

## Teacher Collaboration

<b>Impact on pupils</b>	<b>Impact on teachers</b>	<b>Strength of evidence</b>
Mixed	Mixed	Moderate

### What is it?

Teacher collaboration, in this strand, means colleagues working together as a form of professional learning.

It can be informal in nature, such as teachers sharing resources, co-planning lessons, or engaging in ad hoc discussions. It can also take a more structured form, through models such as [lesson study](#) and [professional learning communities](#), which are explored in their own strands.

Collaboration rests on a professional culture of shared values and vision, with staff agreeing common goals. It involves collective responsibility, where success is understood as shared rather than individual. It also involves reflective dialogue, with open and critical conversations about practice.

Above all, collaboration keeps attention on pupil learning and equity, not on exchanging ideas for their own sake.

### Key findings

#### Impact on teachers

Collaboration can strengthen teaching by fostering opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice, engage in shared learning, and receive professional support. Its reported impact on teacher outcomes is mixed but most promising when it is sustained, embedded in daily work, and closely connected to classroom practice.

- **Enhanced professional learning:** Teachers report greater reflection, engagement, and motivation when they collaborate on shared goals. Collaborative approaches can support teacher leadership and professional confidence, particularly where teachers have agency to shape learning goals and direction.
- **Enhanced knowledge and skills:** Collaboration can build both subject expertise and pedagogical understanding, particularly when tied to practical application. The research suggests this may extend to digital competencies, with collaborative training supporting teachers to develop confidence and capability in the use of digital tools and practices.

- **Greater confidence and clarity:** Working with colleagues can increase teachers' self-efficacy and improve their clarity of instruction.
- **Cultural benefits:** Collaborative routines often foster trust, belonging, and positive relationships between teachers and leaders. Structured peer feedback can improve interpersonal relationships and strengthen collective norms around professional dialogue.

However, collaboration can surface tension or conflict where there is limited buy-in, misalignment in values, or insufficient skill in giving and receiving constructive feedback. These findings reinforce the importance of attending to the conditions and behaviours that shape collaborative work, rather than assuming collaboration is inherently beneficial.

## Impact on pupils

The evidence linking teacher collaboration to pupil outcomes is mixed. Some evidence suggests that collaborative models of instruction have a positive and statistically significant impact on pupils' achievement, meaning that pupils in collaborative environments perform better than their peers (8). Some evidence suggests that collaboration is linked to small gains in pupil achievement, particularly in inclusive settings where teachers work closely together, for example through co-teaching (12). However, other reviews mainly examine how collaboration influences what teachers do in their classrooms, rather than measuring its direct impact on pupil outcomes.

- **Improved outcomes reported:** Some research suggests collaboration can support both pupil understanding of taught content and achievement.
- **Mixed findings:** Other reviews report little or no difference in pupil knowledge development, highlighting inconsistency as a factor.
- **Indirect impact:** Positive results are often inferred through teacher report rather than measured by changes in pupil knowledge and skills.
- **Evidence gap:** There are a limited number of reviews that demonstrate sustained impact on pupil learning.

While collaboration may contribute to pupil progress, its impact is usually indirect and harder to evidence than teacher-level gains.

## How effective is the approach?

The evidence on teacher collaboration is mixed, but findings point more consistently to benefits for teachers than for pupils. Teachers often report that working collaboratively strengthens their capacity for reflection, deepens knowledge, and builds professional confidence, with collaboration valued across different phases and types of schools. By contrast, evidence on pupil outcomes is weaker. Few studies measure direct effects on learning, and those that do show inconsistent findings.

The way collaboration is organised also appears to make a difference. Structured models, such as [lesson study](#) or [professional learning communities](#), are designed to build in features like shared vision and reflective dialogue, which are linked with greater professional impact. Informal approaches can also be valuable, but the conditions they create are often less consistent.

Collaboration is reported to be most effective when it integrates with classroom practice and teachers' daily routines, rather than being treated as an add-on. It is also more likely to succeed where leaders actively support it and create the conditions for teachers to engage with it consistently over time.

While many studies are small in scale or rely heavily on teachers' perceptions, the cumulative weight of evidence across reviews provide a moderately strong evidence base. Overall, teacher collaboration appears to have the potential to be a powerful mechanism for professional learning, provided it is thoughtfully designed and supported over time.

