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Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

Effective classroom observation in primary and secondary schools

October 2014

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Introduction

This report is published in response to a request for advice about effective classroom observation from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit letter to Estyn 2013-2014. The report is intended for the Welsh Government, headteachers, staff in schools, local authorities and regional consortia. It may also be of interest to parents and staff in other sectors and agencies who work with schools to improve the quality of teaching and learning. This report draws on the evidence noted in Appendix 1.

Background

Schools undertake classroom observation of teaching and support work for a wide range of reasons, including:

- sharing effective practice among staff;
- developing particular approaches, skills and innovative ways of teaching;
- evaluating the quality of form-tutor time;
- evaluating the quality of off-site provision for which the school has a responsibility, for example 14-19 provision;
- sharing effective practice with other schools;
- developing teachers' skills through internal and external professional learning communities;
- understanding effective practice in other sectors: primary/secondary, secondary/further education;
- mentoring and coaching serving teachers, support staff and trainee teachers;
- observing newly-qualified and early professional development teachers on the Masters in education programme;
- helping governors to develop their understanding of pupils' learning and the life and work of the school through first-hand experience,
- establishing the quality of candidates' teaching when applying for a post at the school;
- tracking individual pupils to observe their learning experiences and progress;
- monitoring pupil behaviour;
- monitoring school objectives;
- subject/departmental/year group reviews;
- school review; and
- performance management.

For further explanations of these different types of classroom observation and their purposes see Appendix 3.

Over recent years, there has been a debate about the extent to which classroom observation is helpful in raising pupils' standards of achievement and improving the quality of teaching, and about how often teachers should be observed. In 2013, the Welsh Government issued guidance and protocols for classroom observation. This is set out in Appendix 2 and on the Learning Wales website at <http://learning.wales.gov.uk/yourcareer/continuingprofessionaldevelopment/?lang=en>

In the Annual Report for 2012-2013, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for Education and Training in Wales points out that "The quality of teaching has a direct impact on the standards pupils achieve. It is the single most important factor in helping pupils to achieve their potential". Estyn inspections over the last three years show that the quality of teaching has declined. In primary schools, the proportion of schools where teaching is adequate or unsatisfactory overall increased from 18% to 26%. Over the same period, the proportion of excellent teaching fell from 3% to 1%. There is a broadly similar picture in secondary schools, where in 2012-2013 teaching is good or better in only just over half of the schools and where, over the last three years, the proportion of teaching that is adequate or unsatisfactory has increased.

The main focus of this survey report is to identify how schools use classroom observation most effectively to improve pupils' standards of achievement. This survey identifies how effective classroom observation can help teachers to improve teaching and learning and help leaders to improve to support initiatives that will enhance the professional development of all staff.

Main findings

- 1 In most schools, classroom observation takes place for a wide range of reasons. In particular, classroom observation provides school leaders with first-hand evidence about the quality of teaching and learning in their school and is an important management tool. Where classroom observation is effective in improving teaching and learning, it is combined with other activities, such as book scrutiny and listening to learners, to provide a rounded picture of teaching and learning rather than a snap-shot of a particular lesson.
- 2 Where classroom observation is effective, leaders have established a positive culture of improvement, self-evaluation and professional learning. In these schools, staff view classroom observation as a professional entitlement and as an integral part of effective team working. Staff are keen to share practice and to support each other's professional learning. This happens when leaders:
 - communicate a clear strategic vision for the achievement of high standards and for the quality of teaching and learning they wish to attain;
 - are explicit about the purposes of classroom observation in school policies;
 - provide staff with professional development opportunities that derive from classroom observation and link with whole-school priorities and the development needs of individuals;
 - are sensitive to staff concerns and issues of professional autonomy;
 - distribute leadership roles so that responsibilities are shared and understood throughout the school;
 - update their own professional learning regularly; and
 - recruit staff who share the school's ethos and goals and have a balance of skills and experience.
- 3 In practical terms, classroom observation is most effective when:
 - all staff have a clear understanding of the purposes of any observation and know when the observation will take place;
 - the teacher and observer have time before the observation to discuss the focus of the observation and to share relevant information about the class;
 - observations of teaching focus clearly on the extent to which it helps pupils to learn and make good progress, and on the standards achieved by the pupils;
 - observations of teaching and learning draw on a wide range of evidence which includes more than one classroom visit, planning, assessment records, scrutiny of pupils' work, and listening to learners;

