A Process Evaluation of the English Hubs Programme

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Glossary

EHP – English Hub Programme

LS – Literacy Specialist

PS – Partner School

KPI – Key Performance Indicator

PSC – Phonics Screening Check

SSP - Systematic Synthetic Phonics

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Executive summary

Background

The English Hub Programme (EHP) has been running since 2018. The programme was developed by the Department for Education (DfE) to improve the phonics and early reading outcomes for schools with pupils who fall below the expected level of performance on Phonics Screening Check (PSC) scores or schools in areas of high deprivation. It is delivered by 34 Hub schools who were chosen by DfE for being high performing schools in phonics and early reading teaching. Hubs can deliver support through two different categories of support - intensive support, or medium level support (MLS). MLS offers short-term support through conferences, workshops, funding for phonics resources and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) events for schools. It is estimated that around a third of English primary schools accessed MLS support through the EHP in 2023/2024. The intensive support strand provides bespoke longer-term support over two years. As part of the intensive support strand peer support is offered by Literacy Specialists, hired and managed by Hubs, to teachers at schools that are selected by the Hub as eligible to receive support (known as Partner Schools).

This process evaluation has focused on the intensive strand of support. As of January 2024, 1012 Partner Schools are confirmed to have graduated from intensive support from the EHP[1], and the EHP currently supports a further 1304 schools intensively: 658 schools who joined in September 2022, who are now in their second year of support, and 646 schools who joined in September 2023.This support is delivered through intensive support days called Literacy Support (LS) days, leaving Partner Schools with an action plan to continue improvements and changes between LS days. The EHP is primarily monitored by DfE through outcomes on the Phonics Screening Check which is a phonics test completed by all children at the end of year one. From this measure the DfE set a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for Hubs to reach. For the academic year 2023/2024 the KPI set for Hubs is that their Partner Schools show an average of a 7.5 percentage point increase in the number of children passing the PSC when working with the EHP.

Methodological Approach

Initial quantitative analysis conducted by DfE has shown a positive impact of the programme on phonics outcomes[2]; however, this is the first systematic evaluation to explore how the EHP is delivered on the ground, what is working well or not well and what factors may be influencing the measurable impact of the programme. This small-scale process

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[1] This figure may change slightly as further graduations are confirmed throughout AY 23/24.
[2] Early analysis of English Hubs phonics attainment: 2021/22 data (May 2023)

evaluation, conducted by the Central Research Team in DfE[3], used a mixed methods approach to address these questions. In February/March 2024, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Hubs that deliver support through the EHP, and 18 were conducted with Partner Schools receiving support in the academic year 2023/2024. In July 2024, 23 Hubs and 195 Partner Schools completed an online survey. The survey was developed to quantify the findings of the qualitative results to understand how frequent certain processes or experiences were across Hubs/ Partner Schools.

Key Findings

Delivering the English Hub Programme

Bespoke support (refer to section 3.1.1)

- One of the flagship qualities of the Hub model is that the EHP is delivered by Literacy Specialists that visit schools to provide bespoke support. Interviewees spoke positively of how Hubs took their specific school characteristics into consideration, tailoring the action plan and support according to the needs of the school. Of the 195 Partner School survey respondents 185 "strongly" (66%, $N = 128$) or "somewhat" (29% $N = 57$) agreed that their Hub had been considerate of their schools' specific characteristics and challenges. Interviewed Partner Schools particularly valued the collaborative and flexible nature of the support relationship and 96% of surveyed schools believed that Hubs working collaboratively with the Reading Lead was "extremely" (81%, $N = 157$) or "very" (15%, $N = 30$) beneficial.

- To facilitate the bespoke support, Hubs ensured that the Literacy Specialists in their teams had what they perceived to be the most important skills to deliver the programme. Findings indicated that having a team of Literacy Specialists that had good interpersonal skills, phonics knowledge, leadership skills and some specialist skills enabled the Hubs to then match Literacy Specialists to Partner Schools in a way that enabled them to tailor the support to meet the Partner Schools needs in a flexible and collaborative way.

- For Partner Schools, it was deemed very important to receive support from a Literacy Specialist that worked in a school with similar characteristics to their own. They also valued the fact that Literacy Specialists were external experts from outside their setting as this gave a fresh perspective, with 68% (N=132) of Partner School survey respondents indicating that they joined in order to receive external

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[3] The Central Research Team is a team of researchers that is independent to any policy area.

input. It was particularly important for Partner Schools that the support provided was delivered in a non-judgemental and supportive way, and the majority of Partner Schools were positive that this was their experience.

Type and level of support (refer to section 3.1.2)

- While the support provided by Hubs was bespoke and tailored to the different Partner Schools, this was delivered through common means including coaching, modelling, and observations. Coaching and modelling were seen as a way to empower and upskill the Reading Leads to ensure the EHP was having a sustainable change. Observing teachers and teaching assistants helped to identify areas for improvement. This support was generally viewed positively although a minority of Partner Schools felt that observations were less beneficial, particularly as the support period went on.

- Specific aspects of support widely delivered included helping to build Reading Leads' confidence, helping to improve teaching of phonics, for example by modelling teaching practice, support with timetabling and the specific SSPs, or understanding and using data,

- Interviewed Partner Schools were generally positive about the level of support received. Of the 195 survey respondents, 188 (96%) of Partner Schools reported that the level of support received from the EHP was "Just Right", whilst 7% (4%) felt they received "too much" support, and no schools felt they received "too little" support.

- Interviewed and surveyed Partner Schools believed they would benefit from additional support that is not currently within the EHP remit. A large proportion of surveyed Partner Schools (88%, N = 172) felt they would benefit from wider literacy support, and over half of the respondents felt they would benefit from additional funding for books and resources (65%, N = 125) and from support beyond KS1 (56%, N = 109).

Challenges to Delivering the EHP (refer to section 3.2)

- All surveyed Hubs believed that they had experienced a range of challenges to de-livering the EHP in the past academic year (2023/2024).

- Both Hubs and Partner Schools felt staffing issues at the Partner School were the most common and most significant challenges. Hubs provided creative solutions in timetabling and organisation to overcome barriers in low staffing numbers and high staff absence, but staffing shortages often resulted in LS days being cancelled. High staff turnover within school was perceived to halt the EHP progress as outcomes rely on upskilling staff.

- Dedication to the programme from senior leaders and school staff was identified as necessary for the continued success of the programme. When the senior leaders were engaged, they met with the Literacy Specialist at each visit, joined them on their observations, were more willing to implement necessary actions, and enhanced the engagement of the teaching staff. Engaging senior leaders could be challenging.

- The increasing number of SEND learners in mainstream schools was reported as a key challenge for interviewed schools. All Hubs provide specific support to their Partner Schools on teaching SEND children, but they feel centralised training by DfE would be beneficial to support this and prevent conflicting information between themselves and other English support systems provided by the LA or MATs.

Perceived Impact and Outcomes of the EHP (refer to section 3.3)

- Interviewed Hubs and Partner Schools reported that they saw quantifiable improvements in learners PSC scores as well as qualitative improvements in teacher and learner performance. Survey results indicated that a greater number of Hubs and Partner Schools perceived improvements in the professional development and performance of Reading Leads and Teachers, rather than learners' outcomes. Interviews revealed that the improvements in leadership skills were thought to be crucial for longer term changes in phonics and reading outcomes within schools.

- Many Partner Schools and Hubs were frustrated that the KPI did not consider the individual differences of children and that the same parameters were applied to all children. SEND, student mobility, English as an additional language (EAL), and student absence were all identified as factors that can negatively impact the schools PSC scores and the Hubs' ability to meet the KPI set by DfE. Hubs and Partner Schools argued that these characteristics should be taken into consideration when calculating the KPI performance.

Recruiting Partner Schools (refer to section 3.5)

- All the surveyed Hubs felt that it was "extremely" (N= 17, 74%) or "very" (N = 6, 26%) important to the success of the EHP that they could decide whether schools are ready or in a good position to engage with the EHP. All Hubs considered multiple factors when deciding whether to partner with a school. Factors considered by over 90% of Hubs were PSC scores, pupil premium percentages, leadership engagement / buy in to the EHP and schools' receptiveness to support. School's receptiveness to support and leadership buy-in were thought to be the most important factors to consider by the most Hubs.

- Hubs had similar experiences of recruitment, noting that they have easily been able to recruit Partner Schools, but that there are areas in their regions that they described as "cold spots", where contacting and engaging eligible schools with the EHP has been more difficult to achieve. Some reasons for why Hubs have found

engaging these schools difficult included; these schools being in a more rural location with reduced connections to other schools, that their recruitment methods were not reaching these schools, or through push back from MATs or LAs who already receive support through an LA based English Lead[4].

- Most Hubs were using similar strategies for recruitment including utilising existing networks, relying on word of mouth, advertising the Hub on and offline, or directly contacting schools through email or phone calls. Methods that relied on networking were considered the most successful for recruitment while methods that relied on promotion and advertising were perceived as the least successful for recruitment. Some Hub Leads felt unprepared for the marketing responsibilities linked to their role as this is not a skillset typically required for teaching. Increased advertising from DfE was suggested to support the Hubs to reach harder to reach schools and ensure that all schools have an equal opportunity for support.

Staffing within the Hub (refer to section 3.4)

- The number of Literacy Specialists that Hub Schools hire to support the delivery of the EHP was in line with DfE's recommendations of at least 5 (although most Hubs had more)[5].

- Most Hubs hired Literacy Specialists from both within and outside of the Hub school/MAT. Nearly three-quarters of Hubs hired Literacy Specialists from previously graduated Partner Schools as this provided them with insight into their capabilities. 70% (N = 16) of Hubs hired Literacy Specialists who were no longer teaching within schools, on a freelance basis, which allowed Hubs greater flexibility to overcome challenges in organising LS days. However, survey results indicated that it was very important to Partner Schools that their Literacy Specialist was currently working as a teacher or senior leader within a school and a freelance Literacy Specialist would not fulfil this criterion.

Role of DfE (refer to section 3.6)

- Almost all (96%) of surveyed Hubs rated the support provided by DfE as very or extremely valuable. Hubs appreciated working directly with DfE, felt well supported by their Delivery Leads and gained a greater insight into what DfE can and cannot do to progress and develop the EHP, which had improved the working relationships between DfE and schools. However, some Hubs were also frustrated that DfE share changes in the programme late, making it difficult for them to strategically plan and

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[4] These are Local Authority employees. Roles in LAs differ significantly, but some LAs feel the Hubs are duplicating work they offer and therefore in competition with the LA (it is often a paid for service).

[5] DfE guidelines (2023/2024) recommend a minimum of 5 Literacy Specialists for each Hub.

prepare for the following year. Hubs were also concerned that there was a high turnover in the Delivery Leads they receive support from within DfE.

Conclusions

This research demonstrates that the way the EHP was running in the academic year 2023/2024 was very well received by Hubs and Partner Schools. Although the EHP was delivered through similar methods (observations, coaching and modelling), a key element of the EHP was the ongoing support of an external expert (the Literacy Specialists) to up-skill staff and provide bespoke support. Hubs made the support bespoke to Partner Schools by ensuring their teams had a diverse skill set, matching Literacy Specialists to schools based on that skill set, and that support was delivered in a collaborative, non-judgemental way. Strong working relationships with LAs, MATs and within Partner Schools was pivotal for the efficiency and effectiveness of the EHP, especially for recruiting new schools onto the programme.

Hubs did face some challenges in delivering the EHP programme. These challenges were often contextual depending on the location of the Hub and the characteristics of the schools they are working with, and for most challenges Hubs have developed methods to prevent or overcome the barriers. The research also shows that Partner Schools were looking for wider and continuous improvement in English beyond the current scope of the EHP, although some Hubs were sharing some expertise unofficially to accommodate this. Nevertheless, both Hubs and Partner Schools believed that the EHP was having a positive impact on the professional development of staff at the Partner Schools, and on children's outcomes in phonics and reading. Whether the EHP has had an objective impact on PSC scores over the academic year 2023/2024 has not been measured as part of this evaluation but will be reviewed by DfE in a separate impact evaluation.

Strengths and Limitations

The research uses a mixed-methods approach which allows for an in-depth insight into how the EHP is being delivered and Partner Schools experiences as well as an understanding of how many Hubs and/or Partner Schools shared the same perceptions or experiences. The sample size of the Hubs (across the interviews and survey) allows for definite representation across different regions, Hub school characteristics and Hub performances. However, the sample size for the Partner Schools (across the interviews and survey), although satisfactory, was proportionally smaller than the representation given to Hubs. In turn, the results only represent the views of Partner Schools that worked with certain Hubs, therefore Partner Schools that worked with other Hubs are not represented in this research and their views may differ. The sampling approach for recruiting Hubs for interview and survey was more robust, recruiting a more diverse sample, so we have greater confidence in the findings. However, to recruit Partner Schools we relied on Hubs as gatekeepers to which may have biased which Partner Schools had the opportunity to take part in the research and may have skewed results.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 About the English Hub Programme

The shift to teaching phonics in primary education was strongly influenced by The Rose Report (2006)[6] which identified phonics as the most effective method for teaching children to read. In 2007, DfE published the Letters and Sounds[7] resource which was widely adopted in primary schools to guide teachers and practitioners in developing children's phonic knowledge for reading, alongside developing their speaking and listening skills. In 2012 and 2013 respectively two fundamental changes in the teaching of reading were introduced: the National Curriculum since required schools to teach reading using systematic phonics, and the Phonics Screening Check (PSC)[8] was introduced as a statutory assessment of children's phonics skills learned through Reception and Year 1. To support schools with the changes, the Department for Education (DfE) provided £23.7 million of matched funding for resources and training for 14,000 schools between 2011 and 2013.

The English Hubs Programme (EHP) was then established in 2018.The aim of the EHP is threefold: (1) to improve the teaching of phonics, (2) to improve early language development, and (3) to encourage reading for pleasure, however the support to date has largely focused on improving the teaching of phonics. Based on a 'hub and spoke' model of support, 34 primary schools were selected for their expertise in teaching early reading to act as 'Hubs' to deliver the EHP [9]. These Hubs offer support with teaching phonics to children in reception and year 1 in local primary schools that are disadvantaged or underperforming with phonics and early reading. Each Hub aims to deliver this support to schools in their surrounding region, the boundaries of which were allocated by DfE. The delivery of the programme is overseen by DfE directly, where each Hub is assigned a Delivery Lead who is staffed by DfE, to support the delivery of the programme and to monitor the Hubs performance against key KPIs and objectives.

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[6] Independent review of the teaching of early reading: final report - Digital Education Resource Archive (DERA) (ioe.ac.uk)
[7] Letters and sounds - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
[8] Phonics screening check: 2019 materials - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
[9] Suitability for becoming an English Hub required schools to have 90% or more year 1 pupils meet the required standard in the phonics screening check over the 3 academic years prior to 2018; and for schools to have an Ofsted rating of good/outstanding and an Ofsted 'effectiveness in leadership and management' rating of good/outstanding.

Hub Roles and Responsibilities

Hubs are responsible for advertising the EHP to recruit schools onto the programme and developing and delivering bespoke support to schools to improve the consistency and fidelity in phonics teaching. For schools that do not yet teach phonics following a Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) programme from DfE's validated list of 45 SSP programmes[10], Hubs are also responsible for supporting schools to select and implement a SSP programme. This support can be delivered through two different categories of support - intensive support, or medium level support (MLS). MLS offers conferences, workshops, funding for phonics resources and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) events for schools who have not been selected for intensive support but still require assistance, although schools receiving intensive support may also attend. However, this report will focus on the intensive support delivered by the EHP rather than the MLS.

The intensive support offers professional interventions including, school-based audits to understand current practice and areas for development, bespoke action plans to guide development and change, resource funding of £3000 matched funding (or £6000 non-matched funding if schools meet more stringent criteria), and support from a Literacy Specialist on designated Literacy Support days (LS days) over a period of two years to schools referred to as 'Partner Schools'[11]. Literacy Specialists are staff working within the education sector that are considered experts in literacy and work directly with Reading/Phonics Leads at the Partner Schools. It is expected that Hubs pay the schools that Literacy Specialists are employed at to release them from their teaching/leadership responsibilities within their school to attend LS days and training for the EHP.

As of January 2024, when this research commenced, 1012 Partner Schools were confirmed to have graduated from intensive support from the EHP[12], and the EHP was supporting a further 1304 schools intensively: 658 schools who joined in September 2022, and were their second year of support, and 646 schools who joined in September 2023. In the academic year 2023/2024 individual Hubs were supporting between 41 and 65 Partner Schools at the same time.

