

SCHOOL PRACTICE BRIEFING

Evaluating a School Life-Skills Programme

A framework for choosing useful evidence, interpreting it carefully and making a proportionate decision about what should happen next.

Framework. Working template. Sources.

By the Figured team

Education beyond academics – Singapore

The central idea

Agree what you want to know before choosing a measure. Participation, observed practice, everyday use and causal impact are different claims and need different evidence.

1. Choose the question before the measure

“Did it work?” can mean several things. The programme might have reached the intended learners, created a good experience, improved a rehearsed action or supported everyday use. A school may also want to know whether the programme caused a change that would not otherwise have happened.

Those questions require different evidence. Attendance can show reach. A learner reflection can describe an experience. An observation can show what happened during a task. A comparison designed to address alternative explanations is needed for a stronger causal claim.

Begin with the decision the school needs to make: continue the programme, change the age group, improve accessibility, alter the timetable or commission a more rigorous evaluation. Collect information that can inform that decision.

This briefing proposes a practical review framework for schools. It is not a validated measurement instrument, and it does not replace specialist evaluation advice when high-stakes conclusions or formal impact claims are intended.

2. Keep broad evidence and specific claims apart

Durlak and colleagues’ 2011 meta-analysis found positive average outcomes across many school-based SEL programmes and identified implementation-related differences. That establishes a research basis for taking the field seriously; it does not establish that any newly designed programme will reproduce those results.^[1]

The EEF’s implementation guidance makes context and implementation part of the discussion. Its Dialogic Teaching summary also illustrates why time horizon matters: positive initial findings did not become a demonstrated later test-score effect.^{[2][3]}

When reviewing a provider's evidence, ask which programme, learners, setting, measure and follow-up it concerns. A result in another country or a different age group can inform a decision without settling it.

For Figured, the programme pathways currently described are in preparation. This publication sets out an intended approach to review; it reports no Figured programme impact results.

3. Describe the action and the conditions

A broad label such as leadership is difficult to observe consistently. Choose a smaller action: inviting another contribution, paraphrasing a view before responding or explaining a relevant reason for a proposal.

Record the conditions. What task was the learner doing? What opportunity did they have? Was there a prompt, a model, a planning card or a familiar partner? Without that context, the same tick on a checklist can represent very different performances.

Record	A useful description
Task and opportunity	Explaining one option before the group makes a design decision.
Action observed	Gave a relevant reason and answered one clarifying question.
Support used	A written planning prompt; no additional adult reminder during the explanation.
Learner perspective	The learner identifies which part felt useful or difficult.
Next question	Can the learner use the action with different content or a less familiar partner?

This example shows a recording format, not an actual learner record. Avoid turning the presence of support into a deficit score. The support may be an appropriate and continuing part of access.

4. Make comparisons interpretable

If you compare an early and a later task, keep the intended action recognisable and note what changes. A simpler task, more adult prompting or a different attendance pattern can affect the result.

Discuss the observation criteria before delivery. Where feasible, let adults compare a few sample observations and resolve differences in interpretation. A checklist is only as consistent as the judgements used to complete it.

Ask how missing opportunities will be handled. A learner who did not get a turn has not demonstrated inability. Absence is different from a difficult attempt. Report the number of relevant opportunities when summarising observations, and do not silently exclude inconvenient records.

An improvement over time can still have several explanations: ordinary development, familiarity with the task, other teaching, different support or the programme itself. A simple before-and-after review can inform teaching without proving which explanation caused the change.

If a provider proposes an overall score, ask where it comes from, what it measures and whether it is appropriate for the learners. A homemade composite should not be presented as a standardised or validated assessment.

5. Look beyond the session, with care

A transfer question needs a real opportunity. Identify a classroom task or familiar home situation in advance, then ask what occurred there. "Was the learner more confident?" is less useful than a short description of the action, situation and support.

Keep sources distinct. A facilitator's observation, a teacher's account, a parent's account and the learner's reflection offer different views. Agreement can be informative; disagreement can point to differences in setting or demand.

Make follow-up proportionate. Collect the minimum information needed for the agreed review and use the school's appropriate information-handling arrangements. Private narratives and diagnostic details are rarely necessary for an ordinary initial programme evaluation.

Use the review to understand access as well as performance. Did some learners have fewer chances to practise? Did the task depend heavily on language fluency? Were the intended follow-up opportunities actually available?

A programme that appeared effective only for the most vocal learners raises a different question from one that offered accessible, useful practice across the group. The evidence should help you see that distinction.

6. Make a proportionate decision

Bring the evidence back to the original purpose. Avoid asking the review to support a broader claim than the school set out to investigate.

- Continue: the learning goal remains relevant, participation is workable and the observations justify another agreed phase.
- Adapt: the need is clear but the task, support, group size or follow-through needs revision.
- Investigate: the result is promising or unclear, and a more deliberate comparison or follow-up would inform an important decision.
- Pause: the fit, access, delivery conditions or educational value does not justify continuing in its current form.

These are planning options, not universal thresholds. Agree the decision criteria with the school before interpreting the result.

A credible report can say that learners demonstrated an action in supported tasks while everyday transfer remains uncertain. That is more useful than a transformation claim that cannot be inspected. Good evaluation should improve the next educational decision, including the decision to change course.

An evidence plan to discuss

Working notes for a school planning conversation. Adapt the fields to your learners, setting and agreed responsibilities.

Decision this review will inform	
Action, task and support to observe	
Early and later opportunities	
Everyday-use account and its source	
Alternative explanations and missing information	
Next decision, owner and review date	

Sources and scope

1. Joseph A. Durlak and colleagues (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: a meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. Published abstract. Multiple programmes and settings; results are not evidence for Figured's programmes.
2. Education Endowment Foundation (2024). A School's Guide to Implementation, third edition. Public overview of implementation behaviours, context and process.
3. Education Endowment Foundation (2017; follow-up 2019). Dialogic Teaching – trial. English primary-school trial and later follow-up; public summary.

This is a Figured practice framework informed by selected sources. It is not a validated assessment, a systematic review or a report of Figured programme outcomes. Questions and corrections: programs@figured.co.