

Navigating Ofsted: Drawing Upon Evidence in Professional Learning



Why is an evidence-informed approach Important?



Using an evidence-informed approach to professional learning:



Means **decisions about teaching and learning are made using the best available research** combined with **professional judgement** and **knowledge of pupils** (Nelson & O'Beirne, 2014; Cordingley et al., 2015)



Provides a **shared, credible foundation for improvement**, reducing reliance on fads, myths or untested assumptions (DfE, 2017).



Enables teachers to **understand why particular strategies work**, strengthening their ability to adapt approaches thoughtfully and avoid misinterpretation (Wiliam, 2011).



Supports a culture of enquiry, reflection and continual development, as teachers test ideas, evaluate their effects and make informed adjustments, leading to deeper professional learning (Willingham & Daniel, 2021; Timperley et al., 2007)



'The most strongly research-engaged schools were highly effective, well-led organisations within which 'research use' meant integrating research evidence into all aspects of their work as part of an ethos of continual improvement and reflection' DfE, 2017 p7

The benefits of an evidence-informed approach have been associated with:



Improved provision for all pupils by helping staff choose approaches that are more likely to reduce barriers to learning, especially for underserved pupils or those with additional needs.



Improved teacher expertise, confidence and professional judgement, as staff learn how to interpret research, evaluate claims, and apply strategies in a way that fits their pupils and context (Willingham & Daniel, 2021; Wiliam, 2011).



Greater clarity and coherence across the school's professional learning programme, as evidence provides a common reference point for decision-making, goal-setting and designing professional learning (EEF, 2021).

What problems are leaders trying to solve?

According to our work with schools and national research (2025)

Which of these scenarios feel familiar?

Leaders have shared research widely, but this has not translated into practice.

▶ **“Only 20% of respondents reported opportunities to engage in research and inquiry-based CPD’ p.52**

Departments, or individuals within departments interpret research differently, leading to inconsistent practice.

▶ **‘39% of respondents reported that being evidence-based is an important factor when selecting their own CPD opportunities’ p.32**

Leaders want to use research but it feels too abstract and inaccessible to staff and they fail to see how it can apply to their classrooms.

▶ **‘Respondents valued CPD that drew on research and was facilitated with clarity and authority.’ p.38**

Leaders promote the use of research but staff are cautious about taking risks and trying new ideas.

▶ **‘Only 15% of respondents felt there is effective ongoing support and follow-up after CPD activities’ p.41**

What practice are leaders working towards?

Based on the Ofsted Framework (2025)

These are the statements we’ve selected as having the strongest links with this area of professional learning.

▶ **‘leaders ensure that professional learning opportunities **draw on the best available evidence, including high-quality research** and expert provision from beyond and within the school, including nationally recognised career and professional frameworks and programmes, to build capacity and support succession planning’ p75**

▶ **‘leaders ensure that staff continually seek to improve their expertise, **drawing on the best available evidence, including high-quality research, and the effective practice of others**’ p76**

Leaders who create coherent programme of evidence-informed professional learning also support other areas of the framework such as:

- **Teaching:** ‘the school’s approach to teaching is based on an evidence-informed understanding of effective teaching and how pupils learn’ p21
- **Inclusive curriculum:** ‘the school’s approach to the curriculum and teaching draws explicitly on the best available evidence, including high-quality research relating to supporting disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND and other barriers’ p22

Where might you start in drawing on evidence in Professional Learning?

To support your thinking around this area, you might like to start by reflecting on these questions. You may find it helpful to discuss these with your colleagues.



How well are we protecting purposeful time for teachers to discuss and apply research within existing structures (e.g. team meetings, coaching)?



How accessible and relevant is the research we share and do staff clearly understand how it connects to our priorities and the needs of our pupils?



What routines or protocols do we use to ensure that professional conversations about research lead to shared understanding and changes in practice?



How confident are staff in interpreting research critically, including spotting misconceptions or “lethal mutations” and what support do we provide to build this literacy?



How consistently do we help teachers adapt research-informed approaches for different subjects, phases and for pupils with specific needs (e.g. SEND)?



How do we know whether engagement with research is improving teaching and learning, and what evidence do we use to track progress over time?



What small next step could we take to deepen evidence-informed practice (and what might we need to stop doing to make space for it)?

Every school or setting will be at their own specific starting point based on their individual circumstances, vision and culture. Here is an example of what a coherent programme of evidence-informed Professional Learning might look like in one particular setting.

Scenario: Strengthening Research-Informed Practice

Context:

After completing a Diagnostic Review with TDT two years ago, the leader in this school recognised that while staff were positive about professional learning, engagement with research evidence was uneven across the school. Some departments drew readily on trusted sources such as the EEF or subject associations, but others relied more on established habits or informal sharing. Support staff, in particular, had limited access to evidence-informed CPD, and many colleagues lacked confidence in judging the quality of research they encountered.

Developing an evidence-informed approach:

To address this, the leader implemented a more coherent approach that brought research into the centre of everyday practice. An evidence-informed teaching and learning framework specific to the school context was developed and shared. All CPD, coaching and enquiry work was aligned to its core strands, each grounded in robust research. Staff were given structured preparation for enquiry cycles, including training on evaluating research methodologies. Research champions and a curated CPD library widened access to high-quality sources, while weekly bite-sized pedagogy sessions and coaching conversations provided practical opportunities for staff to apply, test and refine evidence-based strategies.

The impact:

As a result, research engagement is now both broader and deeper. Staff across roles are confident in using evidence to guide decisions, and departmental enquiry cycles routinely draw on reputable research to explore specific learning challenges. Support staff are increasingly included through tailored frameworks and role-specific CPD. This leader's coherent, inclusive approach has helped establish research-informed practice not as a specialised activity, but as an everyday habit that guides professional reflection and strengthens consistency across the school.

Where might you go next to learn more?



Instantly access our affordable, 90-minute online module, [Using Research in Professional Development](#), to develop your approach to drawing on research in Professional Learning and apply it in your setting.



Complete our CPD self-audit to explore the coherence of your current provision and identify what you might focus on next to improve, or go into more depth with our Diagnostic Review of CPD and develop a change plan through our [Building Expert Schools Programme](#). Either the CPD self-audit or Diagnostic Review will help you present credible evidence of current focus, provision and improvement plans to Ofsted.



Not sure where to start? Book a free 1-1 coaching call on our [CPD Leadership Hub](#).