- observers use forms suited to the purpose to record the findings of the observation;
- the observed member of staff has an opportunity to receive feedback and engage in professional dialogue as soon as possible;
- observations usually last between thirty to sixty minutes;
- observers ensure that there is a written record of the observation;
- all observations requiring judgements are moderated to ensure consistency;
- observers are trained to use judgement descriptors accurately and consistently to ensure equality and fairness;
- an annual self-evaluation cycle includes timetabled performance management observations and observations to monitor the school's progress against targets in the school improvement plan; and
- the school takes account of formal classroom observations when reviewing improvement targets.

Recommendations

School leaders should:

- R1 establish a shared culture of improvement, self-evaluation and professional learning so that all staff understand their roles and responsibilities;
- R2 establish self-evaluation practices that take account of a wide range of evidence, including classroom observation that focuses primarily on pupils' standards of achievement and on the quality of teaching and learning;
- R3 develop clear, explicit classroom observation policies and practices that all staff understand and apply;
- R4 engage in professional dialogue with teachers and support staff soon after classroom observation;
- R5 arrange professional development opportunities for staff, based on evidence that includes classroom observation, that are matched to school and individual priorities;
- R6 for classroom observations that require judgements, develop grade descriptors and moderation procedures to ensure consistency; and
- R7 train as peer inspectors in order to be able to align and share their practice with that of others as inspectors.

Local authorities and consortia should:

- R8 help schools with strong improvement, self-evaluation and professional learning cultures and effective classroom observation to share their practice with other schools.

The Welsh Government should:

- R8 provide opportunities for schools with strong improvement, self-evaluation and professional learning cultures and effective classroom observation to share their practice on the Learning Wales website.

1 Establishing a shared culture of improvement, self-evaluation and professional learning

- 4 Classroom observation is most effective in schools that have a clear strategic vision of how to achieve high-quality teaching and learning, a strong culture of improvement, self-evaluation and continuous professional development and team working.

Case study 1: Clear strategic vision for teaching and learning, self-evaluation and self-improvement

Ysgol Gymunedol Cefn Hengoed / Cefn Hengoed Community School is an English-medium school for 11 to 16-year-old pupils in Swansea local authority. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 39%, which is well above the average of 17.7% for Wales. The school has 33% of pupils on the special educational needs register, compared to the national average of 21.7% for secondary pupils.

Senior leaders have a clear vision for teaching and learning in the school. They share the vision effectively with all staff and pupils through the Teaching and Learning Policy Statement.

The school's vision is that:

"Pupils of all abilities at Cefn Hengoed Community School will be given equal opportunities to learn in order to achieve their full potential. Varied teaching methods and strategies will be used effectively and appropriately to accommodate differing learning styles.

"School self-evaluation is the key to improvement in order to identify priorities for development in line with the cycle of whole school improvement planning.

"It is the responsibility of all staff and pupils to evaluate their own performance. By knowing and understanding how staff and pupils are performing, staff at all levels can enhance and share strengths and identify potential for improvement."

Teaching and learning are set in a clear culture of continuous self-improvement through a positive focus on personal development. The vision is underpinned by statements about the school's overall aims for teaching and learning. It provides staff with clear guidance about the expectations for planning and preparation for teaching, employment of teaching styles, requirements for assessment, recording and reporting, provision of learning support and expectations that teachers take responsibility for, and regularly update, their professional development. It explains the role of classroom teachers, form tutors, heads of faculty and departments, curriculum leaders, learning co-ordinators and transition managers and the leadership team in monitoring and evaluating pupils' learning and the quality of teaching. It sets out clear expectations of pupils' contributions to developing their own learning. The policy also sets out clearly the time scales for faculty, department and subject review and who will contribute to the reviews.

The impact of having a clear teaching and learning policy statement is that:

- it sets clear expectations; and
- all staff and pupils are clear about their roles in achieving good outcomes and high quality teaching.

