

Suffolk Learning and Improvement Network (SLIN)
Handbook
2024 - 2025



Introduction

Welcome to The Suffolk Learning and Improvement Network (SLIN). SLIN is a Suffolk, school led, Local Authority (LA) managed school improvement tool. It is based on the principle of schools choosing to engage in a process of peer reviews to support their leadership of school improvement and to improve outcomes for their pupils.

SLIN is in its seventh year. Future funding arrangements have changed. The vast majority of school leaders voted for a 'no cost to schools' LA managed SLIN model. This is a pilot year of that model.

By choosing to engage in SLIN, school leaders access a great capacity to support their leadership of school improvement and opportunities for their staff. By choosing to be part of the SLIN community, school leaders are making a commitment to their peer review colleagues to engage fully in the process and have a shared responsibility to each other.

In this handbook you will find everything that you need to guide you through your engagement with SLIN. The SLIN definition of School Leader for the purpose of this handbook refers to: headteacher, principal, head of school and executive headteacher.

Background to the model

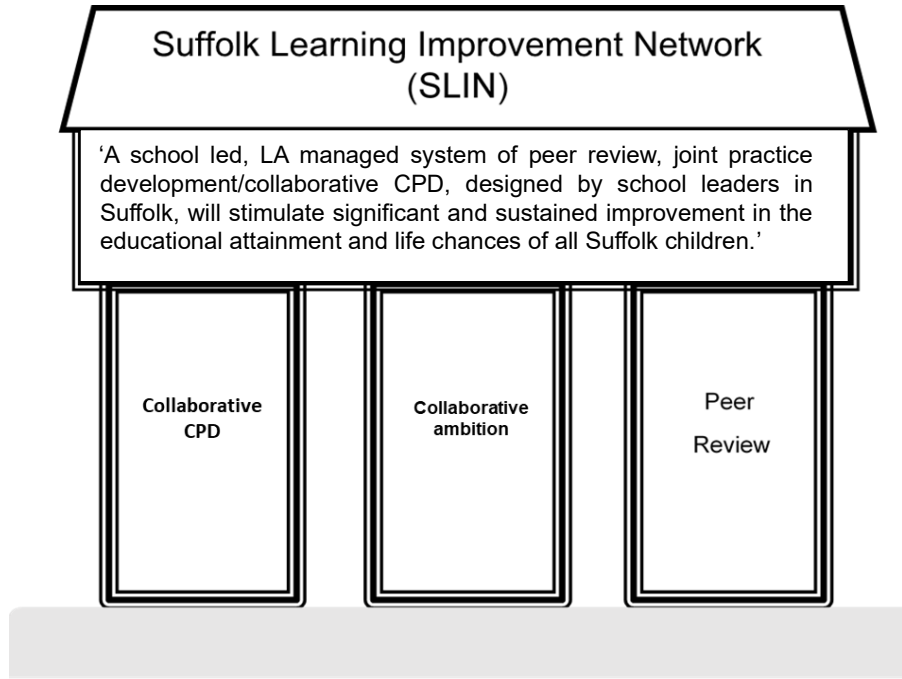
The Headteacher Associations, and LA colleagues recognised the importance of establishing a self-improving school system to improve attainment in all phases to meet and then exceed national. SLIN was designed by Suffolk school leaders working in collaboration with Suffolk LA colleagues.

The principles and features of SLIN are based on considerable research, which was undertaken by the Headteachers' Associations and the LA in 2015/16. Visits were undertaken to Liverpool, Knowsley, Peterborough, and Hounslow, where school led peer review had already been established to then develop the systems and processes that would be best for Suffolk schools. The Suffolk Learning and Improvement Network is the outcome of very fruitful collaboration between all partners. SLIN will go from strength to strength with this continued partnership.

The Suffolk Learning and Improvement Network

SLIN is a collaborative partnership between publicly funded schools in Suffolk and the Local Authority. It promotes collective responsibility for the educational outcomes of children and young people in the county's schools.

When we engage in SLIN, we share the moral purpose which is:



The aims of SLIN are to:

- Foster and embed ambition, high aspiration, and achievement for all the children and young people educated in Suffolk.
- Establish a distinctive and sustainable 'Suffolk' approach to support for school improvement, created, developed and owned by Suffolk schools, and founded on the principles of 'system leadership', in which school leaders contribute to school improvement beyond their own school.
- Adopt an approach to school improvement through robust peer review that supports and challenges all schools at whatever stage of their improvement journey.
- Provide a systematic way to enable school leaders to share their learning and access support from each other.

