

# Identifying and addressing implementation enablers and barriers

March 2025

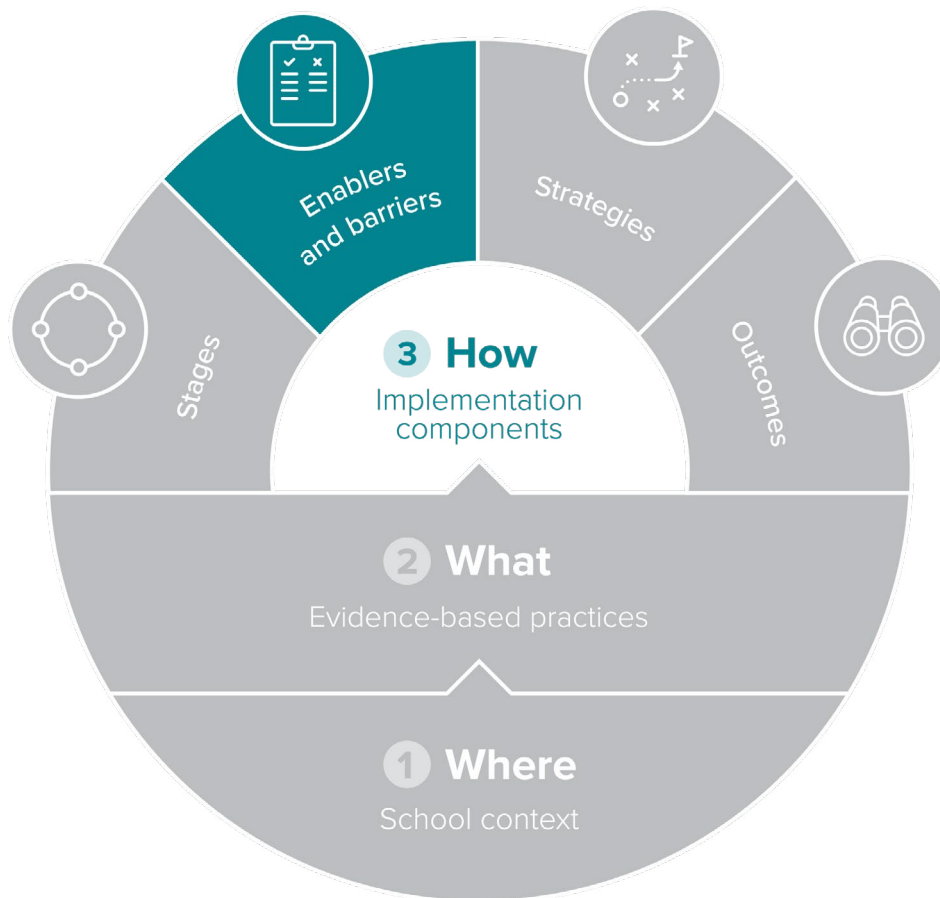


**Enablers and barriers are factors that help or hinder the implementation of evidence-based teaching practices. This practice guide steps implementation teams through the process of systematically identifying and responding to enablers and barriers in their context.**

## About this practice guide

This practice guide has been developed from the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)'s work with schools in the [Learning Partner project](#). This project operationalised key concepts and frameworks from implementation research to support schools to implement evidence-based teaching practices ([Figure 1](#)). Enablers and barriers are one of these key concepts.

**Figure 1:** Enablers and barriers are one component of using a deliberate and structured approach to the implementation of evidence-based teaching practices



## The importance of addressing implementation enablers and barriers

Schools and systems are increasingly drawing on evidence-based teaching practices in efforts to improve learning outcomes for all students. However, just knowing about evidence-based teaching practices is not enough for schools to implement them effectively. The **‘how’** of implementation is just as important as **‘what’** is being implemented, and, in reality, this is complex and often not well understood.

Addressing enablers and barriers is one component of a deliberate and structured approach to implementation. Every effort to implement an evidence-based teaching practice will have factors that help or hinder the process. Understanding exactly what these are to enhance what’s working well and address what’s getting in the way is key for tailoring the implementation process to each school’s specific context. It’s also important for effective implementation.

## Using this practice guide

This practice guide is part of a set of resources that help implementation teams determine, respond to and monitor enablers and barriers specific to their context. The set includes:

1. this **practice guide** for addressing implementation enablers and barriers
2. an editable PowerPoint **slide deck** to support facilitating a whole-staff session to identify and prioritise enablers and barriers.

