

Recruitment Pack

Quality Assurance Review - Lead Reviewer (Special Phase) 2026



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About Challenge Partners

Challenge Partners is a national partnership of schools and trusts who believe the best way to reduce educational inequality and enhance the life chances of children is through collaboration, challenge and leadership development. We work together to ensure every school community can benefit from the combined wisdom of the education system.

Our national partnership currently reaches more than 420,000 pupils in over 480 schools and 131 trusts across the country. All fervently believe that working together is the best way to reduce educational inequality and increase the life chances of all children.

School leadership plays a significant role in pupil outcomes, and our practitioner-led programmes and networks offer unique continuing professional development (CPD) for leaders at all levels - from classroom teachers to CEOs.

And our approach works; pupils in our schools consistently achieve more and progress faster than national averages, despite serving a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils. Inspection and peer review outcomes demonstrate how long-term participation in Challenge Partners leads to sustained improvements over time.

By rapidly sharing innovative practices across the country, we ensure that the most effective support reaches the children who need it most.

You can read our 2030 strategy [here](#) and our latest impact report [here](#).

Mission and Values

Our mission is to reduce educational inequality and improve the life chances of all children. Through collaboration, challenge and professional development, we are working to ensure every school community can benefit from the combined wisdom of the education system.

We were founded by practitioners and their leadership is built into our constitution. This keeps us at the cutting edge and enables us to meet the real needs and aspirations of schools and trusts, while keeping excellent practitioners where they should be – in classrooms, schools and trusts.

The Challenge Partners' values underpin everything we do:

- **Excellence:** We are always looking for ways to improve because we are determined to achieve the best for every child, staff member, teacher and leader
- **Equity:** We treat each other fairly, with trust, care and respect. We seek the best for every child, and know that those who have the least need our combined expertise the most

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- **Courageous Leadership:** We speak up and take responsibility for all children, making sure that we do not harm others in doing our best for our own schools
- **Challenge:** We expect the best of ourselves and each other, and value challenge which helps us improve
- **Collaboration:** We listen to, share with and learn from each other, developing our practice together so that every child benefits from our combined wisdom and creativity
- **Innovation:** We use and generate research, we innovate with discipline and evaluate intelligently in pursuit of better outcomes for all children, especially the most disadvantaged



Excellence



Equity



**Courageous
leadership**



Challenge



Collaboration



Innovation

About the QA Review

Challenge Partners' Quality Assurance Review is a professionally-led peer review focused on teaching and learning. The review identifies areas of strength and areas for development, highlighting and discussing key challenges and providing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for all participants. It is a joint exercise between the visiting reviewers and the host school. All activities, excluding the Pre-Review Analysis (PRA), include a member of the school working alongside the reviewers. The PRA is the Lead Reviewer and visiting review team only.

This approach enables honest and open conversations about where the school is and where it is going, to the benefit of all concerned.

Schools in the Network of Excellence (NoE) can receive an annual QA Review, and reciprocate by sending their senior leaders to review other schools in the Partnership. All reviewers are trained by Challenge Partners prior to attending their first review.

Aims of a Quality Assurance Review:

- Audit, challenge and support for the school being reviewed
- CPD for reviewers and senior leaders and an opportunity to bring back effective practice to their own school
- Opportunity to identify a school's Area of Excellence (AoE)

QA Reviews take place over three days and include the following activities:

- Pre-review analysis (PRA), where the review team analyses the school's assessment information.
- Review activities, including learning observations, work scrutiny, student interviews, and meetings with senior leaders.
- A focus on Engagement and Inclusion
- Accrediting an Area of Excellence (optional).
- Discussion and agreement between the school and the review team on the content of the review report, including estimate descriptors.

After a review, the Lead Reviewer writes a review report, which is the only physical output of the review process.

What makes this opportunity exceptional?

1. **Flagship Programme:** Join Challenge Partners' largest programme, designed to improve outcomes for students across all school settings. Influence the quality of provision and outcomes in a wide range of educational settings in England, and help identify and share best practice across the sector.
2. **Bespoke Training and Professional Development:** You will receive training in Challenge Partners' highly regarded QA Review methodology, designed to develop expert facilitation, evaluation, and leadership skills. As a new Lead Reviewer, you will receive ongoing support through biannual training days and be placed into a support group with experienced Lead Reviewers.
3. **Exclusive Networking:** Join a national community of school improvement experts from diverse backgrounds and settings. Connect with passionate professionals throughout the programme and across Challenge Partners' Network of Excellence, fostering lasting collaborations.
4. **Real Impact:** Make a tangible difference in the lives of students. By leading QA Reviews, you will contribute to positive changes in provision and outcomes for all students.

QA Review Lead Reviewer

Fees for Leading Reviews: Receive a fee for each review you lead. This role is offered at a competitive rate, with fees paid per review. Specific fees will be discussed during the interview and may vary depending on the location of the reviews.

Commencement date: This role will commence at the start of the 2026/27 academic year.

Contract: Contracts are reviewed on an annual basis

About the Role

As a Lead Reviewer on the programme, you play a pivotal role in ensuring the QA Review is both developmental and rigorous. You create the environment for high-quality professional learning, enabling senior and other leaders to share best practice and engage in constructive discussion and challenge. This ensures the process benefits both the host school and the visiting review team, supporting reviewers' professional development beyond their usual school context.