- 5 In schools like Cefn Hengoed, teaching and support staff welcome classroom observation and the associated opportunity for professional discussion about teaching and learning. They see it as an important part of a range of activities to promote high-quality teaching and learning. They see classroom observation as a professional development entitlement and as an integral part of team-working within the school. Teachers and support staff in these schools have a clear focus on improving their teaching and support skills for the benefit of their pupils. They are open to sharing their practice and learning from others. They have a clear view that continuing to develop their own knowledge, understanding and skills is a professional responsibility. They feel themselves accountable to their pupils, parents and the school for ensuring that pupils have the best opportunities to learn. As a result, these teachers derive more satisfaction from their work and there is often evidence that high standards are being maintained or improved.
- 6 In schools with a strong culture of improvement, self-evaluation and professional learning, senior leaders have high expectations of themselves and their staff, and they communicate these expectations effectively. They have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They put in place scheduled opportunities for staff to gather and discuss first-hand evidence linked to the objectives in the school improvement plan. This includes scheduled opportunities for support staff to contribute as part of the whole-school team. They take full account of all relevant evidence when reviewing the school's progress against its objectives. They identify issues early and they are robust in tackling them and identifying opportunities for further improvement at a whole-school level. Senior leaders underpin these systems with scheduled reporting and review dates. This allows the school to review the evidence and act in a timely way to make adjustments to plans and processes as necessary.
- 7 In these schools, leaders do not base judgements about the overall quality of teachers' performance on just one lesson. Leaders are aware that a good teacher can have a weak lesson and a poor teacher a good lesson. Leaders ensure that, as part of the observation process, they observe teachers more than once and they review teachers' planning, marking and assessment of pupils' work systematically. Most importantly, they have a clear focus on the progress pupils make in lessons and the standards they achieve in the course of the academic year. In schools with effective classroom observation, staff take a full part in the self-evaluation processes that operate within the school. Senior leaders appoint staff who put a high value on developing their own practice and who subscribe the ethos of a 'learning school'. Senior leaders ensure as far as possible that the staffing of the school provides an appropriate balance of skills, experience and expertise so that staff can learn effectively from each other.

- 8 A particular feature of schools with a strong culture of self-evaluation and improvement is that senior leaders provide all staff with training on how to analyse information and statistical data on pupils' performance effectively in order to improve learning and teaching. Where most of the staff have a good understanding of performance information, statistical data and its use, the school is normally more effective in raising pupils' standards of achievement.
- 9 In the most effective schools, senior leaders distribute leadership roles among the staff. In many cases, senior leaders ensure that all teachers have the opportunity to lead on gathering evidence for areas for development or research. In many cases, this includes asking support staff to lead on an initiative appropriate to their work. The distribution of leadership often helps staff to work together as a team with commonality of purpose and sound levels of mutual trust and respect.
- 10 Where there is a strong culture of self-evaluation and self-improvement, senior leaders place a high value on continuing their own and staff's professional learning. They understand that teachers and teaching assistants need to review their teaching skills and methods to ensure that pupils can achieve their full potential. Senior leaders with teaching commitments often invite staff into their own classrooms to watch them teach. In this way, they act as role models for other staff and they help to create a climate of openness and a culture of self-evaluation within the school.

Case study 2: Developing a culture of continuous self-improvement and self-evaluation through distributed leadership

Sandycroft County Primary School is an English-medium primary school for three to 11-year-old pupils in Flintshire local authority. The percentage of pupils eligible for school meals is around 24%, which is just above the average of 20.7% for Wales. The school has 16% of pupils on the special educational needs register, compared to the national average of 21.5% for primary schools in Wales.

The headteacher's vision is to develop leadership skills in all staff to ensure consistency and accountability for the school's work and to prepare staff to become the leaders of the future. His vision is derived from leadership training with an international motor manufacturing company, the senior leaders of which continuously engage all staff in seeking ways to improve the company.

The headteacher has distributed leadership roles to both teachers and support staff based on their strengths and expertise. All staff have well defined roles. Their effectiveness in their roles is underpinned by regular professional development linked closely to the targets in the school development plan.

The headteacher and the deputy headteacher have trained as Estyn peer inspectors. They have subsequently used what they learned to train all teaching and support staff in classroom observation skills.