### Tip

Before engaging with the process outlined in this practice guide, we recommend you:

- Complete the module, [Implementation for Impact: A Deliberate and Structured Approach](#).
- Read and discuss key ideas in the explainers, [Taking an Evidence-Informed Approach to Implementation](#) and [Addressing Enablers and Barriers to Implementation](#).
- Read the practice guide, [Developing a School Implementation Plan](#), and the [Worked Example of a School Implementation Plan](#).



## Who this practice guide is for and when to use it

This practice guide supports **school implementation teams** to lead their staff through a process of identifying and responding to implementation enablers and barriers. While there are other possible ways to identify and respond to enablers and barriers, the process described in this guide is one that Learning Partner schools have found useful.

This work can take place at multiple [stages](#) of the implementation process – for example:

- In the **Explore** stage, schools may identify current enablers and barriers to implementation, including staffing, systems and structures that could be enhanced to support implementation.
- In the **Prepare** stage, schools address priority enablers and barriers and include these in detailed implementation plans.
- Late in the **Deliver** stage, schools re-assess current enablers and barriers and tailor implementation strategies in response.
- In the **Sustain** stage, schools prioritise addressing enablers and barriers most important for sustaining the evidence-based teaching practice.

### When enablers and barriers were identified in AERO's Learning Partner project

Schools in the [Learning Partner project](#) identified enablers and barriers **twice** in the school year. They did so during the [Prepare stage](#), when staff were building knowledge and capability in explicit instruction, and then late in the [Deliver stage](#), as schools were engaging with activities for sustaining implementation.

## How to use this practice guide

This practice guide has 4 sections that are intended to be enacted over time:



Each section details a process your implementation team can use to prepare for, identify, respond to and monitor enablers and barriers in your context. Shaded boxes feature specific examples used in the Learning Partner project.

Templates and further examples are included as appendices.

### 1. Get ready



Get ready to work on enablers and barriers by:

- selecting and tailoring potential enablers and barriers
- determining how to conduct an enablers and barriers identification activity
- preparing for an enablers and barriers session.

#### 1.1. Select and tailor a list of potential enablers and barriers

##### Consider the full range of potential factors

**Many factors** can act as enablers or barriers, either helping or getting in the way of implementation depending on the context. For example, the observation, feedback and coaching culture of a school can either help to support practice change (if classroom observation and coaching structures are already well established) or hinder practice change (if classroom observations do not take place or are not used to support teachers).

Implementation scientists have studied factors that act as enablers and barriers across many different settings and categorised these factors into **frameworks**. A widely used framework is the [Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research \(CFIR\)](#).<sup>1</sup> The frameworks are useful because they provide a comprehensive list of potential factors that have been observed in implementation studies. The frameworks also encourage thinking beyond the individuals and organisations involved in implementation to consider the evidence-based practice itself, implementation processes and wider systems. However, the frameworks are long and aren't tailored to any specific context.

## Create a shortlist of potential factors

When working on enablers and barriers, one of the first roles for an implementation team is to work from the full list of potential factors to create a **shortlist** of potential factors that are relevant to their context and the evidence-based teaching practice being implemented.

For simplicity and to save time, your implementation team can start from the list of factors that AERO used in the Learning Partner project (see [Appendix A](#)). Alternatively, to ensure that no potential factors are missed, your team can start from a framework such as [CFIR](#) and discuss and select the most relevant factors (or ‘constructs’) from that framework.

**Remove** any factors that are clearly not relevant to your context. Then, **edit** the language and phrasing to:

- ensure they are easily understood
- reflect concepts and terms used in your school
- align with the evidence-based teaching practice being implemented.

If you are working directly from a framework such as [CFIR](#), convert the constructs into **statements** that allow for responses of ‘agree’, ‘disagree’ or ‘unsure/neutral’ (so these can become a survey, as outlined in [section 2](#)). For example, a statement about the observation, feedback and coaching culture of a school could be: ‘Our school has shared values, beliefs and norms around observation, feedback and coaching to support the development and welfare of teachers.’ The factors used in the Learning Partner project have already been converted into statements (see [Appendix A](#)).

Your shortlist of potential factors will form the basis for a session with staff to identify and prioritise enablers and barriers in your context.

