

Dunmow Excellence in Education Partnership (DEEP) Peer Review Case Study

Context of the Partnership

DEEP consists of 10 primary schools and one secondary school and was formed from a pre-existing local delivery group. Geographically, the schools are spread over south Uttlesford and range in size and diversity. Several small and medium rural schools make up the majority of the group along with two town schools based in Dunmow. DEEP was one of the first School Led Improvement Partnerships to be created in 2016 although many of the schools had been working together for over a decade.

Key Issue/s that your partnership identified to overcome?

There were four main priorities DEEP initially identified:

1. To develop a closer working relationship between the schools with the aim of improving outcomes and wellbeing for all locality children.
2. To build capacity for increasing the rate of school improvement through joint review within the group in order to challenge, question and inspire each other in a professional, honest and open relationship.
3. To improve CPD by targeting specific, identified needs to improve progress and attainment in all the schools.
4. To improve Year 6-7 transition and plan a future strategy to improve nursery reception transition.

What did the partnership learn from undertaking the peer review?

Initially, peer review allowed the Headteachers to get a better 'real time' understanding of the schools within the partnership.

In depth data was agreed to be shared across the group creating a clearer picture of patterns and issues across the partnership. Each school provided an agreed set of information prior to each Peer Review. This included the school's SDP, SEF and inspection dashboard. Every school also had access to a summary of a data sharing exercise carried out at the beginning of the academic year. The summary included the end of year outcomes for EYFS, Key stage 1 and Key stage 2 plus the results of the Year 1 phonics screening. Data sets around gender, disadvantaged and SEND were also shared in the summary. Consequently, the lead reviewer had a very clear understanding of the data before the review. It became clear through the analysis of data that boys writing and the outcomes for pupil premium children would become action points.

Through peer review, it soon became apparent that there was an incredible amount of exciting work going on within each school but often SLT and subject leaders were working and acting alone. Money and time was directed at developing a series of

networks across the partnership to support and develop subject leaders. It also became clear that the cluster before DEEP had focused too much on the 'nice things', organising events etc. Through the steering group the meetings and reviews became more strategic, with an identified collective outcome once the outcomes of all peer reviews were collated.

What was the impact and benefits?

Peer reviews have a positive impact across all the schools as well as developing the partnership further. There is a greater understanding of each others schools' strengths and areas for development which has lead to increased openness, trust and support throughout the group. Heads and senior managers are able to access support from a wider variety of places and that support is delivered in a encouraging, non-judgemental way. Heads are not afraid to ask for help!

For the Heads and Deputies undertaking peer reviews it has been a great opportunity to develop their own monitoring and collaborative skills. All have expressed the benefits for themselves and their schools.

School staff, initially, found the process daunting and some questioned the need for additional monitoring or 'mocksted'. However, the reviews have been conducted in a way that validates the school's hard work and existing development points as well as being a critical friend.

On a whole partnership level it has allowed economies of scale to benefit the whole group particularly on CPD. It was established the core subject leaders needed additional support to carry out their monitoring duties. Over the course of the year English and Maths leaders have had half termly development sessions run by Jonathan Bond and Jill Halsham. As well as networking, it has lead to a more consistent approach to monitoring but also how to deliver subject knowledge to staff, particularly around greater depth. The majority of DEEP schools have been inspected over the last year and core subject leadership has been recognised as a strength in many schools.

Current, training is based on increasing the level of greater depth and how this can be done through a mastery maths curriculum like White Rose, which has been adopted by most DEEP schools. Subject leads are monitoring its progress in school, returning to subject leader sessions with any issues to discuss with the CPD lead.

After identifying through the group data that boys writing was an issue, a collective INSET day was planned with Gary Wilson, looking at the challenges of underachievement of boys and society's expectations of boys achievement.

Collaborative discussions shared best practice and how Gary Wilson's ideas could be implemented in schools.

Peer review has also allowed the spotlight to be shone on individual issues within school. A 'fresh eyes' approach to reviewing a school has identified issues that may have not been established in school development plan. For example, in one of the

DEEP schools, a unintentional and unconscious glass ceiling on expectations in writing was identified because of the way tasks were being presented. Children were being limited by worksheets that were thought to promote scaffolding of ideas or boxes that limited the amount the children could write. After identification of this possible problem pupil interviews were conducted and children expressed that they wanted to write more but felt restrained by the format. Developed as an action point, the reviewing schools were able to support and guide the school in ways that still scaffolded the children's work but developed greater writing stamina and creativity.

Collating the data from peer reviews had allowed the partnership to develop a more precise action plan. Partnership work around resilience and well-being are being researched along with the University of Cambridge. End of Key Stage outcomes have improved across all schools. For example at KS2 the DEEP average for reading went from 65% in 2016 to 82% (10 point above the national average). Writing went from 74% to 84% and maths went from 72% to 79%.

Overall, the impact of peer review has been an endorsement of the headteacher's evaluation of the school's effectiveness and areas of improvement which when fed back to teachers carried the weight of an external review. The practice of teachers has changed as a result. The value of identification of an issue of which the headteacher was unaware but is now able to work on and change. Although there is a teaching and learning focus, the review encourages awareness of a bigger more rounded picture of the school. The positive assessments and comments in the review had an impact on further improvement and staff have responded well to the positives of a school being identified by an 'outsider'. Staff are becoming more appreciative of others opinions and ideas. Finally, headteachers have used experiences from reviewing others schools to improve their own school.

What is the partnership going to do next based on the learning of the peer review?

DEEP is currently in the second cycle of full reviews. Mini update reviews were conducted half way from the cycle, to make sure that action plans develop from a peer review were on track and to discuss any barriers Headteachers were having in moving actions on. It is anticipated that after the second cycle there will be a review to determine frequency, future foci and sustainability of future peer reviews. DEEP are also currently looking at how Governors can become more involved with peer reviews and the possibility of DEEP governors observing other school full board meetings. Our next whole partnership focus is likely to be the broader curriculum, as has been identified both through Peer Review and recent Ofsted inspections.