Apart from performance management observations, teachers and support staff regularly organise observations among themselves to improve key aspects of provision. For example, a teaching support assistant who has been studying for a degree in Welsh has used the classroom observation training to observe all members of staff teaching Welsh. She identified teachers and support staff who have effective

practice and this has been shared with other staff at the weekly staff meeting. The allocation of leadership roles for all staff has led to a high level of openness, trust and professional respect among senior leaders, teachers and support staff. In turn, this has led to a robust culture of support, challenge and shared professional development. As a result, senior leaders and staff work effectively together to realise the school's ambitions for its pupils.

- 11 In many cases, senior leaders undertake higher education qualifications that help them to develop an in-depth understanding of the theory and practice of learning, teaching and leadership. Many senior leaders train as Estyn peer inspectors who inspect other schools. In this role, they take part in inspections where they develop their observational, analytical and evaluative skills further. They use the skills they develop on inspection to improve the quality of self-evaluation, teaching and learning in their own school and they coach their own staff in how best to observe lessons.
- 12 In a few schools, where the culture of self-evaluation and self-improvement is not well established, a few teachers and support staff are overly concerned about classroom observation. They see classroom observation as too frequent or too judgemental, and they feel that classroom observation diminishes their professional autonomy. In a few cases, members of staff do not reflect regularly on their own practice and they do not welcome professional discussion with other colleagues. In a few cases, leaders do not make the reasons for classroom observation clear enough and classroom observations are timetabled unexpectedly. This creates anxiety among staff. These circumstances can give rise to a lack of professional trust between staff and leaders. As a result, it becomes difficult for the school to evaluate effectively the quality of teaching and learning and for leaders to assure themselves that all pupils have equitable learning experiences.

2 Practical arrangements for classroom observations

How do schools plan classroom observations and how often do they occur?

- 13 In the few schools where there is effective practice, school policies set out clearly the purposes and the arrangements for classroom observation. This helps to ensure that all staff receive consistent information about the reasons and expectations for classroom observation.
- 14 In most schools, the 'teaching and learning' or 'monitoring' policy does not refer explicitly to classroom observation. As a result staff are sometimes not clear about the reasons for classroom observation, what it involves or what it aims to achieve. Senior leaders often remind staff of the purpose and procedures for classroom observation through notices or email in advance of the observation taking place. These are usually issued near to the planned time of the classroom observation. The notices are useful, but do not always help staff to understand the role of classroom observation in the overall plan for self-improvement.

- 15 In most of the schools visited, peer observation (teachers observing each other's practice) happens more frequently where teachers are part of internal or external professional learning communities or working parties. Teachers usually plan these observations in advance to fit in with a professional learning community or a working party's programme. Teachers do not usually regard these observations as part of formal classroom observation, but rather as honest and open professional development opportunities to support individual teachers in their work. Peer observations do not usually include a judgment about the quality of teaching and learning.
- 16 In most schools, senior leaders plan schedules for formal classroom observation across the year, making sure that teachers are not observed too frequently. Leaders observe teachers, and in many cases support staff, four to six times a year on average for monitoring and development purposes. The average duration of the observation is between 30 to 60 minutes, depending on the purpose and focus of the observation.

Case study 3: Planning classroom observations

Ysgol Corn Hir is a Welsh-medium primary school for three to 11-year-old pupils in the Isle of Anglesey local authority. The percentage of pupils eligible for school meals is around 10 % which is below the average of 20.7% for Wales. The school has 11% of pupils on the Special Educational Needs register, compared to the national average of 21.5% for primary schools in Wales.

The school plans for two formal classroom observations each academic year. Senior leaders share timetables for observations with staff at the beginning of the academic year. The senior leadership team provide training in classroom observation for all members of staff each year. This helps to make all staff aware of the process, the focus of observations and the evidence needed for observers to make a reliable judgement.

The first observation focuses on performance management targets, while the second observation focuses on a key target in the school development plan. In both observations, observers' key focus is on pupils' progress during the lesson and how the strategies employed by the teacher help different groups of pupils to progress. Observers also note how effectively support staff are deployed in the lesson and the progress that supported pupils make. There is always a focus on the development of pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy. Observers always scrutinise the lesson plan and pupils' work to make a judgement about their progress over time. They make a judgement about the quality of written feedback in pupils' books as to whether it is in line with the marking and assessment policy and whether there has been appropriate follow-up with pupils.

