

LNCT

Fife Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers



LNCT/14
Improving Learning and Teaching

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To All Schools/Educational Establishments

IMPROVING LEARNING AND TEACHING

I enclose a copy of the above policy (guidance) which has been agreed by LNCT (JCG).

The paper provides an agreed framework for Fife schools to ensure that improving learning and teaching is a key focus of our activities.

I trust that all schools will continue to work collegiately to ensure that these principles are applied in order to provide the best possible learning and teaching experience to the children and young people we serve.

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Education and Children's Services

Improving Learning and Teaching

1. Background

Every educational establishment has a responsibility to monitor the effectiveness of the service being provided for its children and young people. As a result of the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act (2000), all schools now have a statutory duty to assure the quality of service provided and to look continuously for ways of effecting improvement.

It is clear that a wide range of factors (Scottish Government policies, Local Authority policies, the McCrone Agreement (TP21), advice from professional associations and Education Scotland, and with reference to GTCS Standards for Registration and school improvement planning have led to widespread agreement that our schools should follow self-evaluative approaches. In addition, while recognising the professional autonomy and authority of teachers, the individual teacher has an obligation and should be afforded the opportunity to review his/her own work and the structures within which it is set. This obligation should be discharged within an ethos of openness, in which all staff feel a sense of partnership and mutual support. Cognisance should be taken of the advice and recommendations of the Curriculum for Excellence working group on Tackling Bureaucracy (2013).

2. Principles

It is accepted that teachers work most effectively within an ethos of mutual respect which does not seek to limit their professionalism but seeks to support it. Within such a system, teachers, whatever their formal status, will work together as professionals to improve practice within their school. It should be noted that this policy is not about critical lessons or a competency framework, it is about being supportive of the professional development of staff.

Given this context, it is recommended that:

- a) Schools should follow self-evaluative procedures involving the use of "How Good Is Our School?" and "Child at the Centre" quality indicators contained within a Journey to Excellence and also follow the principles of GIRFEC. The following questions should be the main focus:
 - How well do young people learn and achieve?
 - How well does the school support young people to develop and learn?
 - How well does the school improve the quality of its work?
- b) The principle of self-evaluation, as set out in the GTCS Standard for Registration should allow for:
 - i. Regular self-evaluation by individual teachers, using HGIOS or locally devised materials

- ii. Sharing ideas and exchanging visits with other colleagues as part of a mutually supportive programme
 - iii. Supportive and constructive visits to classrooms by promoted staff
- c) Self-evaluation activities should be carried out in an ethos of mutual trust in which it is understood by all teachers involved that the whole process is focussed on improving learning and teaching.
- d) Monitoring and evaluation to help improve learning and teaching should be addressed within the normal planning cycle. The timings of related activities must be included in the yearly planning cycle and in the school calendar. In addition, it should also be open to an individual teacher to initiate such activities with a view to securing support with a particular class or initiative.
- e) Monitoring and evaluation activities should be appropriate to the needs of children and young people, staff and the school community. For example:
 - Reviewing children and young peoples' learning
 - Reviewing assessment information and tracking progress
 - Discussion with colleagues, children and young people and parents
 - Resource issues
 - School ethos
 - Health and safety issues
 - Equality and equity issues
 - Skills for Learning, life and work
 - Implementation of agreed school policies
 - Classroom visits and co-operative teaching

3. Classroom Visits

Where there has been consultation and agreement through the planning process that the evaluation of aspects of learning and teaching may be assisted by a programme of monitoring through supportive classroom visits and co-operative teaching, the following advice is given:

- Supportive classroom visits can take different forms, depending on their purpose, which must be discussed and agreed in advance.
- Interaction within the classroom is a supportive means of assisting teachers and enhancing learning and teaching.
- In accordance with principle 2b ii above, there should be opportunities for teachers to participate in cooperative teaching, peer observation and classroom visits. Supportive classroom visits by promoted staff should be located in the overall school context of improving the quality of learning and teaching.
- Following discussion and agreement between promoted staff and class teachers regarding planned classroom visits, the following should be adhered to:

- i. The visits will be agreed in the yearly calendar with time for individual observations within this time frame.
- ii. Observation sessions will be of a reasonable length of time, typically no more than 45 minutes or 1 period.
- iii. In any academic year there can be a maximum of three occasions of classroom observations which may include:
 - School based
 - Cluster based
 - Authority based

The only exception to this is a visit by HMIE

- In addition to general observations, specific focus or foci should be agreed in advance.
- Account must be taken of quality improvement visits by all other staff or agencies external to the school.
- The focus of classroom visits is to improve learning and teaching, the approach must be consistent, positive and constructive. It should allow staff to view it in a positive light as part of their own self-reflection and self-evaluation approaches.
- Classroom visits should embrace all those staff engaged in the learning and teaching process.
- Classroom visits must be preceded by discussion, planning and shared understanding of – the personnel involved; purpose; activities; frequency; duration; timing.
- Constructive feedback must be shared with teachers. This might take different forms of professional dialogue. Good practice should be shared, positive feedback should inform class teachers, professional learning and classroom practice.
- Points for action could inform the consultation process for future individual, department or school planning leading to the setting of agreed targets for next session's improvement planning.

4. Conclusion

Improving learning and teaching should be perceived as the key outcomes from whole school self-evaluation processes. The process of monitoring and evaluating learning and teaching assists staff to be reflective practitioners and allows them to participate and inform the educational process and, consequently, to raise standards in our schools.

This paper aims to assist schools in promoting high standards of learning and teaching within this supportive ethos. Consequently, it is important to note that classroom visits undertaken in this context are not associated with disciplinary procedures, with monitoring the competence of an individual teacher or with any other specific circumstances in which there may be a need for formal observation of classroom activity. These issues are dealt with through other procedures.

5. Disputes

In promoting an appropriate ethos in which this policy can operate effectively, a spirit of trust, positive relationships, co-operation and collegiality is paramount.

Should any dispute arise, therefore, every effort should be made to resolve the matter at school level. In the event of a failure to find a resolution the matter should be resolved through the normal Grievance procedure.

Education and Children's Services
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