

# SCHOOL PEER REVIEW (SPR) TOOLKIT



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Toolkit to guide the school peer review teams  
in the management of the SPR programme

This toolkit provides a guide to the project management team, review team leads and school heads as to the process, requirements and expectations and anticipated timeframes involved in executing a successful school peer review. The toolkit provides and references a number of templates that can be used throughout the review.

# School peer review (SPR) toolkit

## A TOOLKIT TO GUIDE THE SCHOOL PEER REVIEW TEAMS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THE SPR PROGRAMME

### INTRODUCTION

School peer reviews, in the context of the South African Extraordinary Schools Coalition (SAESC), have been designed with the intent to bring about continuous development, change and improvement in the quality of the teaching and learning in member schools.

The SAESC, in partnership with EdVillage, designed a methodology and process orientation for the school peer reviews in June 2012. Through the implementation of phase 1 with six SAESC schools, this model and process was tested and incremental improvements and small changes made to the methodology of the review to enhance and maximise the value of the experience for all those who participated in the process. This toolkit is the result of these incremental improvements, and has been informed through the constructive feedback of the SAESC members at its meeting in November 2012.

### Why are school peer reviews of value to the SAESC?

*"The purpose is to encourage groups of schools to work together to hold each other accountable for leading or creating schools that transform the lives of students by preparing them for academic success and life. Rather than a potentially punitive assessment, a peer review focuses on self-reflection and school improvement. This process creates a safe environment for a school to understand its own strengths and weaknesses and identify strategies, with the support of colleagues from other institutions, to drive gains in student achievement. By creating a culture of peer feedback, EdVillage is helping develop a strong education reform ecosystem that continuously seeks to increase school quality."*  
(EdVillage, June 2012)

In the School Peer Review Document (Final), the SAESC determined that peer reviews were to be used to improve student learning by:

- ✓ Collaborating and supporting participating schools.
- ✓ Sharing and developing best practices in all areas of the school.
- ✓ Identifying areas for growth and improvement.
- ✓ Providing a framework to support the school's internal development and growth.

This would be achieved through a systematic review of schools across four domains:

- ✓ Leadership and Management
- ✓ Teaching and Learning
- ✓ Culture and Climate
- ✓ School and Community

In each of these domains, sub-domains were identified and criteria within each sub-domain clearly articulate the benchmark towards which schools should strive in their journey for continuous improvement.

School peer reviews should aim to achieve the following goals, through the fair and systematic collection of evidence in each of the domains AND through ongoing, sustained dialogue and reflection amongst the reviewers and with key members of the school management team:

- ✓ Assess the school's quality of teaching and learning
- ✓ Assess the effectiveness of the school's operations
- ✓ Document what the school does well to be shared with others
- ✓ Identify what kind of ongoing support the school and school leader need
- ✓ Identify actionable plan for school improvement
- ✓ Develop a culture of continuous learning at the school and among groups of schools

Benefits to schools participating in this process are significant, both for those under review and for those volunteering members to participate as reviewers. For the schools under review, preparing for the review encourages schools to think reflectively and honestly about their teaching and learning practices and the schools' operations, and through the process, enables the school to identify areas of strength and weakness and create a school improvement plan which further builds upon the strengths and addresses the weaknesses. For individuals participating as school peer review team members, not only does this build and strengthen the collaborative partnership between individuals from schools within the community, but it also enables a sharper focus on their own schools' performance against the criteria within the instrument.

## Why the need for a toolkit?

Maintaining the integrity, consistency and quality of the reviews across the SAESC community is critical to the successful realisation of school peer reviews as a methodology and practice. The review process is a time-intensive, resource-intensive programme and the toolkit is intended as an enabler for the process and allows for fair benchmarking within the community.

This toolkit will provide an outline for both host schools and schools participating as members of the team, and should provide much clarity as to the expectations, demands and responsibilities of all those who participate.