Key Responsibilities

- Attend biannual Lead Reviewer training sessions: for the next academic year in person on 24 September 2026 and online on 7 January 2027.
- Prepare thoroughly for QA Reviews by:
 - Communicating openly and clearly with visiting reviewers
 - Conducting a planning call with the host school
 - Quality-assuring the review timetable and visiting reviewers' engagement
- Lead review teams of senior leaders during QA Reviews in schools across the Challenge Partners partnership.
- Facilitate a positive dialogue between the host school and visiting reviewers, fostering an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect that encourages senior leaders to engage openly with challenge.
- Coach and support reviewers during reviews, promoting their professional development.
- Quality-assure reviewers throughout the review process, using this knowledge to support reviewers in their professional learning.
- Write clear review reports, in line with Challenge Partners' style and report-writing requirements.
- Provide feedback to Challenge Partners following reviews to support the continuous improvement of the QA Review programme.

Person Specification

We are seeking experienced school improvement professionals with **current, significant expertise in special schools and the ability to lead QA Reviews across the special school sector**. Candidates must demonstrate a deep understanding of a range of special school contexts and the leadership skills required to guide review teams and facilitate high-quality, developmental reviews.

This could include, but is not limited to:

- Local authority school improvement professionals with special school responsibility
- MAT school improvement leaders with oversight of special provision
- Trust CEOs with significant special phase experience
- Ofsted-experienced professionals with who have led inspections in special schools
- Current special school headteachers or senior leaders with proven experience in leading school improvement and school reviews

Essential Experience and Skills:

- Substantial senior leadership experience in a special school setting
- Expertise in school improvement, collaboration, and systemic support across the special phase
- A strong understanding of special school contexts, with specialist knowledge in one or more areas of SEND (e.g. ASC, SEMH, PMLD, or other complex needs)
- Proven ability to lead school improvement reviews across multiple types of special schools, applying robust evaluation frameworks in diverse special school settings
- Ability to clearly articulate leading practice and high standards in a special school context
- Demonstrable experience in coaching and developing senior leaders, facilitating their professional growth during reviews
- Experience leading teams, managing dynamics with unfamiliar headteachers and senior leaders, and quickly gaining trust and confidence
- Outstanding written and oral communication skills, including the ability to produce clear, concise, professional reports
- Experience in facilitating meetings, synthesising diverse evidence and perspectives, and reaching robust, agreed conclusions
- Understand the professional integrity and willingness to act as an ambassador for Challenge Partners.
- Ability to commit to a minimum of six reviews per year (Monday–Wednesday or Wednesday–Friday). Serving special school senior leaders or headteachers are expected to commit to a minimum of three reviews per year
- Ability and willingness to travel nationally, particularly to schools in the North East and South East of England

Application and induction process

1. Submit your application to review@challengepartners.org by **10:00 am Friday 15th May 2026**
 - a. Send a cover letter, CV and provide two professional referees.
 - b. Your cover letter should outline why you would like to work with Challenge Partners on this programme and how your experience aligns with the role and person specification.
2. Interviews will take place on **5th and 11th June 2026**
3. An offer to begin the induction process is subject to satisfactory references and an enhanced DBS check.

Induction Process

Once an offer has been made, all new Lead Reviewers are required to complete an induction process. The purpose of this process is to provide an opportunity for both Challenge Partners and Lead Reviewers to assess whether the role is the right fit. Each of the following stages forms an essential part of the induction:

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- A one-day virtual induction session with the Challenge Partners central team and an experienced Lead Reviewer (September 2026).
- Attend biannual Lead Reviewer training sessions: in person on 24 September 2026 and online on 7 January 2027.
- Attend a QA Reviewer training session. This provides an opportunity to understand the knowledge and expectations of senior leaders before they participate in reviews.
- Shadow and experienced Lead Reviewer for the duration of a QA Review
- Having one of our experienced Lead Reviewers quality assure one of your first QA Reviews.

Once you have satisfactorily completed the induction process, you will be formally added to the Challenge Partners Lead Reviewer pool and eligible to independently lead QA Reviews.

A note on AI

At Challenge Partners, we are committed to a fair and inclusive recruitment process. We don't use Artificial Intelligence (AI) for recruitment - applications are reviewed by members of the team and we use blind shortlisting to mitigate potential bias and ensure all candidates are considered on merit.

Whilst we recognise that AI can be a useful tool for tasks like proofreading, we encourage you to share genuine examples from your own experience so we can better understand your unique skills and perspective. Authenticity is important to us and we want to hear your voice throughout the application process.

Our commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

At Challenge Partners, we are committed to strengthening diversity, equity and inclusion across our partnership. As part of this commitment, we are actively seeking to diversify our pool of Lead Reviewers to better reflect the schools and communities we serve.

We welcome applications from all suitably qualified individuals, regardless of race, gender, sex, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, or age. We particularly encourage applications from underrepresented groups, as we recognise the value that diverse lived experiences and perspectives bring to peer challenge, collaboration and system leadership.

Our approach to recruitment is grounded in fairness, transparency and inclusion, and we are committed to creating an environment in which all partners feel valued, supported and able to thrive.

Safeguarding

Challenge Partners is committed to safeguarding children, beneficiaries and staff and to taking reasonable steps to protect all those who come into contact with our activities from harm.

All representatives of our organisation (this includes our Trustees, staff, contractors, volunteers, and all others) are required to uphold Challenge Partners' [code of conduct](#) and [safeguarding policy](#).

All offers of employment and voluntary positions will be subject to satisfactory background checks.