

Navigating Ofsted: Nurturing Purposeful Collaboration in Professional Learning



Why is Collaboration Important?

A strong evidence base shows that purposeful collaboration and the sharing of expertise are powerful drivers of improved teaching, pupil outcomes and school culture. Collaboration impacts:



TEACHING QUALITY

- Collaborative environments allow teachers to improve practice more over time ([Kraft & Papay, 2014](#)).
- Pedagogical decision-making, reflection and self-efficacy are strengthened ([Vangrieken et al., 2015](#)).

PUPIL OUTCOMES

- Strong collaborative cultures produce higher pupil outcomes, including for disadvantaged students ([Mora-Ruano et al., 2019](#); [Ronfeldt et al., 2015](#)).
- They also improve understanding, motivation and engagement in pupils ([Cordingley et al., 2020](#)).

TEACHER SATISFACTION

- Staff feel more valued, confident, motivated and resilient. ([Vangrieken, 2015](#)).
- Collaboration improves retention, reduces isolation (linked to burnout) and strengthens professional identity ([Kraft & Papay, 2014](#)).

SCHOOL CULTURE

- High-performing professional environments (discussion of practice, shared problem-solving, and inclusive staff contribution) are more adaptive, resilient, and responsive to challenges ([Coe, Kime & Singleton, 2022](#)).

Our recent CPD Landscape report* echoes the research, respondents citing collaboration as a feature of the most impactful CPD and most commonly used structure in schools (35%).



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‘Having time to collaborate and reflect with colleagues meant I could process the ideas and actually embed them.’

CPD Landscape Report, p38

What problems are leaders trying to solve?

According to our work with schools and national research (2025)

Which of these scenarios feel familiar?

Leaders invest significant hours in professional development, but they don't see sustained change in classroom practice.

- ▶ **'15% of teachers and leaders feel there is effective ongoing support and follow-up after CPD' p41**

Leaders rely on the same group of people to lead most professional development, meaning others' expertise remains under the radar.

- ▶ **'I am often asked to lead parts of the CPD, but there's rarely any focus on developing me.' p37**

Leaders want to develop consistency of practices across the setting, but teachers or departments are working in silos.

- ▶ **'12% feel that professional learning addresses the diverse needs of staff' p9**

Leaders haven't yet found the structures or time for meaningful collaboration that feels worth the effort.

- ▶ **'Coaching (22%), mentoring (29%) and peer observation (30%) are the least used formats of CPD' p33**

What practice are leaders working towards?

Based on the Ofsted Framework (2025)

The framework highlights leaders building a purposeful, collaborative learning culture where staff feel supported to grow their expertise together.

- ▶ **'professional learning includes purposeful collaboration between teachers on: the curriculum, teaching and assessment... behaviour... necessary adaptations for disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND...' p75**

- ▶ **'leaders establish a strong culture of staff professionalism, which includes a commitment from all staff to continuous improvement in their expertise and effectiveness' p75**

- ▶ **'leaders prioritise and participate in professional learning; they act as role models for all staff' p75**

Leaders who create the conditions for collaborative professional learning also support other areas of the framework such as:

- **Curriculum and Teaching:** Creating a shared understanding of the curriculum and effective teaching in their context through strengthening subject and pedagogical knowledge, building consistency, and addressing gaps in learning
- **Inclusion:** Embedding adaptive teaching as part of everyday practice through sharing expertise and working together to understand the needs of disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND.

Where might you start in nurturing purposeful collaboration between staff?

To support your thinking around this area, you might like to start by reflecting on these questions. You may find it helpful to discuss these with your colleagues.

- Where do staff currently feel most able to talk honestly about teaching and learning? Where do they feel least able to do so?
- Whose voices are heard most frequently in your professional development plans? Whose expertise might be underused or overlooked?
- How do senior and middle leaders model vulnerability, curiosity and openness about their own practice?
- What specific aspect of teaching or behaviour, if improved collectively, could make the biggest difference for pupils this year?
- What regular time and structures (e.g. PLCs, triads, coaching, enquiry groups) already exist that can be strengthened rather than starting from scratch?
- How is staff expertise currently identified and mapped across phases, subjects and roles?
- In what ways are support staff and colleagues with responsibility for SEND meaningfully involved in professional learning?

Every school or setting will be at their own specific starting point based on their individual circumstances, vision and culture. Here is an example of what purposeful collaboration might look like in a particular setting.

Scenario: Building Momentum

Context:

This primary school already had some collaborative structures in place through regular phase meetings, but leaders wanted to strengthen consistency across year groups.

Developing collaboration:

They introduced simple discussion prompts to help teams talk more purposefully about teaching and learning and broadened practice spotlights so a wider range of colleagues (including early career teachers and teaching assistants) could share what they were trying.

The school refined a shared problem of practice around questioning during carpet sessions and guided groups, using pupil work samples and short video clips to anchor discussions.

The enquiry cycle was used across a whole term so teams could build and revisit insights rather than starting fresh each half-term. Leaders also developed a live expertise map, noting strengths observed during informal walk-throughs to help connect colleagues intentionally across the school.

Scenario: Embedding and Refining

Context:

This large secondary school wanted to strengthen its collaborative culture, which was visible but inconsistent, with observation welcomed but not regularly used and coaching practised informally by some departments but not universally.

Developing collaboration:

The leader at this school strengthened collaboration by making coaching a regular, non-judgemental entitlement for all staff and embedding an enquiry process as a shared structure for evidence-informed improvement. Leaders protected time for coaching conversations, trained internal coaches and aligned coaching goals with each department's enquiry focus. The enquiry model was expanded from a small trial to a whole-school approach linked directly to school priorities, giving every member of staff a clear process for investigating pupil learning, trialling strategies and evaluating impact together.

Leaders then focused on making these structures inclusive and routine. Protected department time, weekly CPD and scheduled evaluation points brought staff together for joint planning and reflection, while support staff were increasingly included through enquiry groups and access to coaching. By modelling these habits and creating predictable rhythms for collaboration, leaders helped coaching and enquiry become part of everyday practice.

Where might you go next to learn more?



Instantly access our affordable, 90-minute online module, [Leveraging Internal Expertise and Knowledge Sharing](#), to develop purposeful collaboration in your setting.



Complete our CPD self-audit to explore the coherence of your current provision and identify what you might focus on next to improve, or go into more depth with our Diagnostic Review of CPD and develop a change plan through our [Building Expert Schools Programme](#). Either the CPD self-audit or Diagnostic Review will help you present credible evidence of current focus, provision and improvement plans to Ofsted.



Not sure where to start? Book a free 1-1 coaching call on our [CPD Leadership Hub](#).