

Classroom Observation

Guidance for school representatives



INTRODUCTION

Excessive classroom observation is a serious problem in many schools. Steps must be taken to prevent this. NUT school representatives should seek to secure from the school management team an agreement on the total amount of classroom observation for any purpose or purposes to which teachers can be subjected within the academic year and to the procedures to be followed before, during and after such observations. Support for such approaches may be sought from representatives of other teachers' organisations at the school.

If agreement with the school management team cannot be reached, NUT school representatives should seek advice and support from the NUT regional office, or, in Wales, NUT Cymru.

The NUT regional office, or, in Wales, NUT Cymru, should be informed immediately if members are required to participate in classroom observation practices or procedures which are contrary to the NUT's advice.

The first part of this guidance sets out factual background information. The second part sets out the NUT's advice to members.

THE BACKGROUND AND PURPOSES OF CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

OFSTED Inspections

As part of an OFSTED or Estyn inspection, classroom observation is used to gain evidence to inform inspectors' judgements on the quality of teaching and learning provided by the school. The NUT has provided detailed guidance for members on all aspects of the OFSTED or Estyn inspection process, including observation of teaching. The NUT guidance is available to download from the NUT website: www.teachers.org.uk/story.php?id=2864

Induction

Observations are an important part of the statutory induction process for newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Detailed NUT guidance on NQT induction is available to download from the NUT website www.teachers.org.uk/story.php?id=2819

Peer Observation

Peer observation involves a teacher observing another teacher's practice. It is developmental. It involves teachers learning from each other. It offers first-hand experience and direct evidence about what happens in other classrooms. It is a practical and powerful way to support teachers' practice and knowledge about teaching and learning.

Peer observation works best when colleagues choose to work together on a voluntary basis, identifying and focusing on the issues they have agreed to address. It is a professional development activity.

The NUT professional development guidance *An A-Z of Peer Coaching* is available to download from

www.teachers.org.uk/resources/pdf/A-Z-peer-coaching.pdf In addition, the NUT and General Teaching Council for England (GTC(E)) have published jointly the document *The Teachers' Professional Learning Framework: A Guide to Peer Observation*. This is available to download from the GTC(E) website www.gtce.org.uk/pdfs/peer.pdf

Performance Management

Performance management is a statutory and contractual obligation, as set out in paragraph 65.4 of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (2004). The NUT advises that classroom observation for the purposes of performance management should be limited to one observation per year, of no more than one hour in duration. The NUT guidance on performance management, which includes also a model classroom observation checklist, is available to download from the NUT website www.teachers.org.uk/story.php?id=1153

Head Teacher – Local Authority Observations

Classroom observation has a role in the evaluation and monitoring of teachers that is separate from inspection and performance management requirements.

Head teachers may wish to observe teachers carrying out their duties as part of their responsibilities for “evaluating the standards of teaching and learning in the school, and ensuring that proper standards of professional performance are established and maintained” (paragraph 57.7 of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document). This may include visits to classrooms whilst lessons are in progress.

Classroom observation may be part of a programme of support provided to a school as part of improvement programmes such as the Primary and Secondary Strategies. Local authority advisors may be included in monitoring the quality of teaching across the authority. A local authority advisor's visit to a particular school may involve classroom observation.

Capability Procedures

The number of teachers subject to capability procedures at any one time is very small compared to the overall number of teachers. Head teachers should initiate such procedures only as a last resort.

In the event of a head teacher deciding to introduce capability procedures for a teacher, classroom observation may be used as a means of providing evidence of a teacher's strengths and weaknesses. Further information on capability procedures is available to download from the NUT website www.teachers.org.uk/story.php?id=1683

Governor Visits

Governor visits are different from informal and formal observations of lessons. Individual governors may wish to visit classrooms to become familiar with the school or to observe specific aspects of the curriculum. Such visits should always be by prior arrangement and follow procedures agreed and specified by the head teacher and the governing body following consultation with the teaching staff. Such procedures should specify that governor visits are not professional observations. Governors should not evaluate the work of teachers. No report by a governor evaluating the work of a teacher or teachers should be presented to the governing body.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS: NUT ADVICE

This guidance addresses classroom observation processes and practices arising from observation for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating teaching.

There should be a reasonable amount of time between classroom observations irrespective of the purpose of those observations. A bunching of classroom observations, albeit for different purposes, is unacceptable. The NUT advises that head teachers should consult on the pattern of classroom observations which teachers can expect annually. Agreement should be sought by head teachers with their teaching staff on such patterns. For the purpose of satisfying the requirements of the annual performance management cycle, each teacher should undergo a maximum of one classroom observation a year of a duration of no more than 60 minutes in length.

