apply what they have learnt. The suggestion here is not to replace core curriculum teaching on knowledge and skills, but to identify opportunities for linking and embedding SEL skills in ways that complement everyday teaching. Many areas of the curriculum offer opportunities for SEL. For example:

- In English lessons, children can use stories as the basis for discussing characters' feelings and motivations, extending a normal inference activity (see Box 6).
- In history lessons children can develop an understanding of others' perspectives and feelings based on real events. For example, when studying Second World War evacuees, children might discuss or write about what it must have been like to leave home and live with a new family.
- In PE children might explore the features of effective teamwork, or discuss what it feels like to lose a game and how to respond constructively.
- In drama, a rehearsal can provide opportunities for role-play, and practice of emotional expression, such as how we convey or recognise emotions.

Teachers report that integrating SEL into academic content is associated with improved learning, and that integrating SEL across a range of subjects appears to be more likely when teachers are involved in introducing the SEL provision in their school (rather than having it imposed as a school policy, when SEL is more likely to be taught only in discrete time).[43]

Provide support for effective group work and classroom talk

The effects of SEL work can be amplified through classrooms that help children to *practise* their skills in their everyday interactions.[44] For example, collaborative (or cooperative) learning approaches may be particularly beneficial for supporting pupils' peer interactions.[45] Such approaches typically involve pupils working together on activities or learning tasks in groups small enough for everyone to participate on a collective task that has been clearly assigned. The impact of collaborative approaches on learning is consistently positive, with approaches promoting talk and interaction between learners linked to greater gains.[46]

Structured whole-class discussion also provides opportunities for students to practise social and emotional skills, including grappling with multiple perspectives, communicating effectively, and disagreeing respectfully. Teachers can support this by establishing ground rules for talk, as well as acting as guide and facilitator by using well-designed questions to draw out students' thinking, modelling effective communication, and supporting children to build on one another's contributions. For example, a ground-rule during a discussion could be: 'you need to reference a class-mate's name and contribution in your response…' to encourage active listening and a cumulative dialogue. There is evidence that such approaches to improving the quality of classroom talk can improve academic and non-academic outcomes (see Box 7 for an example).[47]

Box 6: Identifying others' emotions and perspectives—linking SEL and reading comprehension

To connect the characters and situations in a book with the children's experiences, the Year 3 teacher plans to read a passage from the book at least twice. During the second reading, he asks questions that a) increase children's emotional vocabulary; b) prompt reflective self-questioning; and c) ask children to link the story to their own circumstances:

- 'What do you think the characters are feeling?'
- 'How can you tell they are feeling this way?'
- 'How would you solve the problem?'
- 'Can you use words from the story to explain how you feel when you…?'
- 'What could we do differently if this happens in our classroom?'

Such open-ended questions enable children to link fictional texts to their own experiences, learn new vocabulary, and practise applying social and emotional skills. Any negative responses (for example, fighting as an appropriate response) should be talked through and alternative positive responses provided. Children can reflect upon and share similar experiences. As an extension, children could then rewrite the story to show how they would have reacted to the problem. This example is based on a range of evidence-based programmes that use stories and scenarios to prompt reflection and discussion.

Box 7: Philosophy for Children

In Philosophy for Children (P4C), structured group discussions are prompted by a stimulus (for example, a story or a video) and are based around a concept such as 'truth', 'fairness', or 'bullying'. The aim of P4C is to help children become more willing and able to ask questions, construct arguments, and engage in reasoned discussion. P4C is not normally thought of as a 'SEL programme', however many of the discussion topics are very relevant to SEL, and teachers and pupils involved have reported that it has had a beneficial impact on outcomes such as pupils' confidence to speak, patience when listening to others, self-esteem, communication and teamwork.[48] There is also evidence that P4C has an impact on academic outcomes, including reading and maths.[49] This is currently being tested through a large EEF evaluation in primary schools.

3 Plan carefully for adopting a SEL programme

Recommendations 1 and 2 focused on flexible teaching strategies that can be adapted to schools' needs. This recommendation focuses on structured programmes as a way of delivering a SEL curriculum—as such they can be a 'vehicle' for introducing a wide range of practices and strategies, such as those mentioned in Recommendations 1 and 2, in a planned and prescribed way.

There is extensive international evidence that teaching SEL through planned programmes can have a positive impact on children's attitudes to learning, relationships in school, academic attainment, and a range of other outcomes. However, not all programmes are effective, and care needs to be taken by schools in selecting and implementing an approach that is suitable to their needs and context: planning is also needed to ensure the quality of delivery.

Use a planned series of lessons to teach skills in dedicated time

Typically, 'social and emotional learning programmes' are delivered to all children in a classroom, usually by the class teachers, and consist of a series of lessons on topics such as identifying and labelling feelings, controlling impulses, and understanding the perspective of others. They are often introduced in the context of specific topics, such as: bullying, friendship, health education, and staying safe (see Box 8 for an example).[50]

Common characteristics of SEL programmes include:

- an explicit curriculum of scheduled lessons;
- a teacher's handbook or manual (ranging from broad principles to heavily scripted);
- resources (such as worksheets) for use with a whole class; and
- a lesson structure (indicating a sequenced and regular progression).

