

Reflection prompts: Professional learning communities

Introduction

These reflection prompts have been developed to align with the research on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and are designed to help leaders think critically about the key considerations when implementing, supporting, and sustaining them in their setting.

The prompts are also informed by the EEF's A School's Guide to Implementation (2024). This guidance highlights the importance of adopting supportive behaviours, attending to contextual enablers and barriers, and using a structured but flexible process to embed change. That process follows four overlapping phases: explore, prepare, deliver, and sustain. While leaders may wish to consult the EEF guidance directly, its principles have been integrated throughout to support a coherent and implementation-informed approach to professional learning.

Phase 1: Strategic Alignment & Awareness

- How might PLCs connect with our professional learning strategy and wider improvement goals?
- What specific teaching and learning priorities could PLCs help us address (for example: assessment, curriculum design, subject pedagogy)?
- What do staff currently understand about PLCs, and how do they see them as different from existing professional learning or meetings?
- How are we involving senior and middle leaders in modelling the value of collaborative inquiry as part of school culture?
- How clearly have we communicated why PLCs matter and how they reflect our values for professional learning?

Phase 2: Design & Preparation

- What PLC structure best fits our context and goals?
- How are staff involved in shaping the focus or inquiry questions within their PLCs to ensure relevance and agency?
- How can we make sure time and space are protected for meaningful PLC work?
- What preparation do facilitators or group leads need to support inquiry, manage dialogue, and maintain focus?
- Which tools or protocols might support consistency without limiting flexibility?

Phase 3: Launch & Communication

- How are we introducing PLCs to staff so that their purpose, structure, and expectations are clear and so they are understood as spaces for inquiry rather than judgement?
- How are we preparing staff emotionally and practically for the challenges and benefits of collaborative professional dialogue?
- What cultural norms (such as equity of voice, shared ownership, and respect for difference) do we want to establish from the start?
- How will we ensure that early PLC sessions feel purposeful, inclusive, and aligned to real teaching and learning problems?

Phase 4: Evaluation & Iteration

- What signs will show that PLCs are strengthening teacher knowledge, confidence, and collaboration?
- Are we gathering regular, low-burden feedback from staff to understand what's working and what needs adjustment?
- How will we monitor whether PLCs are staying focused on inquiry and improvement; not slipping into compliance or resource sharing?
- If we want to consider pupil outcomes, what evidence might help us understand possible links without overclaiming?
- How can we capture broader benefits of PLCs, such as leadership development or curriculum refinement, even if they aren't immediately visible?

Phase 5: Scaling & Embedding

- How do we make PLCs part of the ongoing rhythm of professional learning, so they feel embedded rather than episodic?
- What leadership or structural changes could threaten PLCs, and how might we address these?
- Are we supporting new staff or mid-year joiners to engage with PLCs in a meaningful way?
- What might a pipeline of future PLC facilitators look like and how are we developing their skills and confidence?
- How will we keep PLCs responsive to changing needs while holding onto their core focus on inquiry and collaboration?