### Tailored statements used in AERO’s Learning Partner project

In the Learning Partner project, [CFIR](#) was used to consider the many factors that influence implementation, particularly those most relevant to schools and the evidence-based teaching practice being implemented (i.e., explicit instruction). From the 5 domains and 67 subcategories (constructs) included in the framework, a **shortlist** of constructs was selected. A plain language version of CFIR (Piat et al., 2021) <sup>2</sup> was also used to ensure statements were worded in **school-friendly language** (see [Appendix A](#)).

## 1.2. Determine how to conduct your enablers and barriers identification activity

Once your implementation team has selected and tailored a list of factors that may be acting as enablers and barriers, design an activity to gauge **staff views** on which factors will or are impacting implementation. Specifically, design an activity that enables staff to indicate whether they ‘agree’, ‘disagree’ or are ‘unsure/neutral’ about each potential factor. The aim of this activity is to take a **temperature check** of what’s working well and what’s getting in the way of implementation in your context.

Staff views may be captured via:

- an **anonymous online survey** with individual staff responses
- a **small-group discussion** or individual reflection activity that is not anonymous and uses printed versions of potential factors
- a **team or whole-staff discussion**, where staff are prompted to provide examples of the factors.

Regardless of the format, ensure that each factor is discussed and defined so staff have a shared understanding of what they are being asked.

### The enablers and barriers survey used in AERO's Learning Partner project

An adapted version of the **survey used in the 2024 Learning Partner project** that can be uploaded to survey platforms, such as Google Forms and Microsoft Forms, is in [Appendix B](#). Implementation teams can edit this survey to better fit their context.

If you need some help preparing an online survey, watch this quick [tutorial on uploading questions to a survey platform](#).

## 1.3. Prepare for your enablers and barriers session

Next, consider how you will facilitate a whole-staff session (or sessions) to both complete your enablers and barriers identification activity and prioritise identified enablers and barriers. Your implementation team can use an **editable slide deck** with speaking notes and embedded videos that AERO has developed to facilitate this session.

To prepare for facilitating this session (see also [section 2](#)):

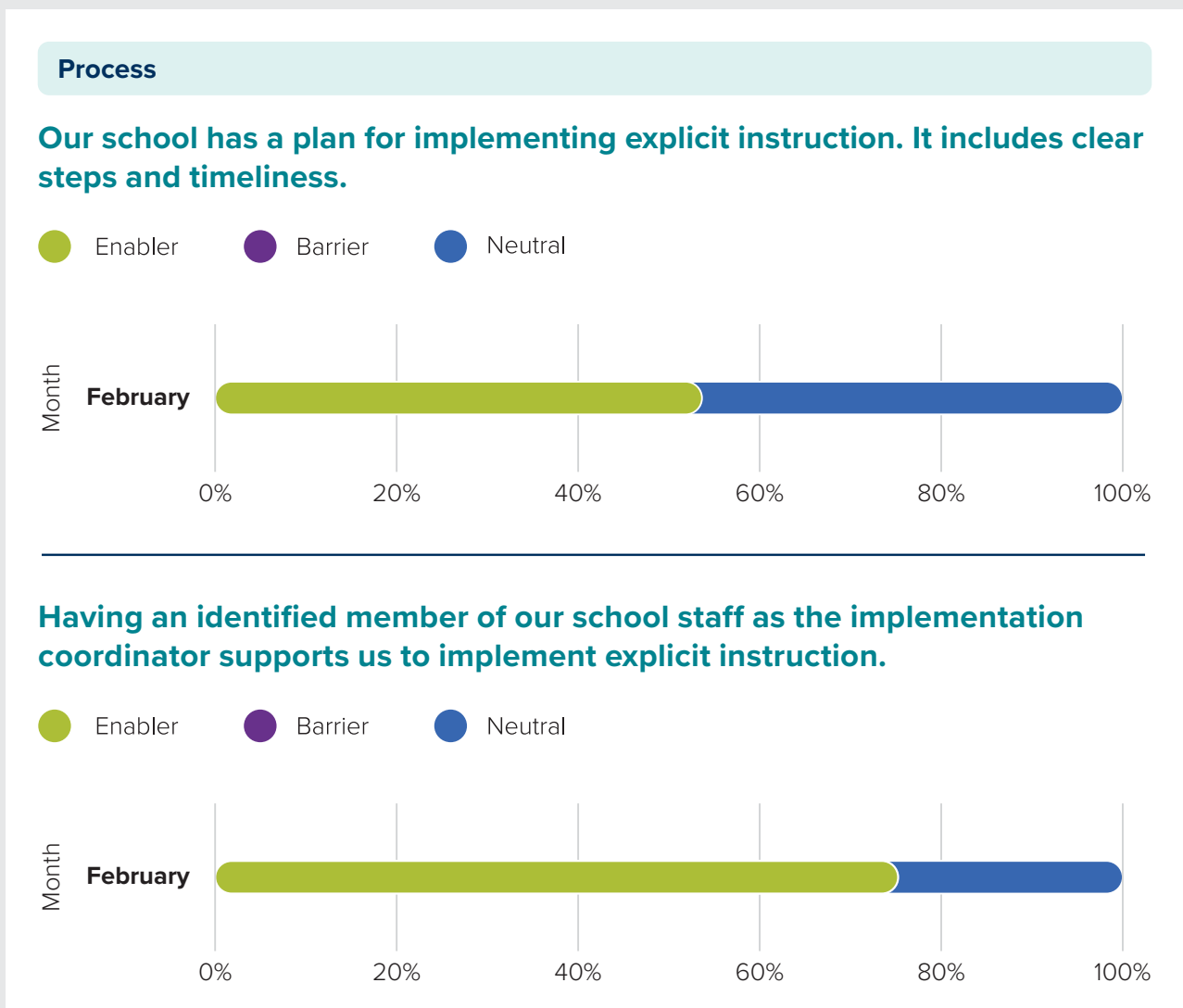
- Review the editable [slide deck](#), and edit where highlighted and as needed.
- Determine whether to both identify and prioritise within one whole-staff session or split this work across 2 sessions to allow time to collate results from the identification activity (see [section 2.1](#)).
- Ensure the session(s) are scheduled at a time when all staff can participate.
- Prepare materials for facilitation, such as an online survey or paper resources.
- Decide how the identification activity results will be collated and shared with staff so they can participate in a reflective discussion.
- Decide whether to print or email copies of the strategic actions template (slide 19 of the editable slide deck).

