



Evidence Based
Education

Great Teaching Toolkit

School Environment and Leadership: **What makes a difference?**

Prof Rob Coe, Evidence Based Education
Cambridge Schools Conference, 25 September 2022
greatteaching.com



Thank you for your support



Cambridge Assessment
International Education



Evidence Based
Education



School leadership: What I used to think

- Leaders think leadership is very important, but most learning happens in classrooms, led by teachers. They probably **overestimate** their importance.
- Most discussion of ‘leadership’ is pretty **frothy**
 - Common sense and ‘truthiness’
 - Poorly defined terms
 - Advice that is not actionable
 - Training with no evidence base
- All the research is **dreadful**



School leadership: What I now think

- Leadership is probably quite **important**
 - Teachers in troubled schools cannot turn things round without strong leadership
 - Good research now shows that environment and leadership matter
- Most discussion of 'leadership' is pretty **frothy**
 - Common sense and 'truthiness'
 - Poorly defined terms
 - Advice that is not actionable
 - Training with no evidence base
- **Most** of the research is dreadful



Three big problems in the leadership research

- Correlations interpreted as causal levers
- Poorly operationalised constructs
- Advice that is neither meaningful nor actionable



Correlation ≠ Causation

- Teacher/principal individual/collective efficacy:
 - “beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997)
- Many studies find correlations between teacher efficacy beliefs and student attainment (after controlling for other things), and interpret them (uncritically) as evidence that high efficacy leads to better attainment.
- But
 - High student attainment / progress / value-added could cause teachers to believe that they are effective
 - Correlations are small and inconsistent anyway (Kim and Seo, 2018)
 - Interventions that raise efficacy perceptions lead to no increase in attainment (Jacob et al. 2015)



Jingle-jangle

(same word, different meaning, different word, same meaning)

- Types of leadership

- Instructional
- Transformational
- Distributed

(These are all meaningless / contested / vague)

- We need

- Clear definitions/operationalisations
- Common usage across researchers
- Validity evidence



Advice for leaders

Table 1. What successful school leaders do.

Domains of practice	Specific leadership practices
Set Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build a shared vision**• Identify specific, shared, short-term goals• Create high-performance expectations• Communicate the vision and goals**
Build Relationships and Develop People	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stimulate growth in the professional capacities of staff• Provide support and demonstrate consideration for individual staff members• Model the school's values and practices**• Build trusting relationships with and among staff, students and parents**• Establish productive working relationships with teacher federation representatives
Develop the Organization to Support Desired Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build collaborative culture and distribute leadership**• Structure the organization to facilitate collaboration**• Build productive relationships with families and communities**• Connect the school to its wider environment**• Maintain a safe and healthy school environment• Allocate resources in support of the school's vision and goals**
Improve the Instructional Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff the instructional program**• Provide instructional support• Monitor student learning and school improvement progress**• Buffer staff from distractions to their instructional work

Work with the energy at hand rather than try to resist it. Tap into your emotions and use them to your advantage. Make sure that you do not let your incredible creative talent go to waste. Make a plan as to how you can make this happen during the days ahead.

Sources:

