

MONITORING OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Monitoring as Part of the Quality Framework

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 Scotland Schools Act (2000) all schools now have a statutory duty to assure the quality of service provided and to look to continuously for ways of effecting improvement.

Many things must be taken into account when measuring the effectiveness of an educational establishment – things like health and safety, financial management, attendance, staff development, child protection, ethos, partnership with other agencies and, of course, the curriculum and teaching and learning. The better the common understanding of the purpose and nature of these core activities, the greater is the likelihood that all staff will recognise the importance of their own roles in assuring, maintaining and improving standards. While the focus of this paper is on the monitoring of teaching and learning, the process and practice described can be applied as a model for the monitoring of other key areas of school life.

In seeking to achieve continuous improvement in educational standards, schools have to engage in a whole range of quality processes. The key ones include:

- Development planning
- The implementation of school improvement strategies
- Monitoring and evaluating
- Continuing professional development of staff

All these processes must have, as the very core of their purpose, improving the quality of teaching and learning so that every child and young person can achieve to the limit of his or her potential. In this context, it is obvious that particular importance must attach to monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning.

The monitoring of teaching learning is firmly embedded in the school improvement agenda and is carried out within four main contexts:

- As part of a systematic review of the key areas of school activity as detailed in *How Good Is Our School 2*, including teaching and learning. Where areas for improvement are identified they can be included in a future development plan in order to promote the model of continuous improvement. Monitoring thus contributes to establishing priorities in future development plans.
- As part of the follow up to the development planning activity in the school or establishment where establishment/departamental targets relate to the promotion of raising attainment or elements of teaching and learning. The school, establishment or department will identify some key priorities for development and will create improvement strategies to secure improvement. It is appropriate for those improvement strategies relating to teaching and learning to be the subject of on going monitoring to determine how effective these are.
- As part of the "maintenance agenda" or the ongoing evaluation of attainment in the school or establishment. Each year the school is required to produce a Standards and Quality report which records details of attainment standards and progress made by the school in relation to national and establishment priorities.
- In the process of the identification and sharing of good practice within the school and the collegiate approach to staff development.

The monitoring of the effectiveness of learning is therefore an essential element of the overall management practice within all educational establishments. It is aimed very clearly at improving teaching and learning and the sharing of good practice is an important consequence of the process.

The monitoring process will obviously have a number of strands. These will no doubt include:

- discussion at collegiate meeting, focussed on pupil and class progress
- the regular sampling of jotter work to monitor the quality of pupil response
- the use of cross marking to calibrate assessments
- analysis of SQA results and subsequent professional discussion
- the agreeing of targets for individuals and groups and the consequent review of attainment
- the swapping of classes to allow teachers to gauge progress in similar sets
- the use of questionnaires and other student feedback measures

It is, however, essential that school managers, who are held responsible for the assurance of quality in teaching and learning, should have the opportunity, on an ongoing basis, to sample the actual classroom experience of pupils across the school.

Teacher Autonomy and Accountability

Respect for professional autonomy and enhancing the role of the classroom teacher is an essential element of *A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century*. Glasgow City Council has stated that there is a need to enhance the professionalism of teachers. A modern profession should have increased professional discretion. However teacher autonomy is not absolute. The development of a genuine collegiate atmosphere and approach in schools is a key part of the process to maximise the skills and expertise of all staff. It is within this context that with increased professional autonomy comes a requirement for accountability for the quality of service provided.

All teachers would accept that the monitoring of pupil experience by school managers is absolutely essential for certain specific purposes:

- Assessing, monitoring and supporting the progress of probationer teachers
- Identifying reasons why a particular group of pupils is presenting behavioural problems to teachers across a school and to agree a common strategy to address specific problem
- Supporting a teacher who is experiencing particular difficulties
- Determining progress made by a teacher whose competence is the subject of formal support and disciplinary procedures as required for the GTCS competency framework
- As a response by management to concerns about physical conditions or health, safety and well being of pupils.

In relation to monitoring of teaching and learning as an ongoing process within the establishment's quality framework, focussed as it will be by reference to the quality indicators of HGioS, direct sampling of the classroom experience is no less essential. Here, however, the emphasis must be clearly upon the quality of the pupil experience – it is not about the mechanistic monitoring of teachers. Consequently there should be no "crit lesson" nor should the process involve a mechanistic tick box checklist. There should of course be an agreed focus for monitoring and an agreed format for recording information about the pupil experience.

The process should encourage staff to work in genuine partnership and help provide the grounds in which a culture of mutual respect can grow.

The Process of Monitoring

The monitoring process can be defined as having three specific stages.

Firstly an agreed understanding of what area(s) of activity is to be considered and which quality indicators are being used as a focus Secondly, an agreed procedure as to how the desired information is to be found. Thirdly, an agreed method for recording results in order to progress constructive evaluations. It is essential that all three procedural stages are in place before the monitoring activities commence.

Stage 1: What do we want to know?

The area or areas of activity to be monitored should be expressed in terms of *How Good is our School 2* or *Child at the Centre* or the improvement strategies defined within the establishment's development plan. The indicators/themes can be used to identify the specific areas of focus and the level 4 illustrations can be used to identify the standard of practice to be achieved where the area of activity relates specifically to an area of activity defined in terms of *HGIOS 2*. This provides a shared frame of reference for defining the areas of investigation and also provides specific examples of the type of practice that are the focus for monitoring. All involved require a clear understanding of what is being monitored before the most appropriate methods for monitoring are identified.

Stage 2: How can we find out?