In addition, the toolkit will provide the necessary templates for all the required documents (both pre-, peri- and post- review) and a timeline for how each review should be planned, executed and completed.

## What needs to be in the Toolkit?

A checklist for the successful construction of the Toolkit has been developed overleaf, based on feedback from the various team members. It serves not only as the roadmap and contents guide for this Toolkit, but also as a stand-alone indicator of the effectiveness of the Toolkit.

In addition to the checklist, a step-by-step outline of the pre-planning, implementation and close-out steps for each review has been included as a guide to future team leaders, school leaders and project management support staff to allow for smooth, easy transitioning between and through the phases of the review process.

## CHECKLIST FOR THE SPR TOOLKIT

| What are the key improvements that need to be built as part of the toolkit?  | How does the Toolkit do this?  | Where will I find this? |
|--|--|-------------------------|
| Team leaders and team members need clearer descriptions of their roles and responsibilities                          | Review team member profiles clarify roles and responsibilities.  | ANNEXURE B              |
| Teams need to have adequately prepared themselves in terms of understanding the school                               | A checklist of all documents that need to be submitted by the school to the team lead.                                       | ANNEXURE A              |
| More opportunity for the team leader to provide feedback to the team members on the check-ins with the school lead   | A template for the scheduling of the two-day review will reflect this.   | ANNEXURE E              |
| Deeper understanding of the value each team member is bringing into the team (both for the team AND the host school) | Team member profiles to be provided AND time in schedule to be provided for introductions                                    | ANNEXURE D + E          |
| Team leaders to provide opportunity for whole-team debrief at the end of the review                                  | This will be included in scheduling template AND letter of invitation to team members to indicate minimum time requirements. | ANNEXURE C + E          |
| More interaction between team leader and school leader on the self-evaluation form prior to the review               | A pre-review timeline must outline this.   | ANNEXURE F              |
| Accountability for how the report is written needs to be shared more with the team.                                  | A post-review timeline must outline this AND this should be included in team member profiles and letters of invitation.      | ANNEXURE F              |
| Timeline, guide and structure for how to write a report that is meaningful without being too time-consuming          | Report template and report-writing guide to be developed (as part of Phase II)   | ANNEXURE H              |
| Provide guidance to school lead (without prescribing) how to share and distribute feedback from the peer review      | Guide to verbal feedback and written report to outline best practice (including who should be at verbal close-out).          | ANNEXURE H              |
| System for documenting changes in the management of each peer review from review to review                           | Document analysis and meeting note analysis should reflect this. Recommend end-of-each phase                                 | ANNEXURE I              |

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|--|---|------------|
|  | report by project manager.  |            |
| Suggested protocols for follow-up between team lead and school lead post review                                      | Draft protocols for ongoing follow-up (Phase II)  | ANNEXURE J |
| Suggest process for using report as a baseline for school improvement plan   | For Phase II (need to identify frequency, nature and purpose of successive reviews)                             | ANNEXURE J |
| More time for the whole team to reflect on self-evaluation questionnaire with school leader                          | Pre-Review Briefing session lesson plan to accommodate this AND to be requested in letter to host school.       | ANNEXURE A |
| Ensure that all team members claim their bias and use this exercise to counter evidence tabled.                      | Pre-Review Briefing session lesson to accommodate this  | ANNEXURE A |
| Improved preparation of staff of host school prior to the review team arrival  | Letter to host school to suggest mechanism for achieving this.  | ANNEXURE A |
| Stronger guidance on the language of evidence-based reviews – constructing precise praise and quick hits effectively | Writing frames and/or thinking frames to be drafted – More time to be allocated in Pre-Review Briefing Session. | ANNEXURE   |
| Constructing the verbal feedback sessions with the school as a conversation and not purely a report-back             | Lesson Plan for Verbal Close-Out report-back to incorporate this  | ANNEXURE G |
| Time provided to introduce the review team members to the whole staff where and if possible                          | Schedule to provide this opportunity AND letter to host school to request as such                               | ANNEXURE E |
| Clearer expectations of hosting requirements by host school (catering, venue, logistics, accommodation, transport)   | Letter to host school to detail such requirements   | ANNEXURE A |