To ensure effective collation of evidence, observers use the same observation form to record their observations. Prior to the lesson, teachers may plan their lessons with another member of staff. The observer and those observed always discuss the lesson immediately afterwards and the observer provides a written evaluation of pupils' progress during the lesson and the most effective strategies used to provide challenge to all groups of learners.

Where observed staff disagree with the review of their lesson, they may request a further observation carried out by another senior member of staff from their own or another school.

This clear planning for classroom observation ensures that all staff have enough time to prepare and are treated equitably.

- 17 In all schools visited, classroom observation linked specifically to performance management objectives took place once a year, unless the teacher requested a second visit, or senior leaders identified underperformance.
- 18 In a very few cases in the schools visited, a new headteacher identified that pupils' standards of achievement were not high enough due to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching across the school. In these cases, senior leaders observed teachers formally more often, but they also provided a programme of mentoring and coaching for specific staff to run alongside the programme of formal classroom observation. This helped teachers and support staff to develop shared expectations of the pupils and a consistent approach to teaching across the school.

Case study 4: Observation as part of mentoring and coaching

Deri View Primary School is an English-medium primary school for three to 11-year-old pupils in Monmouthshire local authority. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 42% which is well above the average of 20.7% for Wales. The school has 12% of pupils on the special educational needs register, compared to the national average of 21.5% for primary schools in Wales.

On taking up post at the school, the new headteacher analysed the school data and realised that pupils' attainment was not as high as might be expected. She undertook a series of observations to make her own judgements about the quality of learning and teaching in the school. She identified that there were inconsistencies in the teaching, and consequently inconsistencies in pupils' rates of progress and achievement.

To support teachers to improve their practice, the headteacher brought in an adviser. The adviser observed identified teachers. Following the observation, the adviser discussed the lesson with each teacher and highlighted one or two areas where, if the teacher changed their practice, it would help to improve pupil motivation and practice. The adviser and the teacher planned a lesson together. The adviser then taught the agreed section of the lesson, while the teacher observed. Following the lesson, the adviser and the teacher discussed the teacher's observations. They planned a subsequent lesson together with a focus on the agreed strategy. This time the teacher put the strategy into action and the adviser observed.

Following the intervention by the adviser, the headteacher undertook a second round of classroom observations and found that inconsistency in teaching had reduced and pupils' motivation and rates of progress had improved.

In this way, by means of small and focused steps, classroom observation helped teachers to improve their practice and pupils' achievements.

- 19 The length of notice given to teachers of formal classroom observations varies from school to school. In many cases, senior leaders notify the teacher of the specific lesson they will observe. In a minority of schools, senior leaders prefer to give notice of a period of time (for example, two days) during which they will choose a lesson to observe.
- 20 In the case of school review, departmental or year group reviews, senior leaders usually make the week of the review known well in advance so that leaders, teachers and support staff can prepare their evidence appropriately. Most schools treat the review as a mini-inspection and they do not let teachers know in advance which lessons they will observe in the scheduled week.
- 21 In a minority of very effective cases, observers allocate time prior to the observation so that they can discuss the teacher's plan, the pupils' progress and the intended learning objectives with the teacher. This helps the observer, if they are unfamiliar with the class, to make a more accurate judgement about pupils' progress during the lesson and develops a shared understanding for professional discussion following the observation.
- 22 In most cases, observers discuss their judgements about the lesson as soon as possible after the observation. In the most effective cases, senior leaders allocate time for feedback, usually around 30 to 40 minutes. Teachers find the feedback session most helpful when it takes place in a room where observer and teacher are not disturbed. It also tends to be more purposeful and beneficial when the feedback takes the form of a professional dialogue. In the most effective cases, observers ask teachers to provide their own reflection on the lesson before the observer provides feedback. Effective discussion focuses on what was successful in the lesson, especially in relation to its impact on pupils' learning. Where appropriate, it also highlights clearly what was not successful and where learners did not make suitable progress as a result. In these cases, the observer invites the teacher to agree targets to help the teacher to improve. In most cases, this involves setting out no more than two or three key issues in order to allow the teacher to improve them in a focused way. Many teachers find it very beneficial to have the opportunity to reflect with another member of staff on how they might improve their teaching.
- 23 Teachers are also more comfortable with performance management observation when they are aware that their performance review does not derive solely from the evidence of one observed lesson, but also takes into account other relevant sources of evidence, such as their planning and assessment and the impact of their teaching on the quality of pupils' work.

