



# *Improving Learning and Teaching (LNCT14)*

## **Guidelines**

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## **Scope**

The LNCT has agreed that Joint Secretaries are authorised to issue extant agreements that require only minor amendment as LNCT agreements. One such area is in relation to Improving Learning and Teaching and this circular sets out the agreed guidance on this subject.

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LNCT Joint Secretaries

29/06/GC/LD

7 February 2006

To All Schools/Educational Establishments

## **IMPROVING LEARNING AND TEACHING**

I enclose a copy of the above guidance which has been agreed by JCG.

The paper provides an agreed framework for Fife schools to ensure that improving learning and teaching is a key focus of our activities and that monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice is an essential element of this improvement process.

I trust that all schools will continue to work collegiately to ensure that these principles are applied in order to provide the best possible learning and teaching experience to the pupils we serve.

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Senior Manager

# FIFE COUNCIL EDUCATION SERVICE

## Improving Learning and Teaching

### 1. Background

Every educational establishment has a responsibility to monitor the effectiveness of the service being provided for its children and young people. As a result of the Standards in Scotland's School Act (2000), all schools now have a statutory duty to assure the quality of service provided and to look continuously for ways of effecting improvement.

It is clear that a wide range of factors (Scottish Executive policies, Local Authority policies, the McCrone Agreement (TP21), advice from professional associations, advice from HMIE and school development planning) have led to widespread agreement that our schools should follow self-evaluative policies. In addition, while recognising the professional autonomy and authority of teachers, the individual teacher has an opportunity and an obligation to review his/her own work and the structures within which it is set. However, this obligation should be discharged within an atmosphere of openness, in which all staff feel a sense of partnership and mutual support.

### 2. Principles and Procedures

It is accepted that teachers work most effectively within an ethos of mutual respect which does not seek to limit their professionalism but seeks to support it. Within such a system, teachers, whatever their formal status, will work together as professionals to improve practice within their school. (cf Teacher Professionalism and the Scottish Parliament - Educational Institute of Scotland)

Given this context, it is recommended that:

- a) Schools should follow self-evaluative procedures involving the use of "How Good Is Our School? (2)", "Child at the Centre" quality indicators and "A Route to Equality and Fairness" to answer three basic questions:
  - How are we doing?
  - How do we know?
  - What are we going to do now?
- b) The principle of self-evaluation should allow for:
  - i. Regular self-evaluation by an individual teacher, using HGIOS or more locally devised materials
  - ii. Sharing ideas and exchanging visits with other colleagues as part of a mutually supportive programme
  - iii. Supportive and constructive visits to classrooms by promoted staff (HGIOS 4.4)
- c) Self-evaluation activities should be carried out in an atmosphere of

trust in which it is understood by all teachers involved that the whole process is directed to improving learning and teaching.

- d) Monitoring and evaluation to help improve learning and teaching should be planned within the normal planning cycle. The timings of related activities should be included in the yearly planning cycle (e.g. on a yearly programme chart such as that given on page 17 of HGIOS or any adaptation thereof). In addition, it should be open to an individual teacher to initiate such activities with a view to securing support with a particular class or initiative.
- e) Monitoring and evaluation activities should be appropriate to the needs of pupils and relevant to the professional needs of staff. These may include:
- Reviewing schemes of work and/or forward plans
  - Reviewing pupils' written work and homework
  - Reviewing test and examination results
  - Discussion with colleagues, pupils and parents
  - Considering resource issues
  - Considering school ethos
  - Considering health and safety issues
  - Considering equality issues
  - Implementation of agreed school policies
  - Supportive classroom visits and co-operative teaching

### 3. Classroom Visits

Where there has been consultation and agreement via the planning process that the quality indicator being evaluated may be assisted by monitoring through supportive classroom visits and co-operative teaching, the following advice is given:

- Supportive classroom visits could take different forms, depending on their purpose, which should be discussed and agreed in advance. Formal *crit lesson* observation is not appropriate to the ethos within which this policy is framed.
- Interaction within the classroom is a supportive means of assisting teachers and enhancing learning and teaching. In particular, co-operative teaching, is an effective means of ensuring constructive participation in a lesson.
- In accordance with principle 2b ii above, there should be an opportunity for peers to participate with agreement in co-operative teaching and to exchange classroom visits with trusted colleagues for their own professional development and as a way of contributing to a Department or School Development Plan.
- Supportive classroom visits by senior staff, middle managers or other relevant and appropriate personnel should be located in the overall school context of improving the quality of learning and teaching. This includes the overall welfare of pupils in the school (e.g. access to individual pupils or groups of pupils); health and safety issues; matters related to the refurbishment of the school; or assisting in a general overview of the work of the school and of classes in the school and related to:

- *Gaining first hand knowledge of pupil experiences and the quality of work produced*
  - *Positively encouraging, supporting and advising staff in the improving of learning and teaching*
  - *Identifying and disseminating good practice*
  - *Supporting teachers*
  - *Improving levels of communication in and across the school*
  - *Achieving the school aims*
  - *Reviewing curricular initiatives arising from the school development plan.*
- There should be discussion and agreement on the timing and frequency of classroom visits by promoted staff. While arrangements will vary from school to school depending on current and previous practice, it is anticipated that planning two to three visits per session, with a duration of up to 45 minutes, might be a reasonable starting base for the implementation and subsequent development of this policy. Where schools have already agreed effective monitoring and evaluating arrangements to improve learning and teaching in line with this paper these arrangements should continue.
  - The focus of classroom visits is to improve learning and teaching. It is as much about identifying and disseminating good practice as it is about identifying areas which require improvement.
  - It is important that, in monitoring learning and teaching, the approach is seen to be consistent, positive and constructive. It should allow staff to view it in a positive light as part of their own self-reflection and self- evaluation approaches.
  - Classroom visits should embrace all those staff engaged in the learning and teaching process, promoted as well as unpromoted staff. The credibility of the promoted members of staff is enhanced if they are to be seen teaching themselves.
  - Classroom visits should be preceded by discussion, planning and shared understanding of – the personnel involved; purpose; activities; frequency; duration; timing.
  - Where appropriate, constructive feedback should offered to teachers. This might take different forms (including oral comment and discussion) and should reflect the previously agreed focus of the visit. A formal *crit lesson* approach would not be appropriate.
  - Any points for action identified in the process should inform the consultation process leading to the setting of agreed targets for next session’s development plan.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Improving learning and teaching should be perceived as the key outcome from effective self-evaluation processes. The process of monitoring and evaluating learning and teaching assists staff to be reflective practitioners and allows them to participate in and inform the educational process and, consequently, to raise standards in our schools.

This paper aims to assist schools in promoting high standards of learning and teaching within this supportive climate. Consequently, it is important to note that classroom visits undertaken

in this context are not associated with disciplinary procedures, with monitoring the competence of an individual teacher or with any other specific circumstances in which there may be a need for formal observation of classroom activity. These issues are dealt with through other procedures.

## 5. **Disputes**

In promoting an appropriate ethos in which these guidelines can operate effectively, a spirit of trust, co-operation and collegiality is paramount.

Should any dispute arise, therefore, every effort should be made to resolve the matter through the school consultative process. In the event of a failure to find a resolution the matter should be resolved through the normal Grievance procedure.

Fife Council Education Service  
January 2006