

AN EEF SCHOOL CASE STUDY: ENGAGING QUESTIONS FOR IMPROVED LISTENING

Billesley Primary School

School context:



Billesley Primary School is a three form entry school located in the South of Birmingham which caters to just over six hundred children. Over 40 different ethnic groups are represented in our school community and 44.35% of pupils on roll are eligible for Pupil Premium funding.

1 What problem were you looking to solve?

Upon returning to the classroom after partial school closures, staff reported that a significant proportion of children were demonstrating noticeably poorer interpersonal skills than they had prior to partial school closures. Specifically, children were increasingly struggling to take turns talking, engage meaningfully with talk partners and respectfully listen to their peers.

We were keen to address this head on in order to re-establish the safe, calm learning environments teachers had worked to create with their pupils previously.

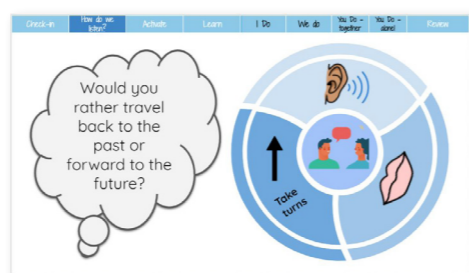
To do so, we looked to the EEF Social and Emotional Learning in Primary Schools guidance report, and decided to focus our efforts around recommendation 1 which asks us to consider how we teach SEL skills explicitly. We resolved to plan regular teaching time which would target two of the five [CASEL SEL core competencies](#), social awareness and relationship skills.

3 What did you do?

We set about teaching SEL strategies discretely at the start of every lesson, by presenting the children with an engaging, low-risk question that was unrelated to the learning. This question was put forward alongside four simple rules for respectful listening to others.

These 'rules' for respectful interactions were accompanied by a succinct visual cue which had been chosen by the children linked to their existing classroom rules. The use of unrelated questions was vital to allow all children to engage with the task – it was important that the sole focus of the activity was to allow pupils to practice interacting respectfully and purposefully with their classmates.

Teachers and support staff consistently modelled these interpersonal skills, continually referencing their class's respectful rules visual, which was then kept in sight throughout the remainder of the lesson.



2 What were the anticipated barriers/challenges?

Given the disruption to teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic, we needed to ensure that our new approach to teaching SEL skills could be applied in a number of different contexts: the physical classroom, online learning platforms and during sessions being covered for Planning Preparation and Assessment time.

We were also conscious that we needed to avoid adopting a 'one size fits all approach' – it was acknowledged that children who experience difficult home situations might require higher level, specialised interpersonal interventions and nuances in whole-class approaches.

4 How are you monitoring the success of this intervention?

Biweekly lesson observations, are being conducted to monitor the success of this approach. Each lesson, the teacher delivering the lesson records the levels of engagement amongst the class and the quality of interactions between students. These are noted and compared to previous sessions, alongside references to any adaptations made to the approach, for example, trying out just the use of the visual vs. use of visual and modelling vs. use of visual, modelling and engaging paired activities.

We continue to adapt this approach to ensure its suitability to the current context and regularly discuss successes and points for improvement as a staff through our regular meetings, including specific SEL CPD training.



Additional:

Suggested reading:

- [CASEL SEL Framework](#)
- *Improving Social and Emotional Learning in Primary Schools* eef.li/primary-sel/



Reflection questions

- Do you ensure curriculum time for SEL is part of your daily routine in addition to grabbing 'teachable moments'?
- Which of the 5 SEL core competencies are a priority for you now? How do you know?
- How are staff trained and supported in teaching and modelling these skills?