Who observes lessons and why?

- 24 In many schools, teachers observe one another's lessons through more informal arrangements. This is often the case where teachers are working together across sectors to improve transition arrangements or where teachers within a school are developing an aspect of work through a professional learning community or working group.
- 25 Most schools have also begun to expand the evidence base for classroom observation to include the perceptions of pupils in the lessons observed. Most

schools are developing good practice in listening to pupils in focus groups and by using questionnaires.

- 26 In most cases, staff reported that they do not feel comfortable with pupils acting as observers in lessons. This is usually because staff do not feel it appropriate for pupils to take a role in commenting on lessons. However, in the very few schools where pupils do take part in observing lessons, there is a carefully-planned programme and a set format for pupils to feed back their impressions. In these cases, leaders organise a selection process whereby pupils express an interest in observing and show how they meet the senior leaders' criteria to fulfil the role. To ensure that pupils act and record appropriately, leaders train the selected pupils in the skills needed.

Case study 5: Pupils observing lessons

Mary Immaculate Roman Catholic High School is an English-medium school for 11 to 16-year-old pupils in Cardiff local authority. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is 29% which is higher than the average of 17.7% for Wales. The school has 36% of pupils on the special educational needs register compared to 21.7% in secondary schools in Wales.

Pupils have been involved in observing lessons as part of the school's self-evaluation process since 2011.

The assistant headteacher with responsibility for continuing professional development selects and trains pupils from a range of year groups who show the appropriate interest and aptitudes in how to undertake classroom observation.

The key focus of the pupils' observations is the learning of pupils in the class, the skills the pupils learn/improve during the lesson and the general atmosphere of the class. Each section is supported by prompts to help the pupils focus their comments. Pupils are told very clearly that it is **not** their role to criticise the teaching, but to evaluate the learning.

The training pupils receive includes:

- an explanation of why pupils are asked to observe lessons and identification of the purpose of their observation;
- familiarisation with areas on the pupil observation sheet and how to record evidence appropriately;
- practice in observing lessons and recording comments using commercial video clips;
- discussion of findings; and
- an emphasis on the importance of expressing their findings and suggestions in a helpful way.

Pupils observe a lesson with the member of staff allocated to observe the class. Following the lesson, they discuss their feedback with the teacher observing. Having considered the pupils' views and their own observations, the teacher provides feedback to the member of staff observed.

The school finds that by including them in classroom observations, pupils have come to appreciate how hard their teachers work and provide useful feedback on how well pupils were learning in the class or where pupils had difficulty. This is helping to improve the quality of learning and teaching in the school.

- 27 Pupil observers accompany the member of staff to observe and they focus on how well their fellow pupils respond to the learning activities in the lesson and how well the pupils learn during the lesson. In most cases, pupil observers give their feedback to the member of staff with whom they have observed the class. The staff observer then undertakes the professional discussion with the member of staff observed. In a few cases, members of staff who have been observed are keen to gain the pupil's perspective of their peers' engagement with the lesson first-hand.
- 28 In nearly all the schools visited, senior leaders undertake performance management and monitoring of whole-school issues. In a very few exceptional cases, a headteacher from another school may undertake the performance reviews, for example where the headteacher of a small school is absent for medical reasons or where a school is supporting another school in raising pupils' standards of achievement.
- 29 In nearly all cases, members of the local authority or regional consortia advisory teams (system leaders or challenge advisers) undertake classroom observations in schools. This is helpful as it provides an independent view of the school's work and can help to improve specific aspects of the school's provision.

Case study 6a: Using external observers to help the school validate its own judgements

Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen is a Welsh-medium school for 11 to 18-year-old pupils in Gwynedd local authority. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 17% which is in line with the average of 17.7% for Wales. The school has 22% of pupils on the special educational needs register, compared to 21.7% for secondary schools in Wales.

The school operates a review system whereby members of the local consortia undertake classroom observations as a part of whole-school and departmental reviews alongside the headteacher and other teachers who observe in the school. This forms part of a planned system of review. The reviewers all use the school's internal observation forms so that they are able to collect the evidence in a systematic way.