Consider the pros and cons of a 'bought in' programme versus a bespoke approach

A question facing most schools is whether to buy in a structured SEL programme (usually a named intervention with training and materials), or develop their own approach. The benefits of buying in a programme are that it should provide a coherent ready-made curriculum that is informed by theory and evidence.[51] The challenge is that such programmes are typically more prescriptive, so may be more difficult to fit into the time available or may not fit with the specific context and needs of each school.

Overall, there is good evidence that structured SEL programmes have a positive impact on children's outcomes.[52] Seven large evidence reviews suggest that, on average, these programmes have positive impacts on outcomes including social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviour, emotional distress, and academic achievement. As such, SEL programmes represent an evidence-based approach that schools should consider carefully—they are likely to be a better bet than adopting a programme without evidence, creating a new approach for your school from scratch, or doing nothing. For an overview of evidence-based programmes, schools can use the *Early Intervention Foundation Guidebook*.

Some schools, however, will want to construct their own curriculum, building on their existing effective practice and tailored to their particular context. In this case it will be important to ensure coverage of the core skills at the heart of SEL (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision making) in a carefully sequenced progression that follows the SAFE principles described in Recommendation 4. Schools should also balance the potential limitations—the time taken to create a programme, and limited evidence—against the benefits of increased tailoring and flexibility.

Plan carefully *before* adopting a programme

Despite the good evidence of promise for SEL programmes overall, the impact of individual programmes varies substantially: simply adopting a SEL programme—even one with a strong track record—is not a guarantee of success. Some recent evaluations of SEL programmes in England, such as PATHS and FRIENDS for Life, have not reproduced the positive impacts that have been reported previously (see Box 8 for an example).[53] It is therefore especially important to identify an approach that fits your needs and context, consider whether and how your school can implement it, and to plan carefully to deliver it with quality.

Table 2 provides tips for selecting an effective SEL programme, and questions that schools should ask before doing so. Successful implementation also requires ongoing review and response: intelligently adapting or tweaking delivery to fit your context, while remaining faithful to the core 'essential ingredients' of the programme. This is discussed further in Recommendation 6, and for more information see EEF's guide *Putting Evidence to Work—A School's Guide to Implementation*.

Box 8: The promise and challenge of SEL programmes — PATHS

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) aims to develop self-control, emotional understanding, positive self-esteem, relationships and interpersonal problem-solving among children aged 4–11. This is primarily delivered through a taught curriculum by the class teacher (approximately twice a week throughout the year), with lessons on topics such as identifying and labelling feelings, controlling impulses and understanding the perspectives of others. Teachers receive one and a half days' training plus ongoing support. The curriculum is supplemented by activities that help children apply the lessons throughout the day, and provides links to the home environment.

Overall, PATHS has a strong international evidence base, including over ten RCTs.[54] However, not all evaluations of PATHS have been positive, and the quality of implementation seems to be important for outcomes. Three trials in the UK have found small and inconsistent effects. Of these, the most recent trial in 45 primary schools found 'tentative evidence' that PATHS improved some outcomes (social skills, perceptions of peer and social support, well-being, and reductions in exclusion), and represented value for money.[55] However, the evaluation was also cautious about the size and duration of these impacts. Implementation was a challenge: teachers struggled to fit all the PATHS lessons into their timetables, delivering lessons at half the recommended frequency. There was evidence that higher quality delivery of the programme was associated with improved tests scores at Key Stage 2 (though this could have been due to better quality teaching overall rather than to PATHS).[56]

In summary: the international evidence base for PATHS is strong, but in UK primary schools it is more tentative—quality of implementation appears important for outcomes, but is challenging to achieve given busy timetables. See Table 2 and Recommendation 6 for responses to this challenge.

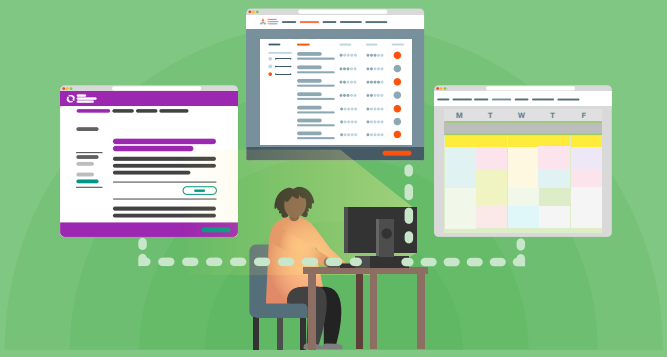


Table 2: Tips for selecting an effective programme—explore and prepare

What to do	Questions to ask
• Identify your own aims and needs as a school. • Assess children's SEL needs. • Audit your current activities and identify priorities.	• What social and emotional skills do we want to prioritise as a school? • What needs do our children have? • What is currently working well and not well?
• Look at the strength of evidence for potential programmes or approaches you're considering: see the EIF Guidebook, and EEF evaluations for evidence on some well-known programmes.	• Has this approach been evaluated previously? • If so, how, where, on which age groups, and with what outcomes? • How similar is that context to my own?
• Review the programme content before adopting the approach to ensure that it matches your needs and priority areas for development. • Check sample activities and lesson plans (include teacher views in this assessment). • Consider piloting in one or two classes before adopting.	• What is the focus of the programme? • What do activities consist of? • How do they match our school priorities/needs? • Does it follow the SAFE principles (see Recommendation 4)? • Is delivery feasible in our context? • Are teachers committed and enthusiastic?
• Be clear about the time required for staff training and development. • Seek staff views on feasibility of implementation.	• What training is required for staff? • Who needs to attend? • When and for how long?
• Ensure you can commit the time required to implement the programme as it was intended. • Develop an action plan to support implementation. • Ensure you can achieve buy-in from all relevant participants.	• How will we make time? • Who will deliver the programme, and how often? • What additional/ongoing support is required to ensure effective delivery? Can we provide this?

