

GUIDANCE ON CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Classroom observation, as with any other Quality Assurance/school improvement activity, should take place in the context of an agreed school policy for monitoring and evaluation, which identifies ground rules and procedures.
- 1.2 As part of this teachers should expect that from time to time school managers, LEA advisers and external assessors will observe their lessons. Teachers have a right to expect that this will be carried out sensitively, unobtrusively and professionally. The following guidance is provided as recommended good practice in this area.

2. Principles

- 2.1 The number of observations undertaken should be kept to the minimum dependent on the context of the observation, eg for Performance Management the number of observations will be dependent on the policy of the individual school (the professional associations recommend a maximum of 3 observations for all purposes during the academic year in order to reduce bureaucracy in schools).
- 2.2 Observations can be undertaken in a number of contexts, eg performance management, as part of an NQT's induction process, whole school evaluation, the monitoring of the implementation of specific curriculum initiatives or as part of a supportive process where concerns regarding a teacher's capability have been identified. The context in which an observation is being undertaken should be made clear to the teacher either by the Headteacher or the observer as far as possible in advance of the observation taking place. An exception could be where performance concerns have been identified and discussed with the teacher and unannounced observations have been planned with the teacher's knowledge to help verify progress towards targets set.
- 2.3 Observers must have teaching experience and wherever practicable have received appropriate training to carry out observations.
- 2.4 The Headteacher has a statutory responsibility for evaluating the standards of teaching and learning and ensuring that proper standards of professional performance are established and maintained. There may be occasions therefore when a Headteacher or a designated colleague decides to carry out unannounced visits to classrooms for monitoring purposes to enable them to fulfil this role (monitoring in this context is not the same as a formal observation and the recommendation of the professional associations (see para 2.1) does not apply in these circumstances).
- 2.5 When general aspects of the school or curriculum are being reviewed and reported upon, individual teachers should not be identified.
- 2.6 Observations which are specifically related to an OFSTED inspection, ie between notification of an inspection and the inspection, should only take place following consultation between the Headteacher and teachers.

- 2.7 The burden of further paperwork as part of any observation process should be carefully considered by the Headteacher to ensure additional work is minimised.

3. Recommended Practice

- 3.1 For all observations other than the unannounced observations referred to above visits by Headteachers there should be discussion or planning before and feedback after an observation in accordance with the following format:

3.2 Before an Observation

The teacher and headteacher/observer should have time to:-

- (i) Discuss and agree which lesson(s) are to be observed.
- (ii) Discuss the context and agree the focus of the observation (unless both teacher and headteacher/observer agree that the lesson and curriculum plans provided are sufficient).
- (iii) Discuss and agree the behaviour/involvement of the observer during the lesson.
- (iv) The observer should arrive in plenty of time before the lesson starts.

NB If the observation relates to the informal or formal stages of the Capability Procedure agreement of which lessons will be observed will not always be appropriate as the Headteacher managing the process may wish to identify lessons to be observed.

3.3 During the Observation

The observer should work to the reasonable requests of the teacher and in accordance with what was agreed before the lesson.

3.4 After the Observation

- (i) The observer should provide constructive feedback to the teacher in private as soon as possible and at least within two working days.
- (ii) The observer should provide a copy of any written reports to the teacher and the Headteacher. The teacher should be able to append comments if they wish to be copied to the Headteacher.
- (iii) The observer should ensure the confidentiality of all reports and discuss with the teacher the proposed circulation of the reports which will be dependent on the context of the observation.
- (iv) The teacher may request the destruction of the observation report after a set period of time. The timing of the destruction of the report will be agreed between the teacher and the headteacher will be in accordance with procedural requirements where appropriate, eg the Capability Procedure.

4. Disagreements

Observation should take place in an atmosphere of supportive collegiality. When serious professional disagreements arise between an observer and a teacher the Headteacher should take action to resolve such issues. If the Headteacher is the observer the teacher should have recourse to the Chair of Governors who should seek professional advice from the School's LSDA. It is recommended that the Grievance and Disputes Procedure set out in Section 15 of the Personnel Manual for Schools is used in these circumstances.

5. Governor Visits

Governor visits are different to informal and formal observations of lessons as detailed above. Individual governors may need to visit classrooms to become familiar with the school or to monitor specific aspects of the curriculum. Such visits should always be by prior arrangement and follow procedures agreed and specified by the Headteacher and the Governing Body. Guidance on this is contained in Section 16 of the School Governors Handbook produced by Somerset Governor Support.