

MONITORING OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Specific Arrangements for Classroom Observation in Monitoring of Teaching and Learning

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This paper describes the LNCT agreed documents pertaining to classroom visits for quality assurance and clarification purposes. This supplements Education Management Circular Learning visits and Monitoring (which was noted at LNCT on 28th September 2016)

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (LNCT) is asked to note the contents of this paper.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Every educational establishment has a responsibility to monitor the effectiveness of its service being provided for 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 continuously look for ways to improve. In addition, education authorities have a duty to secure improvement in the education being provided.

Many things must be taken into account when measuring the effectiveness of an educational establishment, for example, health and safety, financial management, attendance, staff development, child protection, ethos, partnerships 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 learning and teaching, the process and practice described can be applied as a model for the monitoring of other key areas of the life of the establishment.

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

- Improvement planning;
- The Implementation of Improvement Strategies;
- Monitoring and Evaluating, and
- Continuing Professional Development of staff.

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

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

- As part of a systematic review of the key areas of an activity as detailed in *How Good Is Our School* or *How Good is Our School ELC (HGIOS ELC)* including learning and teaching. Where areas for improvement are identified they can be included in a future improvement plan in order to promote the model of continuous improvement. In this way, monitoring contributes to establishment priorities in future improvement plans.
- As part of the follow-up to the improvement planning activity, where establishment/departmental targets relate to the promotion of raising attainment or elements of learning and teaching, the establishment or department will identify some key priorities for improvement and will create strategies to secure improvement. It is appropriate that these improvement strategies relating to learning and teaching are the subject of on-going monitoring to determine their effectiveness.

- As part of the on-going evaluation of attainment in the establishment, schools are required each year to produce a Standards and Qualities Report which provides a statement of how well they are performing, their key strengths and areas for improvement.
- In the process of the identification and sharing of good practice within the school and the collegiate approach to staff development.

4. THE MONITORING PROCESS

4.1 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 learning and teaching and the sharing of good practice as an important consequence of the process. This monitoring process will obviously have a number of strands. These may include:

- Discussion at collegiate meeting, focussed on child/young person and class progress.
- The regular sampling of work to monitor the quality of child/young person's response.
- Use of cross-marking to calibrate assessments and support moderation for professional judgement.
- An analysis of SQA results and subsequent professional discussions.
- The agreeing of targets for individuals and groups and its consequent review of attainment.
- The exchange of classes to allow teachers to gauge progress in similar sets
- The use of questionnaires and other feedback measures.

It is, however, essential that senior and middle managers in the schools and early years centres, who are responsible for the assurance of quality in learning and teaching, should have the opportunity, on an on-going basis, to sample the actual classroom experience of children and young people across the establishment.

4.2 The Monitoring Process can be defined as having three specific stages.

- Stage 1; an agreed understanding of what area(s) of activity is to be considered and which quality indicators are being used as a focus.
- Stage 2; an agreed procedure as to how the desired information is to be found.
- Stage 3; an agreed method of recording results in order to progress constructive evaluations.

It is essential that all three procedural stages are in place before the monitoring activities commence.

4.2.1 **Stage 1: What do we want to know?**

The areas of activity to be monitored should be expressed in terms of *How Good Is Our School* or *HGIOS ELC* or the improvement strategies defined within the establishment's improvement plan. The indicators/themes can be used to identify the specific areas of focus and the *level 5 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* or *HGIOS ELC*.. 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.

4.2.2 **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 establishment improvement promoted by *HGIOS* or *HGIOS ELC*. The individual teacher could be encouraged to respond to the agreed indicator or theme or

illustration 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.

- **Classroom Visits by Peer Professionals.** As these visits will in most instances be arranged within school establishments but opportunities to extend this to cluster working could be beneficial to smaller or more isolated schools. It is up to particular teachers themselves to arrange these and to confirm time to discuss emerging reflections.
 - 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.
- **Young Leaders of Learning (YLL) Programme.** This must have the permission and agreement of teachers for the involvement in advance of any associated activity. A schools decision to become involved in this programme should be taken on a collegiate basis with teachers participating fully in decision making around its implementation and perceived benefit to young people. The YLL programme should not involve young people carrying out activities which would place them in the role of evaluators of teacher performance or professionalism. Teachers may use the YLL toolkit as part of their self-evaluation activities in the classroom.
- **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 of good practice. 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.