## A TYPICAL STEP-BY-STEP TIMELINE FOR EACH REVIEW

Each school peer review will typically move through three phases:

1. Pre-Review Planning and Preparation
2. On-site review implementation
3. Post-Review Feedback and Follow-Up

For each participant in the review, the roles and responsibilities change throughout these phases, and the time demands vary from participant to participant. In this next section, a flow-chart of required activities will be outlined and estimates of time that need to be committed by each participant will be provided.

## Outlining Key Steps in the Review Process

## PRE-REVIEW PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Confirmation of schedule of school peer reviews - by school (with identified team leads, coaches and team members) and with individual team members
- Preparation of school staff by school lead (purpose, nature and structure of the review, the instrument itself, the team make-up, timetable, the self-evaluation questionnaire)
- Correspondence between team lead, project manager and school lead irt logistics, documents needed by school for planning purposes (e.g. timetables, staff lists, school map) and self-evaluation questionnaire
- Follow-up on self-evaluation questionnaire and distribution of this (and any other supporting documentation) to review team members
- Set-up of all documentation required for evidence-based review by the school as per checklist to be provided
- Photocopying and preparation of all templates for the review team members (classroom observation sheets, meeting notes sheets, code of conduct, schedules and school maps, key words, evidence record sheet)
- Preparation of hard-copy file and portfolio for evidence collected at school



## ON-SITE REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION

- Team lead and team members arrive at school for pre-review training and briefing session (see lesson plan)
- School head introduced to team, given an orientation to the programme for the review (as communicated by email in the schedule) and then provided with an opportunity to talk to the self-evaluation questionnaire
- Lesson plan for Pre-Review Training and video calibration exercise undertaken with the team, followed by confirmation of schedule (particular attention to be paid to coverage ito staff numbers and focus areas)
- Start both mornings with early pre-review briefings, and an in-classroom calibration exercise and join any/all whole-school events to orientate to school and possible introductions
- follow the agreed upon schedule - both in terms of classroom visits AND meetings/discussion sessions with staff, students and parents. Important to remember check-ins with team lead AND with team members
- Work-in-progress debate on precise praise, areas for improvement and big rocks should conclude Day One with intention to look at these areas with more focus and clarity on Day Two
- Discuss parameters for school feedback with school head and keep in constant contact to update on developments, findings, areas of concern or where needing clarification. P resent feedback late on Day Two.

PRE-REVIEW PLANNING AND PREPARATION (as above)



ON-SITE REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION (as above)



POST-REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW-UP

- Provide verbal feedback to school management team, and have agreed timeframes for completion of report
- Ensure all paper-based documentation is filed - with all classroom observation sheets and meeting notes sheets filed in lever arch file with schedule of visits (updated as amended) AND any other supporting documents and evidence provided by the school (school lead to keep file and/or portfolio folder)
- De-brief key pointers with the team members before final closure of review
- Use evidence-based templates for the criteria to work through and strengthen points raised and noted as precise praise and areas for improvement
- Circulate draft report to all team members within three weeks post-review
- Finalise report and send to school lead within four weeks of the review, with some suggested recommendations and post-review interventions/suggestions



## Suggested Time Allocation

In the initial briefing documentation provided by EdVillage at the outset of the school peer review, estimates of time to be set aside for the school peer review process were provided. Based on experience from Phase I pilot testing, these estimates have been revised and are provided below for clarity:

