



THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION AND MONITORING

Advice to Members

The EIS policy "Teacher Professionalism and the Scottish Parliament" 2001 is endorsed by the Scottish Executive. In its introduction it states:

"There is an expectation that teachers share in an even more open way than in the past, information on a number of issues relating to the school. This includes information on classroom practice, and, with appropriate individuals and agencies, information about the work of pupils in the school."

It refers to the practice of classroom monitoring and observation as part of the professional relationships among teachers within a school and the ways in which they work together.

"All of this implies that outdated line management practices of classroom monitoring based on superficial tick lists are increasingly replaced by professional debate and dialogue based on a range of evidence."

The number of initiatives and policies recently published by the Scottish Executive or in the process of being published do not alter EIS advice on classroom observation and monitoring. It must constitute part of the professional dialogue which takes place within schools on a collegiate basis as defined by the National Tripartite Agreement "A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century" (2001).

Teachers play a central role in "ensuring the quality and effectiveness of learning in school". (p3) Teachers have the 'right and responsibility ...to contribute to the development of a quality service.'(p29)

HMIE 'How Good is Our School?'

National EIS representatives discuss issues relating to classroom observation and monitoring with senior representatives of HMIE regularly.

HMIE have stressed that the main criterion for classroom observation and monitoring is the extent to which it improves the process of teaching and learning in schools.

'How Good is Our School?' emphasises team work, discussion with staff, working with peers, consultation, support and improvement, carrying out, in short, a collegial process. It also advocates a variety of methods of quality assurance.

The EIS believes that classroom observation aimed at improving teaching and learning can only be achieved in an environment which is supportive and where good professional relationships exist.

The EIS believes also that the professional autonomy and authority of the teacher must be recognised. Teachers themselves are best placed to identify the needs of the pupils in their classes and to have oversight of the most effective means of promoting learning among their pupils.

Visits to classrooms by appropriate senior promoted staff form part of the support for teachers in this task and should be undertaken only after appropriate consultation and agreement.

The EIS believes that classroom monitoring must not be used over frequently. Too much monitoring is counter productive and bad practice. It is our view that there is an onus by all involved in education to work in genuine partnership and to provide the grounds in which a culture of mutual respect can grow. This includes education authorities. Their quality assurance procedures must be supportive and considerate of the views of teachers.

A number of local associations have achieved agreement with Council representatives on classroom observation and monitoring which adhere to the principles outlined in the agreement "A teaching profession for the 21st Century".

These agreements recognise that –

- all involved in education have rights and responsibilities
- the need for mutual respect and trust is paramount to successful teaching and learning
- professional dialogue both formal and informal are integral to the process
- observation and monitoring must be set within a context of improving quality of teaching and learning
- observation and monitoring must be supportive of the teacher
- teachers are central to the learning process

They are clear that when properly implemented classroom observation and monitoring add value to the teaching and learning process.

However, even where agreement has been reached, some difficulties remain, and many local associations have not reached agreement.

The following advice is based on EIS Policy Paper
"Teacher Professionalism and the Scottish Parliament"
January 2001

Classroom Observation

Teachers, after full registration with the General Teaching Council, do not require day to day supervision and direction. Where classroom observation exists it must be within the context of improving teaching and learning. It must be based on a collegiate approach to school management and form part of self, school, and departmental evaluation.

Negotiated arrangements must be adhered to where there is a local agreement (EIS) on classroom observation.

Good practice

- Consultation on purpose and methods and timing of visits.
- Procedures well known and accepted by all through the School Development Planning process.

- Access of senior staff to individual classrooms must be on a strictly professional basis, reinforcing the mutually respectful relationship with professional colleagues and with pupils.

Classroom Observation -

- must be strictly within the context of learning and teaching and the overall welfare of the school and pupils in the school.
- must be preceded and followed by time for discussion.
- may be undertaken by teachers other than Senior Promoted Staff.
- must be with the agreement of the classroom teacher.
- must be either cooperative teaching or reciprocal observation.

What is not acceptable practice?

- Classroom observation must not be associated with disciplinary procedures.
- The use of check-lists by senior staff observing lessons.
- Access to a classroom by senior staff with the express purpose of monitoring the work of an individual teacher.
- Classroom monitoring must not be part of the development and career review of teachers.

If any teacher feels that classroom observation is part of a disciplinary procedure they should contact their local association secretary.

Where no local agreement exists, the EIS School Representative should advise the local association secretary immediately of any intention by school management to introduce classroom observation.

Extract from EIS Policy Paper

“Teacher Professionalism and the Scottish Parliament”

January 2001

Supervision and direction of teachers

Teachers, after full registration with the General Teaching Council, do not require day to day supervision and direction. As stated above (12.8) the EIS is committed to the professional autonomy of the teacher, to collegial management of schools and to greater democracy in schools. Collegial management should mean that the senior staff in schools are openly accessible to individual teachers whether promoted or unpromoted and that all teachers should be supported by colleagues in their work within the classroom.

Access to a classroom by senior staff with the express purpose of monitoring the work of an individual teacher is unacceptable to the EIS. It is unacceptable whether the intention is stated or unstated. It is particularly unacceptable when it is related to a potential disciplinary procedure relating to the individual member of staff. Within all local authority schools (and most other schools) there will be agreed mechanisms which should be applied by the headteacher when complaints or

concerns arise concerning individual members of staff. Senior staff should all be appropriately trained in these procedures and there should be an agreed and transparent mechanism on information to be acquired where an investigatory procedure relating to a member of staff is to be embarked upon. Classroom monitoring should form no part of such procedures. Such monitoring undermines the collegiate relationship between staff and the relationship between staff and pupils.

Teacher autonomy cannot be absolute. If individual teachers are to be supported by senior staff, this may involve access to their classroom by appropriate senior staff. Such access may be informal and designed to facilitate communication. When more formal visits take place there should be agreement within the school on the circumstances and timing of any visits. Visits should be strictly within the context of learning and teaching and the overall welfare of the school and pupils in the school. For example, visits to classrooms could involve access to individual pupils, or to groups of pupils; health and safety issues; matters related to the refurbishment of the schools; or to assist a general overview of the work of the school and of classes in the school. All such visits should be with a view to later discussion of general issues with teachers. The use of check-lists by senior staff during such general visits is unacceptable to the EIS.

Where classroom visits go beyond any general purpose as described above, for example where there is a local agreement (involving the EIS) on classroom observation, arrangements in schools must be in accordance with that agreement. Implementation in schools should be agreed by teachers through the procedures of the School Development Planning process. Classroom observation should take place within the context of learning and teaching in the classroom and should be for no other purpose. It is the EIS view that observation may be undertaken by teachers other than Senior Promoted Staff. Any arrangement for a visit should be with the agreement of the classroom teacher and should involve a general process of interaction within the classroom involving both teachers present. Sitting with a checklist at the back or front of the classroom of a fully registered teacher is not appropriate.

Classroom visits should be clearly distinct from any local arrangements on staff development and career review. There should be discussion prior to any observation taking place and a de-briefing after any observation. There should be agreement on the terms of any outcome to the process. Where a local agreement exists, it will be necessary to take further advice on any such arrangements from the local association. Where no local agreement exists, the EIS School Representative should advise the local association secretary immediately of any intention by school management to introduce classroom observation.

Access of senior staff to individual classrooms should be on a strictly professional basis, reinforcing the mutually respectful relationship with professional colleagues and with pupils. Access by senior staff to individual classrooms must encapsulate the principles outlined above and should be used sparingly so as not to interfere with the on-going work in the classroom or, other than exceptionally, to disrupt the flow of the particular lesson, planned or underway.