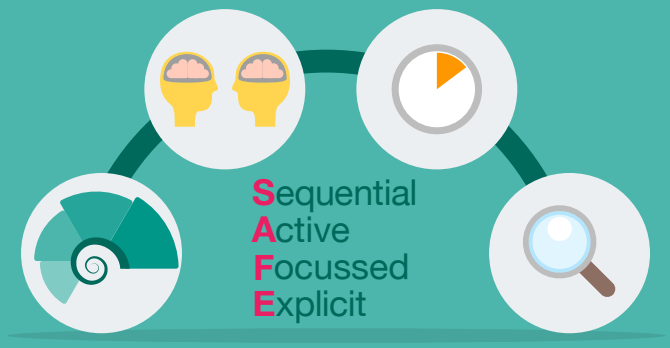
4 Use a SAFE curriculum: Sequential, Active, Focused and Explicit

As Recommendation 3 makes clear, evidence to date on SEL supports the use of dedicated lessons that provide step-by-step instructions to teach social and emotional competencies. These can be effectively provided through an 'off the shelf' programme. An alternative approach is to develop your own curriculum, focused on the core SEL skills and drawing on the evidence-informed practices described in Recommendations 1 and 2. Whichever approach you adopt, ensuring your approach to SEL is Sequenced, Active, Focused and Explicit ('SAFE') is likely to improve outcomes. These principles are summarised in Box 9 and discussed further below.

Box 9: SAFE principles

In an analysis of 213 school-based SEL programmes,[57] those that followed four key principles were found to have larger impacts on children's outcomes than those that did not.

1. **Sequenced activities** that lead in a coordinated and connected way to skill development. New behaviours and more complicated skills usually need to be broken down into smaller steps and sequentially mastered.
2. **Active forms of learning** that enable young people to practise and master new skills. This might include role play or behavioural rehearsal.
3. **Focused time** spent developing one or more social and emotional skills. Sufficient time and attention must be allocated for children to practise applying knowledge and skills.
4. **Explicitly define and target** specific skills. Programmes should identify specific skills that they want children to develop, and teach these purposefully, rather than having a more general approach. See Recommendation 1 for more detail on specific skills.



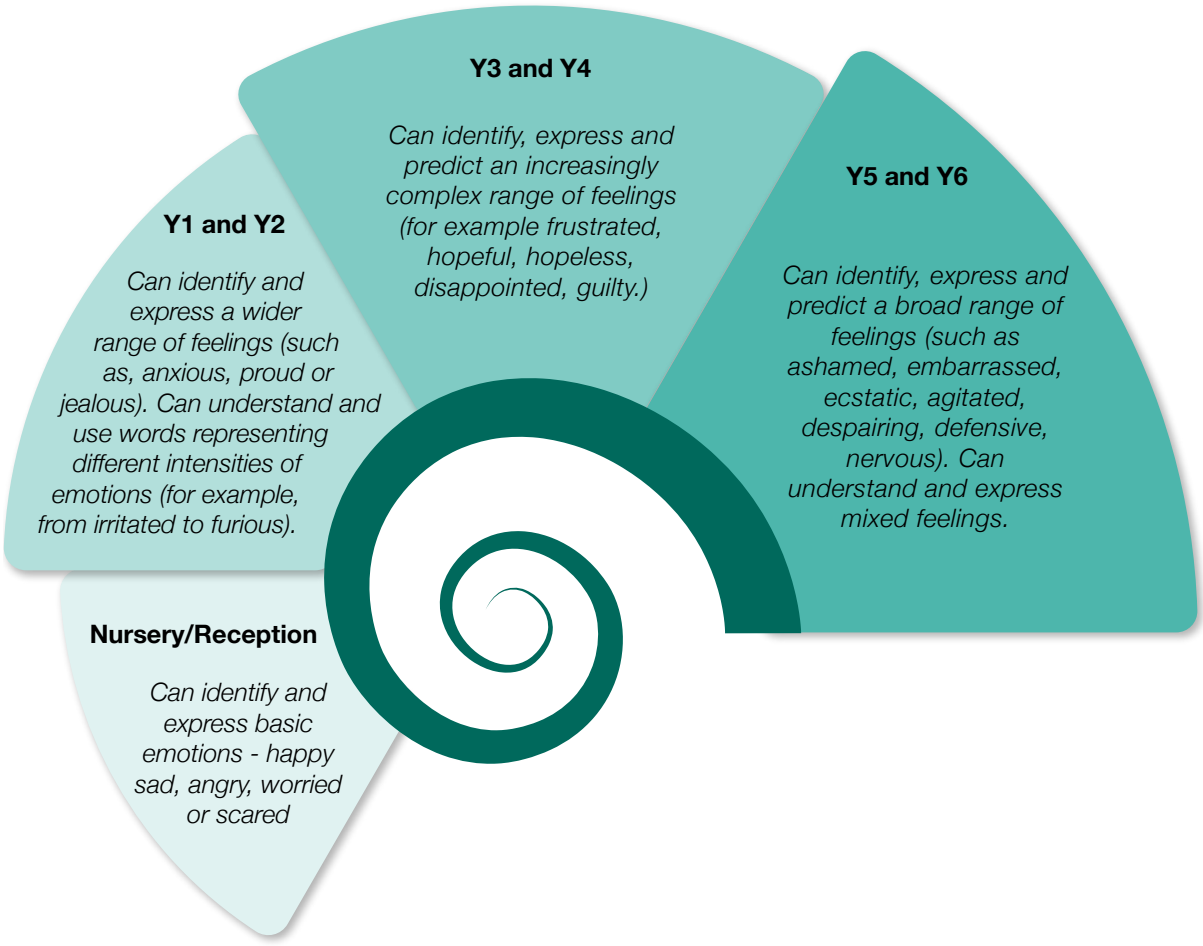
Sequence lessons to build skills progressively