www.horoscopes.com

Leithwood et al (2020): Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited

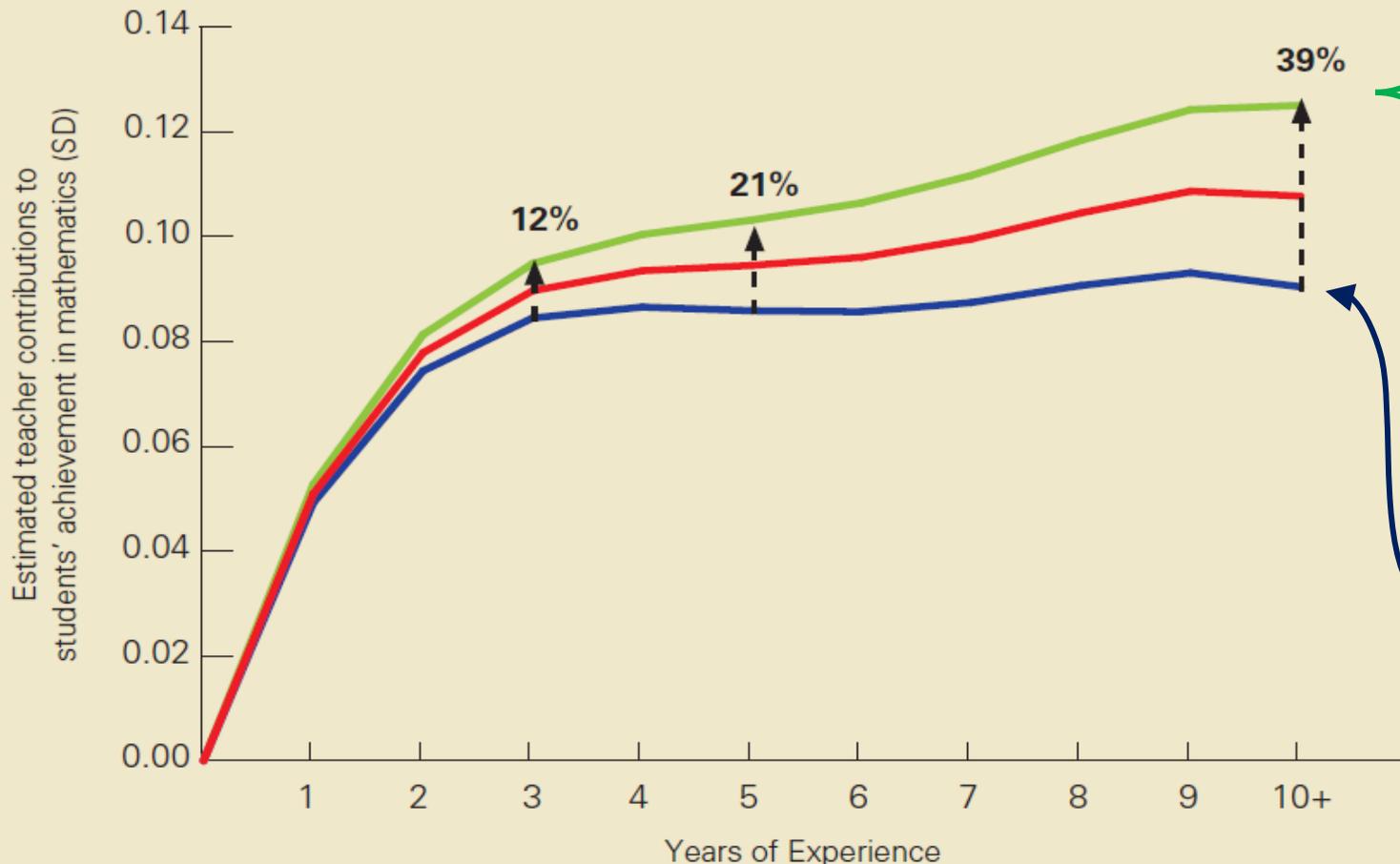
Great Teaching Toolkit



What can the research tell us?

- There is no convincing evidence that any training or support programme for school leaders makes them better
 - **We don't know how to train effective school leaders**
- There is no convincing evidence about the qualities, skills/knowledge, or behaviours of school leaders we should select for or promote
 - **We don't know how to select effective school leaders**
 - **We can't give evidence-based advice to school leaders about what to do**
- It seems likely that
 - A **school's environment does make some difference** to student outcomes, over and above the impact of individual teachers and school context

Papay & Kraft (2016)



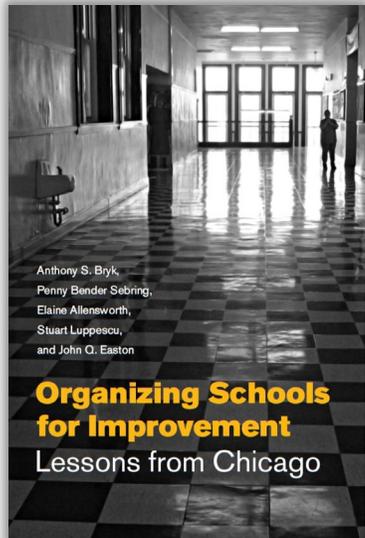
- Ordered environment: rules consistently enforced, teachers supported.
- Professional development: time and resources for professional development that enhances teachers' instructional abilities.
- School culture of mutual trust, respect, openness, collaboration and commitment to student achievement.
- Constructive monitoring: Fair performance management with meaningful feedback that helps teachers.