### Enablers and barriers data collation used in the Learning Partner project

To support the discussion of your enablers and barriers identification activity, you can select from a variety of **free visualisation tools to present your results**. Some are embedded in survey platforms such as Google Forms and Microsoft Forms. Alternatively, you might use your school’s existing data visualisation resources.

Figure 2 provides an example from the Learning Partner project that shows some of the identified enablers and barriers. This data collation was used to inform prioritisation decisions (see [section 2.2](#)).

**Figure 2:** Data visualisation of identified enablers and barriers



## 2. Identify and prioritise



Identify and prioritise enablers and barriers by facilitating 1 or 2 collaborative sessions with all staff who will be implementing the evidence-based teaching practice. In these sessions:

- Introduce staff to the concept of enablers and barriers.
- Complete your chosen enablers and barriers identification activity.
- Analyse results from the enablers and barriers identification activity.
- Prioritise specific enablers and barriers.

Members of your school implementation team can lead these sessions. A suggested flow for the session(s) is described in this section and in the editable [slide deck](#).

### 2.1. Introduce staff to enablers and barriers

If staff need an introduction to or refresher about the concept of enablers and barriers, take some time to explain:

- why it's important to focus on implementation enablers and barriers
- how enablers and barriers form part of the implementation process.

### 2.2. Complete the enablers and barriers identification activity

Complete your chosen enablers and barriers identification activity (e.g., a survey) to gauge staff views on enablers and barriers that will influence or are impacting implementation. As discussions about barriers, in particular, can touch on issues that cause frustration, ensure that staff members are aware of and abide by team norms, such as engaging in professional conversations, having respectful interactions and participating actively.

### 2.3. Analyse results from the enablers and barriers identification activity

In the same session or a subsequent session, provide staff with an opportunity to view and discuss the results from the enablers and barriers identification activity.

When going through the activity responses, consider which responses to the enablers and barriers identification activity stand out more than others. With staff, select a few results to discuss in detail together.



Factors that have:

- strong **'agree' (enabler) or 'disagree' (barrier) responses** can be a good place to begin discussions
- a **range** of responses – from 'agree' (enabler) to 'neutral' and 'disagree' (barrier) – can indicate differences in the experiences of staff across your school that are worth unpacking
- strong **'neutral' responses** can point to factors with the potential to become enablers for implementation.

