

Introduction

Classroom observation is one of a repertoire of strategies which help staff gather information about the core work of Learning and Teaching. It should be carried out sensitively and professionally, and should involve teachers in consultation about the purposes and format of the exercise so that everyone involved is clear about their role in the activity.

Purposes of classroom observation

1. To improve learning and teaching as part of individual staff member, subject department, whole school and authority self-evaluation procedures.
2. To give teachers the opportunity to reflect on and discuss their practice with each other and with school or authority management
3. To share success and good practice.
4. To promote a collegiate approach to developing learning and teaching
5. To allow everyone to have a better understanding of the work and professional practice of teachers.
6. To contribute to standards and quality reporting, including reports to HMIE.
7. To contribute to the process of professional review and development, as appropriate.
8. To contribute to the process of professional development at the request of the member of staff.

Principles of classroom observation

1. It will be strictly within the context of learning and teaching.
2. The purpose, method and timing of the visit will be subject to prior consultation, and may be linked to the school or department improvement plan, to issues raised in an HMIE report, to exploring alternative ways to deliver a topic, to supporting a colleague, to diagnosing or working out a solution to a problem.
3. It will take place only after consultation/discussion between the observer and the class teacher, and other senior managers as appropriate, with the expectations being clearly agreed.
4. It will be followed soon after by a meeting between the observer and the class teacher in order to discuss the observation process. An agreement will be reached beforehand regarding when the feedback will be provided and both parties should endeavour to meet this deadline.

When the observation is used as part of the monitoring process of Learning and Teaching a written record, as appropriate, should be produced by the observer within 5 working days of the observation and, when agreed, should be signed by both parties, giving the class teacher the opportunity to record his/her comments on the process. Where there is disagreement, this should be recorded.

5. It may be undertaken by promoted staff members in the school, the Education Department or peers depending on the purpose of the observation.
6. It will be on a strictly professional basis, reinforcing the mutually respectful relationship with professional colleagues and with pupils.
7. It will involve a general process of classroom interaction involving the observer, the class teacher and any other staff present.
8. It should not be carried out as a 'crit lesson' or based on a checklist. Brief notes may be kept, but should be done unobtrusively, and should not impede the observer's engagement with the learning and teaching process.

Important points to note

1. Classroom observation as described in this protocol should be part of the normal professional support and quality assurance processes which are part and parcel of the relationship between any class teacher and his/her manager(s). As such, it should take place as regularly and frequently as school or authority policies determine and working time allows.
2. Classroom observation **as described in this protocol** will **not** be used to inform the competence or disciplinary processes. Separate protocols will be prepared to describe how classroom observation would be used in either the competence or disciplinary procedures.
3. The criteria for observation will be agreed in advance between the teacher and the observer. In general, the criteria will be based on QIs:-

Teaching for effective learning (QI 5.2)

- The learning climate and teaching approaches
- Teacher–pupil interaction including learners' engagement
- Clarity and purposefulness of dialogue
- Judgments made in the course of teaching

Learners' experiences (QI 2.1)

- The extent to which learners are motivated and actively involved in their own learning and development

Meeting learning needs (QI 5.3)

- Tasks, activities and resources
- Identification of learning needs
- The roles of teachers and specialist staff
- Meeting and implementing the requirements of legislation

Expectations and promoting achievement (QI 5.5)

- Staff expectations and use of praise
- Learner expectations and sense of achievement
- Promoting and sustaining an ethos of achievement
- Staff-learner relationships

but will vary depending on the agreed focus. For example, individual CPD priorities and school and department improvement plans will set the agenda in most cases.

4. PTs who have large departments or faculty areas to lead and manage are given management time commensurate with their area(s) of responsibility. Head teachers have a responsibility to monitor workload levels, including classroom observation commitments.
5. There will be times when a 'broad brush' view of a specific aspect will be taken, through a series of short classroom observations. A written record may be made of the overall evaluation, and not necessarily of the brief classroom observations, unless specific individual requests are made. Feedback should be provided which may be to individuals or to the whole school community.
6. A teacher's observation record will be confidential to his/her immediate manager, the senior management of the school, and to the Director of Education or his nominee.
7. When a class teacher does not wish to be observed by a particular manager, alternative arrangements may be made. The record of the observation will be copied to the class teacher's immediate manager.
8. Personalising the observation process in a particular school will lead to targeted and tailored staff development and training. Teaching and learning approaches will then reflect the core values and qualities of the school.

N.B. Probationers

The classroom observation experience for probationers serves, to a degree, a different purpose than that for qualified staff. Probationers are required to demonstrate that they meet the Standard for Full Registration (SFR). Classroom observation is a requisite part of this as set down by GTCS. The probationer classroom observation does have a "list" element designed to demonstrate progress in meeting SFR. The lists have been developed and agreed by GTCS. This set of protocols may be used in relation to competence and disciplinary matters.