

Peer Review Case Study

Name of Headteacher and School writing the case study

Julie Puxley, Katherine Semar Infant and Junior school

Context of the Partnership: We have eight schools working in our partnership. For peer review, we worked in groups of three schools as shown below:

Peer Review Trio 1	Peer Review Trio 2
Debden Academy NOR – 112	Katherine Semar Academy NOR 431 Infant and Junior
Great Chesterford Academy NOR - 204	R A Butler Academy NOR 609 Infant and Junior
St Thomas More Primary school NOR - 210	Stansted Bentfield Primary NOR – 216

The partnership contains a diverse mix of schools; we have a small village school all the way through to a large three form entry town school.

- One school has enhanced provision places and this school offers the rest of the schools a valuable insight into best practice in inclusion.
- Ofsted: 2 x Outstanding, 3 x good, 1 x Sponsored Academy convertor awaiting inspection
- Two schools are in a multi-academy trust together with two local secondary schools. Another two form a two school multi-academy trust. Another is a stand-alone academy whilst the final school is local authority.

This eclectic mix of schools works well for us. The most important for us to work with schools who wanted to collaborate and were brave enough to allow us to challenge. We have planned to complete two reviews a term (one for each trio of schools). So far we have completed four peer reviews.

Key Issue/s that your partnership identified to overcome?

Although we have a long history of working very closely together previously this tended to focus on collaborative projects like sharing CPD or services. Before completing peer reviews, there were a number of headteachers who had not been into each other's schools, so moving to peer review in each other's schools was a serious undertaking. We had never even shared data with each other and especially as we are all located in close proximity to each other, the process took a lot of trust.

We felt it was important to establish a consistent approach which focused on finding the positives in each school and sharing best practice while identifying a finite number of areas for development. We agreed certain items e.g. that we would keep everything confidential, that we would write the report jointly and it should be completed on the day of the peer review, that we would meet staff (and bring biscuits!) as well as feeding back to SLT at the end of the day and we would use school champions from each schools to facilitate a staff meeting at the host school a few weeks after the review. We wrote down these agreements so that everyone remained clear.

What did the partnership learn from undertaking the peer review? What did you find out that you didn't already know? And how did you respond to this?

An important lesson we learnt was that the initial meeting between the school being reviewed and the schools doing the reviewing was essential. The school being reviewed attended these meeting prepared with a few ideas to explore. These ideas were based on current data, the school's own monitoring processes and self-review. It also meant we could have a clear idea of the sort of activities that would help us to monitor the particular line of enquiry. In this meeting a timetable for the day was written and agreed. We decided that we needed a range of activities likely to give us the best information based on a particular focus. Over the reviews these activities have included interviews with Senior leaders, subject leaders and other staff, pupil interviews, reading with children, learning observations, book scrutiny and data analysis.

When we completed the first review, we realised that we had not discussed whether the headteacher would complete the learning observations alongside the other headteachers. For our first peer review the headteacher chose not to be in the learning observations which actually surprised the headteachers completing the review. She explained it helped her to see her school through fresh eyes and we felt it made the review more objective. We decided that (although headteachers were free to choose) that this model was our recommended version.

Another essential part was a post-review meeting where we discussed what went well with the review and what we felt needed improving. This dealt not only with what developing best practice in terms of the subject being reviewed e.g. pupil premium, but also what would help improve the review process. This involved both triads so each of the reviews improved each time. Examples of things we changed were involving the Improvement Champions earlier in the feedback session, so they had a better idea what were the areas for development and trying to do less on the review day, so more time could be spent on the things that had greatest impact.

Another interesting discussion from our post meeting revolved around what subject to choose when deciding on the peer review. One headteacher picked a pupil premium review as this was a current focus on her school development plan. The reviewing headteachers found that there were many successful interventions happening to support pupil premium children and data supported the review that this area of the school development plan was having high impact. Instead, through their learning observations, they discussed the role of teaching assistants and how their role could further enhance all children's learning. This became the focus of the school staff meeting led by a school champion by another school. So in this case, the Peer Review process was able to act as an external moderation process against an area the school had worked on – we agreed that this was still valid as it gave the Headteacher confirmation that steps put in place were working. She was also open to the new line of enquiry found by the reviewers.

Another school chose something which was a real focus last year on the school development plan. This had been reviewed at the time but the school had new development priorities this year so the headteacher decided she wanted to check that all the work they completed was embedded and still having an impact. She felt that she knew exactly what progress was being made on the school development plan priorities this year. Choosing the correct review topic remains an interesting discussion point which we will continue to explore as more reviews are completed.

We did wonder if as reviewing headteachers created the opportunity to speak to staff at the beginning of the review, whether we should try and make time to see all staff at the end of school review. It is good for staff to have the opportunity to celebrate their hard work and hearing them from the peer review team, may make the process even more beneficial and positive for the schools. We will discuss this as part of the formal review process with both triads.

What was the Impact and benefits?

- A closer working relationship between headteachers in our schools. Through honest sharing of the data and peer review, we were able to share best practice but also areas of development. We all felt more able to come to each other and ask for support which has improved practice in every school. This happened naturally as part of the review process where suggestions and ideas were offered.
- Helped headteachers to have foundations with which to move forward with ideas and to build on the outcomes from the Improvement Champion workshops
- Clarified headteacher thoughts on areas for improvement and identified new trails for the school to work on themselves. These could form the basis of a new Peer Review
- Staff benefitted from the opportunity to hear all about the successful practice in the school and celebrate their hard work.
- Built a stronger foundation for us to continue to work together. We are now ready to expand the Peer Review model to include Governor Peer Review and SLT Peer Review

- All staff engaged incredibly well with the school based meetings led by school champions after the event and this helped to cement further priorities for development as the facilitation tools meant that school staff led the meeting and the future developments rather than the leadership team.
- We found that the peer reviews were very successful and useful for us to learn best practice from our partnerships as well as providing focus for our schools. The actual process of reviewing schools in a day was new to some headteachers and provided excellent continuing professional development for them, particularly around looking at a range of evidence gathered in a short time to make assessments of impact.

What is your partnership going to do next based on the learning/impact of the Peer Review?

We would like to continue working together on Peer Review and to deepen its impact on other members of staff. We felt that it would be a useful development for our Senior staff to join in the reviews. So we are looking at ways of including them in the reviews next year and possibly school champions joining review teams. We feel it would be good to train more Improvement Champions across the triads too.

Another successful aspect of the partnership was a Governor review meeting led by the Local Authority. We looked at sharing the success of our partnership and how Governors might work more closely in the future possibly using a similar peer review model to improve practice.

We need to hold a formal review to look at the processes used between the two Triads to ensure there is consistency between the two processes. From there we will draw up a process sheet which works for us to help establish this consistent working practice.