There is a range of strategies that can be used for monitoring purposes and it is important that time is taken to identify the most appropriate strategies for the particular purposes required.

- Self-evaluation is a key strategy in enlisting the support of the reflective professional in monitoring specific quality indicators or improvement strategies. Self-evaluation is at the core of the process of school improvement promoted by *HGIOS 2*. The individual teacher could be encouraged to respond to the agreed indicator or theme or illustration on the 1-4 scale and provide evidence to support their judgement. A collated response from staff can provide a comprehensive view of how the establishment, function or department is performing or progressing.
- The analysis of classroom documentation and materials, such as forward plans, schemes of work, learning or lesson plans, pupils' work, homework and classroom display. All such monitoring should be carried out using an agreed specification of desired standards of practised which can take account of level 4 illustrations from *HGIOS 2*, together with other appropriate standards and specifications devised collegiately within the school.

- Interview with individual members of staff about the teaching and learning process, classroom methods and issues such as appropriateness of homework activities, behaviour management and support for staff.
- Active participation by management in classroom activity by senior management and principal teachers in classroom activity in order to share with staff their experience of the teaching and learning process. The monitoring becomes a shared activity and promoted as a co-operative response on how well the school or department is meeting specific indicators or targets within the development plan.
- Co-operative teaching can also be used for monitoring purposes. Where such exists there should be an agreed school policy. Members of staff can support each other in monitoring elements of classroom practice. This strategy, which need not involve line managers, could be of particular value in cross-curricular activities such as literacy across the curriculum and the use of ICT in teaching and learning. Preparation for, and evaluation of, such activities should be programmed within the working time arrangements for the 35 hour week.
- The use of questionnaires and surveys with pupils and parents can assist in gathering information about teaching and learning. For example schools now frequently ask pupils to evaluate sections of work and the use of new methods. Parents are asked about the overall teaching programmes provided by the school and the homework policy. Such general questionnaires should not of course identify individual teachers.
- Data analysis is an essential part of the monitoring process. Data is now available in a comprehensive manner on levels of attainment – national testing, SQA results and other internal assessment data. The review of pupil performance can identify specific areas for development, and initiate monitoring procedures to measure progress. Use of the data for the authority as a whole enables good practice to be identified and used to support the development of others.
- Direct observation is part of the range of the monitoring procedures. In a climate where all teachers share a collegiate responsibility for raising attainment, direct observation of the classroom experience of pupils and classes is recognised as an essential professional tool which is part of the on going experience of teachers and pupils. This form of monitoring will be undertaken in the context of trying to achieve the targets set out in the school or departmental development plan or to inform decisions about priorities for future development. Such activity has the potential to generate positive and supportive professional discussion. It also allows promoted staff to see at first hand the challenges and difficulties that classroom teachers are facing on a daily basis. It also permits the impact of professional development to be evaluated.

It is essential that proper professional procedures and put in place at school level to ensure that observations are conducted in a professional manner Sufficient notification should be given to teachers about times when observation of classroom activity will take

place and the purpose of the observation. Where possible an annual programme should be developed as part of the standard forward planning within establishments.

Stage 3: How will the results be collated?

The main purpose of the monitoring activity is to collect information that will inform and facilitate improvement in classroom practice. It is essential that the information is recorded in an agreed, consistent manner which will allow the results from different experiences to be sensibly collated. In clearly specifying what details are to be recorded and in what manner, the information from variety of sources and personnel can be collated into a coherent description of current practice.

Following the collation and analysis, a proper evaluation can be conducted. The evaluation will be informed by the collated responses and individual members of staff can then examine practice and opinions against a bigger picture. An informed evaluation of current practice can help inform the way forward and how the process of improvement can follow a structured and focused path. Through a participative monitoring process all staff are involved in the process of change which follows.

Specific Arrangements for Classroom Observation in Monitoring of Teaching and Learning

A school policy on monitoring of teaching and learning will include specific arrangements for classroom observation. This does not involve the mechanistic monitoring of teachers. Where there is a need for the specific observation of individual teachers then alternative arrangements apply. The policy should include a clear definition of the requirement for classroom monitoring or observation and procedures in place at school level must ensure that observation is conducted in a professional manner.

Procedures should include the following:

- (i) A clear exposition, based on authority guidelines, on the manner in which the procedures will be conducted.
- (ii) An understanding that monitoring and observation will focus on the quality of learning experience of pupils rather than on the classroom teacher. However there will be circumstances in which the teaching methods will be the subject of consideration in the process (for example where new methods are being introduced).
- (iii) The line manager (senior manager or principal teacher) will actively co-operate in the most appropriate manner in the conduct of the lesson within the context of the learning or lesson plan prepared by the classroom teacher
- (iv) There is a planned programme of monitoring of classroom activity to ensure that classroom teachers have adequate opportunity for consultation on the timing and

nature of any observation or monitoring which is to take place. This programme should not be of such a length/scale that it disrupts the progress of the curriculum.

- (v) Written records kept of monitoring or observations are made available to the teacher and must not be made available to anyone without the prior consent of the teacher.
- (vi) Arrangements should be in place for debriefing of staff and the input of the outcome of observation into more general school and departmental discussions.
- (vii) It is not considered appropriate to monitor teaching and learning as part of the quality framework using a "crit" lesson or "tick box" approach
- (viii) Classroom observation in the context of monitoring of teaching and learning is not associated with disciplinary procedures. This is defined in separate procedures.

If not already in place as part of a school agreement, any new scheme of monitoring of teaching and learning should be introduced after consultation and as part of the establishment's development planning process.