• Not so much



Bryk et al 2010

Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago



1. **Effective Leaders:** curriculum, leader trust, teacher influence, instructional leadership
2. **Collaborative Teachers:** Collaboration, collective responsibility, Quality PD, commitment, teacher-teacher trust
3. **Involved families:** teacher-parent trust, parent involvement & influence
4. **Supportive environment:** safety, student peer press, student-teacher trust, high expectations
5. **Ambitious instruction:** quality of instruction, academic press



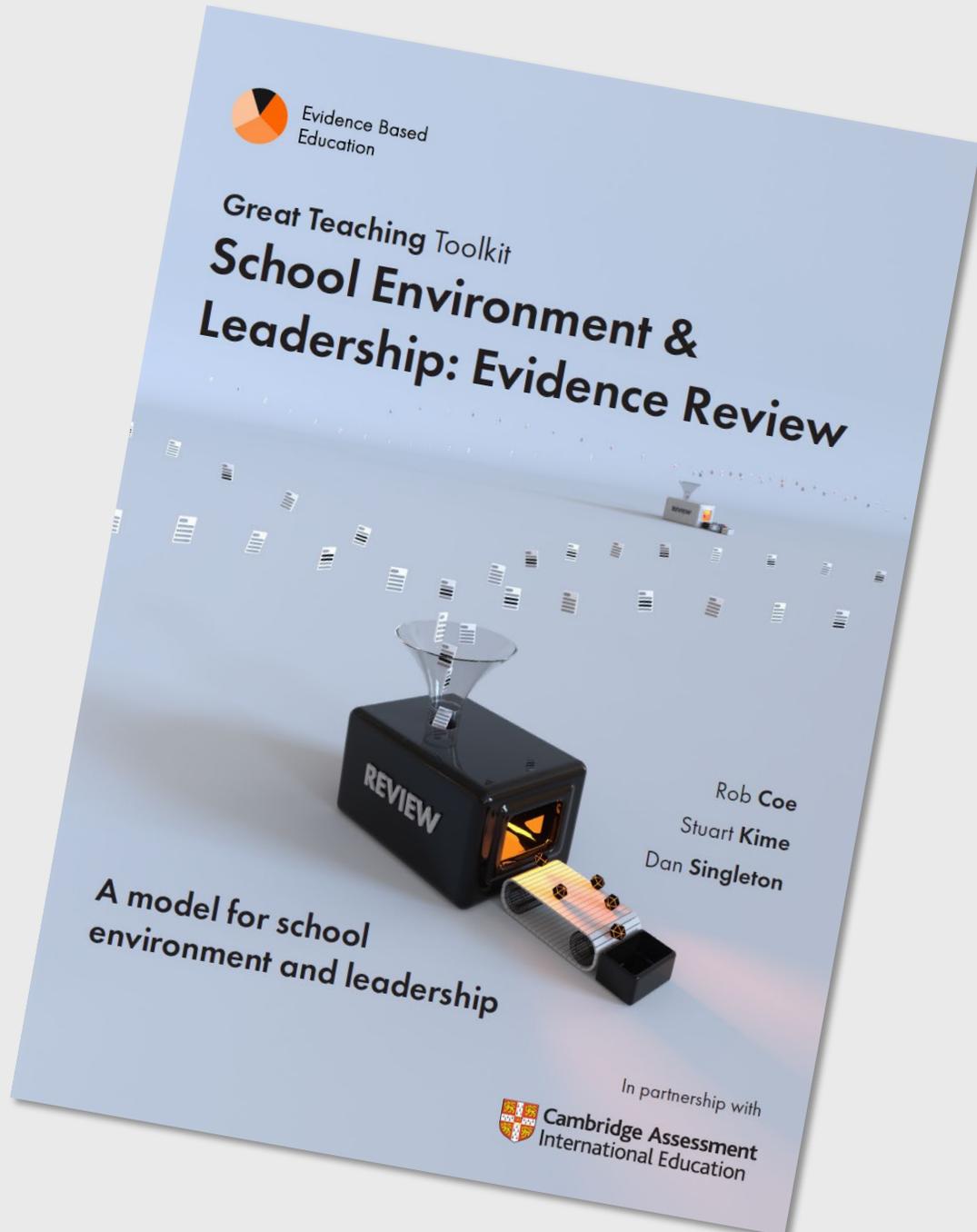
Caveats for school leaders

- Before you invest in leadership training
 - Be clear what you hope to gain (eg confidence, feeling of support; it is unlikely to lead to higher student attainment)
 - Compare the costs/benefits with other things you could do (eg GTT courses 😊)
- With a few exceptions, don't bother reading the research about school leadership
- Anyone who claims to have generalisable knowledge about school leadership is wrong – don't give them attention
- Think critically about any advice you hear. Be wary of
 - Survivorship bias
 - Context misfit
 - Opportunity costs and failure to prioritise



More constructive advice

- **Understand** how/when/why different school-level factors may impact students' learning
- **Monitor** each factor in your context
- **Prioritise** one factor to address, that is both a 'barrier' and a 'lever'
 - **Barrier:** A factor whose current status significantly limits the effectiveness of teaching and learning
 - **Lever:** A factor that can realistically be changed by enough to make a difference
- **Contribute** to the collection of better evidence and generation of stronger recommendations by using the GTT to share data about the status, progress and impact in your school