As with any learning, new knowledge and more complicated skills need to be broken down into smaller steps and sequentially mastered. Schools' teaching of SEL should therefore aim to develop skills that are developmentally appropriate for each year group, in a coordinated and connected way.

'Sequencing' refers both to the development of content within each year, and across year groups. A 'spiral curriculum' is a common feature of evidence-based SEL programmes. It involves revisiting key concepts progressively in age-appropriate contexts as children get older, so that they are recalled and embedded.

Table 3 shows how a particular area of social and emotional learning (the ability to recognise and understand feelings) might evolve and become increasingly sophisticated across age groups. The strategies used to teach and practise the skills would also vary by age.

Table 3: SEL key strategy—Recognising, labelling and understanding feelings



Use *active* forms of learning

A series of SEL lessons might include a range of pedagogical strategies such as teacher-led instruction, written worksheets and discussion of a stimulus (eg, a story or video). Evidence on SEL suggests that in combination with these approaches, it is particularly active forms of learning that have been associated with greater impacts, including interactive methods such as games, simulations, and small group work, which help children to practise using skills in real contexts.[58]

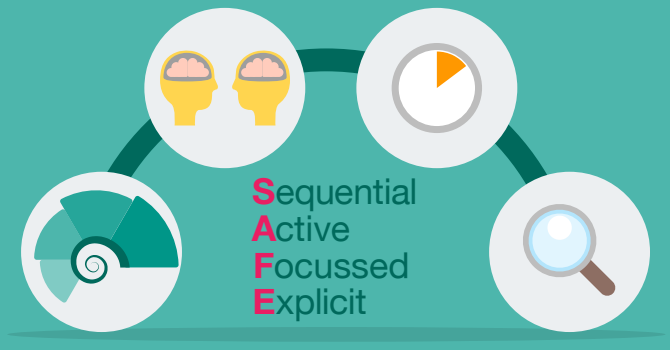
Focus your time

Currently, less than a third of primary school teachers say that they have time dedicated to teaching SEL.[59] Increasing this time is likely to be beneficial, though there are a number of considerations to balance what is effective and what is practically feasible:

- **Frequency and lesson length:** aim for 30–60 minutes per week. SEL programmes with stronger evidence typically involve around one hour per week of instruction and practice. There is variation in how these are structured: some programmes deliver 10–15 minutes per day, others recommend two sessions per week of 30 minutes. There is evidence that such regular instruction is more effective than infrequent long sessions.[60]

- **Duration of programme:** think long term. There is little evidence to support very brief SEL interventions. Most evidence suggests SEL lessons should run for a year, with embedding, repetition, and increasing challenge in subsequent year groups. An exception to this rule is that some positive effects have been demonstrated in programmes operating for 8-10 weeks for specific skills or for specific groups of pupils.[61]

- **Quality matters more than quantity.** Increasing the quantity of explicit SEL teaching beyond one hour per week is unlikely to be feasible for most teachers. In fact, programmes requiring more than 75 minutes per week for explicit teaching have been linked to weaker impacts than programmes spending less than 75 minutes per week.[62] Some evaluations have found that quality of delivery (defined as teacher preparedness and enthusiasm) matters more to outcomes than the quantity (number of lessons delivered).[63]



Be *explicit* about the skills you want children to develop

There is a great deal of variation in how SEL programmes can be designed and delivered, for example, in the length and intensity of programme, focus or relative importance of a particular skill. However, efforts are not likely to be effective if they are based on loose guidelines and broad principles.[64] Schools need to be clear about which skills they are setting out to develop, and these skills should be made explicit: it is important that children know what they are being expected to learn.[65] For example, specific efforts to develop children's awareness of emotions (for example, by learning and practising the use of vocabulary related to emotions) are likely to be more beneficial in terms of skill development than a broader initiative on 'promoting well-being'. Recommendation 1 highlights specific skills that are worth focusing on.