- **The analysis of classroom/playroom documentation and materials**, such as forward plans, Schemes of Work, Learning or Lesson Plans, Child's/Young Persons' Work, Homework and Classroom/Playroom Display. All such monitoring should be carried out using an agreed specification of desired standards or practice which can take account of Level 5 Illustrations from *HGIOS* or *Child at Centre*, together with other appropriate standards and specifications devised collegiately within the establishment.
- **Discussion** with individual members of staff about the learning and teaching process, classroom/playroom methods and issues such as appropriateness of homework activities, behaviour management and support for staff.
- **Active participation by senior and middle management in classroom activity** in order to share with staff their experience of the learning and teaching process. The monitoring thus becomes a shared activity and promoted as a co-operative response to how well the establishment or department is meeting specific indicators or targets within the improvement plan.
- **Co-operative teaching** can also be used for monitoring purposes. Where such exists there should be an agreed 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 children and young people and parents/carers can assist in gathering information about learning and teaching. For example, schools now frequently ask children and young people to evaluate sections of work and the use of new methods to improve their learning. Parents/Carers are asked about aspects of the life of the establishment and their involvement in it. 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 assessments, SQA data and other internal assessment data. The review of child/young person 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 monitoring procedures. In a climate where all teachers share a collegiate responsibility for raising attainment, direct observation of the classroom experience of children/young people and classes is recognised as an essential professional tool which is part of the ongoing experience of teachers and children/young people. This form of monitoring will be undertaken in the context of trying to achieve the targets set out in the establishment or departmental improvement 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 teachers' experiences in their classroom/playroom. It also permits the impact of professional development to be evaluated.

4.2.3 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/playroom 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. This process also allows for sharing of good practice. 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.

5. 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. Argyll and Bute 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 establishments 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 learners' experience by managers is absolutely essential for certain specific purposes:

- Assessing, monitoring and supporting the progress of probationer teachers
- Identifying reasons why a particular group of children or young people 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 wellbeing of children and young people.

In relation to monitoring of learning and teaching as an ongoing process within the establishment's quality framework, focused as it will be by reference to the quality indicators in HGIOS, direct sampling of the classroom experience is no less essential. Here, however, the emphasis must be clearly upon the quality of the learners' 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. It may be helpful for there to be an agreed focus for monitoring.

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

It is essential that proper professional procedures are put in place at establishment level to ensure that observations are conducted in a professional manner.

6. Specific Arrangements for Classroom Observation in Monitoring of Teaching and Learning

A policy on monitoring of learning and teaching will include specific arrangements for classroom/ playroom 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. The backdrop to all classroom visits that include formal observation of learning and teaching must be a culture of integrity, courtesy and professionalism. Local school agreement about the programme, nature and purpose of classroom visits should be established prior to visits taking place.

Procedures should include the following:

- (i) Sufficient notification should be given to teachers about when observation of classroom activity will take place and the purpose of the observation. 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. 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.
- (ii) Best practice is when an annual programme is developed as part of the standard planning within establishments.
- (iii) An understanding that monitoring and observation will focus on the quality of learning experience of children/young people 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).

- (iv) The line manager (senior or middle manager) 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.
- (v) There is a planned programme of monitoring of classroom/playroom activity to ensure that 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.
- (vi) 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. However, a summary of the monitoring or observations can be used to promote good practice.
- (vii) Visits should not generate additional teacher workload as advised in "Tackling bureaucracy and addressing undue workload in schools " Education Scotland
- (viii) Arrangements should be in place for debriefing of staff and the input of the outcome of observation into more general school and departmental discussions.
- (ix) It is not considered appropriate to monitor learning and teaching as part of the quality framework using a "crit" lesson or "tick box" approach.
- (x) Pupils views could be reflected as part of a learning visit. However, pupils should not be invited to make comment on either teachers or their practice, taking them into the territory of evaluating teacher professionalism.

- (xi) Classroom observation in the context of monitoring of learning and teaching is not associated with disciplinary procedures. This is defined in separate procedures.
- (xii) If not already in place as part of an establishment agreement, any new scheme of monitoring of learning and teaching should be introduced after consultation and as part of the establishment's improvement planning process.
- (xiii) As part of the authority's duty to secure improvement under the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act (2000), there may be times when the quality improvement officers or other authority personnel will visit classrooms/ playrooms to monitor the learning experience of children and young people. These visits could be as part of a quality review of an establishment or as part of the annual programme of visits to establishments. Such visits must be consistent with the principles outlined in this circular.

LINKS TO

Standards in Scotland's Schools Act (2000)

www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2000/6/pdfs/asp_20000006_en.pdf

How Good Is Our School (HGIOS)

https://education.gov.scot/improvement/documents/frameworks_selfevaluation/frwk2_nihedithgios/frwk2_hgios4.pdf

How Good is Our School ELC (HGIOS ELC)

https://education.gov.scot/improvement/documents/frameworks_selfevaluation/frwk1_niheditself-evaluationhgielc/hgioelc020316revised.pdf

A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century

<https://www2.gov.scot/Publications/2001/01/7959/File-1>

Tackling bureaucracy and addressing undue workload in schools

www.gov.scot/resource/0043/00438617.pdf

***HGIOS 4 Level 5 Illustrations** - For the purposes of national benchmarking, the six point scale (HGIOS 4. Appendix 3) remains an important aspect of How good is our school? For each quality indicator in the framework there is an illustration of what an evaluation of “very good” might look like. These illustrations are intended to support professional dialogue and critical reflection during ongoing self-evaluation. They are broad generic illustrations which should be able to be applied in any type of school.