

## **Peer Review case Study**

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### **Context**

Our partnership is very small, just three medium to large (ranging from 1.5 to 2 form entry) Primary Schools – called the CHEC partnership; Coggeshall, Halstead & Earls Colne. In our area many schools are small village schools or schools that enjoy their independent working. Through secondary feeder school and Local Delivery Group Meetings we became increasingly convinced of the need to work in partnership but were unable to join an existing group, and so, around four years ago, our partnership was formed.

Initially, work focussed on Headteacher support for one another, but quickly grew to include Deputies, Subject leaders, SENCos, all teachers and Governors. Joint CPD and Governor training has been our real focus, as has regular moderation of children's work. We have had a Memorandum of Understanding for 3 years, which is updated and shared with stakeholders annually. More recently we have extended our work to include pupil voice activities – including presentations on learning, story writing and face to face events. Once staff were accustomed to working together we embarked on a rotation of Peer Reviews, with the order decided by the likelihood of impending inspection. We are currently completing our second round of peer reviews

### **Key Issues**

Initially it was vital for senior leaders to believe in the honesty, integrity and professionalism of their colleagues across the partnership. Once this had been established through joint working projects and support, it was important for staff to know each other, and go through the same process of building trust in order for the Peer Review process to achieve the necessary rigour. Another issue has been timetabling the review and staffing – however, the partnership's belief in the merit of the system has ensured that we have found ways around this.

### **Learn from the Peer Review**

The need for the sharing of data and the associated checks/routines needed have become clear through our Peer Review process. We have refined the type of data (ASP and ISDR data is shared annually to support each other with Inspection preparation, Tracking data for cohorts is shared termly on a common format to enable support for current issues and data is now a standing item on every meeting agenda to enable us to benchmark and support with aspects such as data), we share as well as introducing data sharing protocols. The Reviews have also helped to provide a focus to our partnership meetings and moderation work- ensuring staff are aware of issues arising from the reviews and are able to seek support for findings relating to these areas.

Most importantly, we learned a great deal about the power of perception. Of the challenge to stereotypes about schools and our similarities and differences, (so many more similarities than we could ever have imagined) and the power of pupil perceptions, when skilfully questioned, in informing us about their school.

We are delighted that as a result of our focussed work, Senior Leaders across the schools are now contacting each other for support where they have seen strength, e.g. English leaders have

contacted each other for mutual support on action planning, as well as curriculum foci such as writing pedagogy. Equally, the Peer Review process has added authority to our partnership work in the eyes of the Governing Bodies of all schools, who now recognise the importance of working together stretches far beyond joint CPD and is in fact a powerful tool for school improvement.

### **The Impact and benefits**

As a Partnership, the Peer Review process has provided us with good evidence for Ofsted and SIAMS inspections – evidence of leadership capacity, and momentum, validity of judgements and a confidence in our Self Evaluation. It has also been a great preparation tool for leaders and all teachers for the inspection process. It has enabled all staff to see that review should be a self-initiated and ongoing process which leads to improvement, in addition to the external monitoring of OFSTED.

Our initial round of reviews were led by Headteachers but more recently we have grown this to include Deputy Headteachers; this has added to their development by providing valuable opportunities to lead in other schools, to apply their knowledge in a different context and to develop their evaluative skills. They have particularly led on the Improvement planning and monitoring phase.

Staff in all three schools have reported feeling supported whilst recommendations were made, even if questioning was rigorous! Staff have developed an open attitude to school improvement in their own school as well as a collegiate responsibility across the partnership, for example as a result of a Peer Review SEND structure and monitoring strategies were shared and consequently implemented in the interests of better outcomes for all learners.

At Richard de Clare, our first review looked at Pupil Premium boys' writing. The findings of the review resulted in increased awareness of Pupil Premium and staff's accountability for their performance. It improved practice in the teaching of writing, especially greater use of visual stimuli and raised awareness of the barriers to completing home learning. This led to staff establishing more flexible home learning challenges and ensuring there is opportunity for children to complete this learning within the school environment, as well as promoting to parents the role they can play in supporting their children. As a result, we have seen pockets of narrowing the gap between Pupil Premium writing and others at Key Stage 2, e.g. in Year 5 the gap has narrowed by 20% and in Year 6 by 19% and Key Stage 1 progress at the end of last year was very pleasing and the attainment gap had narrowed by 9%.