## 2.4. Prioritise specific enablers and barriers

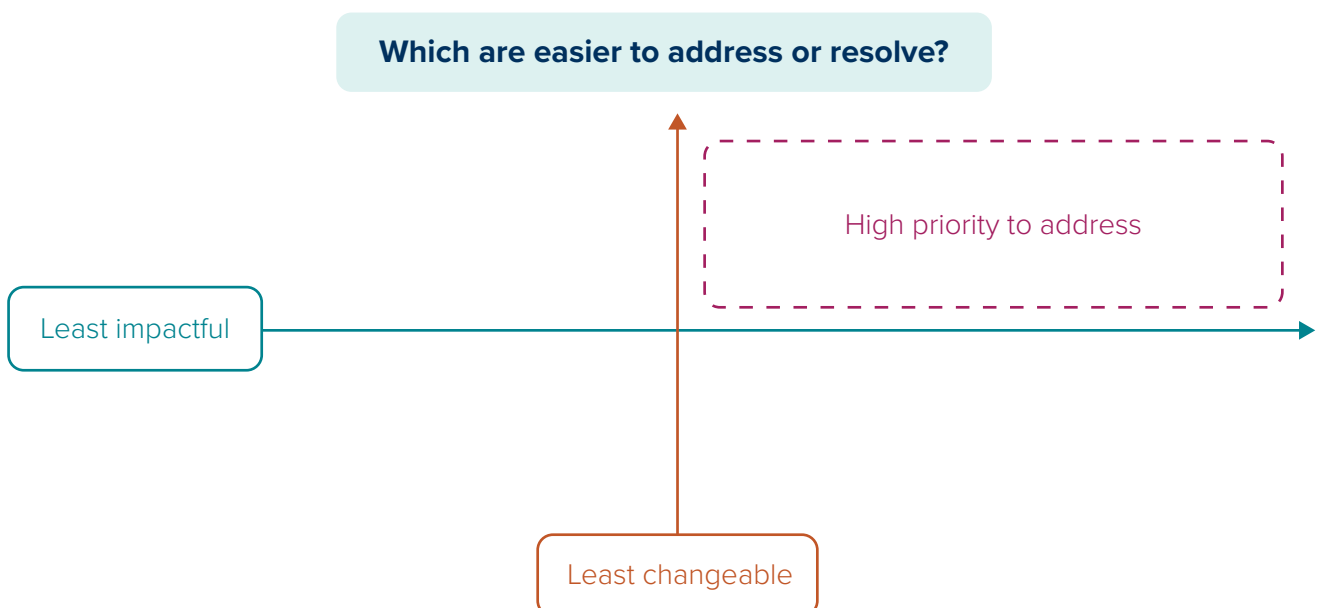
Each enabler and barrier has the potential to impact the implementation of your selected evidence-based teaching practice, but **some will be easier to address than others**. In particular, not all barriers can be overcome simultaneously. A realistic number of barriers to focus on at any given time is 2 to 3 barriers.

A **prioritisation tool** (Figure 3) can support collective decision-making about which enablers your school can best leverage and which barriers you'll start working to change. Use the prioritisation tool to help structure the conversation about which enablers and barriers are both **impactful** and **amenable to change**.

When plotting enabler or barrier factors in 1 of the 4 quadrants of the tool, consider:

- How is this factor being **experienced** as an enabler, barrier or neutral influence across your school? What examples can be provided?
- What might it take for this factor to be a **stronger enabler** of implementation in your school?
- What **neutral factors** could be strengthened to become enablers? What actions would be required?
- Which of these enabler/barrier/neutral factors should be **prioritised**? (These are the factors that will have a positive impact and are amenable to change, which you'll make a plan to address.)
- What specific **actions** could your school take to increase the enablers and reduce the barriers your staff are experiencing?

**Figure 3:** Prioritisation tool to help select the enablers and barriers to address



### 3. Plan to respond



Plan to respond by:

- determining actions to address priority barriers and leverage priority enablers
- linking enablers and barriers with implementation outcomes.

#### 3.1. Determine actions to address priority barriers and leverage priority enablers

Once enablers and barriers have been prioritised, work collaboratively as an implementation team to determine **actions** for addressing priority barriers and leveraging priority enablers. Capture these actions in your [implementation plan](#).

When discussing which actions to take, consider:

- which **implementation strategies** may:
  - reduce/remove the barrier
  - strengthen neutrals
  - leverage enablers.
- whether **short, medium or long-term** strategies are needed.
- how selected actions align with **implementation outcomes**.

Once actions have been determined, make sure all staff know what is planned and how their collective examples and suggestions have contributed to or strengthened these planned actions.

