

Reflection prompts: Leading professional learning

Introduction

These reflection prompts have been developed to align with the research on Leading Professional Learning and to support leaders in making evidence-informed decisions. They distil the key messages into practical, contextualised questions that help those responsible for professional learning consider what this means for their own school or trust. The focus here is on how leaders at all levels shape the culture, routines, and structures that allow professional learning to thrive.

The prompts are also informed by the EEF's A School's Guide to Implementation (2024). In line with that guidance, they encourage leaders to adopt behaviours that underpin effective implementation, attend to contextual factors that influence change, and follow a structured but flexible process. The four implementation phases (Explore, Prepare, Deliver, Sustain) have here been translated into five school-facing stages to support reflection across the full lifecycle of CPD leadership.

Phase 1: Strategic Alignment & Awareness

- Have we clearly articulated a whole-school vision for professional learning that balances accountability with trust?
- What role do senior and middle leaders currently play in shaping professional learning and how well are these roles understood and supported?
- How well is our current professional learning approach aligned with our school improvement priorities and how is this alignment communicated to staff?
- Do we recognise the phase-specific needs of our staff (for example: subject specialism, professional identity, mentoring structures)? How do these influence the way we lead professional learning?

Phase 2: Design & Preparation

- How are we designing professional learning to suit our specific school context, including staff roles, phase, and curriculum structure?
- Do those leading professional learning (particularly middle leaders) have the training, time, and clarity needed to do this well?
- What protected time, systems, or routines have we established to ensure professional learning is integrated into staff's daily professional experience?
- Have we embedded structures (e.g. coaching, peer dialogue, inquiry cycles) that encourage shared responsibility and collaboration?

Phase 3: Launch & Communication

- How are we modelling a culture of learning as leaders; are we participating in professional learning ourselves in visible ways?
- How are we showing staff that professional learning is linked to real classroom challenges, curriculum goals, or pupil outcomes?
- How are we inviting feedback on professional learning content, delivery, or structure from staff across roles and career stages?
- Are we explicitly framing professional learning as formative and developmental; not just linked to appraisal or accountability?

Phase 4: Evaluation & Iteration

- What processes are in place to evaluate whether professional learning is leading to changes in teacher confidence, collaboration, or practice?
- Do we have clear indicators of success (for teacher development, support staff development and any links to pupil progress) and how are these tracked over time?
- How often do we review and adapt our professional learning approach in response to staff feedback or emerging school needs?
- Are we using both formal data and informal feedback (e.g. learning walks, staff surveys) to evaluate impact and relevance?

Phase 5: Scaling & Embedding

- How are we supporting others (mentors, facilitators, middle leaders) to grow as professional learning leaders themselves?
- What steps are we taking to ensure professional learning structures are sustained over time (for example: induction systems, protected time, staff succession)?
- Are we embedding collaboration and professional dialogue into everyday routines (for example: line management, team meetings)?
- As we embed professional learning, how are we building a culture of shared growth where it becomes part of our collective identity rather than a one-off initiative?