To deliver the EHP, Hubs are provided with a degree of flexibility to develop their own strategies, however the DfE have prescribed some fixed policies alongside more flexible recommendations for best practice, which are outlined below. Although DfE provide these

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[10] Validation of systematic synthetic phonics programmes: supporting documentation - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
[11] Schools that are offered intensive support are referred to as 'Partner Schools' within this report, but they may also be referred to as 'intensively supported' schools in other documents referring to the EHP.
[12] This figure may change slightly as further graduations are confirmed throughout AY 23/24.

stipulations, it is not clear how Hubs are running the EHP outside of these, where differences in practice may occur nor how this may influence the impact of the EHP. Key stipulations were:

- DfE have stated that a Hub must have several key staff working on the programme at a minimum, but that Hubs can expand this list if feasible. This includes a Strategic Lead who will have strategic oversight of the Hub and should be a senior leader at the Hub school or trust; a Hub Lead, who is responsible for overseeing the planning, running, and delivery of the Hub; a minimum of 5 Literacy Specialists; and an administrator to support with finances and other business needs. Hubs may also consider creating a wider audit team who can be made up of Hub staff – often Literacy Specialists - trained to audit prospective schools.

- DfE provides some guidance for recruiting schools onto the programme, suggesting that Hubs should run showcases that demonstrate good phonics practice and what can be achieved through participation in the EHP, that schools need to complete a self-assessment to reflect on their current practice and what support may be needed, and that Hubs should conduct an audit with potential Partner Schools to observe and assess areas for support and development. DfE also suggested some possible criteria that Hubs can use to prioritise which schools to provide intensive support to in each wave of support (see Appendix 1).

- When providing support to Partner Schools DfE stipulate the minimum number of LS days that each Hub can allocate to a school in a year, but the Hub has flexibility to decide when LS days run and how many additional days they allocate to schools.

- DfE stipulate that support provided by Hubs should be guided by the "Challenge Checklist"[13].

DfE Monitoring

The DfE monitor the impact of the EHP through the number of children that pass the PSC at each Partner School. From this measure the DfE set a KPI for Hubs to reach. For the academic year 2023/2024 the KPI set for Hubs was for their Partner Schools to show an average of a 7.5 percentage point increase in the number of children passing the PSC when working with the EHP.

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[13] The "Challenge Checklist" is a document shared by DfE that outlines what schools should have in place and what practices they should be following to deliver high quality phonics teaching.

1.2 Existing evidence on the English Hub Programme

In May 2023 a quantitative impact analysis of the programme was published by DfE[14]. This research found that when comparing the change in year 1 PSC results between pre-pandemic years 2016/2017 and 2021/2022, schools supported intensively by the EHP outperformed schools not on the EHP by an average of between 6-7 percentage points depending on the statistical method. Although demonstrating the impact of the programme on PSC results, this analysis only captures average treatment effect estimates and hides variation by different waves and Hubs. It also does not take into account differences in phonics performance beyond whether pupils passed or failed the test. In addition, this analysis may have been impacted by wider contextual issues related to COVID-19 and the pandemic. Consequently, this report has been treated as early findings, however, moving forward DfE plans to complete an updated impact evaluation. Nevertheless, this ongoing analysis will not be able to determine why the EHP has had this impact, nor identify potential best practice and barriers to performance. Therefore, this evaluation is needed to understand the mechanisms of impact, why impact varies across Hubs, how Hubs are delivering support to schools, and what is and is not working well from the perspective of the programme users. This systematic evaluation will complement the management information (MI) data DfE uses to monitor the programmes outcomes, by informing key research questions about how the programme is delivering, additional data collection needs to be undertaken.

1.3 The aims and objectives of this research

The overarching aim of this research is to explore how the EHP is being implemented by Hubs, what is working well or not well and what factors may be influencing the measurable impact of the programme. This may support DfE and Hubs to maximise the effectiveness of the EHP through alterations in the design and delivery of the programme, as well as provide learnings for the future of this, and other, similar Hub programmes. The research will focus on the delivery and perceived effectiveness of key programme activities under the intensive support deliver model, such as LS support days, how Hubs target schools to support, and any barriers or challenges that Hubs may experience in delivering the programme. As such, this research seeks to address three key research questions:

- How are Hubs delivering the support to schools to improve phonics outcomes?

- What has worked well / has not worked well from the perspective of Hub schools and Partner schools?

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[14] Early analysis of English Hubs phonics attainment: 2021/22 data (May 2023)

- Are there differences in the experiences or practices of Hubs that influence Hub performance?

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Research Approach

This research study used a mixed-method approach to conduct an exploratory process evaluation of the EHP. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of English Hubs and their Partner Schools from the academic year 2023/2024. Using this approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how the EHP is being delivered and potential differences in the delivery approach and experiences across Hubs. A follow up survey was distributed to all Hubs and Partner Schools from the academic year 2023/2024 to quantify the key processes and experiences that were reported within the qualitative interviews across a larger sample.

2.2 Qualitative Interviews

2.2.1 Sample

Stratified random sampling was used to identify a representative sample of Hubs to invite to interview. Hubs were categorised by school characteristics (as recorded in academic year 2022/23) and Hub performance (as defined by KPI outcomes and Objectives ratings from DfE) and a random number generator was used to select Hubs from within these different categories for recruitment. The details of this approach are detailed in Appendix 2.

DfE management information was used to directly contact the Hub Leads employed at the Hubs inviting them to interview. Of the 21 invited to interview 20 consented to the voluntary interview. In total, 16 interviews were conducted with a single 'Hub Lead', in 3 interviews 2 Hub Leads attended, and in one interview the Hub lead and Deputy Hub Leads employed at the Hubs attended the interview.

To recruit Partner Schools, emails were sent to the generic email addresses of schools who started receiving support from the interviewed Hubs in the academic year 2023/2024. Administration staff at these schools were relied upon to act as Gatekeepers and to forward the research invite on to the appropriate staff members. Interviews were conducted with the Reading/Phonics Lead at the school, and/or the Headteacher. Of the 323 Partner Schools invited to take part in the interview 18 consented to participation. In 9 of the interviews the Reading Leads at the schools participated, in 6 of the interviews the Head Teacher of the school attended, and in 3 interviews the Deputy Head Teacher and Reading Lead both attended the interview. The characteristics and descriptive statistics of the participating Hubs and their Partner Schools are reported in Appendix 3.

2.2.2 Procedure

Interviews were conducted online using Microsoft Teams between February and March 2024. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and asked participants about how the EHP was being delivered, participants experience of delivering/receiving the programme and of working with partner/hub schools and DfE. Interviews were attended by the participant, an interviewer and a note taker. Interviews were transcribed using the Microsoft Teams live transcription software and supported by notes.

2.2.3 Analysis Approach

An inductive approach was taken to develop the codes and themes; however, this was guided by the research question. Initial codes were developed by 4 researchers following two core steps. Firstly, researchers familiarised themselves with the transcripts, reading through the transcripts and writing self-reflective notes. Secondly researchers began to code the data. To ensure reliability, two moderation meetings were conducted where initial codes were discussed, similar codes were clustered, and the final codes were agreed between researchers. After each moderation meeting researchers re-reviewed the transcripts and recoded where necessary to match the moderated codes. Codes were then clustered together to develop themes. The development and interpretation of the themes was collaboratively conducted through two workshops attended by all four researchers. The themes were reviewed against the codes and other themes, and the interpretation of the themes were moderated through discussion between the analysts.

2.3 Quantitative Survey

2.3.1 Sample

In July 2024, Hub Leads at all Hubs were invited by email to complete the online survey, if a Hub Lead was not available the Strategy Lead at the Hub was contacted instead. Of the 34 Hubs contacted 23 (68%) completed the survey.

Hubs were also asked to act as gatekeepers and forwarded an email invitation to Reading Leads (or Headteachers if a reading lead is not available) at their Partner Schools to complete the Partner School version of the online survey. In total, 195 Partner Schools across 19 Hubs completed the survey. This makes up approximately 13% of the Partner Schools currently receiving support from Hubs in July of the academic year 2023/2024

A breakdown of how many Hubs engaged with any element of the and the characteristics and descriptive statistics of the participating Hubs and their Partner Schools are reported in Appendix 3.

2.3.2 Procedure

The surveys were available to complete online via Qualtrics over the last two weeks of the summer term in July 2024.

2.3.3 Analysis Approach

Descriptive information including frequencies, proportions and averages were calculated for each survey question response. Although Hubs and Partner Schools completed similar survey questions, Hubs will have answered the questions through the perspective of supporting multiple Partner Schools at once, whereas Partner Schools will only have their own experiences to reflect on. For this reason, statistical comparisons between Hubs and Partner Schools results are not included in the analysis, however there is some discussion of qualitative differences. We were also planning to run comparisons in survey findings between Hubs with different performance outcomes, however results showed that there were minimal differences in responses and therefore not enough variance in the data to run statistical tests that would reliably allow us to conclude that different processes were associated with performance outcomes. Therefore, no statistical comparisons have been performed across Hubs.

2.4 Ethics

The research project gained ethical approval from the DfE GSR ethics committee. All participation in the research was voluntary and fully informed consent was collected prior to data collection. All data has been stored in line with GDPR policies – only researchers had access to the data and the data was fully anonymised.

Chapter 3: Results

3.1 Delivering the English Hub Programme

Results indicated that the way the EHP was implemented was generally consistent across Hubs. Hubs used similar methods and strategies to provide bespoke support to the Partner Schools, however there were some differences between and within Hubs and Partner Schools as to which elements of the support were the most important.

3.1.1 Providing a Bespoke and Quality Service

One of the flagship qualities of the English Hub model is that it enables bespoke support. Interviewed Partner Schools spoke positively of how Hubs took their specific school characteristics into consideration, and of the 195 surveyed Partner Schools, 66% (N = 128) "strongly" agreed and 29% (N = 57) "somewhat" agreed that their Hub had been considerate of their schools' specific characteristics and challenges, illustrating that the vast majority of surveyed Partner Schools also felt their Hubs had provided a bespoke service,

> "The English hub lady that we've worked with has been really good at, like, listening and understanding what our school is like" *[PartnerSchool_16]*

> "Yeah, they've been really kind, really supportive and very, very knowledgeable in terms of understanding the context of our school and putting in plans in place in order to support us, but I think they are aware that and actually we haven't been able to do this because of XYZ. It's been very much 'Yeah, I can see that. I can see why that hasn't worked' That's changed it so adaptable."
> *[PartnerSchool_6]*

Whilst the DfE's Challenge Checklist guided the support, interviews with the Hubs and Partner Schools identified specific strategies Hubs use to ensure high-quality tailored support for Partner Schools. These included:

- ensuring skills and expertise within the Hub team,

- strategically matching Literacy Specialists to Partner Schools, and

- being flexible and collaborative.

3.1.1.1 Ensuring skills and expertise within the Hub Team

In general, findings indicated that having a team of Literacy Specialists that had good interpersonal skills, phonics knowledge, leadership skills and some specialist skills enabled the Hubs to then match Literacy Specialists to Partner Schools in a way that enabled them to tailor the support to meet the Partner Schools needs in a flexible and collaborative way. Despite all Hubs broadly following this approach, there were also some observable differences between Hubs in their specific approaches through their perceived importance of these practices.

A key feature of the EHP for interviewed Partner Schools was the long-term support they received from the Literacy Specialists as external experts. Interviewed Partner Schools felt that the external perspective introduced creative solutions to overcoming challenges, that they could not see themselves,

> "…to have a fresh pair of eyes. You know, you can get ingrained in this is your school's way. And this is how we do it here. So, I had to have a different perspective." *[PartnerSchool_18]*

> "… having someone external coming in and saying, actually, you know, let's look at this together. We can make it work… that was really that was crucial for me having her to help to do that." *[PartnerSchool_9]*

This was echoed by survey results with 68% (*N* = 132) of Partner Schools reporting they joined the EHP to receive input from an external expert. In turn, 27% (*N* = 52) of Partner Schools and 39% (*N* = 9) of Hubs felt that this was one of the top 3 strengths of the EHP.

Hubs thought carefully about the breadth of skills, experience and knowledge they required in their team of Literacy Specialists in order to ensure a quality and bespoke service to Partner Schools. Although opinions on what were considered key skills varied across the Hubs, the main skills highlighted in interviews with Hubs included, interpersonal skills, phonics expertise, specialist skills, and leadership skills. In the survey, Hubs were asked to rate how important it was that the Literacy Specialists in their team had these certain skills and the results presented in Figure 1 suggest that although all the skills were perceived as important, that on a scale of between 1 and 5 (not at all important – extremely important) the skills that were rated of highest importance were phonics expertise, interpersonal skills and skills in using data.

Figure 1. How important Hubs perceived different skills to be for Literacy Specialists within their teams.
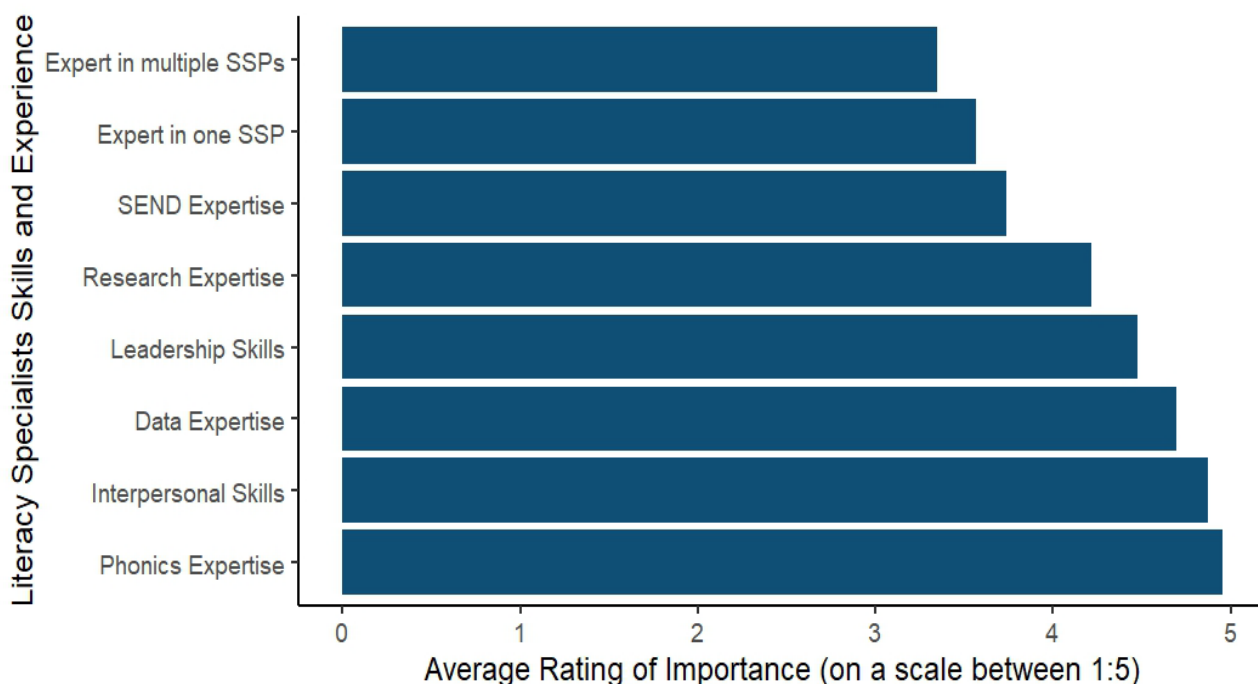
Interpersonal skills

Interpersonal skills were deemed essential by all interviewed and surveyed Hubs, who rated it as an "extremely" (87%, N = 20) or "very" (13%, N = 3) important skill for their Literacy Specialists to have. Throughout the interviews Hubs and Partner Schools raised how crucial positive working relationships between the Hub and Partner Schools were for the EHP's success, and Hubs were particularly conscious that support was delivered in an understanding and non-judgemental way. Some Hubs described their method of delivery as "*nurturing*" or "*high challenge/low threat*" and they specifically wanted to differentiate themselves from other external authorities such as Ofsted that are there to grade performance,

> "Sometimes we have schools that, despite everything that we tell them, don't quite fully realise what we're doing as an English hub. You know, they almost thought we were Ofsted in one school in the staff, so really resented us going in. And so, we had to have a big sit down and go, actually we're not, we're here to support and work alongside you." *[Hub_11]*

Hubs believed that strong interpersonal skills were essential to build these positive relationships to ensure Partner Schools felt positively supported,

> "…we need a kind of personality type that can go into a school and form relationships quickly and positively and can, you know, potentially have some courageous conversations. Yeah, it needs to, you need to be the right person to win the trust of people and win the support." *[Hub_13]*

For 194 (99%) of the surveyed Partner Schools it was deemed "extremely" (83%, *N* = 161) or "very" (17%, *N* = 33) important that the EHP was delivered in an understanding and non-judgemental way, and 192 (98%) of the Partner Schools reported that this was achieved. In total,163 (84%) strongly agreed and 29 (15%) agreed that the support they received was delivered in an understanding and non-judgemental way. During the interviews, Partner Schools fed back that this was most frequently observed in situations where Literacy Specialists delivered feedback or had difficult conversations with staff, and that this made the experience of working with the Hubs a positive and reassuring experience that built the confidence and motivation of the school staff,

> "We absolutely, thoroughly enjoyed her coming in. Yeah, she's been so supportive. But she like, like I said, it's been very she's very thorough. She's very to the point. But she does it in such a nice way, yeah, she she's just so positive" *[PartnerSchool_7]*

Phonics expertise

Of the 195 surveyed Partner Schools, 189 (97%) believed that it was either "extremely" (69%, *N* = 133) or "very" (29%, *N* = 56) important that the Literacy Specialist has specialist knowledge of the SSP that they were using. A marked proportion of interviewed and surveyed (91%, *N*= 21) Hubs also believed that this was important for EHP delivery, however, in a minority of cases, interviewed Hubs argued that the Literacy Specialist did not need to be an expert in phonics or a specific SSP to deliver the EHP if they had other desirable skills,

> "We've got a literacy specialist, for example, who has research experience and has a lot of crossover work. So their knowledge is really grounded in research when experiencing literacy, but doesn't teach phonics day-to-day. We found because of her management experience and her ability to kind of run projects and support people, she's just as effective as those of her people who are brought on just for their phonics knowledge." *[Hub_3]*

Nevertheless, most interviewed Hubs aimed to ensure that all the SSPs of their Partner Schools were known within their teams so that they could provide bespoke support. Hubs took differing approaches to covering this knowledge base, with some upskilling or hiring Literacy Specialists to cover multiple SSPs, and others recruiting Literacy Specialists that had expertise in one specific SSP and maintaining their training in that one SSP,

"So the literacy specialists they all have accredited training within the SSP that they're going to deliver whichever SSP that that school is delivering. So we and every user make sure that they have refresh training if they haven't had it for a number of years because every SSP tweaks during the year." *[Hub_16]*

When surveyed Hubs were questioned how important it was for Literacy Specialists to have specific knowledge of a single or multiple SSP on a scale of 1 – 5 (not at all important – extremely important) results indicated that, on average, Hubs rated specialist knowledge of a single SSP (M = 3.57, SD = 0.73) of greater importance than knowledge of multiple SSPs (M = 3.35, SD = 1.11) ($t(1)$ = 31.80, p < 0.05).