#### 3.2. Link enablers and barriers with implementation outcomes

Use the information gathered from the enablers and barriers session to tailor your implementation plan. This data helps you determine and [monitor implementation outcomes](#), which indicate how well implementation is going.

##### Enabling factors mapped to implementation outcomes used in AERO's Learning Partner project

The enabling factors used in the 2024 Learning Partner project have been mapped to **4 monitored implementation outcomes** – acceptability, feasibility, fidelity and sustainability (see [Appendix C](#)).

## 4. Monitor progress



Monitoring the progress of actions to resolve barriers and leverage enablers provides an indication of what's working and what's getting in the way of implementation at any given time. Progress monitoring also provides information on implementation strategies, stages and outcomes, and should become part of regular implementation team meetings.

As an implementation team, schedule time to regularly discuss:

- **actions** taken since the previous meeting
- **data** that indicates:
  - how actions are contributing towards reducing barriers and leveraging enablers
  - progress over time (e.g., observations of changes to staff skills, beliefs or attitudes linked to implementation outcomes)
- reflections about whether identified enablers and barriers are still **current**
- any **new barriers**, whether these need prioritising and how implementation strategies can be adjusted accordingly
- how changes, progress and next steps will be **communicated** to staff.

### Monitoring enablers and barriers in AERO's Learning Partner project

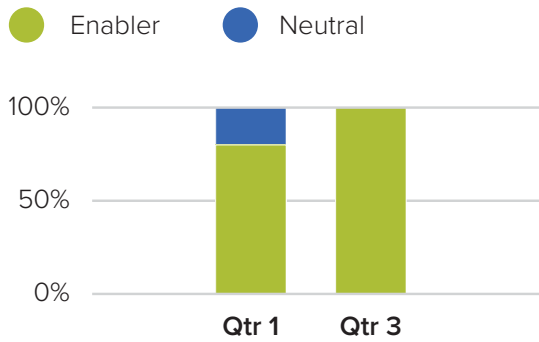
To enable monitoring of enablers and barriers, schools in the Learning Partner project scheduled time for whole-staff enablers and barriers sessions in Term 1 and again late in Term 3.

[Figure 4](#) provides an example of their data visualisation, showing changes from Term 1 to Term 3. This data was used to inform implementation decisions for Term 4 and the following year.

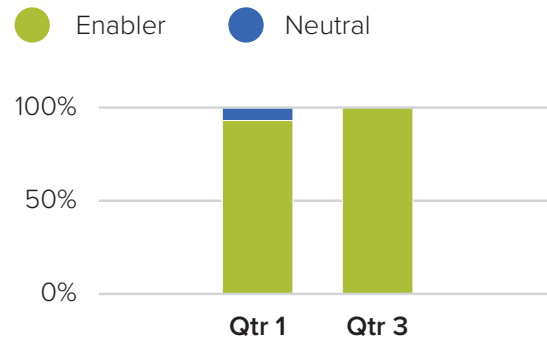
**Figure 4:** Data visualisation showing changes to enablers and barriers over time

