

Aberdeenshire Education, Learning & Leisure

Information Circular

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SUBJECT: MONITORING CLASSROOM PRACTICE - VISITS TO CLASSROOMS BY PROMOTED STAFF/EDUCATION NETWORK MANAGERS (ENMs)/QUALITY IMPROVEMENT OFFICERS (QIOs)

There have been some enquiries from headteachers and classroom teachers seeking clarification over the purpose and procedures for visits to classrooms by promoted staff for the purposes of observing the learning and teaching process. This circular clarifies the context for visits and outlines guidance to be followed by all staff.

Aberdeenshire Council is fully committed to the principles of collegiality and the development of the autonomous professional as stated in the McCrone Agreement. We are also committed to the provision of high quality professional standards for the users of our service.

The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 makes it a legal responsibility for all authorities to ensure that schools produce an improvement plan. This plan should be produced and reported on through the Standards and Quality (SQUiP) report on an annual basis and should involve all stakeholders in its construction. This process is now well established in Aberdeenshire schools. Arrangements for observing classroom practice should be agreed each year through the School Improvement Planning Process.

Observing classroom practice is distinct from the agreed procedures for Professional Development and Review Scheme or Discipline. Similarly it is distinct from those processes established for the purpose of constructing a reference.

Since probationer teachers (i.e. all those provisionally registered with the GTCS) are subject to extensive classroom observation within the context of Aberdeenshire's policies and procedures on probationer support, observation

of classroom practice for school requirements should be subsumed within these procedures.

The above provides the context for the observing of learning and teaching in school classrooms. The following quotes also set the context for observing and monitoring the quality of learning and teaching.

Self-evaluation also involves groups of teachers reflecting on their work together. We can do this in a number of ways by:

- *Commenting on each other's work, for example plans and assessments;*
- *Engaging in co-operative teaching and discussion; and*
- *Visiting each other's classrooms to see how particular developments are going, to experience different methods of teaching or to confirm our views of learners' progress.*

This process of peer evaluation is an important professional activity symbolizing the professional responsibility of teams of teachers for their work. It complements professional discussion with senior colleagues who might teach alongside teachers or observe practice in classrooms. The indicators in this edition have been written in such a way that they talk directly to teams of teachers. In this way they recognize this important collegiate responsibility.

Collegiate self-evaluation by teachers and with school managers works best when a school community has a shared understanding of what it means by quality. This often stems from a shared vision of a school community for the school and its pupils, perhaps based on an agreed view of what the school should be like in two or three years time.

How Good is Our School

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

Registered Teachers are able to plan coherent and progressive teaching programmes which match their pupils' needs and abilities and they can justify what they teach.

The Standard for Full Registration - GTCS

Guidelines

The following procedures should be observed when establishing an agreed programme of classroom observation through the School Improvement Planning process:

- Visits should be related to the ongoing work contained within the improvement plan. This will be known to all. Arrangements should be made for long term temporary staff to have access to the improvement plan.
- Visits should be within the context of learning and teaching and the overall welfare of the school and its pupils.
- Visits should be pre-planned and timings agreed and negotiated with the class teacher.
- The purpose of the visit should be clear to the promoted staff/ENM/QIO and class teacher and be agreed.
- Visits should involve a general process of interaction within the classroom involving both the class teacher and promoted member of staff/ENM/QIO.
- There should be formal feedback provided to the teacher and this should be in written form with a copy provided for the teacher.
- The number of visits to classrooms should not be onerous and should be set within the context of the agreed whole school quality assurance programme.
- Schools should make arrangements to allow appropriate time for consultation and feedback.

NB Some schools have developed a system of peer visits and this is considered as good professional practice. Where this does take place it should be with the agreement of both teachers.

Conclusion:

Where classroom observation is undertaken by teachers committed to providing high quality learning and teaching experiences and by managers committed to the process of collegiate management, the outcome will be the improvement in the learning experiences for the young people of Aberdeenshire.

The development of an ethos of trust and professional respect is the key to effective evaluation procedures.

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