Our most recent Review focussed on Key Stage 1 Maths. It is too early for us to have seen any impact on pupil outcomes, however the process has helped leaders to create a focussed action plan, to provide support for colleagues in a very directed manner and to refine the monitoring process within the school. What has been really pleasing to see one year on, is the increased confidence with which pupils spoke about their learning to visitors.

At Earls Colne Primary School and Nursery one review has taken place with a focus on writing in Key Stage 1. The review was a positive experience that staff welcomed and were confident that outcomes would be fair and constructive. Following the review, Key Stage 1 teachers have introduced a new system of using Success Criteria, which children and staff use across a number of days to show progress and inform targets. As a result, children have more involvement with the Success Criteria and can see progress within a unit of work. Time for children to act on feedback and edit their work by themselves and with peer support has been incorporated into lessons.

The impact of the review has seen children become more involved in their learning, particularly in assessing their own writing which in turn has led to at least good progress. In Year 1, fifty-nine of the sixty-one pupils have made at least four steps progress in writing and forty-nine of these have made five or more steps progress. In Year 2, only two of the fifty-two children have made less than the expected four steps progress and thirty have already made five or more steps progress. Across Key Stage 1 the majority of children have made more than expected progress and these judgements have been confirmed during writing moderation within the CEC partnership.

At Coggeshall, St Peters, one review has taken place – focussing on provision for SEN. Following the findings of the review, systems are now in place to record soft data and sub-steps linked to personalised target setting. The review outcomes encouraged staff to use evidence to measure the impact of interventions and to track the support SEN pupils receive on a more regular basis. The challenging questions posed by the reviewers encouraged the SENCo to review her role within the school and to accept that her position needed to be more strategic to have a greater impact on pupil progress. Following the review she met with the SENCos from the partner schools to discuss this further and she has continued to move towards the position of leading the provision for SEN as member of the SLT.

The impact of the review has been to make teachers more aware of their responsibilities towards meeting with parents and target setting. This will be further enhanced by the Achievement for All programme which we have just commenced jointly with Richard de Clare school. A further impact is that our within school tracking shows that SEN pupils are making progress towards their targets and that our interventions are monitored by teachers and team leaders which enables them to evaluate the effectiveness. As a result, our SENCO is working more strategically, and all leaders have a clearer picture of SEN progress.

As a result of review, school improvement priorities have been developed and refined and all Head's believe the rigour of evaluation and the validation of judgements has contributed greatly to their school's success at Ofsted – all three schools are judged to be good.

There have only been two types of outcome from our reviews:

- a) Some new evidence as to why an area is concerning to the school – in which case a new perspective can be useful
- b) Telling the school what leaders already knew or suspected – in which case a new voice reiterating the point can add weight and substance to the urgency for improvement, leading to pressing action.

### **Next steps**

Our partnership must grow over time: moving from collaboration to co-responsibility and shared professional accountability. The foundations are strong for this to happen as we have established a clear and shared moral purpose. In the near future it is important that we continue to develop the roles of the School Improvement Champions so that all schools have trained Champions and these are able to facilitate improvement in each other's schools. We have found this to be a powerful tool for generating ownership of improvement actions.

We are also looking to widen the number of reviewers within each school to include other leaders, e.g. where there is a literacy area to be investigated using English leads to conduct reviews and are giving careful thought as to the role of Governors in the process – currently they receive reports on the process and feedback on outcomes once these are measurable. Given that leaders and teachers

report that the process itself is good preparation for Ofsted, it is important that we consider how the Governors could benefit too.

It will be important that we develop procedures to follow up on the impact of the reviews. Currently these are left with the reviewed school to monitor, however there is a necessity to develop a cycle of collaborative enquiry to look at the impact.

We were pleased to have our LA representative Quality Assure the process last year. She sat in on a peer review as an observer and reported on the process rather than the review findings. She noted the rigour of the day and the willingness to share good practice as strengths and suggested some improvements to the process of reporting at the end of the review. Next, we are exploring ways to continue this quality assurance through the use of other Headteachers/Ofsted inspectors as part of the review team or impact review in order for us to maintain the rigour and efficacy of the programme and to continue to advance the system in order to bring about cross school improvement and systemic change.