### Host School –

#### Pre-review preparation (14 -20 hours)

- Staff sessions on instrument itself (work-through and self-analysis) - 5 - 6 hours
- Meetings and briefing with other school stakeholders (SGB/BOG, parents etc) - 2- 3 hours
- Preparation of self-evaluation questionnaire - 2- 3 hours
- Supporting documentation preparation (as per letter and checklist) - 4 - 6 hours
- Logistical arrangements (accommodation, IT infrastructure, catering) - 1 - 2 hours

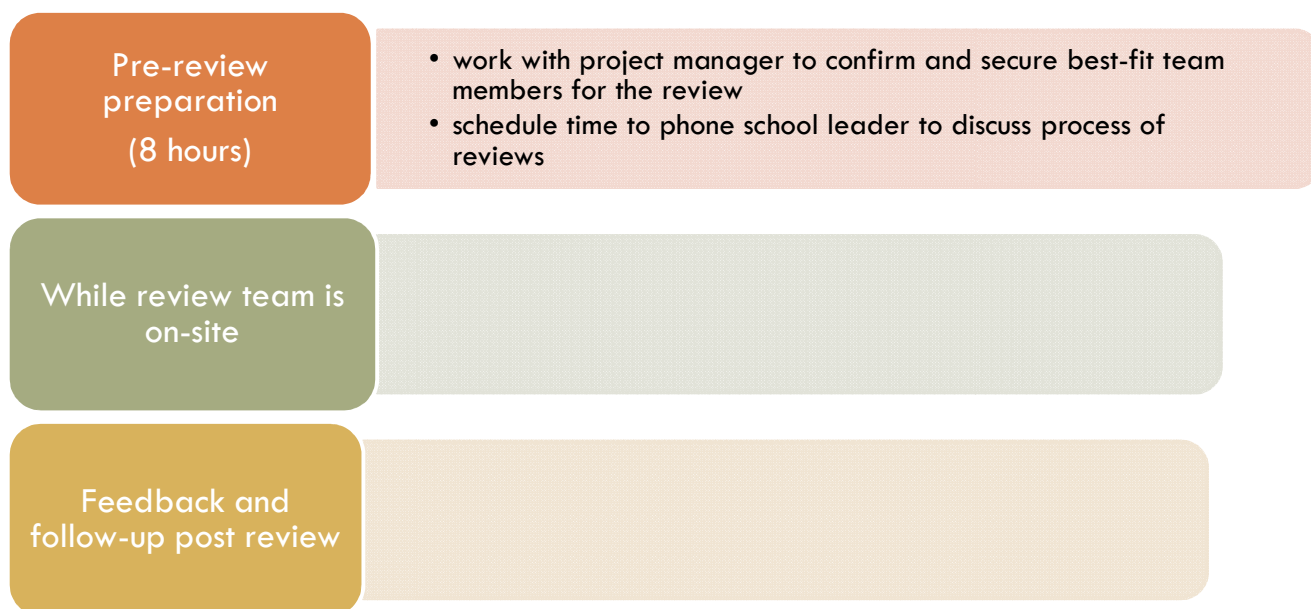
#### While review team is on-site ( 14 - 18 hours)

- In-classroom lesson observations of all staff over two days (8 - 10 hours)
- Teacher focus groups and interviews (2 - 3 hours) - sample selection
- School leader check-in and de-briefing with team leads (at least 3 check-ins of min 1 hour each)
- Verbal close-out report from review team (1 - 2 hours)