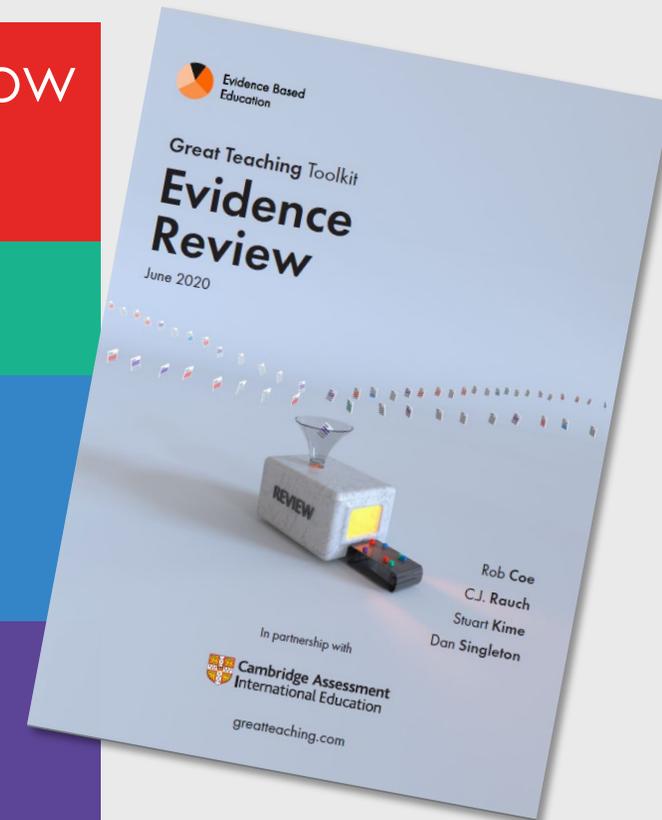




The Model for Great Teaching

Great teachers:

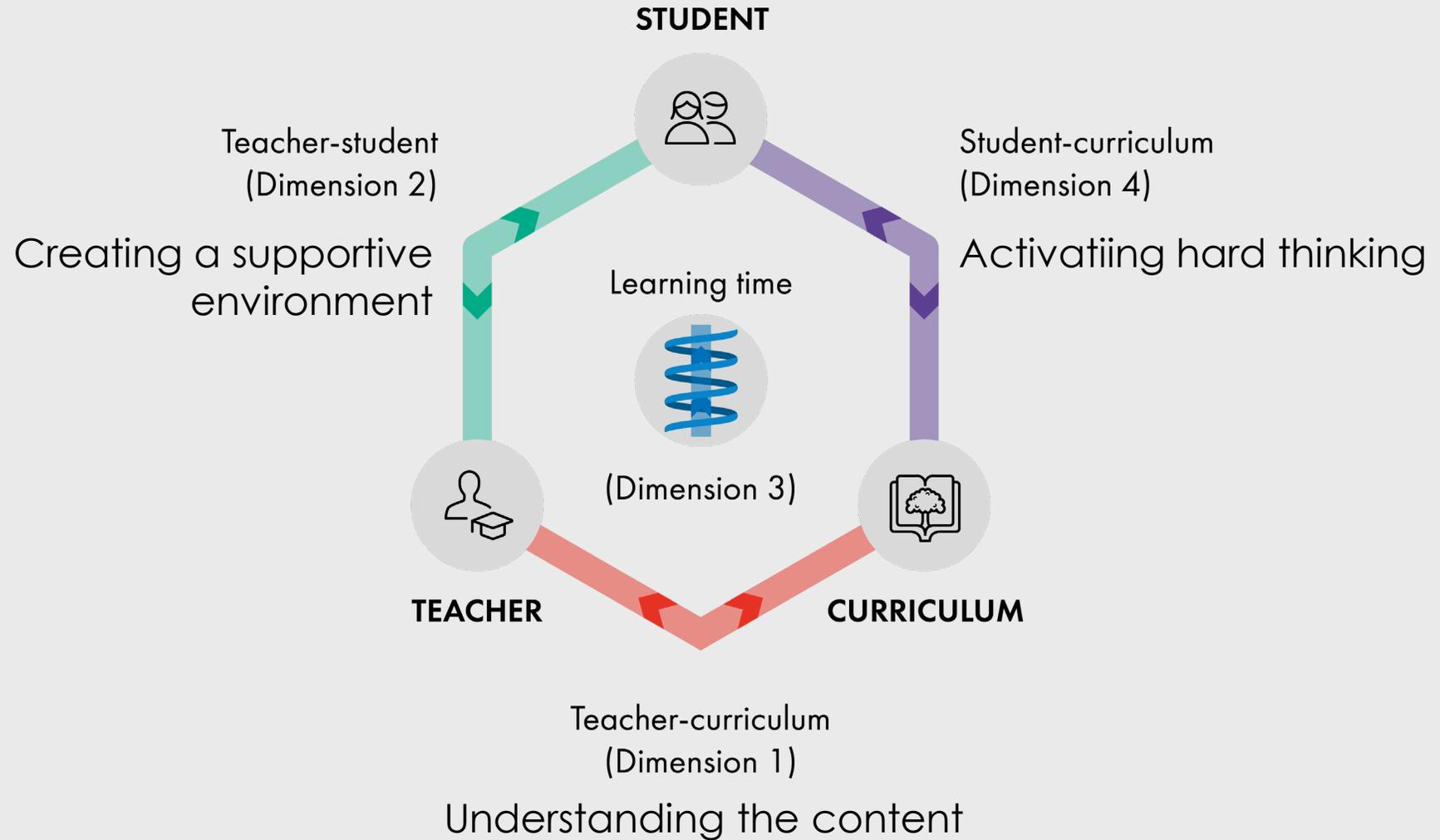
- 01 **understand the content** they are teaching and how it is learnt
- 02 **create a supportive environment** for learning
- 03 manage the classroom to **maximise opportunity to learn**
- 04 present content, activities and interactions that **activate their students' thinking**