5 Reinforce SEL skills through whole-school ethos and activities

When messages, routines and strategies are aligned across the classroom and whole-school setting, students learn and apply social and emotional skills more rapidly and more effectively.[66] A large review of evidence related to SEL concludes that going beyond the curriculum to consider the whole school (for example, changes to school ethos, professional development, liaison with parents, community involvement, and coordinated work with outside agencies) is needed for maximising positive impacts.[67]

However, the evidence underpinning the effectiveness of whole school approaches to SEL is less strong than the adoption of classroom-based SEL interventions;[68] they are also more challenging to implement due to the number and complexity of school systems that need to be addressed. Nonetheless, whole school practices can be developed incrementally, with commitment from senior leadership, clarity about aims, starting small and with realistic expectations.[69]

Establishing schoolwide expectations for SEL

Schoolwide norms and expectations are a set of agreed-upon principles that outline how everyone will behave and interact. Principles that take into account children's SEL development help to create a common language around how all staff and children will support each other socially and emotionally, for example, *'We listen to each other. We treat others as we want to be treated.'*

Norms that simply hang on a poster in the classroom or school corridor will not create a positive school environment on their own; they need to be discussed and used to guide interactions and behaviour. Teachers and pupils must understand and be committed to the norms. In order for this to happen they should be developed collaboratively with staff, pupils and parents (see box 10 for an example).

When deciding on schoolwide norms, think about: what type of school do you want to be a part of, what might it looks like, how might people interact with each other, solve problems, communicate, express their emotions, respect others? Look to frame schoolwide norms in a positive manner rather than focusing on what not to do. When you have agreed your school's norms, they can be embedded into school-wide systems for recognition and reward.[71]

Box 10: School councils

Recommendation 1 provided the example of 'class rules'—with evidence that rules are more likely to be followed when children have been involved in developing them. Similarly, at a whole-school level, involving children in 'school councils' or 'action groups' with representatives from each class could be an effective way of creating shared values across the school, and identifying and addressing issues that affect socio-emotional development.

There has been little evaluation of school councils in primary schools to date. However, in a recent randomised trial of one SEL programme in 40 English secondary schools, a school 'action group' (comprising at least 6 pupils and 6 staff, meeting twice per term) was used to review and revise school-wide policies that could improve the school environment. Together with staff training in restorative practices and a SEL curriculum, this programme of support was found to lead to reductions in bullying, and increases in pupil well-being.[70]

SEL routines

School routines are important opportunities to introduce and reinforce SEL skills taught in the classroom. Here are examples of whole-school routines commonly used across evidence-based SEL programmes:

- Regular school assemblies are devoted to children's social and emotional development, encouraging the use of particular skills or strategies for the week ahead. There might, for example, be a focus on helping others or respecting differences.
- Classes use circle time at the start or end of the day as an opportunity to share news and warm up for the day ahead or reflect on the day. This helps to build a sense of community and practise social and emotional skills
- There are school-wide systems for noticing and reinforcing examples of SEL skills being put into practice, for example, using points, peer nominations, praise postcards, or certificates sent home.

Changes to the school environment

The school's physical environment can help children apply their social and emotional learning through, for example:

- providing 'worry boxes' in which children can post any worries they may have, and ask for help from an adult; and
- providing areas in the playground where children can go to calm down, or spaces where they can use the problem-solving process to resolve conflicts, with support from an adult or trained peer mediators.

Check behaviour and anti-bullying policies are aligned with your approach to SEL

When thinking about whole school strategies, it is important to reflect on how your school's behaviour and anti-bullying policies align with your other work on SEL. Behaviour policies which are supportive and reinforce SEL development lead to better behavioural outcomes, positive student teacher-relationships and a more positive school climate.[72] In contrast to this, there is some evidence that harsh, punitive, and exclusionary approaches to behaviour problems can have a negative impact on students social, emotional, behavioural and academic outcomes.[73]

