



Medway Teaching
Schools Alliance

PEER REVIEW AND CHALLENGE

A strategy for school to school support for improvement

The Medway Teaching School Alliance

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS

Supported by Local Government Association and
Canterbury Christ Church University

Peer Challenge

1. Introduction

Peer review and challenge has been used in a range of educational contexts as a strategy for enhancing self-evaluation through external reference.

The common denominator in all models is that peers come together and spend time in each other's contexts to review practice, share expertise, recommend strategies for development and challenge each other to achieve continuous improvement.

In 2013 The Medway Teaching School Alliance piloted a model of peer challenge between schools in the alliance. The pilot was supported by funding from the Local Government Association (LGA) and was formally evaluated in partnership with Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU).¹

3 primary and 3 secondary schools were involved in the pilot, each being represented by their Headteachers. In the case of the secondary pilot, Chairs of Governors were also undertook a parallel peer review².

What Headteachers said:

'The peer review will make a difference to pupil attainment this year.'

'... we are doing it to ourselves, rather than someone coming in and telling us.'

'Explore, discuss, observe, challenge – its all done in a day.'

'... we are a better school for having done it.'

'We are going to make some significant changes as a result of the peer review.'

'We want to invite people back and do it again'

What Governors also said:

'... we don't normally talk to each other...we don't know each other that well... but it's amazing how helpful it is to meet and discuss'.

'.....[it gives you a] sense of being connected to something'.

'It's all about trust'

Trust between schools is an essential feature of the process. Participating schools will need to have the confidence to share honest self-evaluation with their peers and in turn will find that the experience builds trust between colleagues who gain respect for each other.

'Every school can learn something from their peers'

¹ The full report is available from www.mtsa.co.uk

² A separate guidance document is available for Governors

The peer review process ensures that the benefits are reciprocal. Each school gains from the insights of others, contributes expertise to support their peers and takes away models of practice that influence change in their own school.

The Peer Review process - At a glance

The peer review involves 3 schools working as a trio. Each school identifies a theme or area of their development that it wishes to review through the process. The group spend a day in each of the schools conducting the review, during which they may tour the school, visit classes, meet with staff, review documentation as appropriate to the theme. At the end of the day, peers provide feedback to the host Headteacher. Schools may then decide to meet again to review the impact of any changes made by the school.

Setting up a Peer Review – Top Tips

1. Establish a trio of schools
 - Consider schools that offer contrasts and are not in direct competition for pupils
 - Schools new to the process might initially work with one who has
 - Peer review may not be appropriate for all schools at the particular point in their improvement journey
2. Prepare for the review
 - Commit time to meet together to plan the peer review
 - Agree the themes for review in each school (see 3. below)
 - Consider how you want to organise each day and who else to involve
 - Agree any information to provide in advance, for example data or policies relating to the focus of the visit
 - Establish agreement regarding confidentiality
 - Set all 3 dates and times in advance
 - Plan a schedule for each day, allowing time for an initial input by the host Headteacher and sufficient time for discussion at the end of the visit
 - Establish your expectations regarding the reports to be produced (See 5. below)
3. Choose the theme for review
 - Each school chooses their own theme, this might derive from the SIP or from a recent inspection as appropriate
 - The theme is likely to be one which features within the school's priorities
 - Headteachers need to be prepared to be honest in the self-evaluation and to present their peers with an accurate picture
4. Conduct the visits
 - Circulate a detailed plan for the day in advance
 - The host school may provide a brief introduction on the day, to reinforce the focus and provide contextual information
 - The host is responsible for briefing staff and students and ensuring they understand the context of the visitors who will be in the school and classes
 - Host Headteachers should avoid 'showcasing' or micro-managing the visit
 - Arrange the day to allow maximum flexibility for appreciative enquiry and opportunities for peers to gain as many perspectives as possible.

- Headteachers may choose to be accompanied by an 'expert' from the school, for example if the theme of the peer review is KS1 then the KS1 Leader might accompany the Headteacher to the host school.
5. Reporting on the visit
- A verbal report on the visit and the key observations should be made at the end of each day
 - A short written report may be provided either produced by the visitors or by the host following verbal feedback from the visitors
 - Headteachers need to be both supportive and challenging in their reflections, offering practical suggestions and balancing the celebration of positive features with notes on areas for development
 - The host Headteacher is responsible for planning and implementing any actions arising from the visit
 - The report and its contents remain confidential between the peers and are shared within the host school at the host Headteacher's discretion
 - The report may comment on the observations relating to theme but it is also useful to comment on the peer review process itself
6. Following up
- Visitors should remember to thank those involved in the visits
 - Host Headteachers should arrange a debrief session to inform school staff (and students/parents where appropriate) of the outcomes
 - It is useful for Headteachers to discuss the outcomes of the peer review with their governors
 - Following a review, Headteachers may wish to meet again, for example 6 months later, to review and discuss the changes made in the schools as a result of the peer review and early indicators of impact.
7. Developing the model
- Once you have completed a trio, consider what your next steps might be. For example:
 - Schools may want to help extend the model by initiating another trio with 2 schools new to the peer review process
 - As a group of 3 you may wish to re-visit the peer review, either on the same or different topics, regularly. However the pilots cautioned against the relationship becoming too 'cosy' and recommended that new relationships be developed as well as existing one sustained
 - The secondary pilot group have now extended the model to include peer reviews between senior and middle leaders as well as Headteachers
 - The primary pilot have plans to include a further 2 schools each working with 2 of the original trio to create 2 new triads for peer review
 - While the detail and contents of the reports remain confidential between the trio, the trio is invited to identify good practice for sharing across the wider Alliance

For further information and guidance on the Peer Review process, please contact:
 Kate Wilson
 Director, Medway Teaching School Alliance
 c/o Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School

Maidstone Road, Rochester, Kent ME1 3EL
Email: katewilson@mtsa.co.uk
Telephone: 01634 84400 / 07788485214

Appendix A

Schools participating in the phase 1 pilot

- **Greenacre Academy**
Headteacher: Andy Reese, Chair of Governors: Sue Butler
- **The Hundred of Hoo Academy**
Headteacher: Gary Vyse, Chair of Governors: Peter Clough
- **Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School**
Headteacher: Eliot Hodges, Chair of Governors: Michael Costello
- **Cliffe Woods Primary**
Headteacher: Tim Watson
- **Hilltop Primary School**
Headteacher: Gavin Evans
- **Wainscott Primary School**
Headteacher: Liz Edwins