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LNCT/16/01

Classroom Visits to Improve Teaching and Learning

Dear Colleague,

Attached are the renewed LNCT agreed documents pertaining to classroom visits for quality assurance purposes.

Yours sincerely

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Within Aberdeenshire Council's Education and Children Services Strategic Service Plan (2015-2016) is the priority: "To improve learning and teaching and the quality of the curriculum in our schools." This on-going target is aimed at improving the quality of learners' experiences in the classroom.

One aspect supporting this process is the appropriate and planned use of visits to classrooms by fellow professionals. This circular, and the attached appendix, clarifies the context for visits and outlines guidance to be followed by staff.

Context

The aspect of classroom visits is now well established in Aberdeenshire schools and reflects and accommodates a range of thinking within Scottish education:

- a) The Standard in Scottish Schools Act (2000) confirms a responsibility for local authorities and schools to improve the quality of their service. It confirms the importance of such improvement focussing on what happens in the classroom.
- b) GTCS endorsement of commitment for improvement: "Registered teachers reflect and engage with the professional standard and demonstrate constructive participation and engagement with curriculum development, improvement planning and professional review and development. (The Standard of Registration 2012)
- c) "Where classroom observation exists it should be within the context of improving teaching and learning. It should be based on a collegiate

approach to school management and form part of self, school and departmental evaluation”
(EIS: Teacher Professionalism and the Scottish Parliament)

For classroom visits to be valued and effective the following guidelines and principles should be observed and form part of agreed processes for school improvement planning.

Guidelines and Principles

The existence of an **ethos of trust and professional respect** is essential in ensuring that all involved in classroom visits gain benefit and feel valued.

Detail and protocols appropriate for specific types of classroom visits are included in the appendix ‘Approaches to Classroom visits’, but the following over-arching principles should be adhered to:

- Visits should be related to ongoing work contained in the schools’ improvement plan.
- Local school agreement about the programme, nature and purpose of classroom visits should be established prior to visits taking place.
- Visits should not generate additional teacher workload.
- Classroom visits should facilitate subsequent appropriate professional dialogue but as advised in “Tackling Bureaucracy” such a process should not be burdensome.
- In all cases the ultimate focus of all classroom visits will be the improvement of learning experiences for the young people in Aberdeenshire.

See appendix “**Approaches to Classroom Visits to Improve Learning & Teaching**” for elaboration on possible approaches and types of classroom visit that might be pursued.

Distribution:

Attachments: Approaches to Classroom Visits to Improve Learning and Teaching

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**APPROACHES TO CLASSROOM VISITS
TO IMPROVE LEARNING AND
TEACHING**

- Detailed below are examples of **possible** approaches to classroom visits to improve learning and teaching.
- When pursuing any of the different approaches, the **over-arching principles and guidelines found in the Information Circular IN2/483 should be applied.**
- Different types of classroom visit may be considered but **engagement in any aspect should be confirmed within a local school agreement on self-evaluation procedures.**
- Alongside these planned classroom visits there may also be other complimentary reflective activities in a school. These could include consultation exercises with learners or parents, and classroom visits either formal or informal, in line with the protocols identified. These activities also should be pursued in a collaborative manner and they too should be in line with the principles in the above Information Circular.

TYPES OF CLASSROOM VISITS

1. Collaborative Learning Rounds/Learning Walks

As part of a school's plans to focus on improving learners' experiences Collaborative Learning Rounds or Learning Walks may be planned as part of the agreed catalogue of CPD activities. These are events where a group of professional colleagues engage in a collaborative study of learning across a range of lessons and contexts. The focus will tend to (delete) be on what it is like to be a learner in those places. They do not make evaluative judgements on particular teachers.

2. Classroom Visits by Peer Professionals

As a supportive measure, peer professionals may informally agree to visit each other's lessons to observe and subsequently discuss aspects of learning and teaching. Such engagement has often resulted in significant growth in capacity and is being seen more and more in schools.

3. Formal Classroom Visits as Part of School/Service Policy

Formal classroom visits as part of a programme of school self-evaluation have featured across schools for a number of years. These are planned visits where learning and teaching are observed and in order to increase teacher capacity, formal feedback mechanisms are arranged. They may be carried out by Principal Teachers, School Senior Leaders or members of a Quality Improvement Visit team. Reference points for such visits will be based on published Quality Indicators as per How Good Is Our School.

APPROPRIATE PROTOCOLS FOR CLASSROOM VISITS

Given the variety of types of classroom visits that take place, different protocols are appropriate for different circumstances.

However, in all circumstances the focus should remain on improving learner's experiences and all visits should take place in a context of trust where professional respect is displayed by all. Similarly, in all cases if any serious health and safety or child welfare concerns are seen then appropriate intervention should be taken straight away.

1. Collaborative Learning Rounds/Learning Walks

These exercises in collaborative professional learning should be seen as part of a wider programme of an individual's professional learning. On most occasions the preparation and planning will be led by groups of teachers rather than senior leaders. Specific protocols to incorporate are:-

- a) Participation – this activity is voluntary in terms of both those visiting and being visited. Clear dialogue before such events is needed to confirm participation.
- b) Findings from such events should be descriptive only and focus on learner's experiences.
- c) Emerging discussions and dialogue should not be evaluative in terms of individual teachers nor should individuals be identified.
- d) Facility should exist to ensure all teachers benefit from the emerging findings. A plan for relevant professional learning in response to findings should be promoted.
- e) All the above protocols should be publicised and known by all before embarking on the exercise.

2. Classroom Visits by Peer Professionals

As these visits are arranged locally and voluntarily, it is up to particular teachers themselves to arrange these and to confirm time to discuss emerging reflections. Relevant protocols include however the following:-

- a) Peer classroom visits are voluntary. However they are seen as being professionally worthwhile. This could be applied in a cross-sector way but to support this approach collegiate agreement is needed.
- b) Emerging reflections are for those directly involved to discuss and consider – no formal account of the exercise should be requested by other professionals.

3. Formal Classroom Visits as Part of School/Service Policy

The backdrop to all classroom visits that include formal observation of learning and teaching must be a culture of integrity, courtesy and professionalism. The agreed rationale for all such events is to improve the quality of learner's experiences and to identify effective practice that can be shared with others. Relevant protocols for such events are:-

- a) Formal visits should take place as part of a planned and published programme of self-evaluation.
- b) In advance of such visits the following should be confirmed:- when the visit will take place (at least 5 working days notice); who will be involved; what purpose the visit has as part of school improvement; what focus the visit will have; how, when and by who will feedback emerging from the visit be discussed.
- c) Normally, a maximum of 3 formal visits per session should be applied regarding how much time any individual teacher is formally visited. This would include classroom visits as a formal part of Aberdeenshire Council led QI processes including QI visits.
- d) Feedback following this type of visit will depend on the context .When visits are made by colleagues within a school, feedback should be timely, confidential and supportive. Any agreed action points for improvement must be reasonable and supported through appropriate available resourcing and opportunity for professional learning. A record of discussion points should be kept and agreed by the relevant participant. Where the visit is part of a Quality Improvement Visit, feedback would be more limited and based on a brief conversation about the learners 'experiences observed.

LINKS TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

The General Teaching Council for Scotland:

<http://www.gtcs.org.uk/standards/standards.aspx>

Education Scotland:

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/examplesofpractice/selfevaluation.asp>

Teaching Scotland's Future

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/3376...>