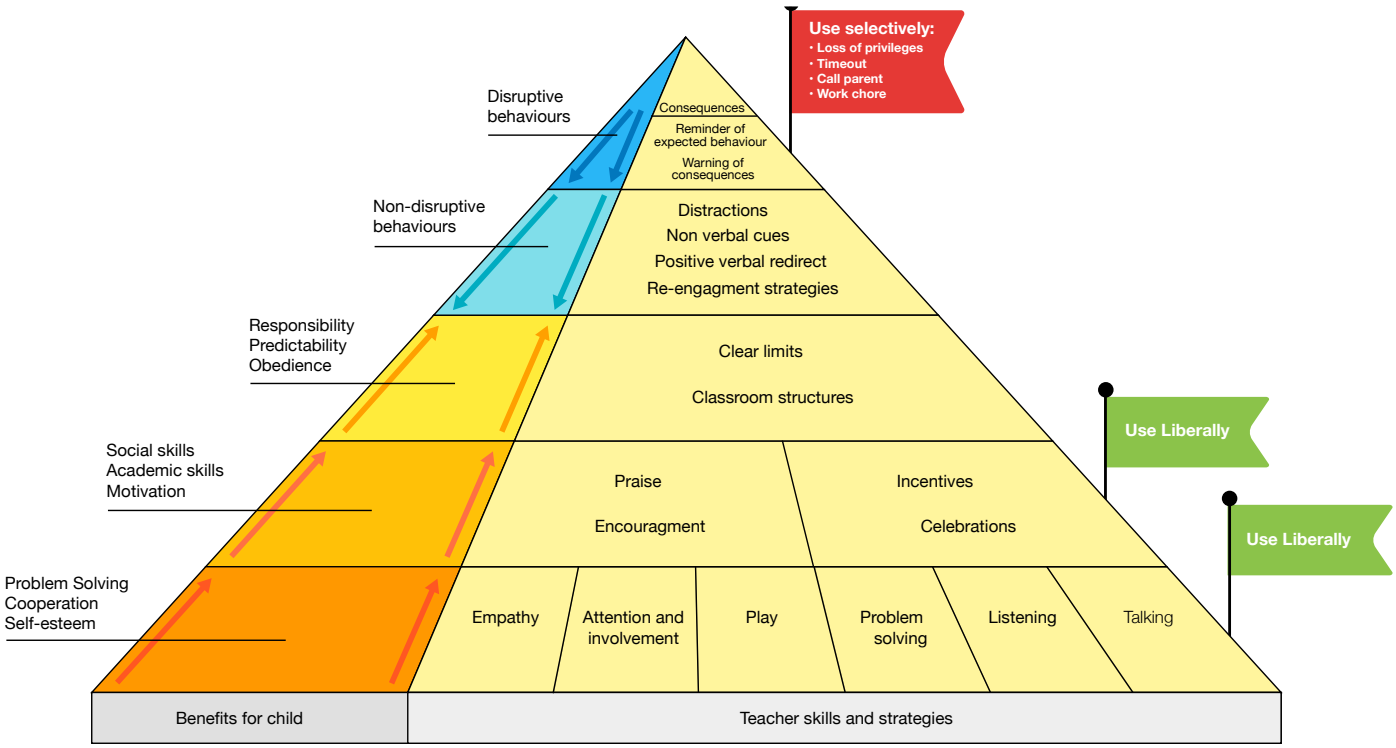
Aligning behaviour policies with SEL development could include:[74] helping children understand the impact of their behaviour, developing shared rules based on mutual respect, or deciding among staff that you are a 'no shouting school'. Anti-bullying policies can also be aligned with SEL through sessions focused on empathy and perspective-taking, or considering the role of bystanders when bullying takes place (see Box 11).

The EEF's guidance report *Improving Behaviour in Schools* provides more information that can support schools' planning for SEL. For example, Figure 2 provides a framework for developing a consistent, school-wide approach to integrating social and emotional development with behaviour management, illustrating SEL skill-development as the foundation for good behaviour. As this report shows, the social and emotional skills in this pyramid can be developed actively through teaching and whole school efforts.

Box 11: The role of bystanders in reducing bullying

KiVa is a whole-school approach aimed at reducing bullying, first developed in Finland (where it is used by 90% of schools) and now used in several other countries. It places particular emphasis on the role of the bystander in intervening when bullying takes place. Classroom lessons aim to: (1) raise awareness among children of the role that the group plays in bullying; (2) increase empathy towards victims of bullying; and (3) promote children's skills in supporting victims. Lessons follow the SAFE practices (set out in Recommendation 4) and are reinforced through the school environment (assemblies, posters and so on), and information to parents. KiVa has had positive results in several trials internationally.[75] UK evidence is limited so far, though future evaluation is planned.

Figure 2: The incredible years teaching pyramid ®



Adapted from Webster-Stratton, C. and Reid, M. J. (2001) *Incredible Years Teacher Training Program: Content, Methods and Processes* (Facilitator Manual), Seattle.

Engagement with families and community

The family is the first place of learning for SEL skills, guided by what parents and communities consider important. Schools build on this and provide opportunities to influence skill development. An important part of whole school strategies is therefore the school's engagement with families to ensure that social and emotional skills that are taught and practised at school are reinforced in the home environment. However, currently, only 35% of UK teachers agree that 'my students have consistent behaviour goals between home and school' (the proportion was higher for those who had training related to SEL).[76]

Strategies used to engage parents could include:

- the involvement of parents in the drafting of school norms, vision and behaviour policy;
- information sent to parents about the strategies used to support skill development, including information about ways to practise SEL skills at home;
- sending positive messages home to families about children's social and emotional development (for example, sending postcards home that praise the child for using specific social and emotional skills);
- inviting parents to participate in SEL learning opportunities, workshops, family events, and so on; and
- using parent-teacher meetings and end of term reports as an opportunity to discuss children's social and emotional development in addition to their academic development.

For more information on strategies for working with families, see EEF's guidance report *Working with Parents to Support Children's Learning*.

6 Plan, Support, and monitor SEL implementation

Thinking carefully about implementation is especially important in relation to SEL due to the wide variation in programme outcomes and the potential complexity of whole-school change. High-quality implementation is positively associated with better outcomes for children.[77] Moreover, uncoordinated approaches to SEL programming have been shown to have negative effects on staff morale and student engagement, and therefore may risk doing more harm than good.[78] Insufficient time for teachers to plan and deliver SEL lessons, and lack of training or buy-in from staff, are particular challenges to address.

Establish a shared vision for SEL

The leadership team shapes the core values, attitudes, beliefs and culture of the school and classrooms, and therefore influences the extent to which schools see social and emotional learning as a priority and make time for it. Where school leaders are perceived to be supportive of SEL initiatives, teachers feel better equipped to deliver it in class and view skills as more likely to become embedded across the school.[79]

The first priority for leaders is to develop a shared SEL vision for the school that helps to foster commitment and ownership among all stakeholders (staff, pupils, parents). It takes into account the school's unique strengths and shares the hopes and expectations of the entire school community.