Leadership skills

Leadership skills were also widely discussed across Hubs interviews, where some Hubs viewed them as essential to support Reading Leads to develop their own leadership skills and subsequently take the programme forward beyond the EHP. However, other Hubs viewed leadership skills of lower importance. This was also observed within the survey responses where most surveyed Hubs agreed that leadership skills were important, but there was some division between whether they were "extremely" (57%, N = 13), "very" (35%, N = 8) or "moderately" (9%, N = 2) important. Where leadership skills were viewed as particularly important, Hubs would only hire Literacy Specialists that had been in a leadership position and had leadership experience, for those who viewed it as less important tended to offer training in leadership and skills associated with leadership (e.g. difficult conversations) instead,

"Based on what we've seen in early wave schools and people that really had capacity, it's so important to be able to talk about the leadership side of it. The phonics knowledge needs to be really strong but being able to talk about all of the logistics you've faced as a leader and all of the different problem solving that has come with that, is really important." *[Hub_10]*

Specialist skills

To ensure that Hubs had the expertise in their team needed to support their Partner Schools interviewed Hubs reported that they aimed to hire Literacy Specialists with specialist skills. The skill rated of highest importance in the survey was knowledge of data, however over 50% of Hubs also rated research experience and experience working with SEND children as either "extremely" or "very" important (see Figure 1),

"They [Literacy Specialists] are hired from across the regions, we are really looking again at expertise reflecting the communities that we serve." *[Hub_10]*

3.1.1.2 Matching Literacy Specialists to Schools

Interview and survey results showed that Hubs tailored support by matching Literacy Specialists to Partner Schools based on specific considerations. Survey responses revealed that Hubs considered multiple different factors, considering an average of 3.5 (Range: 2 - 4) of the five potential factors. The most considered factors, where each factor was accounted for by 91% (*N* = 21) of Hubs, included:

- if the Literacy Specialists had knowledge of the SSP that Partner School was using,

- if the Literacy Specialist had a specialist skill that matched the support the school required (e.g. in SEND, data/ research experience) and,

- the Literacy Specialists level of experience.

Interviewees noted that matching Literacy Specialists to schools allowed them to draw upon their own experiences for creative problem solving and helped build trust and rapport with the Partner Schools. In turn, this allowed specialists to deliver the EHP in a way that uniquely considered the schools specific challenges. Several interviewed Hubs and over half of the Hub survey respondents (52%, *N* = 12) also reported matching Literacy Specialists to schools depending on the characteristics of the school the Literacy Specialist currently teach within,

> "[LS name redacted] comes from a year two class, she's English lead, she knows how difficult it is. She's in a school with a very similar catchment area to ours, where it's really challenging. So although knowledgeable, she's really realistic as well…I think having somebody who is coming from a school background who is in there at the moment is experiencing what we're experiencing, has been really important." *[PartnerSchool_18]*

Survey results indicated that on a scale between 1 – 5 (not at all important – extremely important), Partner Schools perceived this practice as more important (*M* = 4.05) than Hubs *(M* = 2.78).

3.1.1.3 Being Flexible and Collaborative

Support being flexible and reactive to schools' specific challenges also facilitated bespoke support. Hubs implemented this from the initial action/support plans, and continued the practice throughout the programme by continually reviewing ongoing challenges in the school and individual teachers' performance,

"They came in, they looked at our context, they got to know our context first. So they got to know where the children were at, how many supports that we had and they then worked with the teaching staff and reading lead to say, right, OK, this is the challenge, we understand it's a challenge, but let's see if we can work creatively to ensure that we still get all of the children to get the correct place that they need for their progress and phonics to be as rapid as possible now." *[PartnerSchool_3]*

Partner schools were particularly receptive to the flexibility and spoke positively of the collaborative element that this bought to the programme. Of the surveyed Partner Schools, 96% believed that Hubs working collaboratively with the Reading Lead was "extremely" (81%, *N* = 157) or "very" (15%, *N* = 30) beneficial. Interviewees felt that it enabled them to direct the type of support their school needed and to refuse support that was not relevant to their needs,

"If there's anything we think that's been less than useful. We've just said no, we're not doing that. So that's been OK and they've been responsive to that." *[PartnerSchool_8]*

Working collaboratively with the Partner Schools was discussed as a focus for them when delivering the programme, arguing that "it is a collaborative approach. It's not just someone standing at the back of the room making notes" *[Hub_9]*

"on the first day as a team, we're always like, make sure you meet as many people as you can and explain that you're not Ofsted, you're not there to judge, you're not there to make comments. You're there to help…" *[Hub_19]*

3.1.2 EHP Delivery

Interview and survey results indicated that the level of support provided within the EHP met Partner School's needs. Across all interviews respondents stated that nothing was missing from the support they received and that "…the support that we're getting actually is the kind of the support that I was hoping for" *[PartnerSchool_12]*. Similarly, of the 195 survey respondents, 188 (96%) of Partner Schools reported that the level of support received from the EHP was "Just Right", whilst 7% (4%) felt they received "too much" support, and no schools felt they received "too little" support.

"Let's be honest, it's all been very, very useful. It's been absolutely golden…I honestly would say there have been no challenges. They're very transparent. They come in, you know, they're so supportive. The training they've obviously had is amazing I know that I'm able to just contact my leads and ask any question no matter how silly it might seem, and I instantly get that support back. Yeah, I felt very, very supportive through the whole process. And you know, just going

on to see what I can do next and being shown different things and obviously improving my leadership skills as well, they've been amazing. Absolutely amazing…I'm not sure if it would have been such a successful implementation without having them to kind of back up my confidence if that makes sense." *[PartnerSchool_2]*

Interview and survey results demonstrated that a variety of support options were delivered to Partner Schools through methods of observations, coaching and modelling. These activities were identified through the qualitative interviews with Hubs, then surveyed Partner Schools were asked if they received these types of support, and to rate their perceived benefit. Figure 2 shows that most Partner Schools received each type of support, and for each type of support, the average rating for how beneficial the support was ranged between 4.2 and 4.83 on a scale of 1 – 5 (not at all beneficial – extremely beneficial). Therefore, on average each type of support received was viewed as very to extremely beneficial.

Figure 2. The proportion of Partner Schools that received different types of support from the English Hubs.
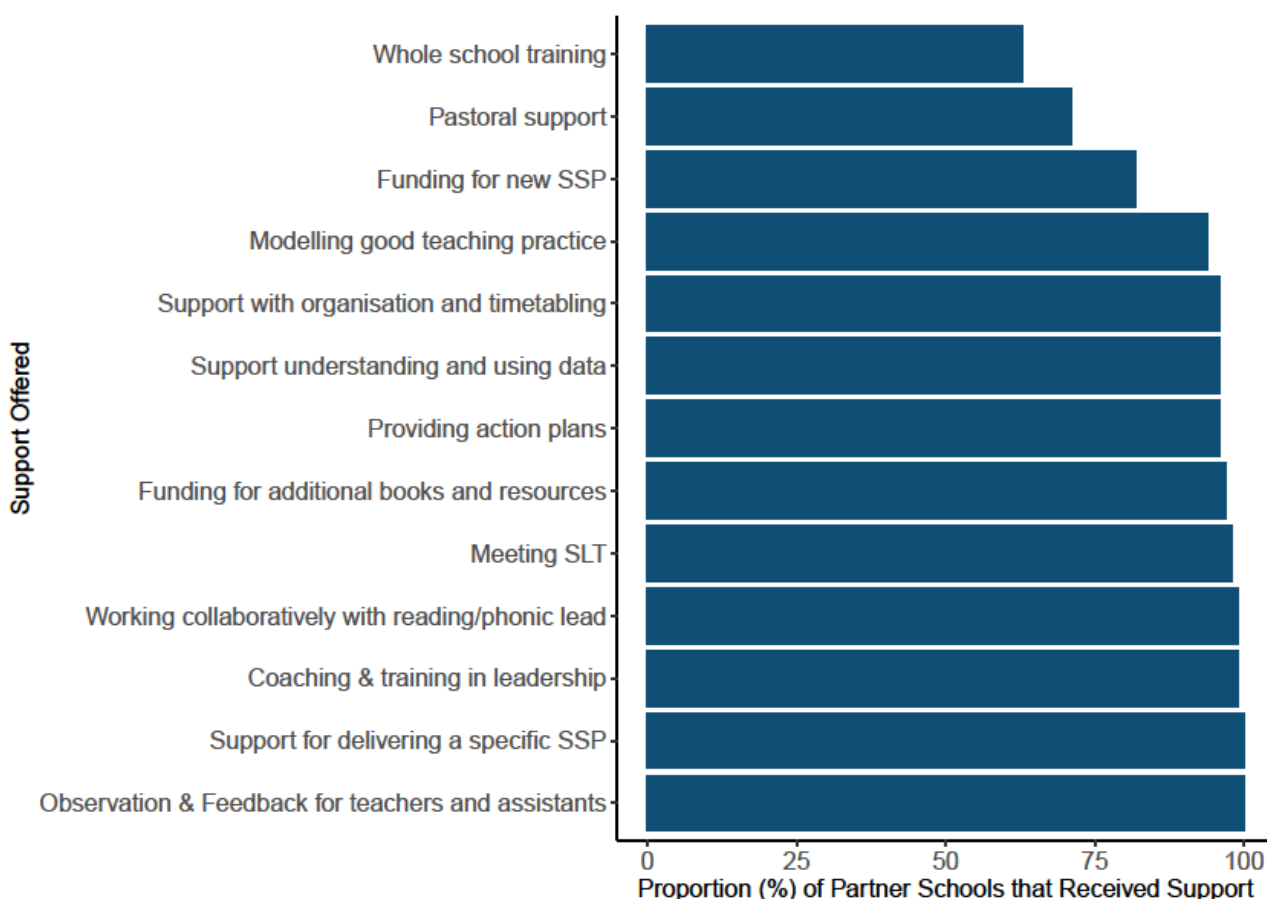
3.1.2.1 Coaching and Modelling

Coaching was discussed in the Interviews as a particularly important element of the support. Some Hubs stated that from their perspective a key aim of delivering the EHP was to prepare the Reading Leads at the school to deliver phonics teaching to a high standard without the support of the Hub, and therefore coaching the Reading Leads across different areas was a strategic aim of Hubs was to ensure the programme was having sustainable change,

> "…we go in with the reading leader and model how to be a reading leader, jumping in and coaching, offering support, that kind of thing and then, as you go through the two years, I am wanting to pull back and say to the reading leader "what would you do? Show me, we're going to go into this classroom, you show me what you would do" and then we'll come out and we will discuss it because ultimately, we've got to hand the reins over to them to be as successful as possible and develop their expertise." *[Hub_13]*

A key component of coaching included upskilling the Reading Leads in leadership to develop their skills and confidence to support their staff and to ensure they could work with Senior Leadership Teams. Interviewed Partner Schools commented that this support had provided them with confidence and reassurance within their role, and had specifically supported them with their professional development and learning,

> "And then anything we've picked out that specifically relates to individual teachers, we might run some coaching sessions with them or sometimes it's just working with me on how I can cascade that and deliver that within school myself." *[PartnerSchool_16]*

The perceived benefit of upskilling Reading Leads in leadership was corroborated by the survey results, whereby 95% of surveyed Partner Schools that received this type of support rated this support as "extremely" (80%, $N = 156$) or "very" (13%, $N = 25$) beneficial.

Another element of the coaching involved Literacy Specialists supporting Reading Leads to problem solve issues with the timetabling and organisation of staff to deliver the SPP. In the interviews it was revealed that the level of support needed with this often depended on the SSP the school were using and the schools staffing numbers. Some SSPs are well known to be more resource intensive than others, requiring a greater number of staff to deliver the programme. Of the 187 surveyed schools that received support with timetabling and organisation, 107 (57%) schools rated it as "extremely" beneficial, 51 (27%) rated it as "very" beneficial, and 24 (13%) rated it as "moderately" beneficial. Although it wasn't the most highly rated support, in most cases it was deemed necessary to overcome challenges in staffing numbers and reduced staff capacity (see section 3.3.4).

To support Partner Schools to deliver the SPP with fidelity interviewed Hubs and Partner Schools shared that Literacy Specialists used modelling techniques by demonstrating best practice. This involved the Literacy Specialists proactively stepping in and teaching classes so Teachers/Teaching Assistants/Reading Leads could observe them, or by filming themselves or Reading Leads in delivering interventions. Modelling practice was well received by the interviewed and surveyed Partner Schools. Of the 182 surveyed Partner Schools that received support through modelling, 127 (70%) rated the support as "extremely" beneficial and 38 (21%) reported it as "very" beneficial. Interviewed Partner Schools also saw the value of modelling, praising the "hands on" approach and appreciated that the Literacy Specialists did not just come into the school and tell individuals what to do,

> "So, I think the hands-on approach and the support that they give is good because ultimately now we can probably run it well" *[PartnerSchool_1].*

> "It's encouraging… and quite refreshing to have hands on support rather than just saying do this, do that, yeah. Yeah, she led from within. It's really brilliant and quite a skill." *[PartnerSchool_13]*

3.1.2.2 Observations

Observing teachers and teaching assistants, and providing feedback, was identified as a key method of support, with all surveyed Partner Schools reporting this practice. The interviews revealed that observations helped Literacy Specialists identify support needs and monitor improvements. Some Hubs observed all teaching at each visit, while others tailored observations based on data or perceived teaching quality from previous observations. In most cases, it was reported that observations are done in collaboration with the Reading Lead and sometimes the Head Teacher, to support coaching.

