

GUIDELINES - CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING AND TEACHING

Background

Traditionally classroom observation may have been seen as a strategy associated with the Quality Assurance agenda. While it has an important contribution to make to the QA agenda, classroom observation is about the development of learning and teaching as a whole.

Rationale for Promoting Classroom Observation

The vision of Dumfries and Galloway Schools' Service is to raise levels of Attainment, Achievement and Participation, through encouraging innovation and creativity, collaboration and a culture of sharing and learning.

The Purposes of Classroom Observation

The overall purpose of classroom observation is to evaluate the way in which teaching impacts upon pupils' learning and to ensure that all learners' needs are met.

Classroom Observation is a process which provides a means of sharing good practice throughout a school. When used effectively it enables staff to develop greater awareness of their own strengths and areas for development as classroom practitioners and provides a stimulus for professional dialogue amongst staff. While it contributes to the process of quality assurance, associated processes and procedures should not be shaped by disciplinary requirements.

Developing a Climate Conducive to Classroom Observation

For classroom observation to be effective it is crucial that a positive climate exists within a school. This relates to expectations of staff and pupils, and the extent to which the school promotes an ethos of achievement for all learners, including staff, where there is respect, a culture of openness and all stakeholders have shared values.

The focus of observations should therefore be on the outcomes for all learners. Following observations professional dialogue should explore the practice, be constructive, formative and identify if applicable, the next agreed steps.

Breaking Down Barriers to Classroom Observation

Possible Barriers:

Staff may be afraid or suspicious of classroom observations the reasons may be historic or as a result of a genuine misunderstanding about the purposes. The reality in some schools may be that classroom observation is seen as a threatening process – something which management “do” to staff. Classroom Observation cannot become a powerful tool for enhancing learning and teaching until this barrier is broken down. Working with staff to build the appropriate climate takes time.

Reasons given for not undertaking Classroom Observation may include:

- It is not a priority!
- No time!

However if we are serious about continuous improvement ways of removing these barriers must be found. It may be necessary to provide some cover initially and be prepared to use collegiate time, and /or in-service days to promote the practice of professional reflection. As staff come to recognise the benefits of classroom observation and the associated professional dialogue, it will become an intrinsic and sustainable part of their own professional development.

Creating the Right Climate

The promotion of Classroom Observation should not be seen as a SMT initiative. Strategies for achieving this end **might** include:

- Involving staff in professional dialogue (See Regional paper entitled Professional Dialogue for specific ideas)
- The creation of a learning and teaching group whose remit is to promote the sharing of good practice
- The promotion of TLCs
- The involvement of staff in creating the school processes and procedures for classroom observation.

Classroom observation can be both formal and informal. It is a tool in a range of strategies which will contribute to improving the quality of the learning experience for young people in our schools. There is a need to recognise that development of such processes and procedures is evolutionary.

A Systematic Approach to Classroom Observation Within a School

There is no single set of classroom observation procedures nor a single check-list which will suit all schools. Classroom visits may vary in format and may range from short episodes to more extended stays. These visits may involve teachers from different schools, stages, subjects or levels of responsibility. Staff should agree their own procedures which best serve their particular circumstances. This will develop the right climate and the necessary sense of ownership.

Maximising the benefits of well planned classroom observation requires that the process be systematic. Key components of a systematic process have:

- a fully discussed and agreed approach to the process;
- clarity about the purposes of the classroom visits;
- meaningful feedback to those observed.
- a direct relationship with the school's priorities as identified in the improvement plan;
- the frequency of classroom visits, by peers, line managers or others, is reasonable;
- evaluation of process and programme;

It is important for teachers to both undertake learning visits to others' classes and to have others visit their class. By doing both they learn from, and with, those around them. All involved need to know the intentions of the lesson or learning activity to be observed, to enable them to discuss the extent to which the experiences led to the intended outcomes for learners.