## How to implement it well

The evidence suggests that effective teacher collaboration depends on professional behaviours, processes and a level of contextual adaptation that promote trust, ownership, and purposeful learning.

### Behaviours

The research proposes that leaders of professional learning consider how they can embed several professional behaviours:

- **Fostering a culture of trust:** Creating conditions where teachers feel safe to share, challenge, and refine teaching practice together.
- **Balancing ownership with direction:** Allowing teachers to shape collaboration while ensuring there is a clear, shared purpose.
- **Facilitating without dominating:** Skilled facilitators guiding processes, encouraging reflection, and keeping discussions focused.
- **Normalising collaboration as purposeful growth:** Positioning collaboration as part of ongoing professional learning that remains focused on improving outcomes for pupils, not as an optional add-on.
- **Enabling constructive critique:** Encouraging respectful challenge so that differing perspectives strengthen rather than dilute practice.

### Contextual factors

Teacher collaboration is likely to have most impact when aligned with the specific realities of the school. Evidence suggests that leaders consider:

- **Practical fit:** Adapt the approach to phase, consider staffing profile, school size, and improvement priorities.
- **Staff capacity:** Take account of workload, competing initiatives, and readiness to engage so collaboration is introduced with the right support.
- **Strategic positioning:** Embed collaboration within the wider professional learning strategy and attend to cultural legacies that shape trust and attitudes.
- **Leadership modelling:** Visible commitment from senior leaders signals importance and encourages sustained engagement.

### Structured but flexible

Collaboration appears to work best when it follows clear processes while still allowing adaptation. Evidence suggests leaders can support this balance by:

- **Protecting time:** Regular, protected time may help collaboration stay focused on professional learning.
- **Setting clear goals:** Guiding questions can provide direction, while allowing teams flexibility to adapt to pupil needs and emerging insights.
- **Monitoring and adjusting:** Reflecting on progress and refining structures over time seems to help collaboration remain relevant.
- **Embedding routines:** Agreed protocols, such as inquiry cycles or structured dialogue, may provide consistency and momentum.
- **Building continuity:** Systems that anticipate staff or leadership changes can make collaboration more resilient.

## Barriers to effective implementation

Even with thoughtful design, collaborative professional learning may fall short if certain underlying challenges are not managed.

- **Shallow practice:** If collaboration is poorly understood, it can default to surface-level exchanges that feel busy but bring limited growth.
- **Power imbalances:** Reviews suggest some voices may dominate while others are marginalised, reducing trust and authentic engagement.
- **Avoidance of critique:** Without a strong culture of trust, teachers may steer conversations away from challenge, limiting professional learning.
- **Limited feedback capability:** Evidence suggests that collaboration, particularly peer-feedback approaches, can be constrained when teachers lack the specific skills needed to give high-quality, constructive feedback.
- **Competing priorities:** When collaboration runs alongside multiple initiatives, its focus may be diluted or sidelined.
- **Unclear success measures:** If it is not clear what effective collaboration looks like, colleagues may struggle to stay motivated or to judge progress.

The evidence suggests barriers to implementing teacher collaboration as an effective element of professional learning often relate less to the model itself and more to the surrounding culture and conditions.

## Other considerations

The way collaborative professional learning is understood, experienced, and sustained may influence its success. Leaders may want to consider:

- **Varying staff readiness:** Teachers bring different levels of confidence and prior experience, so some may need more modelling and support to engage fully.
- **Keeping collaboration fresh:** Practices often require renewal through new questions, perspectives, and opportunities for reflection.

- **Recognising hidden work:** Effective collaboration may depend on behind-the-scenes efforts such as resolving tensions, checking in with individuals, and adapting approaches.

## Summary

The evidence suggests teacher collaboration can be a valuable form of professional learning, particularly for strengthening teaching practice and professional culture. Its impact, however, appears mixed and depends on how it is designed and supported within each school. Key takeaways for leaders of professional learning to consider include:

- **Cultural conditions matter:** Collaboration is more likely to succeed where staff trust, inclusion, and openness to risk-taking are nurtured.
- **Impact on teachers is more promising than impact on pupils:** Evidence more consistently shows benefits for teacher learning, with pupil outcomes less secure and often indirect.
- **Design influences effectiveness:** Collaboration appears most promising when job-embedded, clearly structured, and aligned with school priorities.
- **Sustainability requires support:** Regular time, facilitation, and leadership commitment may help collaboration endure.

