

Blog post

## Evidence-based practice in schools: Diving deeper

Timothy Lynch, School Leader, British Schools Overseas (BSO) • 12 Oct 2022

In their recent [BERA Blog post](#), Watkins et al. (2022) highlighted concerns about school leaders' understanding of research and using research for school improvement; specifically, knowing what evidence-based research is and how to bridge the gap between research and practice in schools. The purpose of this blog is to complement the knowledge surrounding the call by Watkins et al. for greater systemic use of evidence. This response offers a successful example of evidence-based research implementation. Furthermore, it sheds light on concerns raised, suggesting that the problem is embedded within the education system as a whole and is limited by deeper infrastructural issues when it comes to practitioner research knowledge.

In my recent [article](#) I used evidence-based research to explore how best to enact recovery in English schools impacted by the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic (see Lynch, 2022). Specifically, the aim of this research was to investigate the following question: 'How do we improve children's mathematics, reading and writing through the promotion of wellbeing?' The context for this evaluative case study was a medium-sized English maintained school. Methods engaged included: semi-structured and focus group interviews; reflective journal; observations; surveys; and document analysis.

Leading curriculum recovery in a school community during the challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic contributed to a UK government school leadership initiative which aimed to prepare teachers to be high-performing senior leaders through the [National Professional Qualification for Senior Leadership \(NPQSL\)](#). The NPQSL uses research as a framework for improvement in leadership and school performance and wellbeing was its key focus.

Wellbeing is simply defined as a state of feeling good about ourselves and the way our lives are going – feeling that we belong and are valued (Lynch, 2019). Explicitly identifying wellbeing as a curriculum priority was a common international research finding (Lynch, 2019, 2016), thus advocating wellbeing as a curriculum and extra-curricular focus was evidence-based. Prioritising wellbeing at the time was not common in English schools, as curriculum core subjects were given more

importance than foundation learning areas. This was also evident in the Department for Education's school leadership programme; in this study, prioritizing wellbeing was questioned and opposed at the time by the NPQSL tutor (see Lynch, 2022).

The key findings of my study supported the evidence-based research provided by the NPQSL programme materials and further research they stimulated:

- Wellbeing is essential to curriculum recovery.
- The leader's ability to communicate effectively is very influential to success.
- Curriculum change (and curriculum reform) is a long and complex process.
- A whole school curriculum approach is vital.
- Physical health is a key to the promotion of wellbeing.
- Programmes such as the NPQSL need to be flexible and open to the most recent research findings in education.
- Challenging deeper thinking is necessary for teachers (and not only children in schools).
- Leaders need to be inclusive to all teachers and teaching approaches.
- Teachers as reflective practitioners are researchers, they just don't always realise they are.

This study illustrated the significance of research for school improvement (curriculum reform), whether through formal postgraduate education qualifications or professional development. School leaders and teachers require an understanding of evidence-based research to enhance school improvement. As we dive deeper, questions are raised about essential research knowledge for teacher educators, teacher and school leader preparation, and continuing professional development requirements for teachers and school leaders.

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## References

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