**Evidence-based practice**

**I think explicit instruction is based on strong research.**

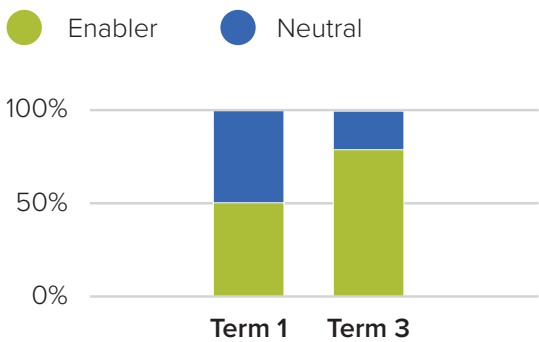


**I see why it's better to implement explicit instruction than keep thing ...**

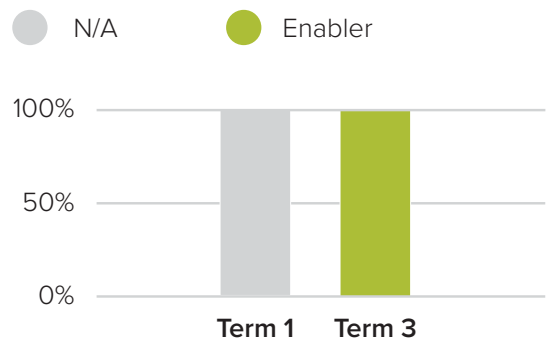


**Process**

**Our school has a plan for implementing explicit instruction. It includes clear ...**

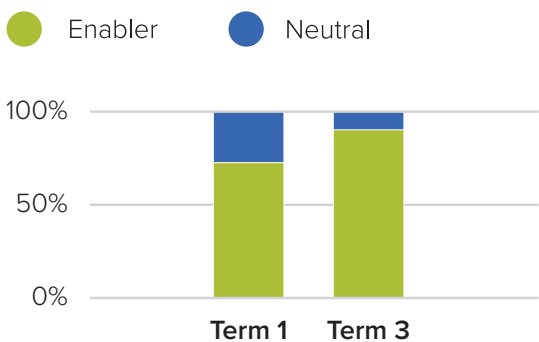


**Our school's plan for implementing explicit instruction is being followed ...**

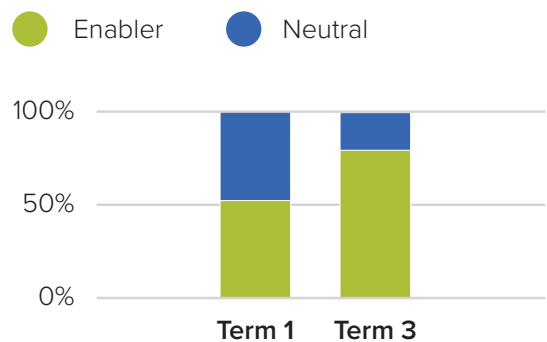


**People**

**I think it is really important to use explicit instruction in my teaching.**



**I have the skills to use explicit instruction in my teaching. I am excit ...**



## Appendix A: List of potential enablers and barriers adapted from the Learning Partner project

Note: This content has been sourced and adapted from the [Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research \(CFIR\)](#) and a plain-language version of CFIR<sup>3</sup>. It is provided as an example. Before using the **school-friendly statements** in this table with your staff, tailor them to ensure they reflect your context and the evidence-based teaching practice(s) you've chosen to implement.

CFIR domain	CFIR construct	School-friendly statement
Evidence-based practice	Evidence strength & quality	Explicit instruction is based on strong evidence.
	Relative advantage	Implementing explicit instruction is better than keeping things as they are.
	Complexity	Explicit instruction is simple to use in the classroom.
	Design quality	The way AERO defines explicit instruction makes it accessible to implement.
System and community	External policy	Policies and guidelines from our education department support the implementation of explicit instruction.
	Local attitudes	Our school is supported by a shared responsibility with department personnel to implement explicit instruction.
	Community partnerships & connections	Our school consults, engages or partners with the local community, families and/or the school council when implementing new evidence-based teaching practices.
School	Work infrastructure	Our school arranges tasks, responsibilities and resources within and between teams to implement explicit instruction.
	Technology infrastructure	Systems for electronic documentation, data storage, management, reporting and analysis are in place to support our implementation of explicit instruction.
	Relational connections	Connections within my immediate teaching team make it easy to implement explicit instruction.
	Communication	There are established formal and informal information-sharing practices across our school to support successfully implementing explicit instruction.
	Observation, feedback & coaching culture	Our school has shared values, beliefs and norms around observation, feedback and coaching to support the development and welfare of teachers.
	Learning-centeredness	Our school has shared values, beliefs and norms around continuous improvement and using data to inform practice.

CFIR domain	CFIR construct	School-friendly statement
School	Tension for change	Explicit instruction practice is something we need to work on as a school. <b>(Ask this question in the initial survey.)</b>  Explicit instruction practice is something we need to sustain or continue to work on as a school. <b>(Ask this question in the follow-up survey.)</b>
	Relative priority	Of all the initiatives we could focus on, improving our use of explicit instruction is a high priority.
	Mission alignment 1	Implementing and delivering explicit instruction is in line with our school's vision or strategic priorities.
	Mission alignment 2	School goals are shared with staff and we receive feedback that relates to them.
	Time	Time is resourced to successfully implement explicit instruction.
	Materials and equipment	Resources are available to successfully implement explicit instruction.
	Access to knowledge and information	Staff have access to enough relevant information on explicit instruction and how to use it in class.
Individuals (roles and characteristics)	High-level leaders	Our leadership team is committed, involved and accountable in supporting teachers to use explicit instruction.
	Opinion leaders	Influential people in our school are clear and supportive when discussing explicit instruction.
	Implementation coordinator(s)	Implementation coordinator(s) are identified and have implementation, critical thinking and problem-solving skills to support us to implement explicit instruction.
	Implementation team members	Our school has selected and identified relevant members of staff as the implementation team to support us to implement explicit instruction.
	Capability	I have the knowledge and skills to use explicit instruction in my teaching.
	Motivation	I am enthusiastic to use explicit instruction in my teaching.