Most of the interviewed Partner Schools saw worth in the critical and positive feedback that came from observations and reading leads felt that it improved their ability to recognise areas of improvement. A considerable proportion of the surveyed schools also perceived the observations as "extremely" (73%, N = 142) or "very" (21%, N = 41) beneficial,

> "I mean, [LS name redacted] observes and then she'll pass on advice, what she thinks, and she's been really, really helpful. It's really been really positive and it's ended up being now that teachers enjoy [LS name redacted] and I going into lessons, because they know it's a positive experience and we're only there to tweak little bits of their lessons or interventions. And I feel like staff are really grown in confidence since…" *[PartnerSchool_14]*

However, a minority of Partner Schools felt that observations were less beneficial. Interviewed Partner Schools felt that observations added additional stress and could become

repetitive. Although they were viewed as important at the beginning, smaller schools felt they became less useful as the programme progressed, which they perceived as an indication that they didn't need support for as long term,

> "…observations are less useful, especially at this point in the year. At the beginning, I would have probably said the opposite and said that they were the most useful…and from what I've observed before, our team, they perform better when they're not being watched." *[PartnerSchool_15]*

3.1.3 Perceptions about the delivery of the EHP

3.1.3.1 Key Strengths of the EHP

In interviews, Partner Schools consistently reported that all the support provided was useful, with no aspects deemed unhelpful. To provide some clarification the surveyed Hubs and Partner Schools were asked what they believed were the top three greatest strengths of the EHP. In general, Hubs and Partner Schools experiences of the EHP were positive, but the reasons why Hubs and Partner Schools felt the EHP was useful varied. As shown in Figure 3, only one element (funding) of the EHP was selected by a majority (>50%) of Partner Schools and in no cases did 50% or more Hubs selected the same option as a key strength. This indicates that although Hubs are delivering the service in a similar way, that their priorities differ, and that experiences across Partner Schools do differ. Nevertheless, in most cases, the proportional difference between what Hubs and Partner Schools felt were the strengths of the EHP were minimal, indicating that Hubs and Partner Schools saw similar strengths in the EHP. A greater proportion of Hubs than Partner Schools did perceive supporting Reading Leads to deliver SSP's independently and that support was delivered by an external expert as a key strength of the EHP. Whereas a greater proportion of Partner Schools saw the funding, the resources of training, that support is delivered to all staffing levels, and the approachability of the Hub staff as key strengths of the EHP.

Figure 3. Which elements were selected by Hubs and Partner Schools as their "Top 3" key strengths of the EHP
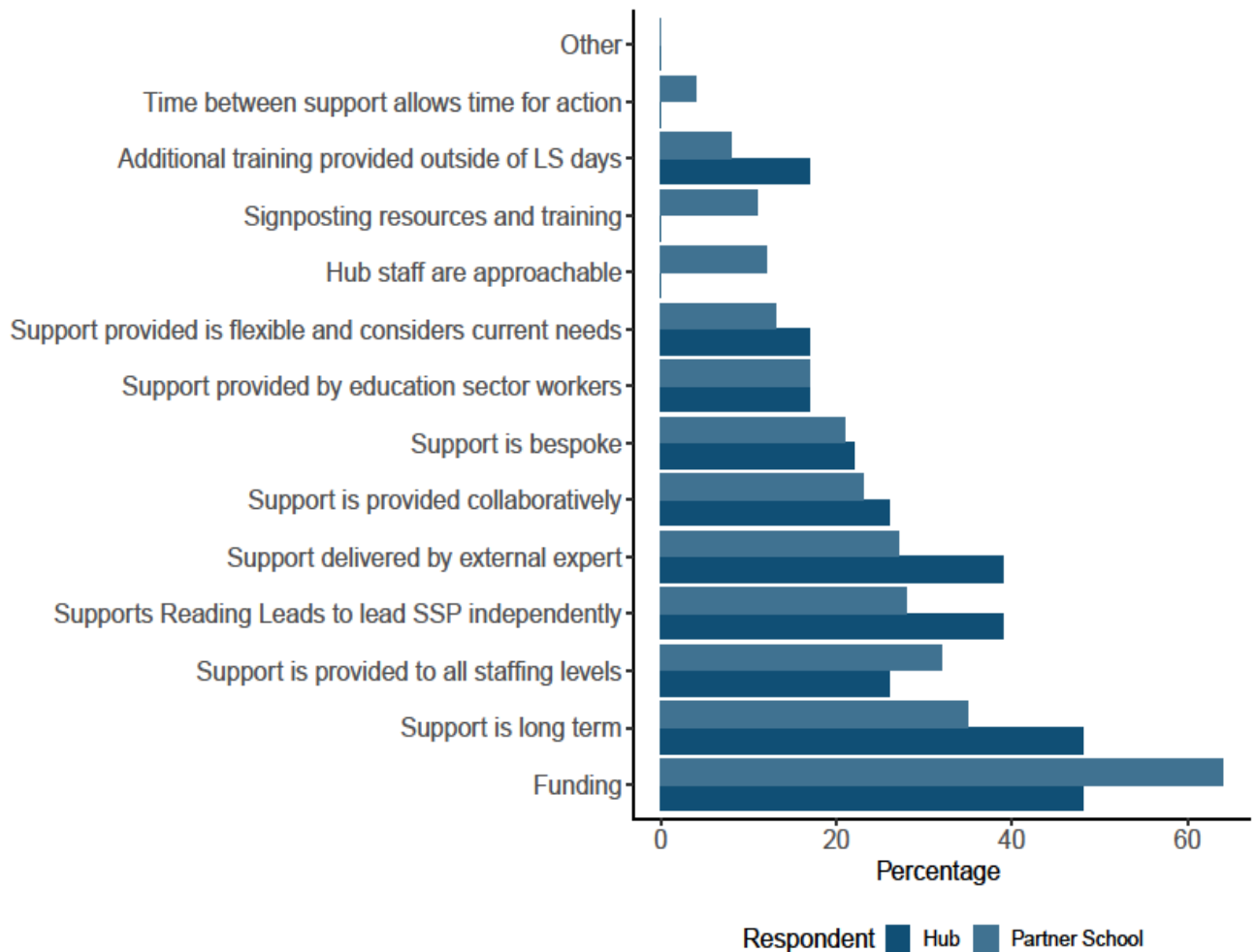
3.1.3.2 Suggestions for Programme Expansion or Change

Across the interviews, Hubs spontaneously questioned what the next step may be for the EHP once all schools have received support in phonics and are performing at their best. They also freely shared what Partner Schools had requested from them outside of their current remit which offered some suggestions for potential expansion or changes for the EHP. In the survey these suggestions were put forward to Partner Schools to determine how many schools felt they may benefit from these suggested additions. Results indicated that a marked proportion of Partner Schools (88%, *N* = 172) felt they would benefit from wider literacy support, specifically support with writing (52%, *N* = 100), spelling (46%, *N* = 88), fluency (44%, *N* = 84) and comprehension (39%, *N* = 75). Over half of the respondents felt they would benefit from additional funding for books and resources (65%, *N* = 125) and from support beyond KS1 (56%, *N* = 109). Only 5% (*N* = 9) of respondents

stated that they felt they needed no additional support beyond what the EHP currently provides.

Wider Literacy support (fluency and writing)

Hubs expressed that some Partner Schools had asked for support in wider literacy teaching, most commonly in fluency and writing. Some Hubs shared that they already offered advice unofficially based on what Literacy Specialists currently do within their own schools, or they use Medium Level Support training as an opportunity to expand on the intensive support remit. For one Partner School, they felt like this wider literacy support is what was lacking from the EHP and wanted to see progression in reading outcomes, not just phonics,

> "So we might do a bit of fluency in the second-half of [medium level support] meeting. I found if we tell them it's just phonics, then they kind of feel that they're working on that with the person and they might not need that. So we get them in with that we have something a bit more exciting and then just do a bit of fun, and accept at the beginning to make sure that they're on track." *[Hub_3]*

> "So what's starting to happen now is when we go in and actually they might say, well, we're OK with that, but it's now our reading beyond decodables, or it's some aspects of our writing, so they're starting to sort of come to us with requests around the wider literacy sort of curriculum. And obviously that doesn't really fit into our remit. So I think there's a little bit of frustration creeping in really about the, you know, I think there's probably a desire for the for the process, the DfE to sort of respond to some of the requests from our schools for supporting some of the areas that our remit doesn't really cover." *[Hub_15]*

Although Hubs can provide ongoing support with reading for pleasure and early reading the focus of the EHP is on phonics. All of the Partner School respondents reported that they had received support with phonics, however only 36% (*N* = 70) reported they had received support with reading for pleasure and 16% (*N* = 32) reported that they had received support with early language development. Many interviewed Hubs reported that they take the approach of "phonics first, reading for pleasure after". Within the survey, 83% (*N* = 19) of Hubs reported that they only support with reading for pleasure if/when phonics teaching is at the desired place, and the remaining 17% (*N* = 4) reported that all their Partner Schools received support with reading for pleasure alongside phonics support. This suggests it is more common practice for Hubs to support Partner Schools with reading for pleasure or early reading if the Partner School has met their objectives on the challenge checklist for phonics. However, this meant that a few of the interviewed Partner Schools felt that the programme was too focused on phonics and did not improve reading outcomes,

"For quite a while now, reading has been an issue in our school and we're trying lots of different things to try and raise the profile of reading. I don't think the English Hub, they literally have focused on phonics, there's been no reading for pleasure focus at all since we started. So, because of that, the impact is limited. It has to be, it is phonics, not reading." *[PartnerSchool_5]*

Support for KS2 learners and secondary schools

A second suggested area for expansion was the delivery of phonics support for older age groups. Although the older years do not complete the PSC, interviewed Hubs shared that many schools had sought support for children in KS2 and in secondary schools where children are struggling with reading and teachers feel ill-equipped to support these specific children,

"So actually, a lot of schools will ask for support in key stage two and within year 2 Still with phonics, because they've just got children that still need that phonics teaching within those year groups. And again, if there's time in the LSD, then we can offer that. But we've kind of said actually in these next two terms, let's really focus in on year one and because that's obviously what we're measured on as well." *[Hub_4]*

"Secondary schools are banging on the door to say how can you help us with the teaching of phonics and obviously our remit is not there at this moment in time as there's still so many schools that we've not reached. *[Hub_19]*

Nevertheless, over half (62%, *N* = 121) of the surveyed Partner Schools reported that they had received whole school training. Though it was described as resource-intensive by interviewed Partner Schools, it was liked by most schools because it was perceived to help KS2 teachers to support any students in their own classrooms struggling with reading, widening the potential impact of the programme. This was supported by the survey results whereby 76% of the 121 schools that received whole school training rated it as "extremely" (50%, *N* = 61) or "very" (26%, *N* = 31) beneficial, and 18% (*N* = 22) reported it as "moderately" or "somewhat" (5%, *N* = 6) beneficial,

"The English hub person is very good at thinking holistically about the support that she's offering. Her focus is phonics, but that doesn't mean just in year one or in foundation. So we talk a lot about the children that that I haven't quite reached and indeed, we do have a small number of children across key stage two who still need to access the phonics programme. And so she's discussed with us the kind of strategies and approaches that we could use to be able to support children across the whole school. So that's been really useful at those days [LS days]". *[PartnerSchool_12]*

3.2 Challenges in Delivering the EHP

Throughout the interviews, multiple factors were identified that could positively or negatively affect the running of the EHP, which highlighted what was working well or not well. In the surveys, Hubs and Partner schools were asked which of the barriers identified from the interviews they had experienced within the academic year 2023/2024. Figure 4 shows the proportion of Hubs that reported they had experienced each challenge and Figure 5 shows the proportion of Partner Schools that reported they had experienced each challenge. The findings demonstrate that there was a greater consensus between Hubs as to what factors were challenging compared to Partner Schools, and fewer Partner Schools reported that they had experienced each challenge. This suggests that Hubs face similar challenges when considering all their Partner Schools, but that not all Partner Schools face the same challenges. In fact, a substantial proportion of Partner Schools (22%, *N* = 43) felt that there were no barriers or challenges to delivery of the EHP, yet all Hubs selected that they had experienced between one and ten of the twelve barrier options in the past academic year (2023/2024). Nevertheless, the results showed that staffing issues and challenges with the SLT at the Partner School were the most commonly experienced challenges.

Figure 4. The proportion of Hubs that experienced different challenges across the academic year 2023/2024, and their perceived significance.
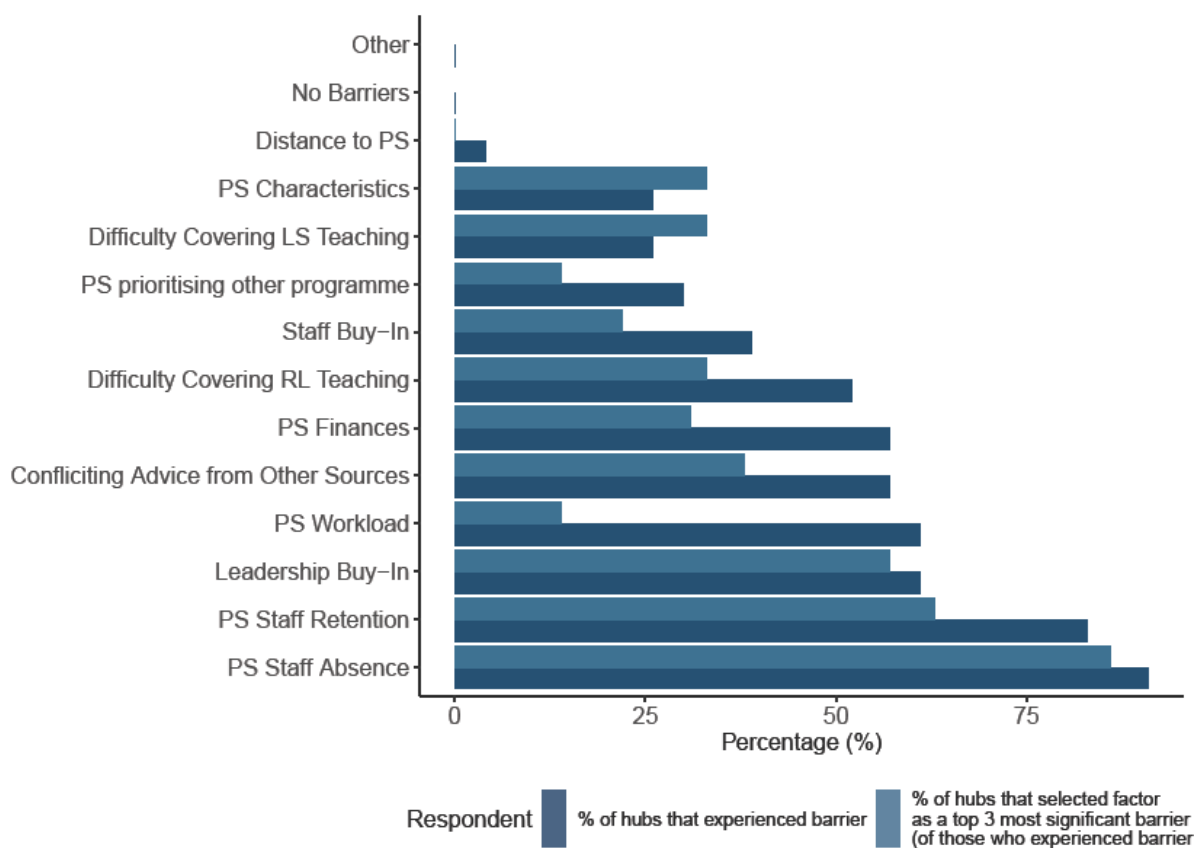
Figure 5. The proportion of Partner Schools that experienced different challenges across the academic year 2023/2024, and their perceived significance.
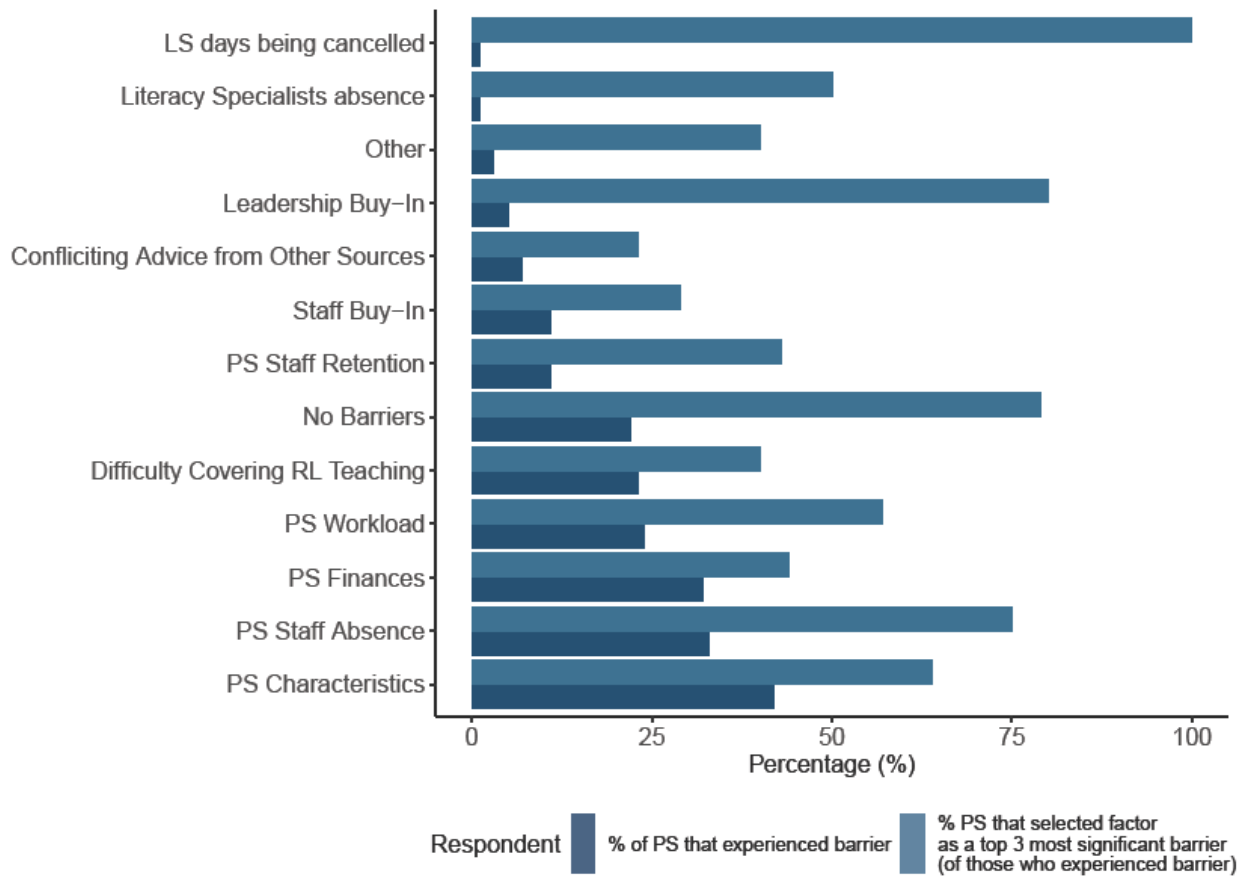
3.2.1 Staffing

The most discussed challenge in the interviews, was the availability and capacity of staff. All surveyed Hubs and over half of the Partner Schools (52%, *N* = 102) reported that the EHP was affected by high teacher absences, poor teacher retention, or poor staff capacity (see Table 1a and Table 1b).