The SLIN Collaborative Ambition

At the heart of SLIN, the underlying core principle is the improvement of outcomes for all Suffolk pupils. SLIN has established a collective responsibility for improving outcomes where every school contributes. We will collate and share the data for % pupils at EXS in the cohort for 'SLIN schools' as one figure to model the collective impact of 'One SLIN school'. Individual schools' data will not be shared outside the review group.

A key aspect of the peer reviews is a conversation about pupil outcomes and subsequent action to further improve them – areas of strength and areas in development.

Collaborative Professional Development

Collaborative Professional Development (CPD) will be informed by report priorities and outcomes from quality assurance (see below for further details). This will facilitate the sharing of practice and learning across schools through:

- an annual event to share experiences, facilitate links between schools and provide an opportunity for CPD linked to peer review.
- regular newsletters to share learning and case studies.
- bitesize online sessions to share experiences and learning.

These offer an opportunity for school leaders to share their experiences, both positive and 'even better ifs' or 'if we did it again' and be open to being contacted for further discussion. The goal of this shared learning is to enable school leaders to connect with colleagues and learn more about different areas of their work. This is not a directory of "best or exemplary practice".

Peer Reviews

SLIN provides school leaders with the opportunity to work collaboratively following a tried and tested, evidence-based model. It provides:

- A space for school leaders to receive fresh perspectives on their school's work from their peers
- An opportunity to validate what is working well.
- Fresh eyes on areas under development.
- An opportunity to develop skills in using evidence to evaluate, summarise key messages, and determine appropriate next steps.

Every school has both knowledge to share and areas for learning or development.

Considerations for creating triads

Schools will have the opportunity to collaborate with schools they don't typically work with. Triads will be reviewed every two years, with a focus on ensuring the distance between schools is less than an hour's journey time.

Engaging in SLIN means:

- All colleagues will prioritise peer review in their schedules as part of their commitment and responsibility to their triad colleagues.
- The triad meeting is for school leaders. The host school may also involve their senior leaders for professional development.
- The review will be conducted by the school leader from the lead and support schools. Other colleagues may attend with prior agreement from the Triad.
- All colleagues within the triad will commit sufficient time to meeting preparation, participation in the review, and follow-up.
- All colleagues will ensure they are appropriately prepared for their review visits.
- Any issues that arise during the day will be shared openly and professionally between the triad school leaders to ensure they are resolved, maximising the benefit from the review.
- Reviews will be evidence-based, with all findings supported by documented evidence.
- The host school owns the peer review report. School leaders often choose to share it as part of their school improvement reporting with their Chair of Governors, MAT CEO, and any school improvement professionals they work with. If there is a difference of opinion during the peer review, this will be reflected in the report.

Reviews

All SLIN schools will have two peer reviews a year (each review lasting one day). The first will be in the Autumn term. The second review can be scheduled at a time that best meets the needs of the school. The second review is a good opportunity to look at what has changed in areas that were part of the first review. What has been done? What difference has it made? Where is the school now in their journey of improvement?

The lead peer reviewer will send dates for the peer review, for preparation and planning meetings to ELStandardsandexcellence@suffolk.gov.uk QA will be planned using these dates.

The focus of peer reviews will:

- evaluate an aspect of the quality of education.
- contribute to the SLIN Collaborative Ambition.
- establish areas of school improvement to feed into wider CPD.

A range of evidence should be used such as:

- discussions with school leaders.
- published performance data.
- sampling pupils' work.
- pupil and staff voice.
- information from the host school's internal monitoring.

These will enable peer reviewers to validate the school's chosen area of strength or provide support for identifying next steps in another chosen area. Feedback from previous peer reviews has been that preparing questions to explore, helps to plan activity and keep focus on the review process.

The priorities from the peer review will be sent by the host school to ELStandardsandexcellence@suffolk.gov.uk These will be used anonymously and collectively to inform the collaborative CPD annual event, facilitate links between schools and articles in newsletters.

There is specific detail in Appendix 1 to support with planning and carrying out your peer reviews.

Quality Assurance (QA):

QA is to support impact as a whole system level strategy to achieve the aims and intentions of SLIN.

QA activity will focus on:

- Fidelity to the guidance for peer reviews as set out in the handbook.
- Strengths and lessons to be learnt from peer reviews to inform collaborative CPD.

