

## **Guidance on Classroom Observation/Visits**

Classroom observation is a regular practice in schools. This guidance, which has been developed by the Management Side and the Teachers' Side of the Teachers' Salaries and Conditions of Service Committee, aims to share and promote good practice, acknowledging the role classroom observation can play in the improvement of learning and teaching and in the professional development of the teacher.

Classroom observation should be a positive experience which brings benefit to teaching and learning in the school.

### **1. Context**

- 1.1 The Teachers' (Terms and Conditions of Employment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987, commonly referred to as the Jordanstown Agreement, define the professional duties of a principal which include "keeping under review the work and organisation of the school" and "evaluating the standards of teaching and learning in the school and ensuring that proper standards of professional performance are established and maintained".
- 1.2 The National Standards for Head Teachers NI 2005 states that the principal, working with others, is responsible for evaluating the school's performance, to identify the priorities for continuous improvement and raising standards. This implies setting high expectations and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of learning outcomes. The principal is expected to monitor, evaluate and review classroom practice and to promote improvements strategies.
- 1.3 The Performance Review and Staff Development Scheme TNC 2009/10 (PRSD) provides for formal classroom observation, focusing on appropriate aspects of objectives which have been agreed in advance.
- 1.4 The Procedure for Dealing with Principals, Teachers and Vice Principals Whose Work is Unsatisfactory provides for formal observation, monitoring and evaluation of a teacher's work.
- 1.5 Therefore classroom observation may be undertaken:
  - (i) to ensure proper standards of professional performance are established and maintained;
  - (ii) to develop and share teaching and learning strategies;
  - (iii) as part of the PRSD process;
  - (iv) to monitor unsatisfactory work/performance.

Principals should exercise their professional judgement on the timing and frequency of classroom visits and observation.

### **2. Formal Classroom Observation**

- 2.1 Classroom observation should be seen as part of a wider process within every school of school self-evaluation and the observation should always be undertaken with professionalism, integrity and courtesy.

- 2.2 Arrangements for dates and periods for observation should normally be by agreement between the teacher and the observer who in most cases will be the principal or head of department. Teachers should normally be given adequate notice of when the observation will take place, but principals have the right to enter classrooms unannounced. Principals should take care to exercise this right sensitively.
- 2.3 The duration of the observation should normally be agreed in advance and should not exceed more than one half hour at any time. If more than one observation is to be undertaken, there should be a reasonable time lapse between them.
- 2.4 The objectives of the lesson should normally be discussed in advance and should be the focus of the observation.
- 2.5 The teacher should be given verbal and/or written feedback, as appropriate, which should be supportive and developmental.

### **3. Peer Observation, Mentoring and Coaching**

- 3.1 Many schools have initiated a process of peer observation, mentoring and coaching for professional development purposes. Peer observation, mentoring and coaching is a practical way of teachers supporting each other, developing the curriculum within the school and improving teaching and learning. This process should be by agreement between the teachers concerned and should not involve judgements of teacher performance.

### **4. Curriculum Co-ordinator Visits**

- 4.1 Co-ordinators are tasked with developing an area of the curriculum and may visit classes to observe the teaching and learning in that particular subject. Co-ordinators should not be asked to monitor or evaluate the work of other teachers. Observation by curricular co-ordinators should be treated in the same way as peer observation in that it should normally be by agreement and should not involve judgements of teacher performance.

### **5. General Classroom Visits**

- 5.1 In order to fulfil effectively their duties, as outlined in the Jordanstown Agreement, principals must be free to visit classrooms at any time they consider appropriate, subject to the above guidance.

***The frequency or purpose of classroom observation/visits is not prescribed and the Employing Authorities will support principals exercising their professional judgement in line with the above guidance.***