Table 1a. The number and proportion of Hubs that experienced challenges with delivering the EHP due to staffing issues at the Partner School.

Staffing Barrier	Number of surveyed Hubs that experienced barrier (number)	Percentage of surveyed Hubs that experienced barrier (%)	Of which, selected as a significant barrier (number)	Of which, selected as a significant barrier (%)
High staff absence in Partner School	21	91	18	86
Low Staff retention in Partner School	19	83	12	63
High staff workload in Partner School	14	62	2	14

Base column 2 and 3: 23 surveyed Hubs; Base column 4 and 5: number presented in corresponding row in column 2.

Table 1b. The number and proportion of Partner Schools that experienced challenges with delivering the EHP due to staffing issues at the Partner School.

Staffing Barrier	Number of surveyed Partner Schools that experienced barrier	Percentage of surveyed Partner Schools that experienced barrier	Number of Partner Schools that experience barrier who selected it as a significant barrier	Percentage of Partner Schools that experience barrier who selected it as a significant barrier (%)
High staff absence in Partner School	65	33	49	75
Low Staff retention in Partner School	21	11	9	43
High staff workload in Partner School	47	24	27	57

Base column 2 and 3: 195 surveyed Partner Schools; Base column 4 and 5: number presented in corresponding row in column 2.

Staff absence and low staff numbers

In the interviews, high staff absence within schools were identified as a challenge for nu-

merous reasons. One of the most frequently discussed reasons was that it could be difficult to cover the teaching responsibilities of reading leads and literacy specialists on LS days. Although Hubs offer payment to backfill the teaching, they reported that there were often not enough supply staff to cover teaching as well as staff absence, resulting in LS days being cancelled and reorganised. Over half of the surveyed Hubs (78%, N = 18) also reported that they experienced challenges covering the teaching responsibilities, however this was more frequent for covering the reading leads in Partner Schools (52%, N = 14) than of literacy specialists in their schools (26%, N = 6). A second reason reduced staffing was identified as a challenge was because it often left schools unable to deliver the SSP due to its high demand for teaching staff and assistants, causing Partner Schools to struggle with running Phonics sessions,

> "…schools are running on a very, very skeleton staff, and so they're really affected by absences and staffing problems. As well, we've got a lot of schools in our hub area who have recruitment and retention issues…" *[Hub_17]*

> "…and if I'm brutally honest, it's difficult because of staffing needs and staff can't always be released because we're operating on a skeleton staff" *[PartnerSchool_12]*

To ensure the phonics programme continued despite staffing challenges, Literacy Specialists suggested different timetabling structures. Solutions offered included taking a whole school approach, training all KS1 and KS2 teachers and teaching assistants in the SSP so that Phonics classes could be covered in times of teacher absence, or relying more heavily on teaching assistants from across the whole school. Sometimes these solutions were also discussed as frustrating for staff across the wider school because teachers and teaching assistants had to be removed from other classrooms to make up staffing numbers which could be disruptive.

High staff turnover

Another well reported staffing challenge was high turnover of staff in schools. Hubs viewed this as a more extensive barrier compared to Partner Schools. Of the 19 Hubs that experienced this challenge 63% (N = 12) selected this as a significant barrier compared to 43% (N = 12) of the 21 Partner Schools that experienced the barrier (see Figures 4 and 5). Interviewed Hubs stated that the success of the EHP relies on upskilling and development of staff within the school, so progress halts or is lost if staff leave. In these situations, Hubs felt they had to "…start from scratch…" with new employees. While some Hubs positively reflected that staff turnover can spread EHP benefits to new schools, it was also strongly acknowledged that it challenges the original school's ability to implement changes and see impact. This suggests EHP's impact is tied to staff, not the school, and high turnover schools may need more ongoing support for long-term success,

"That's always been our big worry is that we leave, and things begin to tumble down because of the churn in these schools, a lot of the schools we work with are in challenging areas that have high staff turnover and the worry is that we will no longer have a footprint in some of these schools" *[Hub_3]*

3.2.2 Buy in from staff at Partner Schools

Although already identified as a necessary quality that Hubs assess during the recruitment of Partner Schools, dedication to the programme from senior leaders and school staff was also identified as necessary for the continued success of the programme. From the survey, 22 (96%) Hubs believed that good school leadership buy-in was a facilitator to the delivery of the EHP. However, 16 (70%) Hubs and 28 (14%) Partner Schools felt that poor leadership or staff engagement had been a barrier in the academic year 2023/2024 and over half of the Hubs (57%) and Partner Schools (80%) that experienced poor leadership buy-in felt that this was one of the most significant barriers they experienced.

In the interviews Hubs noted that when the Head Teachers were engaged, they met with the Literacy Specialist at each visit, joined them on their observations, and were more willing to implement necessary actions, such as providing more staff to focus on delivering the SSP and providing the Reading Lead with time away from teaching to focus on implementing set actions and coaching and training the wider staff. In turn, it was suggested that when the Head Teacher showed an interest in the programme, that this improved the engagement across staff mitigating resistance to change from teaching staff,

> "we've got some schools where the Head Teacher blocks out their day…but those days the engagement is really high and they kind of hand off every work that the literacy specialist utters". *[Hub_18]*

> "we've only had one problem where one teacher just wouldn't take on board what we were trying to say to them…the next literacy specialist visit, she'd been moved around by the head teacher". *[Hub_16]*

In multiple interviews it was relayed that irrespective of how well the Reading Lead was performing, they often do not have the authority to approve or implement certain actions such as releasing staff for training, or reorganising lessons to allow for more teacher capacity to deliver interventions. Therefore, the Head Teacher needs to be well informed and engaged with the programme to approve and implement such changes,

> "It often can't be done without that senior leadership support and the head teacher driving it. So where we've had challenges around even the LS not being allowed to go into a lesson comes back to the head teacher and the tone that they set in that school and their expectations". *[Hub_2]*

Consequently, some Hubs reported that during recruitment they clearly communicate that they expect the Head Teacher to engage with the Literacy Specialist each time they visit, and that they support in implementing the necessary actions identified during the visits. In cases where senior leaders were not prioritising or engaging with the programme, Hub Leads or Strategic Leads had conversations with the SLT of the school to remind them of the engagement requirements agreed at the beginning of the programme. This approach was often successful, but in the very few cases where Partner Schools were not willing or able to engage with the EHP Hubs exited these schools.

3.2.3 Finances

In the interviews Hubs and Partner Schools noted how helpful the initial funding offered by the English Hubs was, but that school finances limited continued progression because of the ongoing cost of updating the resources necessary for delivering the SSP, or the cost of buying new books to support reading for pleasure,

> "I just think that we can't afford, and I think most schools are in the same place, we can't afford to buy all the resources that would really benefit our children, I think it's a budget and funding issue really. We do the best we can but with these programmes there's so much more you can buy and access, but schools haven't got funding for that." *[PartnerSchool_17]*

Of the 62 (32%) Partner Schools that reported their school's finances were a challenge to delivering the EHP and 27 (15%) felt this was one of the most significant barriers. More than half of the surveyed Hubs (57%, *N* = 13), also reported that finances has been a barrier to delivering the EHP in academic year 23/24.

3.2.4 External input from other reading/phonics experts

Another barrier that interviewed Hubs and Partner Schools discussed, were instances where Partner Schools received different or conflicting advice from other sources, particularly when it came to advice for teaching children with SEND (such as from SSP trainers, or LA/MAT English Improvement Officers). Partner Schools shared that it was often confusing to receive different information and advice from different sources, and Hubs felt strongly that these instances undermined the support and advice that they offered, negatively impacting the schools trust in the Hub. Of the surveyed Hubs, over half (57%, *N* = 13) had experienced this within at least one Partner School in the academic year 2023/2024, however, very few surveyed Partner Schools identified this as a challenge (2%, *N* = 3). To mitigate the confusion across agencies Hubs shared research to support the advice they have provided, however, one Hub also suggested that access to nationalised training approved by DfE and developed from research would minimise this confusion and streamline practices across schools.

A few interviewed Hubs also commented how Partner Schools progress can sometimes be inhibited if they are involved with multiple different Hubs or initiatives at one time. Nearly half of the Partner Schools (49%, *N* = 85) reported that they were involved in other improvement initiatives alongside the EHP, and of those 85 schools, 51 (61%) were involved with another English focused initiative. This is important to consider when reviewing changes in PSC scores, as it makes it more difficult to determine whether improvements in reading and phonics are associated with the EHP or the other improvement initiatives. In turn, 21% (*N* = 18) of these 85 Partner Schools felt that this had made it more difficult to implement change as part of the EHP.

3.3 The Perceived Impact of the English Hub Programme

The interviews and surveys revealed that most Hubs and Partner Schools observed positive impacts from the EHP. It is important to note that these impacts have not been observed directly by this research and this section is reporting perceived benefits only, impacts will be explored in the separate impact evaluation. It is also important to consider that Hubs will have formed their perceptions of impact across all the Partner Schools they have worked with, in contrast, Partner Schools will only be reporting the impact they have seen in their own school. Moreover, some Partner Schools respondents had not been in the EHP for very long, and therefore may not yet be able to see the full level of impact within their school.

In the interviews Hubs and Partner Schools shared where they had perceived changes that they believed were a consequence of the EHP. In the survey, Hubs and Partner Schools were then presented with these elements and asked to select all the factors they believed the EHP had positively impacted (see Figure 6 and 7 for results), and which factors they believed the EHP had negatively impacted. If respondents reported that they had perceived a change, they were then asked to rate to what extent they believed the factor had been impacted by the EHP. In general, Hubs and Partner Schools believed the EHP had led to positive changes. None of the surveyed Hubs and only a small number of surveyed Partner Schools (7%, *N* = 13) had perceived negative changes, whereas all Hubs and Partner Schools perceived at least one positive change.

Results also indicated that the most commonly perceived improvements were in the professional development and performance of Reading Leads and Teachers, rather than learners' outcomes. For example, over three quarters of both the surveyed Hubs and Partner Schools (PS) perceived positive change in:

- Reading Leads leadership abilities (Hubs = 100%, *N*= 23; PS = 77%, *N* = 150),

- Teachers' confidence (Hubs = 96%, *N*= 22; PS = 90%, *N* = 175),

- Fidelity in delivering the SSP (Hubs = 96%, *N*= 22; PS = 94%, *N* = 184).

The most frequently perceived improvements in children's outcomes for both Hubs and Partner Schools included:

- Improvements in pupils reading abilities (Hubs = 96%, *N*= 22; PS = 67%, *N*= 130),

- Average PSC score changes across the school (Hubs = 83%, *N*= 19; PS = 55%, *N* = 107),

- Individual pupils PSC scores (Hubs = 78%, *N*= 18; PS = 66%, *N* = 128).

However, some surveyed Partner Schools (22%, *N* = 42) felt that other aspects of the curriculum had been deprioritised to accommodate engaging with the EHP. A quarter of the surveyed Partner Schools (*N* = 48) also felt that the EHP had increased workload for Teachers, however 29% (*N* = 56) felt there had been no change and most believed workload increased initially but had decreased in the long term (47%, *N* = 91). Hubs did not report any negative impacts of the EHP, and no negative impacts were raised during the interviews with Hubs or Partner Schools. Nevertheless, this does suggest that surveyed Partner Schools were seemingly more aware of negative aspects of the EHP.