CFIR domain	CFIR construct	School-friendly statement
The process	Teaming	Teams within our school communicate, coordinate, delegate, act, reflect and trust each other to support the implementation of explicit instruction.
	Assessing need	Our school collects information about priorities, preferences and the needs of students to guide the implementation of explicit instruction.
	Planning	Our school has a contextualised plan for implementing explicit instruction. It includes a goal, clear steps, timelines and people responsible.
	Engaging	Staff who promote explicit instruction both within the teaching team and wider community will be supported. <b>(Ask this question in the initial survey.)</b> Staff who promote explicit instruction both within the teaching team and wider community are supported. <b>(Ask this question in the follow-up survey.)</b>
	Doing	Our school's plan for implementing explicit instruction is being followed and optimised as required. <b>(Only ask leaders this question in the follow-up survey.)</b>
	Reflecting & evaluating	Data is regularly discussed and used to track progress and optimise the implementation of explicit instruction. <b>(Only ask this question in the follow-up survey.)</b>

Source: 'The Updated Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research Based on User Feedback' by L. J. Damschroder, C. M. Reardon, M. A. Opra Widerquist & J. Lowery, licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#); and 'The CFIR Card Game: A New Approach for Working with Implementation Teams to Identify Challenges and Strategies' by M. Piat, M. Wainwright, E. Sofouli, H. Albert, R. Casey, M. Rivest, C. Briand, S. Kasdorf, L. Labonté, S. LeBlanc & J. J. O'Rourke, licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#).









## Appendix C: Learning Partner project links between enabling factors and implementation outcomes

Note: This table shows the connections between potential enabling factors and the **4 implementation outcomes** that were monitored in the 2024 Learning Partner project — namely, acceptability, feasibility, fidelity and sustainability.

Implementation outcome	Aligned enabling factors (from the 2024 Learning Partner project)
<p><b>Acceptability:</b> The evidence-based teaching practice is satisfactory or agreeable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicit instruction is simple to use in the classroom.</li> <li>• The way AERO describes explicit instruction makes it accessible to implement.</li> <li>• Of all the initiatives we could focus on, improving our use of explicit instruction is a high priority.</li> <li>• Explicit instruction practice is something we need to work on as a school.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Feasibility:</b> The evidence-based teaching practice can be successfully applied in the school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connections within my immediate teaching team make it easy to implement explicit instruction.</li> <li>• Our school arranges tasks, responsibilities and resources within and between teams to implement explicit instruction.</li> <li>• Our school has shared values, beliefs and norms around continuous improvement and using data to inform practice.</li> <li>• Time is resourced to successfully implement explicit instruction.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Fidelity:</b> The evidence-based teaching practice is implemented as intended.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our school's plan for implementing explicit instruction is being followed and optimised as required.</li> <li>• I have the knowledge and skills to use explicit instruction in my teaching.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sustainability:</b> Evidence-based teaching practice is embedded within the school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influential people in our school are clear and supportive when discussing explicit instruction.</li> <li>• Implementation coordinator(s) are identified and have implementation, critical thinking and problem-solving skills to support us to implement explicit instruction.</li> <li>• Our school has a contextualised plan for implementing explicit instruction. It includes a goal, clear steps, timelines and the people responsible.</li> <li>• Systems for electronic documentation, data storage, management, reporting and analysis are in place to support our implementation of explicit instruction.</li> <li>• There are established formal and informal information-sharing practices across our school to support successfully implementing explicit instruction.</li> </ul>

## Endnotes

- 1 Damschroder, L. J., Reardon, C. M., Opra Widerquist, M. A., & Lowery, J. (2022). Conceptualizing outcomes for use with the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR): The CFIR Outcomes Addendum. *Implementation Science*, 17, Article 7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-021-01181-5>
- 2 Piat, M., Wainwright, M., Sofouli, E., Albert, H., Casey, R., Rivest, M.-P., Briand, C., Kasdorf, S., Labonté, L., LeBlanc, S., & O'Rourke, J. J. (2021). The CFIR Card Game: A new approach for working with implementation teams to identify challenges and strategies. *Implementation Science Communications*, 2, Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43058-020-00099-1>
- 3 Piat et al., 2021