Experienced LA colleagues specialising in school improvement, will carry out the QA function. Whenever possible, these colleagues will be selected to be outside the school improvement officers of the host school or the lead reviewer's school.

QA activity will include:

- shadowing a set up.
- shadowing a peer review.
- gathering feedback from the school leaders involved in the review.
- reviewing reports in line with the handbook for fidelity to the model and alignment with the principles and purpose of SLIN.

A written summary of the QA findings will be shared with all schools in the triad within 5 days of the review, following verbal feedback shared at the time of the QA activity.

A summary of headlines from QA reports will be used by the oversight group in their termly meetings to inform next steps and annual events.

Further detail of QA activity is included in Appendix 4.

Oversight of SLIN

As a school led, LA managed approach, SLIN will be overseen by LA colleagues from Education Skills and Learning, representatives from the HT associations for schools involved in SLIN, and volunteer HTs participating in SLIN.

Through half termly meetings, we will gain an overview of the number of schools in SLIN, reviews conducted, key findings from quality assurance activities including school leader feedback, and a summary of priorities identified through peer reviews.

Oversight will also keep sight on the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) associated with the three pillars of SLIN:

- Percentage of pupils in 'SLIN schools' and 'non SLIN schools' achieving expected standards (EXS) compared to national averages.
- Percentage of schools maintaining or improving their Ofsted rating to 'good' or 'outstanding'.

Operational function of SLIN

As part of the LA-managed approach, colleagues in Education, Skills, and Learning (ESL) will coordinate triads and maintain an updated handbook.

The ESL team will arrange an annual event to bring together the school leaders engaged in SLIN and arrange newsletters, bite-sized sessions, and tools for sharing learning.

Appendix 1 - Roles and responsibilities

An effective peer review will align with the school's needs, providing the necessary support for ongoing school improvement efforts. The peer review process will complement and bolster, rather than replace, other school improvement initiatives that contribute to the holistic support framework for the school's improvement journey.

Before the review

Host school leader	Lead review school leader	Support review school leader	QA partner
<p>Engage actively with the process respectfully and openly throughout the planning and preparation, review day and follow up to establish the strong professional rapport that will maximise the impact of the peer review opportunity.</p>			
<p>Selects two or three areas of focus for the peer review that include strengths and areas the school is developing or improving, aligned with priorities in the school improvement plan and shares these with the lead reviewer to plan the agenda for the day.</p> <p>Plans the peer review day with the lead reviewer.</p> <p>Sends necessary documentation to the lead and support school leaders at least one week before the peer review. Recommended documents include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Suffolk School Improvement Summary (SSIS) sheet (provided by the LA) or equivalent. ▪ Current pupil progress performance information for all 	<p>Liaises with the host school leader and support school leaders prior to the visit, to consider and agree the focus/foci for the review. With the host school leader, plan the peer review day.</p> <p>Arranges an online meeting. Schools have found it useful to have an online meeting when new triads are set up before the first review to set dates for the year and collectively plan the agenda for the peer review day.</p> <p>Sends the dates of the preparation meetings and the reviews to ELStandardsandexcellence@suffolk.gov.uk</p> <p>Ensures familiarity with the host school's documentation. Give sufficient time to reading and absorbing the information</p>	<p>Plays an active part in the Review process through preparation. Ensures familiarity with the host school's documentation. Gives sufficient time to reading and absorbing the information provided and planning questions as a result.</p>	<p>Uses the information from the preparation for the review as part of the QA process.</p> <p>Models that they are not part of the review team. If asked, they may make suggestions or raise questions to strengthen the review.</p> <p>Confirms QA arrangements and dates with the lead reviewer.</p>