Figure 6. The proportion of Hubs that believed the EHP had positively impacted different outcomes at Partner Schools.
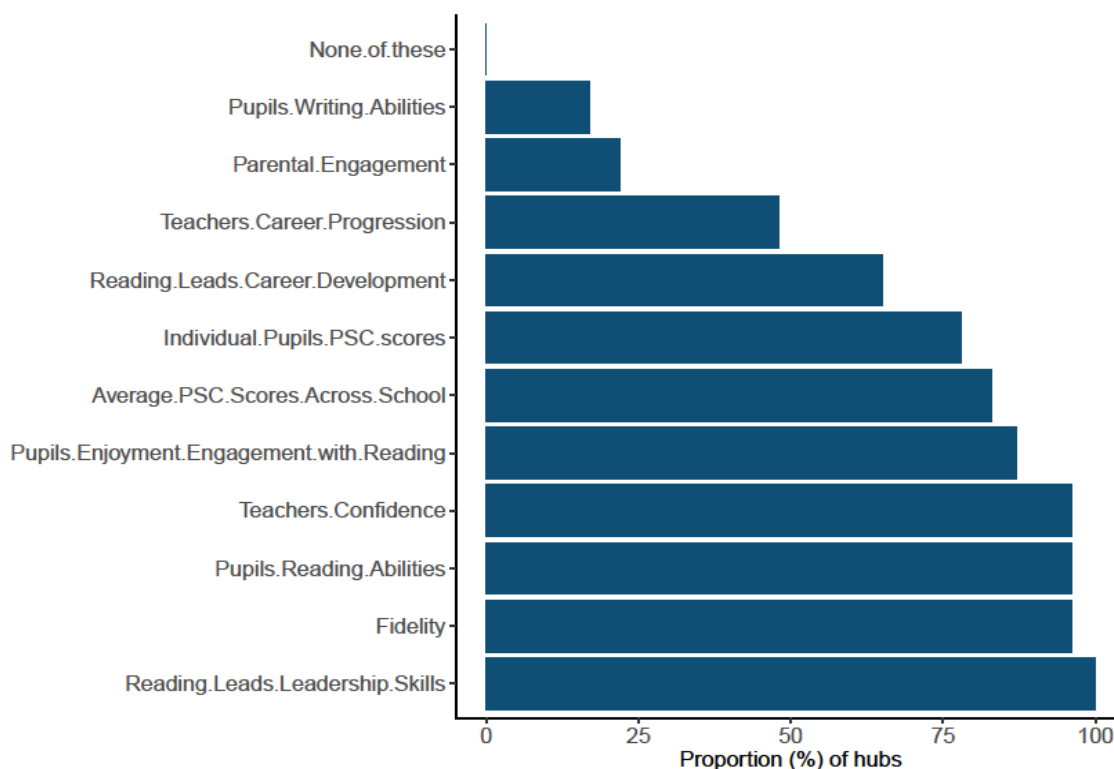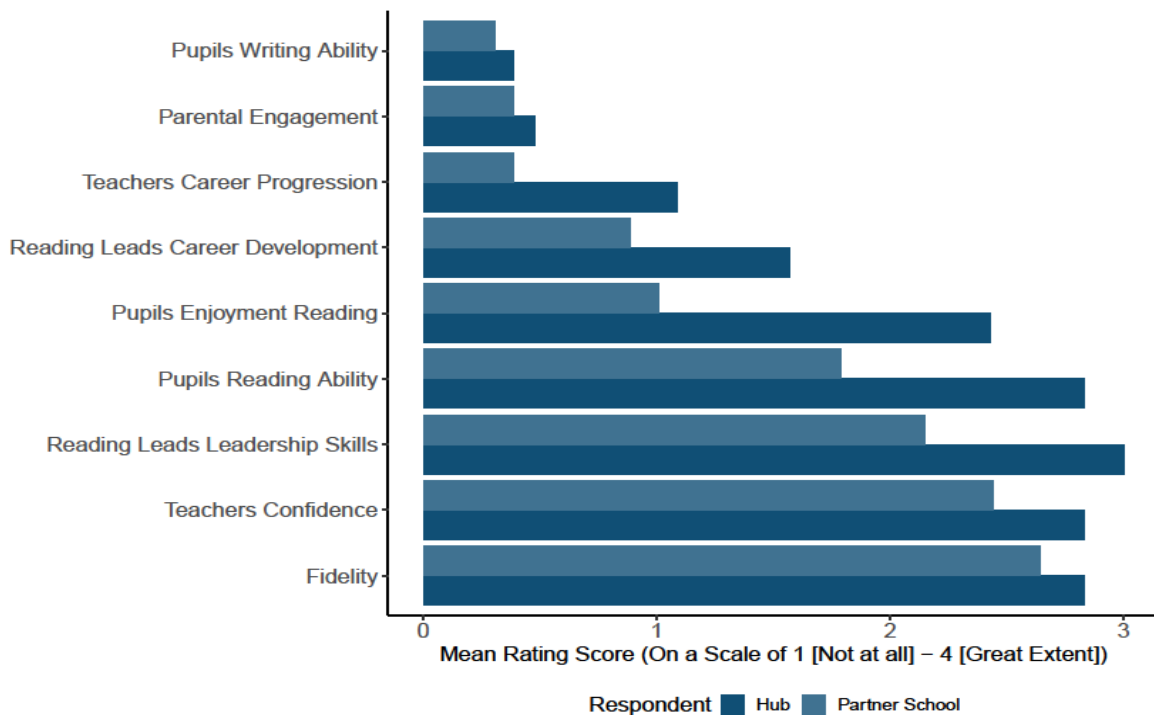
Figure 7. The proportion of Partner Schools that believed the EHP had positively impacted different outcomes at their school.
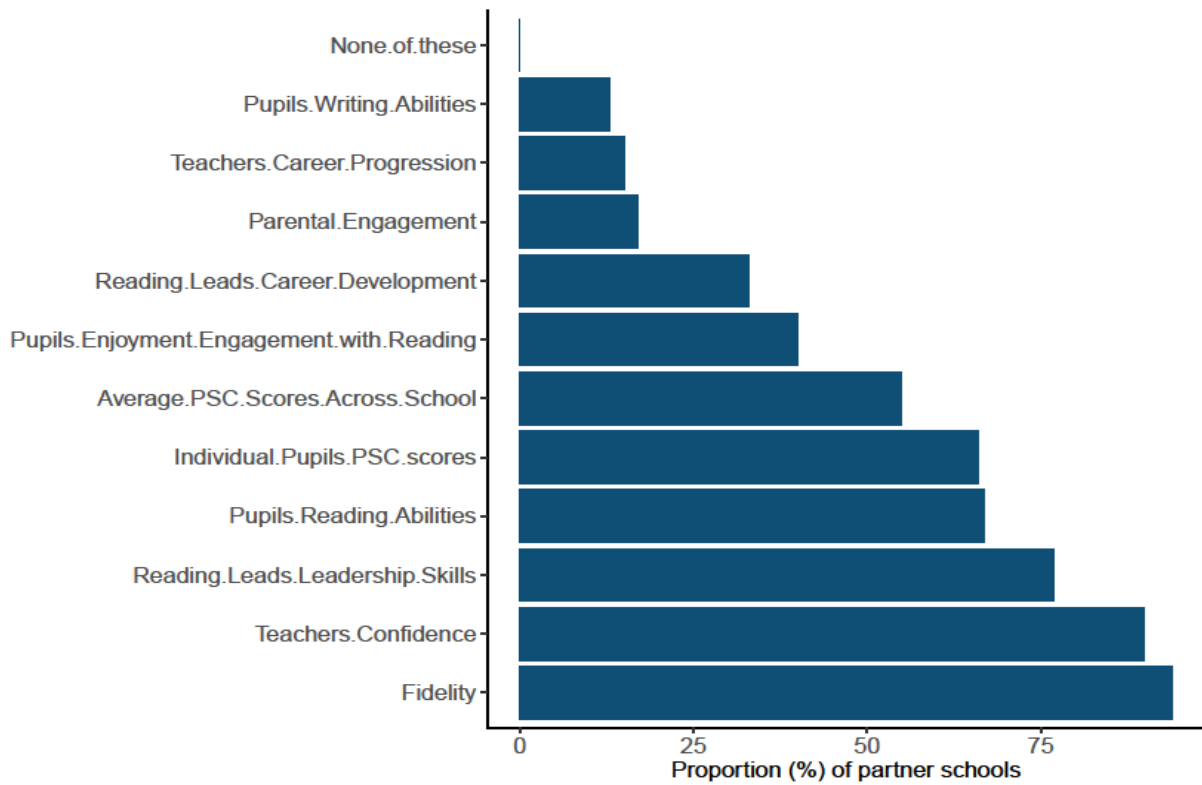
Figure 8. Hubs and Partner Schools perceived rating of the level of impact the EHP had on different outcomes

3.3.1 Professional Development

3.3.1.1 Reading Leads leadership abilities

As well as a large majority of surveyed Hubs and Partner Schools believing that the EHP had positively impacted the leadership skills of reading leads, it was also believed that the level of impact the EHP had was substantial. Of the 23 Hubs and 150 Partner Schools that reported they had perceived changes in reading leads leadership abilities, all Hubs and 80% (N =120) of Partner schools, believed the EHP had impacted leadership skills "to a great extent". Interviews with Partner Schools and Hubs revealed that the improvements in leadership skills were thought to be crucial for longer term changes in phonics and reading outcomes within schools. Many interviewees also felt that the improvements in leadership skills resulting from the EHP had a further impact on individual staff members' opportunities for promotion,

"My head phoned and said we need you to take early reading on because it's always been my passion. And it was nerve wracking. It was something that I've never had the confidence in myself. I didn't think I wanted to be a leader. And now I've ended up leading all of these different subjects, but it it's the confidence that the English hub have given that's helped do that." *[PartnerSchool_9]*

"We think that soft skills of leadership training that we've given those reading leaders, we've actually seen that impact quite heavily on the school. It's just harder to quantify. We know it will impact long term and we've seen quite a few of those people move up through leadership as a result of support from somebody else coaching them to be a leader. It's not necessarily shown in data. It's harder to measure, but I would imagine it's probably fairly standard. Then people say across the programme is we're working with these individuals, and they are just getting better and better at their role and therefore sometimes move on and move upwards. Just kind of a by-product I guess of the programme, that's not measured by KPIs." *[Hub_3]*

3.3.1.2 Teachers confidence, ability and fidelity to SSP

Interviewees reported that improvements in the teaching of phonics had been observed in evaluations of third parties. For instance, many Hubs and Partner Schools noted that Ofsted had provided "amazing feedback" to schools since their engagement with the EHP, highlighting phonics and early reading as strengths. Similarly, Partner Schools reported that school advisors expressed satisfaction with their phonics and reading teaching,

"we just had Ofsted and…it's deemed that the early reading was outstanding. So we've gone from requires improvement to outstanding in that sort of 2 1/2 years." *[PartnerSchool_9]*

In most interviews fidelity in delivering the SSP and teachers' confidence were often discussed as collective outcomes, suggesting that improved knowledge and ability to deliver the SSP was associated with improved confidence in teaching,

> "Generally, staff are much more knowledgeable and engaged with sort of the understanding of the phonics programme and phonics teaching and we're all more confident and able" *[PartnerSchool_6]*

> "But kind of professional development for us, it's been great kind of gives us validation that what we're doing is right. And now I feel so much more confident as a subject leader from the support we've received from the hub. And we have phonics that I'd be proud for anyone to walk up, like anyone, to come and watch our phonics now because we have got exactly what we wanted to get out of it. We've got consistency. We've got knowledge, we've got staff who are trained so well. So yeah, it's been, it's really been beneficial*." [PartnerSchool_14]*

Despite a large proportion of surveyed Hubs and Partner Schools believing that the EHP had improved teacher's confidence and fidelity, the extent to which Hubs and Partner Schools believed the EHP had positively impacted these factors differed. Figures 6 and 7 shows that both Hubs and Partner Schools perceived significant changes in these outcomes, but that Hubs believed the impact was greater than Partner Schools.

3.3.2 Learner outcomes

3.4.2.1 Reading abilities

In the interviews Partner Schools noted that improvements in pupils reading abilities were observable when comparing reading abilities across cohorts and year groups, or through children and parents' attitudes towards phonics and reading,

> "You can almost see the cut off where the children that are in year three now, had the help of the English hub and the year fours didn't because it was prior to that, and you can see in terms of their writing and their reading" *[PartnerSchool_9]*

> "It's the children's confidence and also the parental feedback that are the biggest things, the children are a lot more confident in their reading…the knock on effect of that is also that parents are feeding back that reading at home with the children is now a pleasure and not a chore because the children are going home wanting to read and wanting to show off their skills…." *[PartnerSchool_3]*

Of the 22 surveyed Hubs that believed the EHP had improved learners reading abilities, 95% (N = 21) rated that the EHP had improved the outcome "to a great extent", compared to 68% (N = 89) of the 130 Partner Schools.

3.3.2.2 Changes in PSC scores

Many interviewed Partner Schools and Hubs were frustrated that the average proportion of pupils meeting the expected pass level of the PSC across the schools did not consider the individual differences of children and that the same parameters were applied to all children, subsequently impacting the Hubs capacity to meet the KPI. SEND was discussed as a specific trait that should be taken into consideration when calculating the KPI performance. Hubs and Partner schools stated that for many children with SEND and additional needs it may not be possible for them to pass the PSC check by the end of year 1, but that they could still observe and measure positive progress in these children,

> "[we have] really high percentage of SEND in our schools which, alright they're making steps of progress, it's not seen because it's not met the KPI. But if you look within the school, if you looked at their individual progress, you'd be able to measure that change". *[Hub_6]*

More practical challenges in delivering the programme revolved around student mobility and absence. Hubs shared that if children were absent from school for extended periods of time, or joined the school later in the year due to high mobility this limits the amount of phonics teaching these children receive, which can impact their ability to pass the PSC. In turn, if a student is absent during the PSC testing day they are scored as 0 which brings down the schools average scoring. Finally, the size of the school was also discussed as a core characteristic that can impact the data outcomes,

> "Data doesn't mean much in a school where you've got two children in the year 1 cohort. You know if one of them had significant SEND, you're going to get 50%." *[Hub_9]*

Thus, many interviewed Partner Schools and Hubs felt that because certain learner characteristics (EAL, SEND, mobility, absence etc.) are not considered when determining if schools have met the KPI, it negatively affects the perceived success of the school and the EHP. Consequently, some Hubs and Partner Schools reported that they did not aim to meet the KPIs set by DfE and instead monitored changes in individual student scores, which they felt demonstrated progress more appropriately. Nevertheless, 93% (N = 181) of the surveyed Partner Schools reported that they were "strongly" (47%, N = 90) or "highly" (47%, N = 91) motivated to meet the KPI set by DfE, indicating that for the majority of schools meeting expectations is still an important aspect of their perceived impact and only a few a less inclined to measure PSC scores against the expected standards,

"we don't really look at the [PSC national] percentage when we're choosing our Partner Schools, and then we're really looking at those higher pupil premium levels and high deprivation, a lot of the schools we work with have got really high EAL children, quite a lot of mobility, really high SEND. So, it's kind of all worked against us when we're trying to reach the KPI". *[Hub_5]*

3.4 Staffing within the Hub

In general, how Hub staff were structured was consistent across Hubs, however there were two key elements that differed. Firstly, there were differences in the arrangements of the Hub Lead role and secondly different approaches towards recruiting Literacy Specialists. Key findings indicate that the Hub Lead role is a demanding position that requires breadth of skill and time to be able to perform all the responsibilities well. Hubs overcame these challenges by granting the Hub Lead more capacity to perform the role either by making the position full time, or through delegating responsibilities across different team members. Detailed findings about the Hub Lead role are reported in Appendix 4.

3.4.1 Literacy Specialists

The survey indicated that the number of Literacy Specialists that Hub Schools hired to support the delivery of the EHP was, on average, greater than the minimum of 5 Literacy Specialists per hub[15] (*Mean* = 11, *Range* = 5-18) specified by DfE. The survey results, presented in Table 2, also supported qualitative findings that Hubs hired Literacy Specialists from across multiple different settings

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[15] DfE guidelines (2023/2024) recommend a minimum of 5 Literacy Specialists for each Hub.

Table 2. A breakdown of where Hubs hire their Literacy Specialists from.

Where Hubs Hire Literacy Specialists From	Number of Hubs	Proportion of all Hubs (%)
Hire within Hub School Only	0	0
Hire outside of Hub School Only	4	17
Hire from both within and outside Hub School	19	83
Hire from Graduated Partner Schools	17	74
Hire Freelance Literacy Specialists	16	70
Hire from the wider Education Sector (not within schools)	9	39

Base: 23 surveyed Hubs

In the interviews participants shared some of the positives and challenges of each approach which provided an insight into their strategic decisions.

Pros and cons of hiring Literacy Specialists from within Hub School/ MAT

One reported benefit of hiring Literacy Specialists from within the Hubs school or Trust was that Hubs knew the quality of their own staff and therefore were more confident of their ability to perform as Literacy Specialists. They also felt that this approach eased organisation of the programme because they could more easily communicate with the specialists and organise release from teaching responsibilities for delivering LS days and for any training. It was also reported that there was a strong advantage of professional development for their own staff, leading to improved teaching in their own schools/MATs. In contrast, other Hubs felt that if they exclusively hired LS from within their school that it would drain their own resources which could negatively impact their teaching.

> "I do find having them within our trust is helpful in in a multitude of ways because I can draw on them on different points that I need to because the heads understand and actually the schools that our specialists are in within our trust, they're the highest performing schools." *[Hub_20]*

Pros and cons of hiring Literacy Specialists from outside the Hub School/ MAT

Recruiting outside the Hub School / MAT was reported to bring in wider expertise and improve the Hubs networks and links across the region. This is beneficial for Hubs as it allows them to build a team with more diverse knowledge and skills that is necessary to support the Partner Schools in their region,

> "[we are] really looking at expertise reflecting the communities that we serve" *[Hub_10]*.

Many Hubs approached Reading Leads from previous Partner Schools to build their team.

This afforded the same benefit of recruiting internally as Hubs were already aware of their skills and capabilities, providing confidence that they could perform well as a Literacy Specialist. In turn Hubs felt that by recruiting from previous Partner Schools acted as preliminary training and preparation for these staff to go forward and support other schools,

> "Our literacy specialists have come from past Partner Schools where they were reading leads and past Partner Schools, and we've been able to see their work and how well and how successfully they're leading in phonics and early reading in their own skills. So that's why we onboarded them…having worked with us before, that's been beneficial because they know the process, they absolutely know what's involved in these LS days, they absolutely know the kind of questions that they're looking to ask. They know the process and they also know what it what it feels like to be on the other side. So, they're really quite understanding of the staff when they're going to school. They know what it feels like." *[Hub_01]*

Hiring Freelance Literacy Specialists

Many Hubs disclosed that their Literacy Specialists work in a "freelance" or "consultancy" model. Results from the survey indicated that Hubs had between 1 and 6 Literacy Specialists within their teams that worked on a freelance basis, on average this constituted as19% of Hubs Literacy Specialist Team (*Range* – 6%:56%). This model of working was discussed positively by Hubs stating that it overcomes the barrier of reduced capacity for Literacy Specialists still in teaching positions. It was acknowledged that using this model prevented the need to arrange release and cover from teaching and provided greater flexibility in times of staff absence and in response to staffing issues at Partner School,

> "The main one [barrier] is time constraints, of course. It's being released [from teaching], so my independent consultants, they have a lot more Partner Schools to actually support because they've got the time, whereas we're very limited for the days that school based [Literacy Specialists] will be released through school." *[Hub_16]*

Despite the practical element of using freelance literacy specialists, some Hubs were concerned that it may minimise the quality of support provided. Some Hubs argued that a core element of the EHP is that the support is delivered by Literacy Specialists who were working within schools experiencing similar challenges, and that using freelance Literacy Specialists does not meet these criteria. Results from the survey indicated that Hubs did not believe Literacy Specialists currently practicing as a teacher was as important as Partner Schools. On a scale of 1 – 5 (not at all – extremely important) Hubs average rating of perceived importance was moderate ($M = 2.95$), and Partner Schools was very important ($M = 3.90$). This was reflected in the interviews where some Hubs argued that Literacy Specialists being in classrooms

every day gave them an advantage for "understanding the stresses and strains that schools are facing" *[Hub_11],* whereas others argued that it was not necessary for the delivery of the EHP. Many Hubs acknowledged that it may be problematic but noted that as the program expands, it may become impractical to continue using school-based Literacy Specialists and a shift to use freelance Literacy Specialists to address staffing challenges may be necessary,