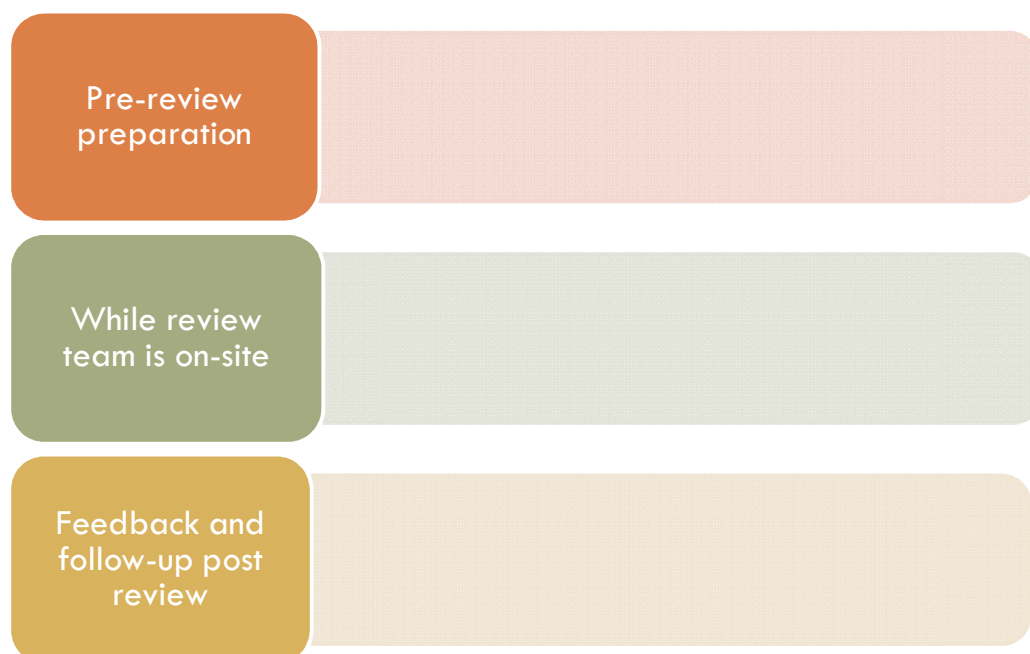
#### Feedback and follow-up post review (15 - 25 hours +++)

- School head de-brief with whole staff (2 - 3 hours)
- School head feedback to SGB/BOG (1 - 2 hours)
- Development of school improvement plan based on written report once received (8 - 10 hours)
- Check-ins with review team lead (once per quarter over 12 month period)
- Implementation of school improvement plan

### School Peer Review Team Lead –



### School Peer Review Team member –



4 hours for preparation by review team

6 hours conducting observations and interviews in school

2 - 4 hours for compiling and discussing observations and analyzing data

2 hours spent on final presentation/discussion

### School Peer Review Team Project Manager -

#### Pre-review preparation (3-5 hours)\*

- send self-evaluation form to school leader, and letter outlining key requirements for the review team (logistics)
- brief school leader on key steps in the process and address any concerns or queries
- follow-up on self-evaluation form and all other required documentation with school lead
- create team profiles (to include photo, where possible and brief bio) to send to host school
- draft schedule for on-site review - including classroom observations, meetings with school lead and team lead, other interviews etc (\*)
- ensure all team member logistics (travel and accommodation) have been arranged

#### While review team is on-site (18 - 20 hours)

- collect signed code of conduct sheets from all team members and file in review file
- review schedule and logistics for all team members in pre-review briefings
- take notes of all de-briefs and check-ins between team lead and team members
- follow-up and maintain ongoing contact with school administration team (or assigned contact) for all necessary documents for review
- manage and monitor all lessons observed as per schedule with a view to amending schedule to ensure adequate school coverage
- analyse and work through check-ins and debriefs to draw key precise praise and areas for improvement - use the group debriefs to explore and define this further and then group into each of the four domains for review prior to school feedback

#### Feedback and follow-up post review

- ensure all evidence and observation sheets collected and filed in team lead file for the report
- provide support to the team lead in construction, review and editing of school report (as required)
- follow-up with team lead to keep within 30-day turnaround, and keep copy of final report on electronic file
- document any key process improvements for the purpose of later review

## ANNEXURE A: INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO THE SCHOOL HEAD

## ANNEXURE B: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PEER REVIEW TEAM MEMBERS

## ANNEXURE C: INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO REVIEW TEAM MEMBERS AND THEIR RESPECTIVE SCHOOL HEADS