Paperwork and Procedures to Support Classroom Observation

- Classroom observations do not always need to be formal or for a whole lesson. They should however have a clear purpose and an outcome. The nature and length of the observation will depend upon the purpose of the visit. Procedures and supporting paperwork therefore need to be flexible.
- Recording formats need to be appropriate and applicable to their current position. The very act of producing appropriate supporting paperwork should be part of the process creating the right climate and developing a sense of ownership over the whole process. The Authority will continue to collect examples of good practice to show the range of procedures and paperwork currently being used in schools where Classroom Observation is contributing to the development of Learning and Teaching and the Quality Assurance agendas.
- Paperwork and procedures should encourage the “observation/feedback/implement change/evaluate” process but should not be paper heavy.
- Receiving feedback from pupils is an effective way for teachers to gain feedback on how their learners’ needs are being met. It may also help learners develop a greater self-awareness of their responsibility for their own learning.
- Which ever observation format is agreed, there will not be any overall numerical grading of the observation.
- When deciding upon the construction of an observation sheet, it is essential to focus on a limited number of indicators, therefore it is not desirable or appropriate to include all indicators. It is important to prioritise a small number of previously agreed indicators upon which the observation can be focussed.
- The number of observations for each teacher will be normally two within the academic year.
- Title of this paper reflects the need to consider the **two** different but related processes of teaching and learning. The two documents and procedures/paperwork for Classroom Observation should reflect on both elements.

How Good Is Our School?

HGIOS is a framework for self evaluation and is based upon a shared understanding of quality. It can be a useful tool when evaluating the quality of learning. The illustrations given can be used as a comparison to the classroom practice observed. It can help teachers see how they can raise the standards in their classroom to a higher level.

Self-evaluation is about individual teachers and groups of teachers evaluating their work together, and teachers reflecting on the work of their peers.

HGIOS can be used for observations of lessons and learning experiences by peer and promoted staff, and can sit alongside professional expertise and other sources of guidance to contribute to a common search for quality.

HGIOS reflects the developing context within which schools now operate. The indicators focus specifically on the impact of schools in improving the educational experience and lives of pupils through learning and their successes and achievements.

It is worthwhile only if it leads to improvements in the educational experiences and outcomes for children and young people, and to the maintenance of the highest standards where these already exist. It builds on good practice in schools and classrooms. It is designed to help staff to evaluate their current performance and to identify priorities for action.

Teachers have individual responsibilities to reflect upon their work. Use can be made of the quality indicators and other sources of advice such as the Standard for Full Registration.

The same set of indicators will also be used by quality improvement officers and HM Inspectors to confirm where schools and teachers are and to help them to plan their way forward.

The key work of a school is the focus upon learning and teaching.

The Standard for Full Registration – What it Means for Teachers

The Standard for Full Registration (SFR) sets out the standard of competence expected of a fully registered teacher with GTC Scotland.

The SFR builds on The Standard for Initial Teacher Education and the concept of Continuing CPD for teachers, which extends from Initial Teacher Education through to Probation and throughout a career.

The SFR serves three main purposes:

- 1 It provides a clear and concise description of the professional qualities and capabilities teachers are expected to develop in the course of induction.
- 2 It is a professional standard against which reliable and consistent decisions can be made on the fitness of new teachers for full registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland.
- 3 It is a baseline professional standard, which will apply to all teachers through their careers.

The first two purposes clearly relate to the development of new teachers. The third one, however, makes the SFR significant to all teachers across Scotland.

There is a clear commitment within the SFR that teachers, having gained full registration, will then maintain that standard throughout their professional careers and, if necessary, provide evidence that it has been maintained.

The SFR can be used to help when evaluating the quality of teaching. However, it must not be used merely as a checklist for identifying “failing” teachers. As this document is part of the post McCrone arrangements, it will be helpful for schools to become familiar with it.

- References: Learning Together: Opening Up Learning (23.04.09) www.hmie.gov.uk.
- Teachers tv.

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