Teacher collaboration should be seen as a strategic investment in professional culture rather than a quick fix. Its value lies in careful design choices that balance structure with trust and flexibility.

**When citing this strand, please use the following reference:**

**National Institute of Teaching (2026). NIoT Evidence Toolkit: Teacher collaboration strand**

## References

	<b>Review</b>	<b>Years of research</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b># studies</b>	<b>Countries</b>	<b>Impact on pupils</b>	<b>Impact on teachers</b>	<b>Reporting quality</b>
1	de Jong, Meirink, & Admiraal (2022) School-based collaboration as a learning context for teachers: A systematic review	1995-2021	ITE & CPD	50	Africa, Asia, Europe, North America	Not reported	Mixed	Medium
2	DeLuca et al. (2015) Collaborative inquiry as a professional learning structure for educators: a scoping review.	2000-2013	CPD only	42	Canada, Hong Kong, USA	Mixed	Mixed	Medium
3	Fernandez-Rio, Rivera-Pérez, & Iglesias (2022) Cooperative learning interventions and associated outcomes in future teachers: A systematic review.	2001-2020	ITE only	19	England, Germany, Indonesia, Israel, Kuwait, Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, Türkiye, USA	Mixed	Positive	High
4	Holmqvist & Lelling (2021). Teachers' collaborative professional development for inclusive education.	After 1990	CPD only	21	Australia, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Ireland, South Africa, USA, Zanzibar	Mixed	Positive	Medium
5	Ramos et al. (2022). Pedagogical models for the facilitation of teacher professional development via video-supported collaborative learning. A review of the state of the art.	2003-2019	CPD only	120	Unclear	Not reported	Mixed	Medium
6	Vangrieken, et al. (2015). Teacher	2000-2012	CPD only	82	Australia, Belgium,	Positive	Mixed	High

	collaboration: A systematic review				Canada, Denmark, Greece, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, UK, USA			
7	Camili Trujillo et al. (2024) Training for teacher professional development in schools: systematic review	2010–2021	CPD only	68	Australia, Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, Ecuador, Israel, Jordan, Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, UK, USA	Not reported	Mixed	Medium
8	Vembye, Weiss, & Bhat (2023) The Effects of Co-Teaching and Related Collaborative Models of Instruction on Student Achievement: A Systematic Review and Meta- Analysis	1998–2020	CPD only	76	Multiple countries	Positive	Not reported	Excellent
9	Fry, Nakar, & Zorn (2025). Professional learning interventions for inquiry-based pedagogies in primary classrooms: A scoping review.	2012–2022	CPD only	22	Multiple countries	Positive	Mixed	Medium
10	De la Iglesia, Forteza, & Duma (2024). Peer feedback in teacher professional development: A systematic review	2012-2022	CPD only	30	Multiple countries	Not Reported	Mixed	Medium
11	Jin et al. (2024). Implementation models for teacher peer feedback: A systematic review.	2000-2020	CPD only	29	Countries not mentioned	Not Reported	Mixed	Medium
12	Rytivaara et al. (2024). Learning to Co-Teach: A Systematic Review.	2009-2018	CPD only	17 (8 studies and 9 full-text reports)	Multiple countries	Not Reported	Positive	Medium

## Review citations

de Jong, L., Meirink, J., & Admiraal, W. (2022). School-based collaboration as a learning context for teachers: A systematic review. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *112*, 101927.

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Fernandez-Rio, J., Rivera-Pérez, S., & Iglesias, D. (2022). Cooperative learning interventions and associated outcomes in future teachers: A systematic review. *Revista De Psicodidáctica*, *27*(2), 118–131.

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Camilli Trujillo, C., Pastor Gil, L., Serrano Díaz, S., & Aymá González, L. (2024). Training for teacher professional development in schools: Systematic Review. *Revista De Educación*, *1*(406), 203–231.

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Rytivaara, A., Ahtiainen, R., Palmu, I., Pesonen, H., & Malinen, O.-P. (2024). Learning to Co-Teach: A Systematic Review. *Education Sciences*, *14*(1), 113. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14010113>