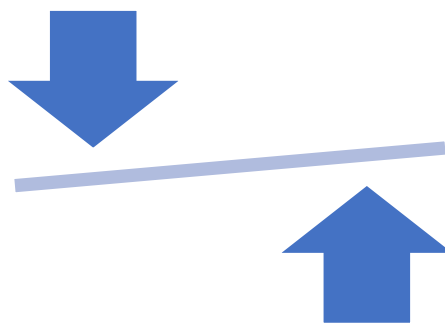


LA Maintained Schools' Peer Review

'Reflective Improvement'



1. Introduction and background

The Portsmouth Education Partnership Education Strategy 2020 - 2023 aligns with the moral purpose to ensure that we collectively achieve the best outcomes for all children and young people in our city and has as one of its priorities: *"Strong leadership and ambition at all levels within individual schools and education settings to improve effectiveness and outcomes for children and young people"* which is led by the PEP School Leadership and Effectiveness Board.

Recognising the many and mutual benefits, Portsmouth LA Maintained schools worked with officers from the local authority to co-produce a peer review process that would enable school leaders to reflect upon their work utilising an objective evidence-based approach, working with external peer colleagues, so that they can explore their own school priorities and further their school improvement work, hence the title 'Reflective improvement'.

2. Implementation

In June/July 2021 LA Maintained schools were invited to express interest in both a) receiving a peer review and b) senior leaders within school teams being members of review teams for other schools. All 18 LA Maintained schools positively completed their submissions by the end of the summer term. There were no 'nil returns'.

Over the summer break, the schedule for all 18 peer reviews, with timing and the composition of peer review teams was drafted. This enabled letters to be distributed to schools in early September 2021 with the relevant information. The LA business support team were instrumental in the administration of the process.

Training for participants in the peer review process was facilitated in a LA Maintained schools' headteacher briefing, with the training distributed for cascading to senior leaders within individual schools. For review team leaders, including headteachers, LA officers and an external consultant, a separate training session was organised to consider the additional responsibilities. This activity enabled much discussion and the sharing of previous experience plus the opportunity to consider any potential areas of difficulty or barriers.

- 14 out of 18 peer reviews successfully took place during the 2021 - 2022 school year.
- Of the 4 that did not happen, this was due in main to staffing absence and issues resulting from Covid-19. One school deferred because they received an Ofsted inspection.
- Some peer reviews were rescheduled from the original dates, but this was managed proactively by review team leaders and headteachers.
- On rare occasions review team members had to withdraw due to personal or school reasons. This was effectively covered by school senior leaders stepping in at late notice, even if for some of the time of the peer review.
- The peer review at the only LA Maintained secondary school required more review team members from Key Stage 3 and 4. This was enabled through reaching out to secondary schools within Multi Academy Trusts, hence the team for this peer review came from across the Portsmouth Education Partnership.

3. Feedback

In June 2022, two feedback surveys were released for:

- peer review host school leaders and
- peer review team members

The surveys contained a variety of question types from Yes/No/Maybe to ranked and free text responses.

Host school feedback

- 8 out of 14 schools responded
- 100% found the 3-stage process of pre-review, review day and post-review workshop helpful
- 100% gained something specific from the peer review that will move the school forward
- 87.5% agreed that the peer review had a positive impact on staff, 1 response was unsure
- 100% agreed the peer review met the school's needs
- 100% would recommend the peer review process to a colleague
- Suggestions for the future of the process include using the PIE model (provision, impact, evaluation) to aid clarity in feedback; including schools beyond those locally; and further consideration about the relevance and usefulness of the post-review workshop.
- Other comments included the effective organisation and preparation of the lead reviewer; clarity around defining the focus of the review line of enquiry; agreeing timings well in advance; the professionalism of team reviewers being thorough and yet challenging; and whether the post-review workshop was needed.

Review team members feedback

- There were 9 respondents to the survey
- Respondents included headteachers, deputy and assistant headteachers, LA officers and an independent education consultant who were either review team leaders or members
- 88.9% of respondents felt they learnt something new from the peer review
- 77.8% will take something from the peer review that will impact upon their own school or work
- 100% would recommend taking part in a peer review to a colleague
- 1 respondent was unable to make a positive contribution to the peer review as it did not take place and could not be rescheduled, therefore was unable to rate the quality of the process positively
- Suggestions for the future of the process include more sharing of good practice; proformas being useful; the usefulness of the pre- and post-review parts of the process (mixed views from essential to not required); more guidance on writing up findings.
- Other comments included hoping schools will be braver in identifying a line of enquiry that is more challenging; the honest, open and collegiate engagement making the whole process effective.

Additionally, there have been informal and anecdotal examples of feedback:

- *Thank you for your work with us over the past couple of weeks with the peer review. I really value the work and look forward to developing our curriculum as a result*
- *It had rigour and structure which made us focus and value the feedback without it feeling judgemental.*
- *I liked that it involved most of our teaching staff so that it had a wider input than just SLT.*
- *I think this process has a lot to offer us in helping us get back on track to a focus on strategic planning reviewing and evaluation of the school improvement process*
- *This was a worthwhile process.*
- *The peer review enabled us as school leaders to have the time and opportunity to step back and look at our school, having important conversations with each other and external peer colleagues on the review team. Very worthwhile and we would do it again.*
- *The peer review experience has provided us with external validation of our judgements and evaluations.*
- *It is great to get out into other schools, work with other schools, peer colleagues and bring these experiences and learning back*

4. Evaluation

The LA Maintained schools' peer review process 'Reflective Improvement' has clearly been well received by schools as both a quality assurance and developmental school improvement tool. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, schools found the peer review experience extremely useful for multiple reasons, being low cost and high benefit.

Organisation is critical and we need to ensure that dates for all 3 stages of the process are agreed at the earliest opportunity, so all participants are available and committed. During the year it became clear that schools wanted more time between the actual review day and the post-review workshop to enable senior leadership teams to synthesise the findings of the peer review, decide the follow-actions and begin to plan for and enact these. This was mutually agreed, and a degree of flexibility built in immediately and in the updated version of the process for 2022-23.



Some schools were less convinced about the advantages of the post-review workshop however other parties remain certain that this 'so what' part of the process is vital. Without the review aspect of the Plan-Do-Review cycle we would miss the opportunity for objective professional discussion, reflection and support upon how things could be better. It is this considered and collaborative activity that may generate key insights, ideas and actions to see if further improvements can be made.

5. The way forward

- Invite LA Maintained schools to take part in the Peer Review process 'Reflective Improvement' for 2022-23
- Agree dates for all aspects of the peer review to be established as far as possible in advance of each peer review
- Revisit training for review team leaders and members
- Ensure peer review team leaders are briefed and clear about expectations for each part of the process and the completion of relevant useful documentation
- Clarify the importance of the post-review workshop for all schools and leaders
- Follow up on the submission of brief summary findings to the local authority from each peer review, so that learning can be gathered and evaluated