In order to support SEL, leaders should:

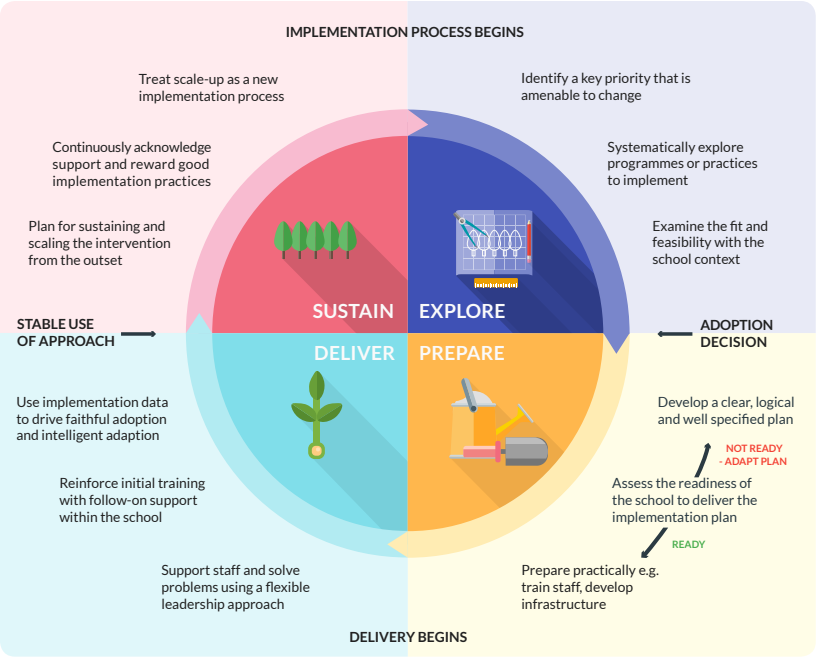
- establish a team that shares leadership responsibility for SEL;
- work with the team to build a school vision that includes developing and supporting SEL, for both pupils and staff;
- review school policies so that they are compatible with the school's SEL vision;
- review the curriculum to build in opportunities for SEL learning across a range of subjects;
- create time and space for all staff to engage in SEL planning and implementation (for example, as part of inset training, or in place of activities that may be time-consuming but having limited impact—see this Workload Toolkit for ideas);[80]
- structure the school environment so that it supports SEL development;
- involve parents and the community in what the children are learning in SEL; and
- model the behaviours they wish to see adopted in others.

Ultimately, it is key that SEL is integrated with the whole school system, so it is '*connected to*—rather than *competing with*—other school priorities'.[81] As noted in the introduction, there is good evidence that when well-implemented, SEL has a positive impact on academic attainment so these aims should not be in tension.

Treat implementation as a process, not an event

The EEF's guidance report, *Putting Evidence to Work—A School's Guide to Implementation*, can support schools to think through the process of managing change around SEL. Figure 3 sets out the steps for successful implementation.

Figure 3: cycle of implementing change



Involve all school staff in planning for SEL

Though leadership is crucial, if teachers and others school staff are not consulted about their views on SEL, efforts to integrate it are much less likely to be effective. A survey of teachers found that:

- partnership between teachers and senior leadership in introducing SEL is associated with a higher likelihood that teachers are satisfied with the SEL provision; and that
- SEL is more likely to be considered across many different subject areas when teachers are involved in introducing it.[82]

It is also important to consult with school staff because there are likely to be mixed views about if and how SEL can be introduced. For example, most teachers say that they see SEL as important, but not all believe that socio-emotional skills are teachable, or that it is the core focus of their role.[83] Teachers also have mixed views about the extent to which SEL should be given dedicated time as opposed to being integrated into a range of other subjects. Discussing these views openly is likely to increase the chances that all school staff support efforts for embedding SEL—the evidence provided elsewhere in this report should be helpful for informing these conversations.

Focus on implementation quality

How SEL approaches are implemented really matters. The extent to which teachers and other school staff value SEL, are given time and support to prepare, and are engaging in their delivery of activities influences outcomes.[84] Research on over 200 school-based SEL programmes showed that higher quality implementation was associated with improvements in academic performance, as well as reductions in conduct problems and reductions in emotional distress (when compared to students who received poorly implemented programmes).[85] In this study, 'high quality implementation' was characterised by higher intensity, consistency, clarity and programme fidelity, and this was associated with larger impacts than loose guidelines and broad-based principles.[86]

As noted in Recommendation 3, staff preparedness and enthusiasm for delivering SEL has been associated with improved impacts in two recent UK evaluations,[87] and appears to be more important than simply delivering more SEL lesson content. Quality delivery is likely to be supported by the school being clear about the outcomes it is trying to achieve, ensuring genuine buy-in from teachers, and building in reviews of progress.