Teachers should be observed on an equitable basis, that is, all teachers should have a comparable number of observations per teacher per year.

Teachers should be made aware of the purpose or purposes of any proposed observation before it takes place.

Observations should not take place in a negative atmosphere. They should be conducted in a supportive and professional manner and should be neither intrusive nor threatening.

The “Protocol for Inspections”, in the OFSTED school inspection handbooks, contains a number of principles that would apply equally to anyone undertaking a professional classroom observation, in particular:

- undertaking observation with professionalism, integrity and courtesy;
- evaluating objectively;
- reporting honestly and fairly;
- communicating accurately;
- acting in the best interests of the pupils at the school; and
- respecting the confidentiality of information gained through the observation.

In addition to the provisions of the protocol, classroom observation conducted by OFSTED or Estyn inspectors must not lead to individual teachers being identified in subsequent reports.

The NUT believes that observers involved in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching should have the requisite experience, qualifications and training for the lessons they observe.

If a teacher believes that the observation has been carried out in an intimidating, intrusive way, this could constitute bullying or harassment.

The NUT believes that observation should not involve additional workload for teachers. Neither the teachers under observation nor those observing colleagues’ lessons should be asked to produce additional materials specifically for this purpose. **Where NUT members believe that any aspect of classroom observation, including the proposed timing, poses an unreasonable workload burden, they should contact their regional office or, in Wales, NUT Cymru, for advice.**

BEFORE THE OBSERVATION

The purpose or purposes of any observation should be made clear before it takes place. The following information and arrangements should be available to and accepted by both observer and observed beforehand:

- a) the reasons why the observation is taking place;
- b) the procedures to be followed;
- c) an agreement about the recording of any evaluation outcomes made and their reporting;
- d) a discussion about the aims and objectives of the lesson; and
- e) where relevant, the identity of the person from whom further information may be obtained if required.

The NUT believes that teachers should be given at least five days' notice of the observation of any lesson.

The checklist below should be used for discussions between observer and observed.

- Has the purpose of the observation been made clear?
- What is the focus of the observation?
- Which lesson or part(s) of lesson(s) are going to be observed?
- Has there been an opportunity for the teacher being observed to describe the context of the lesson?
- What level of involvement will the observer have in the observed lesson?
- Should there be a standard format for recording the observation, for example, a pro-forma?
- When and how will the feedback be given?
- What use will be made of any information arising from the observation?

DURING THE OBSERVATION

During the lesson(s), the observer should respond positively to any reasonable requests from the teacher being observed. The observer should act in as unobtrusive, sensitive and professional a manner as possible.

AFTER THE OBSERVATION

The feedback offered following the observation should be well balanced and constructive. Where possible, feedback should be given at the time and in the manner agreed during pre-observation discussions.

Feedback may take a number of forms. In many cases, a brief discussion after the class has been dismissed will be sufficient. In other cases, where it is agreed that there is a need for a more detailed analysis, a suitable opportunity should be agreed as soon as possible after the observation. This should be within the normal school day, and in an appropriate environment which ensures confidentiality. If both the teacher and observer agree to feedback, proposed during a school break or lunchtime, the teacher must have the opportunity to take a reasonable break as compensation before going to his/her next class.

Teachers should be allowed to read any notes arising from the observation before any discussion takes place. They should also have the opportunity to record their own comments if they wish.

Feedback should identify on good points from the lesson and constructive advice on any areas for improvement.

Discussion of the teachers' professional needs should be built into any feedback and used to identify opportunities for support and continuing professional development.

Report(s) arising from observations should be kept in a secure place and remain confidential to the observer, the observed and the head teacher. The teacher should be made aware of any proposed wider circulation. If concerned about such wider circulation, NUT members should contact the NUT regional office or, in Wales, NUT Cymru.

A visit by a Primary or Secondary Strategy consultant or local authority advisor, for example, may lead to reports which are circulated within relevant local authority teams. Such reports should not name individual teachers.

Teachers should retain reports of their classroom observation reports for up to five years. These can then be used, for example, for threshold application purposes. The NUT believe that at the time of the observation there should be agreement between observer and observed on the arrangements for the retention of reports and agreed end dates.

NUT joining hotline

0845 300 1669

NUT membership helpline

0845 300 1666



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