> "So it's generally that we're looking for people in the classroom because what we said as part of our hub is we want to be an authentic example, so it's vital that the people that are out there supporting really understand what schools are up against." *[Hub_2]*

> "I think a big part of the model was that you're being supported by someone who has that credibility of teaching their own class, you know, four days a week and is doing living this and breathing it every day. But the reality is, is now that the hard programme is much bigger. We've got 240 days of support to deliver at our hub and it's like a machine to keep it all kind of going. I think the reality is we have to move away from that model probably." *[Hub_17]*

> "She makes you feel like she absolutely understands where you're coming from. Like she was a teacher first and foremost. So, she understands, and that's really nice. Like, being able to discuss with somebody who knows." *[PartnerSchool_15]*

3.5 Recruiting Partner Schools

3.5.1 Experiences and Challenges Recruiting Partner Schools

Interviewed Hubs generally found recruiting Partner Schools easy, except in larger or more rural regions. Despite recruitment experiences being positive overall, all Hubs mentioned that some areas, termed "cold spots," were harder to engage. Challenges reported in the interviews included limited networks to the school, resistance from MATs or LAs already supported by an LA-based English advisor, and limited interest or capacity within schools to take part,

> "…particularly looking at cold spots… we have lots of kind of cut off locations as well. It can be really isolating [for the schools in rural locations] so it's really important that they feel there is someone there to support them particularly these really little schools". *[Hub_20]*

The survey results indicated that the barriers most experienced across Hubs for recruiting Partner Schools, were limitations in Partner Schools' capacity (70%, *N* = 16), and poor networking resulting in difficulties contacting eligible schools (52%, *N* = 12)

and schools not having heard of the EHP before (52%, *N* = 12). Interviewees emphasised the importance of good relationships with schools, LAs, and MATs for the EHP's success and how this facilitated recruiting Partner Schools. However, in some cases Hubs specifically experienced difficulties in contacting more rural schools due to a lack of these networks and were having to invest time in building these relationships and connections,

> "…It's very rural, they're very small schools, quite isolated, there isn't a great network in terms of there isn't a wide school network…and because there are a lot of individual schools, so there are not a lot of trusts…we didn't really have a significant sort of connection…." *[Hub_15]*

Some interviewed Hubs and 30% (*N* = 7) of surveyed Hubs reported that they had difficulty reaching schools because LAs and MATs had been resistant to English Hub involvement. Interviewees shared that some LAs and MATs viewed the support offered by the EHP as competition to their paid for services in English and Phonic training. Therefore, Hubs have worked hard to build collaborative relationships with these LAs/ MATs to demonstrate their worth above and beyond the services that they already offer. While some reported they had been successful, other Hubs reported ongoing challenges,

> "I think it's been about the main barrier has been the local authorities. I think in the beginning they did consider us to be in competition with them, not realising that what we offer is free and it's funded by the DfE. Lots of LAs will offer support to schools for phonics but it's paid for. Schools have to buy into that package, and they felt that the English Hubs Programme was something that would compete for their customers. So we've had to work really hard to work on that with the local authorities". *[Hub_8]*

3.5.2 Factors influencing the decision to offer intensive support

All the surveyed Hubs felt that it was "extremely" (*N*= 17, 74%*) or* "very" (*N* = 6, 26%*)* important to the success of the EHP that they could decide whether schools are ready or in a good position to engage with the EHP. Before partnering with potential schools, Hubs gather data and contextual information to assess schools' suitability for intensive support. All Hubs completed an audit[16], however some interviewed Hubs reported that they gathered additional information through self-assessment forms, or meetings with school senior leaders, LAs or MATs. From this information, interviewed Hubs considered multiple factors,

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[16] To Note: Partner Schools must undergo an Audit, where a Hub staff member goes into the school, observe classes and speak with different staff members to assess the school's needs, as a requirement for receiving support through the EHP.

including the factors suggested by the DfE[17], buy-in from senior leadership, stability of the school's leadership team, and their perceived potential for impact, to determine schools' eligibility. The survey results showed that the type of factors Hubs considered when recruiting Partners Schools was relatively consistent across most Hubs, whereby over 90% of Hubs considered:

- PSC scores (100%, N = 23),

- pupil premium percentages (96%, N = 22),

- leadership engagement / buy in to the EHP (91%, N = 21) and,

- schools' receptiveness to support (91%, N = 21),

However, there were a few factors that less than half of the Hubs considered, which may lead to different experiences of delivering the EHP:

- school attainment (48%, N = 11)

- SEND needs in current cohort (39%, N = 9),

- the potential for the school to reach the KPI set by DFE (35%, N = 8) and,

- the SSP the school is using (22%, N = 5)

As well as identifying which factors Hubs considered during the recruitment process, the survey also asked Hubs to identify which of the factors they considered were the most important for their Hub. Results, presented in Table 3, indicate that school's receptiveness to support and leadership buy-in were considered as the most important factors to consider by the most Hubs. Findings from the qualitative interviews provide some insight into why these two factors were considered important and potential differences in Hubs views towards these factors.

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[17] The factors DfE suggested that Hubs should prioritise when choosing which schools to offer intensive support to included: the school being part of Education Investment Areas, PSC scores, Pupil Premium, Ofsted rating, attainment, hard to reach learner characteristics and local referrals.

Table 2. What factors Hubs considered when deciding whether to work with a Partner School, and how many Hubs perceived this as a highly significant factor to consider.

Factor for Consideration	Number of Hubs that consider factor	Proportion of Hubs that consider factor (%)	Number of Hubs that considered the factor as one of their top 3 most important	Proportion of Hubs that considered the factor as one of their top 3 most important (%)
PSC Scores	23	100	9	39
Pupil Premium Percentages	22	96	4	19
Schools' Receptiveness to Support	21	91	15	71
Leaderships buy-in / engagement to the EHP	21	91	15	71
Local Referrals	20	87	1	5
Hard to Reach Learner Characteristics (e.g. EAL, student absence, student mobility)	19	83	1	5
Ofsted Rating	19	83	1	5
Schools Level of Need	19	83	1	5
Standard of current Phonics Teaching Practices	19	83	5	26
School in an Education Investment Area	18	78	1	5
Leadership Stability	16	70	3	19
Changes in SSP	14	61	0	0
Changes in Reading Lead and/or Staff	14	61	0	0
Attainment	11	48	0	0
SEND Needs in Current Cohort	9	39	0	0
Potential to reach KPI	8	35	1	12
Current SSP	5	22	0	0

Base column 2 and 3: 23 surveyed Hubs; Base column 4 and 5: number presented in corresponding row in column 2.

3.5.2.1 Considering Phonic Screening Check Scores

Although all interviewed and surveyed Hubs considered the PSC scores of schools, the

survey suggests that fewer consider the PSC scores of high importance, and the interviews suggest that PSC scores were considered differently across Hubs depending on their interpretation of "potential impact". For example, some Hubs were aware of balancing different characteristics in a way that still enabled them to meet the KPIs set by DfE, whilst others reported that they do not consider the KPI and are more focused on making long term and sustainable changes over time, thus targeting schools with the lowest PSC scores,

> "…we've got to review what that looks like because of our key performance indicators that we're working towards and making sure we show impact on the data." *[Hub_19]*

> "I guess we try to get to where the need is greatest and the challenge along that is these are schools that are not always the easiest to improve and can be really challenging, but that does morally that's where we feel we should work." *[Hub_3]*

3.5.2.2 Partner schools buy-in and receptiveness to support

Many Hub schools noted that when determining eligibility they gauged Partner Schools potential engagement. For many, this was discussed as a definitive, non-negotiable factor and was highlighted as important for the success of the programme (see section 3.2.2). Without investment from the senior leadership team, it was argued that necessary changes for the programme to succeed may not be approved or implemented, reducing the possibility of positive impact,

> "…you've got to get absolute complete commitment from the head teacher…" *[Hub_13]*

> "the main thing is the head teachers on board, because we go into some schools and give it the best reasoning, the best team, but if we make suggestions and the head teachers priorities are elsewhere then things just don't change" *[Hub_18]*

One factor associated with leadership buy in, was the current stability of the school's leadership as this can disrupt buy-in. Some Hubs reported that early in the programme they had taken on schools that were in the process of changing Head Teachers or moving to become an Academy, and that this change in leadership led to reduced engagement from these schools and poor outcomes,

> "we can deal with staffing changes, you know people on maternity leave, but we want a settled leadership and a reading leader that's established as well. That's my top two". *[Hub_2]*

Some Hubs explained that if they felt that leadership may change and that this would disrupt engagement, they placed schools on a "waiting list" ready to offer support when the school position has changed,

> "[if] what we find is a departing head teacher goes I'll leave this for the new head teachers and we go, actually, lets wait a year, let's get them in and see if there's a priority" *[Hub_11]*

3.5.5 Methods Used to Recruit Partner Schools

Findings from the interviews showed that Hubs use a variety of different methods to recruit and engage Partner Schools with the EHP. The survey asked Hubs which methods they had used in the last academic year, which of the methods used had been the most successful, and which of the methods used had been the most successful for targeting hard to reach schools. An overview of the results is presented in Table 4. In most cases, over 70% of Hubs had used all the proposed methods in the academic year 2023/2024 to recruit Partner Schools, which indicates that most Hubs are using similar strategies for recruitment. Nevertheless, findings indicate that methods that relied on networking were considered the most successful for recruitment while methods that relied on promotion and advertising were perceived as the least successful for recruitment. Of the 195 surveyed Partner Schools 74% (*N* = 144) shared that they had first learnt about the EHP through networks and connections, compared to 15% that had learnt about the EHP through promotional materials or events.

Table 4. How many Hubs used each different method of recruitment to engage new Partner Schools onto the EHP.

Method of Recruitment	Number of Hubs that used the method in academic year 2023/2024	Proportion of Hubs that used the method in academic year 2023/2024	Number of Hubs who felt it was most successful for recruitment of hard-to-reach schools	Proportion of Hubs who felt it was most successful for recruitment of hard-to-reach schools
Working with LAs	23	100	14	61
Through existing connections with LAs MATs or schools	23	100	8	35
Self-referral forms	22	96	1	5
Contacting MATs directly	22	96	8	36
Working with School Improvement Officers	20	87	11	55
Word of Mouth	20	87	6	30
Medium Level Support Offers	20	87	3	15
Running Showcases	20	87	1	5
Promotion through networking events	19	83	3	16
Contact Schools directly	19	83	6	32
Promotion on social media	16	70	1	6
Promotion using marketing materials	16	70	0	0
Calling on schools in person	4	17	0	0

Base column 2 and 3: 23 surveyed Hubs; Base column 4 and 5: number presented in corresponding row in column 2.

3.5.3.1 Recruitment through Networks and Connections

All the surveyed Hubs had used their existing connections with LA's and MATs to recruit schools within the academic year 2023/2024. Over half of these Hubs (57%, *N* = 13) believed this was one the three most successful methods they had used to recruit, however less felt this was one of the most successful methods for engaging hard to reach schools

(35%, *N* = 8). Within the interviews, Hubs emphasised the importance of having good networks across schools, LA's and MATs as it makes it easier to contact and engage multiple schools. In some cases, Hubs reported that their strategy was to recruit multiple Partner Schools from within the same MATs or LAs.

Interviewees also discussed how working with LAs was beneficial as they provided the Hub with lists of potential schools and /or invited them to events and meetings where they could promote the EHP. All the surveyed Hubs stated that they had worked with LAs in the previous academic year to recruit schools, however only 35% (*N* = 8) of those felt it was one of the most successful methods they had used, and 48% (*N* = 11) felt that it was one of the most successful methods they had used to engage harder to reach schools. A sizeable proportion of surveyed Hubs reported that they had specifically relied on school improvement leaders within LAs for recruitment in the academic year 2023/2024 (87%, *N* = 20). Interviewees stated that working with school improvement leaders within LAs was helpful as they acted as gatekeepers, introducing schools to the EHP on the Hubs behalf and facilitating word of mouth, and survey results suggest that this may be a positive tactic for engaging harder to reach schools. Just over a third of Hubs that had used this method felt it was one of their most successful methods of recruitment (35%, *N* = 7), and over half believed it was one of the most successful methods for recruiting harder to reach schools (55%, *N* = 11),

> "It's all about relationships…that was the first thing that I did was make those links go to visit the local authority offices, you know, rung up the school improvement teams, ring up the teaching school Hubs. It's engagement for me is just if I scratch their back, they scratch mine type approach". *[Hub_9]*

> "So local authorities send us lists and invite us along to meetings and all sorts of different places where we can promote ourselves." *[Hub_3]*

Partner Schools corroborated the importance of teaching networks, as most common methods of engagement selected by the surveyed Partner Schools were through their MAT, LA or school improvement officer (41%, *N = 79*), through word of mouth from other schools (22%, *N* = 43), or through being contacted directly by the Hub (11%, *N* = 22),

> "I reached out to my school improvement officer in the local authority, and he was the one that said you know the best thing you can do is get involved with the English Hub." *[PartnerSchool_3]*

Several interviewed and surveyed Hubs shared how they took the lead in contacting schools directly through email or phone calls (83%, *N* = 19). However, there were some logistical challenges if they did not have a direct contact, because they relied on admin staff forwarding the email to the correct contacts. In some cases, Hubs shared that they overcame these challenges by visiting the schools in person without an appointment (17%,

$N = 4$), however none of the Hubs that used this method felt it was one of the most effective ways of contacting schools. Nevertheless, despite the challenges faced in contacting schools through email or phone calls, one third that used this method felt it was one of the most effective methods for engaging hard to reach schools,

> "we're trying to recruit schools who will be sort of in need of funding and support and we try and sort of market to those schools… but it all just depends on who responds because sometimes the schools that you target, and you try and call and you send those personal emails sometimes it's very tricky to get through to those schools. You call schools, but you can't speak to that reading leader or the head teacher, so you leave a message and we're not always sure if those messages are being relayed to the correct people in the school." *[Hub_5]*

3.5.3.2 Recruitment through Promotion

The survey indicated that methods focused on Promotion of the EHP were less successful at engaging schools. In the interviews, Hubs reported that over time they were having to be more creative in their recruitment of Partner Schools and could not just rely on networks and connections to reach all schools, including harder to reach schools. However, some Hub Leads shared that they felt unprepared for the marketing responsibilities linked to their role as this is not a skillset typically required for teaching. Other Hub members suggested that increased advertising from DfE may help support the Hubs to reach these harder to reach schools and ensure that all schools have an equal opportunity for support,

> "we're in a position where a lot of the schools that really wanted the support have had the support and now we're in a situation where we're needing to market ourselves more and this is a whole new world to like [Participant 1] and myself [Hub_ Leads], because we're teachers, obviously, so we're learning about marketing where we're having to kind of market what we're offering and encouraging schools to come to us more now and often that's tricky because we're trying to engage the schools and the leaders where it's not the type of people or the type of schools that would jump on board and kind of grab the support with both hands." *[Hub_14]*

> "We still regularly come across people who don't know anything about the English Hubs programme at all… I don't think it's necessarily been well advertised or well kind of shared or well pushed from DfE level... The English Hub model is quite different to the other curriculum Hubs… so sometimes [there is] a lack of clarity around what we can do." *[Hub_17]*

3.6 Working with DfE

Hubs appreciated working directly with DfE, feeling well supported by their Delivery Leads and gaining a greater insight into what DfE can and cannot do to progress and develop the EHP. When surveyed Hubs were asked what factors have facilitated the effective delivery of the EHP, 83% (*N* = 19) felt that attending DfE Hub events had been helpful and 74% (*N* = 17) felt that support from DfE Delivery Leads had been helpful. When rating the support provided by the DfE Delivery Leads most Hubs felt that it had been "extremely" (65%, *N* = 15) or "very" (30%, *N* = 7) valuable and one Hub felt that the support was moderately valuable (4%). However, less than half of the respondents (48%, *N* = 11) felt that contact with their Hub Triad [18]had been helpful indicating that gaining support from other Hubs was perceived as less effective than the support from DfE.