Class teachers can deliver SEL effectively

In most cases, schools do not need external or specialist staff to deliver SEL activities to children. In fact, effects on academic performance are generally larger when teachers—as opposed to external practitioners, researchers or community members—implement SEL programmes.[88] This may be because there is more opportunity for practice to become embedded over time. A partial exception to this may be more targeted forms of support, where specialist input is likely to be more beneficial.[89]

Provide training and support to school staff

Children are more likely to benefit from SEL when staff receive training and the programme or practice is implemented well and embedded into everyday teaching and learning.[90] Teachers, however, often receive little or no training in how to promote these skills and report limited confidence in their ability to respond to students' emotional, social and behavioural needs.[91]

Teachers who have received training related to SEL are more likely to agree that SEL has improved their relationship with their children, more likely to agree that emotion is fundamental to learning, and more likely to agree that their children had consistent behavioural goals between school and home.[92]

Professional development on SEL should broadly focus on meeting three key goals:

1. **Readiness for change.** This involves ensuring that school staff recognise and agree with the perceived needs for the approach, and understanding the procedures and process for achieving the goal.[93]

2. **Specific skills-based training** in relation to a teacher's sense of self-efficacy in implementing SEL. Self-efficacy is underpinned by knowledge, understanding and perceived competence.

3. **Embedding practices** and ensuring quality and fidelity[94] involves providing ongoing support to check that a programme or approach is being delivered as intended, and that staff have the time and support required. This may involve bringing groups of staff together periodically to trouble-shoot issues that arise.

It is important that professional development extends beyond classroom teachers. Staff members other than teachers receive even less training and support despite the fact that teaching assistants, lunch and hall supervisors, catering staff, sports coaches, and other non-teaching staff are with children during many of the interactions that may particularly demand effective SEL strategies and skills.[95] Schools may wish to review the EEF's guidance and training on *Teaching Assistants* for more information.

Monitor implementation and evaluate the impact of SEL

The call to 'monitor and evaluate' can feel like generic advice, and one that risks creating additional workload. However, it is likely to be especially important in relation to SEL, for several reasons relating to recommendations in this report:

- Flexible strategies drawn from evidence-based programmes are a promising approach and there is growing research promoting such practices as a complement to programmes. But they have not been formally tested; schools need to judge which strategies work in their contexts.

- The impact of SEL programmes varies substantially. Even those with good evidence of impact cannot guarantee positive results in new contexts, and the effort to introduce or maintain a programme is likely to be substantial. Therefore, checking it is meeting its goals is essential.

- Whole-school change is known to be more challenging to achieve than introducing a classroom curriculum, and requires careful coordination and oversight from the leadership team.

- Given the perceived implementation challenges related to SEL in general (lack of time; lack of training; competing priorities), assessing progress is needed to check barriers are being addressed, and to provide reassurance that efforts are meeting their aims (and to learn and change approach if not).

Schools should ensure that their monitoring and evaluation is proportionate to the scale of their needs and efforts (and doesn't become a further barrier). As a starting point, regular, low-intensity and efficient auditing is likely to be helpful—focused on indicators that are proxies for SEL development, such as pupil behaviour or well-being, or teacher perceptions. Collecting regular feedback by surveys from children and staff on issues like class or school climate is relatively straight-forward, could help to identify ongoing issues, and should also promote a positive culture in which the school listens to and responds to needs. This is likely to provide valuable information for:

- identifying needs;

- focusing efforts; and

- checking whether approaches are having an impact.

To extend these efforts schools should also consider assessing children's SEL development using validated measurement tools. Care needs to be taken in the interpretation of the results and actions that follow. Some resources to support schools in identifying possible measures include:

- The EEF's SPECTRUM database. This provides an overview of measures, and the accompanying report provides guidance on selecting measures.

- For more of a focus on mental health and well-being, Public Health England's Toolkit for schools and colleges and CORC's Well-being measurement framework for primary schools provide helpful related resources.

Next steps on SEL

For schools seeking further information and ideas to help them plan—in addition to forthcoming EEF tools—the following links may be helpful, providing advice and many free SEL resources:

- EIF Guidebook
- CASEL
- PSHE Association
- SEAL Community
- Mentally Healthy Schools

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HOW WAS THIS GUIDANCE COMPILED?

This guidance report draws on the best available evidence regarding social and emotional learning in primary schools. It is based on a review conducted by Dr Michael Wigelsworth, Lily Verity, Carla Mason, Professor Neil Humphrey, and Professor Pamela Qualter (University of Manchester).

The guidance report was created over four stages:

1. **Scoping.** The EEF and EIF consulted with a number of teachers and academics about the scope of the report. We then appointed an advisory panel and the review team, and agreed research questions for the review.

2. **Evidence review.** The review team conducted searches for the best available international evidence using a range of databases, including new analysis on the common elements of effective programmes.

3. **Research on current practice.** The review team also conducted a survey of 436 primary schools in England to understand what schools are currently doing in relation to social and emotional learning.

4. **Writing recommendations.** The EEF and EIF worked with the advisory panel and reviewers to draft the guidance report and recommendations. The final guidance report was written by Matthew van Poortvliet (EEF), Dr Aleisha Clarke (EIF), and Jean Gross CBE (SEAL Community) with input and feedback from many others.

The advisory panel included Jonathan Baggaley (PSHE Association), Professor Robin Banerjee (University of Sussex), Professor Margaret Barry (National University of Ireland Galway), Dr Vashti Berry (University of Exeter), Jean Gross CBE (SEAL Community), Emma Lewis (Heathmere Primary School), and Liz Robinson (Big Education). We would like to thank them for the support, challenge, and input they provided throughout the process.

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