<p>year groups, if relevant to the focus areas or as desired.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most recent OFSTED report, if conducted since the last peer review visit, along with any new relevant external reports. ▪ Relevant sections of the SEF and School Development Plan, such as Leadership and Management, supported by sample evidence. ▪ Any other pertinent reports that the host school wishes to share. <p>With the lead reviewer, finalises and circulate the programme for the day, with the focus/foci for the peer review visit specified on the programme (area of development and a strength as a minimum).</p>	<p>provided and planning challenging questions as a result of the reading.</p> <p>With the host school, finalises and circulate the programme for the day, with the focus/foci for the peer review visit specified on the programme (area of development and a strength as a minimum).</p>		
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During the review			
Host school leader	Lead review school leader	Support review school leader	QA partner
<p>Manages logistics so that the day runs smoothly.</p> <p>Ensures that a suitable room is available for the day with access to refreshments, including a 'working lunch'.</p> <p>Provides a contextual sheet for the classes or sets to be available with SEN, PP, G&T groups etc. if pertinent to the area of focus.</p> <p>Where appropriate and possible, invites other members of SLT to participate in the day as part of their CPD.</p> <p>Enables the review team to use a range of evidence to support comprehensive and</p>	<p>Leads the review, modelling that this is a peer review, not an inspection, and chair the discussions about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evidence in relation to focus/foci, validation of strength and further support/ consideration/suggestions for area of development. ▪ Projected Key Stage outcomes with reference to the SLIN Collaborative Ambition. ▪ Pupil progress with reference to groups of pupils and comparison to national (the SSIS will be useful for this, and the host school may share it). ▪ Impact of Leadership and Management, particularly relating to quality of education. ▪ Identify and make suggestions about any gaps in the school improvement work. Or how this could be strengthened. ▪ Progress and impact of action to address areas for development identified in previous peer review (if applicable). <p>Using the range of evidence, and working with the support reviewer, summarises the key findings from the day and share these in the verbal feedback at the end of the day.</p>	<p>Engages in the Review, modelling that this is a peer review, not an inspection.</p> <p>Asks follow up questions as appropriate</p> <p>Minutes all meetings to support Lead, being mindful of final report format.</p> <p>Contributes to the verbal feedback meeting as invited by the lead reviewer.</p>	<p>Observes the review process in the school. The QA partner does not contribute to the review dialogue unless asked. If asked, makes suggestions or raises questions during meetings and the review day</p> <p>Shares verbal feedback at the time and in the written report below.</p> <p>Focuses QA activity during the review day on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fidelity to the guidance for peer reviews as set out in the handbook. ▪ Strengths and lessons to be learnt from peer reviews to inform collaborative CPD.

<p>accurate exploration into the areas chosen.</p>	<p>Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Celebrating the school’s strengths, particularly in relation to Leadership and Management/ Quality of Education. ▪ Validating or sharing suggestions regarding areas of development. ▪ Discussing further support that would help the leadership of improvement from Triad, the SLIN community or the wider networks. ▪ Identify opportunities for the school to contribute to Shared Learnings. <p>Where possible, draft the report during the day.</p>		
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After the review			
Host school leader	Lead review school leader	Support review school leader	QA partner
<p>Sends any amendments to the draft peer review report to the lead reviewer within 5 working days.</p> <p>Uses the outcomes of the review to support leadership of school improvement and share these with staff, governors/ MAT.</p> <p>Sends the priorities from the review report to ELStandardsandexcellence@suffolk.gov.uk for LA colleagues to use anonymously and collectively as part of the planning for collaborative CPD and to upload to 'shared learnings' document.</p>	<p>Writes the draft Peer Review Report, in collaboration with the support review school leader, within two days in an evidence-based, evaluative style focusing on the impact of provision on children's learning. Write the report using the standard Peer Review Report format as included in the appendix.</p> <p>Sends to the host school to read and return with any amendments within 5 working days of the peer review.</p> <p>Finalises the report and send the final version to the host school leader.</p>	<p>Liaises with the lead reviewer to produce the final report.</p>	<p>Summarises the outcome of QA activity in a written report and send it to the lead reviewer within 5 days of the peer review. The template for QA feedback as set out in Appendix 4 Will be used.</p> <p>Uses QA feedback to inform collaborative CPD.</p>

Appendix 2 - Example outline for peer review visit day.

The triad school leaders will be able to amend this timetable to suit the needs of the review. A final timetable must be agreed by the triad school leaders before the day of the review.

8.30 – 10.00

Triad school leaders meet to discuss:

- Discussion about the school context; any issues for the reviewers to be aware of.
- Linked to the areas of focus for the review, initial observations from pre reading and evidence shared before the review day.
- Confirm the questions to explore and evidence to be seen as part of the exploration of the areas of focus for the Peer Review
- Current pupil progress data and the trajectory for Key Stage outcomes, with reference to SLIN Collaborative Ambition.
- Priorities and actions in the school development plan linked to the areas of focus for the review.

10.00 – 12.00

Scrutiny of evidence to enable reviewers to validate a school's identified strength and provide fresh eyes on the area for development.