A strong rhetoric across interviewed Hubs was that they felt listened to, heard and supported, and all surveyed Hubs reported that they were either "extremely" (61%, *N* = 14) or "somewhat" (39%, *N* = 9) satisfied that DfE had listened to the Hub and their suggestions since the launch of the EHP, and 92% felt "extremely" (57%, *N* = 13) or "somewhat" (35%, *N* = 8) satisfied that the DfE had consulted them with updates and changes to the EHP since its launch,

> "the benefits have been in the delivery of this programme. I think one of the main benefits for us has been how we connect directly with the DfE. They listen to us, and I think throughout the programme what's really become apparent is the determination that the DfE have had to listen to us and to try and take things on board. And an eye opener for me has been that when that's not been possible, perhaps in the timescale that I might previously have thought it could have been, it's gaining a real understanding that it's because of processes and times scales beyond their control, because you know we do get some schools and staff that do moan a little bit about the DfE (laughing) and how things don't change quickly enough and they're not listening to us…but yeah, I think throughout sort of five years, it's been really evident that they have wanted to make the programme as successful as it can be, as useful to the schools, and have responded as soon as they possibly can to issues when they can." *[Hub_15]*

> "I think the programme got real strength. It's innovative, the DfE are really forward thinking and have been really generous with the amount of money we're

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[18] DfE matched Hubs with other local Hubs in nearby regions to create a small network where Hubs could share support and advice.

able to give, and schools are really thankful for the money and thankful for the support. So I think that's something that we don't often get to say, is thank you for running this programme." *[Hub_8]*

Interviewed Hubs also provided critical feedback of DfE, stating that changes in the programme were shared quite late, which made it difficult for them to strategically plan and prepare for the following year. In particular, Hubs found it difficult not knowing what was going to be funded for the following year so that they could continue employing their Literacy Specialists and Hub staff. A large proportion of Hubs also found it frustrating that there had been a high turnover of Delivery Leads leading to a lack of consistency. They felt this hindered their experience as it took significant time for new Delivery Leads to build a working relationship with them. Some Hubs also felt like the face-to-face EHP events were London centric which made it difficult for Hubs in northern regions to attend and prevented face to face meetings with their Delivery Leads. These Hubs felt like this prevented them from building networks and connections with other Hubs and subsequently hindered their development and opportunities for progress,

> "Only thing historically is they did we have been through quite a lot of delivery leads, haven't we? So, you just getting used to building a relationship with one delivery lead and then they will be moved on with not much notice and you'll get somebody new. Who then had to learn about your school, and you had to get build that relationship with them again". *[Hub_1]*

> "The frustration we've had is that we seem to go through a cycle of new person [delivery lead] starts with us and they spend sort of six months going, "Oh, I'm not sure, I'll just go and check" if you ask a question, after about six months, they start to be kind of really useful and then probably six months after that, they say, "oh, I've got another job, been lovely working with you. So and so is taking over", and then it all starts again. I think we've had about 7 different delivery leads since we've started.." *[Hub_18]*

Chapter 4: Conclusions

The aim of this research was to explore how Hubs are delivering the support to schools to improve phonics outcomes, what has worked well or has not worked well from the perspective of Hub schools and Partner schools, and if there were any differences in the experiences or practices of Hubs that may influence their performance. Using a mixed methods approach, the research successfully provided insight into how the EHP is running, what challenges Hubs have faced in delivering the EHP and the experiences of Partner Schools in receiving the support.

How are Hubs delivering the support to schools to improve phonics outcomes?

The research has demonstrated that the approach to delivering the EHP was similar across Hubs. Hubs used similar methods, such as coaching, modelling and observations, to upskill Reading Leads in leadership, to improve the organisation of SSP delivery, and to improve teaching SSPs with fidelity across Teachers and Teaching Assistants. All Hubs also worked to ensure that the support delivered to Partner Schools was tailored to the schools needs and characteristics. To facilitate the bespoke support, Hubs ensured that the Literacy Specialists in their teams had what they perceived to be the most important skills to deliver the programme. Having a team of Literacy Specialists that had good interpersonal skills, phonics knowledge, leadership skills and some specialist skills enabled the Hubs to then match Literacy Specialists to Partner Schools in a way that enabled them to tailor the support to meet the Partner Schools needs in a flexible and collaborative way.

Despite all Hubs broadly following this approach, there were also some observable differences between Hubs in their specific approaches through their perceived importance of these practices. Some Hubs placed greater importance on leadership and phonics skills and were more focused on matching Partner Schools to Literacy Specialists with the necessary skills and experience than others. Nevertheless, Partner Schools felt that being supported by a Literacy Specialist that was an expert in the same SSP their school was using, and that the Literacy Specialist had experience teaching in schools with similar characteristics as their own was particularly important.

To engage potential schools onto the programme Hubs relied on a variety of similar methods of recruitment. In general, methods that relied on networks and connections (e.g. word of mouth, using existing networks with MATs and LAs), were considered the most successful methods for engaging schools whilst more active methods that relied on promotion and advertising were perceived as the least successful. Hubs generally found recruiting schools onto the EHP straightforward, but all Hubs mentioned that there were "cold spots" in their regions where schools were harder to engage. Schools were harder to engage with the EHP if they had limited networks or connections to hear about the EHP through passive means, if Hubs met resistance from MATs or LAs, where schools were more rural, and if schools were struggling with reduced capacity. Therefore, it was acknowledged that a

more active approach was necessary to connect with harder to reach schools.

What has worked well or has not worked well from the perspective of Hub schools and Partner schools?

Both Hubs and Partner Schools felt that the EHP was running well, with both perceiving positive change in the professional development of staff and teaching at the Partner Schools as well as improvements in children's Phonics and wider English outcomes in some cases. There were some key factors that were thought to have facilitated the delivery of the programme. Firstly, Hubs and Partner Schools felt it was important to the success of the programme that they had the freedom and opportunity to judge when Partner Schools were in a good position to engage with the EHP. To assist Hubs in making this decision they considered numerous factors, however receptiveness to support and buy-in/engagement from senior leadership at the schools were seen as essential factors. These features were not stipulated by DfE in their requirements, but Hubs found through experience that without investment from the staff and senior leadership team, the EHP would not be successful at influencing change in that school. Secondly, positive working relationships seemed to support the delivery of the EHP, through supporting recruitment of new Partner Schools and ensuring the support was delivered in a positive understanding and non-judgemental way. Partner Schools particularly appreciated the support being collaborative and flexible, and valued that the Literacy Specialists were hands on in their approach to supporting the school delivering support through coaching and modelling. Partner schools also felt that Literacy Specialists delivering support based on their own experiences of working within schools with similar challenges was particularly important. Therefore, hiring Literacy Specialists with the skills necessary to ensure this practice was also deemed an element of the EHP that has worked well. Finally, from the perspective of the Hubs, the support provided by the DfE was seen as highly valuable and was thought to have worked well. Hubs appreciated being able to seek support from the DfE Delivery Leads and found the events and training delivered by the DfE as helpful.

Nevertheless, the research also identified that Hubs and Partner Schools faced challenges in delivering / implementing the EHP. The most common challenges faced originated from staffing issues, including high staff absence, low staffing numbers and high turnover of staff. Low staffing numbers and high staff absence required Hubs to problem solve methods to ensure that the school could still deliver the SSP to fidelity but could also often result in organisational challenges when LS days needed to be cancelled to ensure wider teaching within the Literacy Specialists schools and Partner Schools was not disrupted. High turnover of staff was a challenge to implementing longer term change, often meaning that what had already been delivered as part of the EHP needed to be repeated with new staff preventing longer term change. Funding was also perceived by as a barrier for longer term change. Without sufficient funding to update resources it was felt that progress would be stilted, and Partner Schools wouldn't be able to continue implementing the practices the EHP had supported them to put in place. Finally, a common barrier for recruiting harder to reach Partner

Schools onto the EHP was that Hubs felt unprepared to use active methods of marketing as it is not a skillset typically required for teaching. It was argued that increased advertising or training in this area was required from DfE to ensure that all schools have an equal opportunity to access support from an English Hub. In addition, Hubs felt that DfE could improve their support for the Hubs by ensuring greater consistency in who acted as their Delivery Lead and providing information on changes to the policy area at an earlier date to allow them to plan more strategically for the longer term.

The results also highlighted that although Partner Schools were pleased with the level of support they were provided, and positive about the way the EHP has been delivered there was also a desire from some Partner Schools for continuous support in English Teaching, such as in reading and writing, outside the current remit of the EHP. Some Hubs were providing this exchange of expertise unofficially, and were keen to understand the direction of the EHP after phonics delivery is improved in the targeted number of schools.

Therefore, the results suggest that to ensure the EHP is successfully delivered in the future Hubs should continue to deliver the EHP through highly skilled Literacy Specialists, ensuring that their skills and expertise is aligned to the needs of the Partner Schools. It should also be a continued priority of Hubs that support is delivered in a collaborative and non-judgemental way that specifically considers the challenges and needs of that specific school. However, more support and timely communication is needed by DfE to ensure Hubs feel equipped to reach and engage the harder to reach schools, and to plan for longer term implementation of the programme.

Are there differences in the experiences or practices of Hubs that influence Hub performance?

There were some instances where priorities differed across Hubs, such as the level of precedence Hubs placed on the skills Literacy Specialists required or what factors were considered the most important when deciding to partner with schools, but in general the experiences and practices of Hubs was consistent. The lack of variance in the survey responses meant that we could not compare results between Hubs with different performance levels to determine what processes may be influencing the outcomes that define if Hubs meet the KPI set by DfE. It could be that there are key differences in the processes used by Hubs that this research did not capture, or if could be that the Hubs capacity to meet the KPI set by DfE is dependent on factors outside of the Hubs control, such as the characteristics of the schools in the regions which they are supporting. The research did highlight that Hubs and Partner Schools felt that the KPI was impacted by factors such as the proportion of children in the school with harder to reach characteristics, the size of the school and high turnover of staff.

4.1 Strengths and Limitations

- The research uses a mixed-methods approach which allows for an in-depth insight into how the EHP is being delivered and Partner Schools experiences as well as an understanding of how many Hubs and/or Partner Schools shared the same perceptions or experiences.

- The sample size of the Hubs (across the interviews and survey) allows for definite representation across different regions, Hub school characteristics and Hub performances. However, the sample size for the Partner Schools (across the interviews and survey), was proportionally smaller than the representation given to Hubs. In turn, the results only represent the views of Partner Schools that worked with certain Hubs, and Partner Schools that worked with other Hubs are not represented in this research and their views may differ.

- Participation in the research was voluntary, which increases the risk of bias. However, the sampling approach for recruiting Hubs for interview and survey was more robust, recruiting a more diverse sample. Thus, we have greater confidence in the findings. To recruit Partner Schools, we relied on Hubs as gatekeepers which may have limited the proportion of Partner Schools invited to take part in the research which may have skewed results.

Appendices

Appendix 1

1.1. The eligibility criteria suggested by DfE for Hubs to review when selecting which schools to provide intensive support to.

A Partner School must be a state funded school and be either a primary or infant school (covering KS1) which completes the PSC.

They should have engaged in the following activities and been judged by the hub as suitable for intensive support:

• Attended a showcase

• Completed a self-assessment, including expressing an interest in becoming a Partner School

• Completed an audit

• Selected and committed to one specific validated SSP programme and

• Committed to and booked their specific SSP training – if they have not received training recently Hubs should ensure that Partner Schools understand the financial commitment of adopting an SSP programme and are committed to funding this independently following their time in the English Hubs programme. The Partner School's SAP should reflect this commitment from its leadership.

1.2. The prioritisation criteria suggested by DfE for Hubs to review when selecting which schools to provide intensive support to.

Although not essential, Hubs should take into account the prioritisation criteria when considering a school's eligibility to become a Partner School:

• Lower than average percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in the Phonics Screening Check (2019 PSC expected standard is 82%).

• Low attainment in bottom 20% of children

• A higher-than-average proportion of children eligible for pupil premium (2021/22 the pupil premium national average is 27.3%).

• Ofsted judgement of Requires 'Improvement' or 'Inadequate';

• a high proportion of groups considered hard to reach, such as EAL, FSM, travellers, etc.

• schools referred by local partners (e.g., NLEs, RSCs, LAs);

• Schools that sit in an education investment area (EIA).

Appendix 2

2.1. Details of this sampling approach taken to recruit participants for the interviews.

A stratified approach to sampling was taken to ensure the sample was representative across Hubs of similar characteristics and performance. The characteristics included: region, deprivation decile, Ofsted rating, school size, proportion of SEN in target year groups (reception and year 1), proportion of ESOL learners in target year groups (reception and year 1) and proportion of learners on free school meals. In this research project, the KPI was defined as the average change in learners meeting the PSC pass score from before working with an English Hub to the end of the first year of working with an English Hub. This change was averaged across all Partner Schools that have worked with the English Hub over the previous three academic years - 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22 - and was weighted on the number of pupils in each Partner School.

Appendix 3

Information about the research respondents

3.1.   The number and proportion of Hubs that engaged with the research through the interviews, surveys or both the interview and survey.

	Number of Hubs	Percentage of all 34 Hubs (%)
Any engagement with research	28	82
Interview and Survey	15	44
Interview only	5	15
Survey only	8	24
No engagement with research	6	18

3.2   The number of Partner Schools that engaged with the research through the interviews, surveys or both the interview and survey.

	Number of Partner Schools
Any engagement with research	210
Interview and Survey	3
Interview only	14
Survey only	192

3.4.   Descriptive information about the interviewed Hubs.

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Number of pupils	350	132	989
Proportion of Reception and Year 1 EAL pupils (%)	15	0	70
Proportion of Reception and Year 1 pupils with SEN support (%)	8	0	18
Proportion of Reception and Year 1 pupils with an EHCP (%)	1	0	6
PSC Pass Scores 2022/2023 (%)	95	85	100

Base: 20

3.5. Descriptive information about the surveyed Hubs

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Number of pupils	100	10	233
Proportion of Reception and Year 1 EAL pupils (%)	14	0	59
Proportion of Reception and Year 1 pupils with SEN support (%)	8	0	18
Proportion of Reception and Year 1 pupils with an EHCP (%)	1	0	6
PSC Pass Scores 2022/2023 (%)	95	85	100

Base: 23

3.6. Descriptive information about the interviewed Partner Schools

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Number of pupils	270	80	560
Proportion of Reception and Year 1 EAL pupils (%)	18	0	99
Proportion of Reception and Year 1 pupils with SEN support (%)	11	0	38
Proportion of Reception and Year 1 pupils with an EHCP (%)	3	0	9
PSC Pass Scores 2022/2023 (%)	76	38	96
PSC Pass Scores 2021/2022 (%)	68	47	90

Base: 17. Information from 1 interviewed school could not be matched with DfE data on demographics.

3.7. Descriptive information about the surveyed Partner Schools

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Number of pupils	292	38	929
Proportion of Reception and Year 1 EAL pupils (%)	18	0	88
Proportion of Reception and Year 1 pupils with SEN support (%)	14	0	50
Proportion of Reception and Year 1 pupils with an EHCP (%)	3	0	19
PSC Pass Scores 2022/2023 (%)	73	25	100
PSC Pass Scores 2021/2022 (%)	64	12	90

Base: 179. Information from 15 surveyed schools could not be matched with DfE data on demographics.

Appendix 4
The detailed results about the Hub Lead role.

DfE stipulate in their guidance that the Hub Lead role should be performed over an average of four days per week, leaving one day to focus on other duties within their school. It is also stated that this role could be split between two people. However, the interview and survey results identified that this suggested set up of the role was adopted by a minority of the Hubs and that most considered the position as a full-time role (five days per week). Interviewed Hub Leads commented that the level of responsibility associated with the role felt like a full-time job. Those that worked full time in the position felt fortunate that they could dedicate their time and focus on the Hub responsibilities to ensure that these tasks were performed well, and those that worked part time stated that the working pattern felt more difficult because they had to balance many different responsibilities and tasks across the different positions.

> "At one point, I think we had three literacy specialists and myself, which was tricky because I was looking after schools and being hub lead only three days a week. And now I'm five days a week Hub lead. It's a five day a week job." *[Hub_09]*

For some of the interviewed and 22% (*N* = 5) of the surveyed Hubs, the position was performed as a job share. In the interviews it was identified that this working pattern either allowed the Hub Leads to continue with some of their other school responsibilities with less pressure or allowed for flexible working to support caring responsibilities. Hubs liked this structure because it allowed the roles and responsibilities of the Hub Lead role to be distributed depending on the staff members skill set and experience,

> "I have a Hub Lead who leads on Partner Schools, another one that leads on LS and another who does audits and funding. Actually, we find it's much better [to divide up the] role because the skills needed for all of those different areas are quite significantly different, you know, to work with Partner Schools is really different than organising the funding and things, and so it allows us to build on different people's skills but also gives us some capacity". *[Hub_11]*

4.1 How many Hubs follow the different staffing structures for the Hub Lead role.

	Number of Hubs	Proportion of Hubs (%)
Hub Lead Role performed as a part-time position (4 days per week)	9	39
By a single person	7	30
As a job share	2	9
Hub Lead Role performed as a full-time position (5 days per week)	14	61
By a single person	11	48
As a job share	3	13

Several interviewed Hubs and 17 (74%) of surveyed Hubs also reported that they delegated Hub Lead responsibilities to one or more Deputy Hub Lead(s) and/or Literacy Specialists with "lead" responsibilities. Hubs felt that this approach supported the delivery of the EHP by increasing capacity across the team, ensuring roles were performed by individuals with strength in the required skills, and provided greater development opportunities for Literacy Specialists.