Great Teaching Toolkit

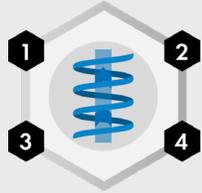


Our model: The classroom

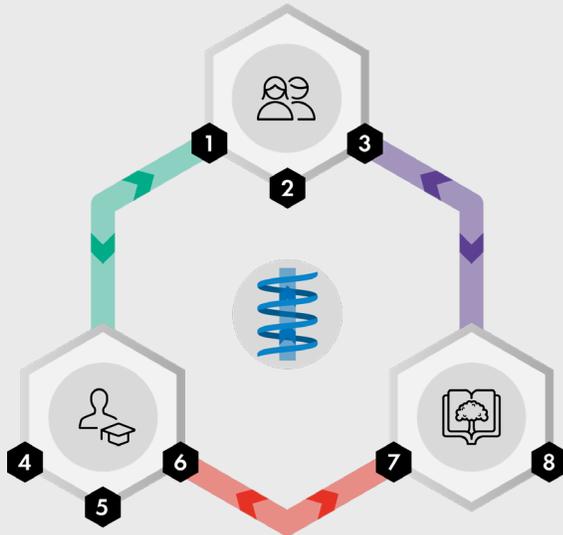




Learning Supports (outside the classroom - mostly)



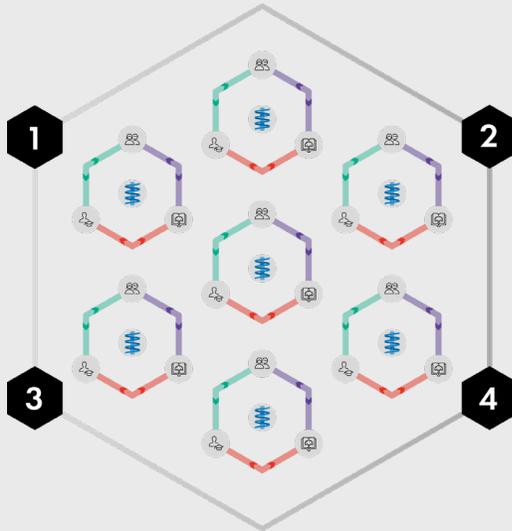
1. Classroom time allocated
2. Time outside the classroom
3. Attendance at school
4. Disruption to timetabled lessons



1. Family and community support
2. Student fundamental needs
3. Student beliefs and dispositions
4. Teacher collaboration
5. Collective teacher expertise
6. Professional learning
7. Curriculum goals and demands
8. Resources and materials



Management factors



1. Supportive working relationships
2. Improvement mindset
3. Delivery
4. Staffing



Evidence Based
Education

Great Teaching Toolkit

- School Environment and Leadership Evidence

Review

- <https://evidencebased.education/school-environment-and-leadership-evidence-review/>

- Survey tool (in beta)

greatteaching.com



Evidence Based
Education

Great Teaching Toolkit

rob@evidencebased.education

@ProfCoe