Time spent could include lesson and group observations and learning walks, book scrutiny and conversations with pupils and middle leaders. This will contribute to the evidence base to validate or question the school's self-evaluation.

12.00 – 1.00

Discussions with Peer Review Team on findings from morning's activities over lunch.

1.00– 3.00

Further scrutiny of evidence to enable reviewers to evaluate a school's identified strength or area of development.

3.00 – 4.00 Final discussion

This will include:

- Discussion of findings from the day relating to leadership and management and area of visit focus/foci.
- Discussion of findings from the day relating to pupil progress and attainment.
- A professional conversation to agree upon and document the findings related to the school's evaluation of effectiveness, specifically regarding the impact of leadership and management, based on the evidence observed during the review.
- Summarising learning to be shared with other schools; priorities and recommendations to support the school's continued improvement.

Appendix 3 Peer review report template

The Suffolk Learning and Improvement Network



Peer Review Report 2024-2025

School		Date of Peer Review: Autumn Summer
Contextual information		
Summer 2024- progress with planned action from Autumn 2023		
Date of last OFSTED Inspection and Judgement		
Lead Peer Reviewer		
Support Peer Reviewer		

FOCUS Lines of Enquiry for Peer Review Visits	
Autumn 2024: <i>(written as a question)</i>	Strengths
	Area for Development
Summer 2025 <i>(written as a question)</i>	Strengths
	Area for Development
Evidence shared today	
Summary of the evidence shared and considered in this peer review. See handbook for examples of evidence Which evidence was most pertinent to this line of enquiry?	

Autumn 2024 Peer Review - Key findings based on the evidence
Strengths: Would you be willing to share as part of a peer to peer support process?
Area for Development:
What support would you welcome?
Actions linked to key findings from peer review:
Current overview of achievement – if relevant to the line of enquiry

Summer 2025 Peer Review- Key findings based on evidence
Impact of Autumn 2024 actions:
Strengths:
Would you be to share as part of a peer to peer support process?
Area for Development (this may well be a continuation of Autumn focus)
What support would you welcome?
Actions linked to key findings from peer review:
Current overview of achievement – if relevant to the line of enquiry
Signatures:
School leader Date
Lead Peer Reviewer Date

Appendix 4 - QA activity

QA template

QA is to support the impact of SLIN as a whole system level strategy to achieve the aims and intentions of SLIN.

- LA colleagues with appropriate experience and expertise in school improvement will be involved in the QA activity.
- This will be done professionally, respectfully, and openly in all meetings, modelling that the lead reviewer is leading the review. QA will involve listening and observing. The QA partner will not be part of the review team.
- If asked, they may make suggestions or raise questions during the day to strengthen the review. Verbal feedback will be shared at the time and only aspects shared verbally will be included in the written report below.

QA activity will focus on

- Fidelity to the guidance for peer reviews as set out in the handbook.
- Strengths and lessons to be learnt from peer reviews to inform collaborative CPD.

QA activity includes:

- Shadowing a set up and preparation.
- Shadowing a peer review
- Written feedback on the review reports based on fidelity to the guidance in the handbook; modelling adherence to the pillars and purpose of SLIN and gathering feedback from the HTs involved in the review.

Strengths of the peer review

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-
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-
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Areas for consideration

-
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Appendix 5 - FAQs

- Who owns the peer review report and how is it used?
The host school uses the information to support them in their leadership of school improvement. The report belongs to them, and ownership of peer review is with the host school.
- Can our triad stay together longer than 2 years?
We would support school leaders in staying in their triad where SLIN is having a positive impact, where possible.
- Are there other considerations beyond geography and distance taken into account when putting triads together?
Other considerations may include schools who have worked together before to extend your networks and links with other schools.
Ofsted grades will not be taken into consideration.

SLIN – a Suffolk, school led, LA managed school improvement tool / model	
What will stay the same?	What will be different?
HT led	School led (to encompass roles such as Head of School/Executive Head etc)
Optional – choose to take part	
Is built on the 3 columns of SLIN which are peer review: collaborative CPD and collaborative ambition	
Is focussed on improvement	
Collaborative ambition about children's attainment and learning	No facilitators
Triads based on open transparent criteria	No strategic lead
Is a school improvement tool which forms part of the school's whole school improvement support	QA
	No board – oversight group
Reports are confidential owned by the school They are a tool for HTs to support them in their lead of improvement.	Operational detail managed by LA officers in ES and L
	No funding for collaborative CPD and no bids