The benefit of having an external reviewer is that they bring a different perspective to the review which is based on the external person's experience of observations in a range of contexts. In turn, senior leaders go to other schools to observe and moderate judgements. This helps the school to measure and moderate its own judgements.

- 30 Many schools include an independent person when undertaking an internal review.

More often than not, this is a member of the local authority or an adviser from the regional consortium. However, schools may also include a senior leader from the cluster of schools or the family of schools, or they may include a consultant to provide an independent opinion.

- 31 In line with their responsibilities, consortia undertake reviews of schools' progress. This often includes lesson observations as well as an overall review of the schools' policies, systems and practices. Inclusion of external people in review teams helps schools to measure their own provision and performance against a wider measure than their own. The inclusion of an external reviewer is particularly helpful to senior leaders where there may be a contentious issue in the school and the independence provided by an outsider can be reassuring to teachers.

Case study 6b: Using challenge partners to help the school validate its own judgements

Sandycroft County Primary School is an English-medium primary school for three to 11-year-old pupils in Flintshire local authority. The percentage of pupils eligible for school meals is around 24%, which is just above the average of 20.7% for Wales. The school has 16% of pupils on the special educational needs register, compared to the national average of 21.5% for primary schools in Wales.

The school has set up a team of 'challenge partners'. The 'challenge partners' are drawn from within the local authority area and made up of colleagues who are Estyn-trained inspectors. The team includes a registered inspector, four peer inspectors and a lay inspector¹. The challenge the team provides to the school is ongoing. Throughout the academic year, the school draws on the team's expertise to challenge the school as it evaluates its progress. This includes undertaking classroom observations based on lines of enquiry. The team helps the school to analyse the school data robustly and set appropriate targets. The team also reviews the self-evaluation report and it helps to ensure that the school improvement plan is tightly focused on key areas for development.

As a result, the 'challenge partners' have helped the school to develop robust internal challenge and to improve pupils' outcomes. The school's self-evaluation is honest and accurate.

- 32 It is also common, particularly in secondary schools, for middle leaders to undertake classroom observations to gather evidence about pupils' progress or other more specific aspects of work relating to their area of responsibility.

How do schools develop the observational skills of staff?

- 33 In all cases, observation of teaching and learning is most effective where schools train staff (and, where relevant, pupils) in the skills of classroom observation and how

¹ This does not represent a conflict of interest as Estyn does not allocate inspectors to inspect schools in their home local authority.

to feed back the findings of the observation professionally and effectively. Many schools with good classroom observation arrangements train their staff during scheduled staff meetings. In the most successful schools, all staff receive training in the most effective ways to observe teaching and learning. In this way, those who observe lessons and those who are the focus of the observation share a common understanding of the school's requirements and observation methods.

- 34 The most effective observers do not judge lessons by subjective criteria such as how they would have taught the lesson themselves. Effective classroom observation avoids this fault and ensures that the focus of the observation is on how well pupils make gains in their learning during the lesson. The observer reflects on how the structure of the lesson and the range of activities undertaken helped the pupils to make progress in their learning or whether they hindered pupils' progress.

Case study 7: Ensuring observers judge what they see fairly

Ysgol Gynradd Hafodwenog is a Welsh-medium school for three to 11-year-old pupils in Carmarthenshire local authority. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 0.9% which is well below the average of 20.7% for Wales. The school has 27% of pupils on the special educational needs register compared with 21.5% for primary schools in Wales.

Ysgol Gynradd Hafodwenog is a small school of 45 pupils. To ensure that observers judge what they see fairly, the headteacher and staff discuss what kind of features exemplify good or excellent learning and teaching so that they establish a common basic understanding.

The school ensures that they have observations forms with prompts that are appropriate for each observation that observers undertake. This helps the observer to collect detailed evidence related clearly to the focus of the observation – for example the use of 'assessment for learning' strategies to help pupils meet their targets.

Clearly prompted and recorded evidence allows the observer to provide well-focused evidence to each person observed. It allows the school to have a clear picture of the strengths and areas for improvement across the school and to share effective practice across the school.

A space for teachers to record their comments about the observation following verbal and written feedback allows senior leaders to understand how fair and helpful teachers judge the process to have been.

- 35 In a few cases, particularly where schools are working to develop a more consistent quality of teaching across the school, a statement is included in the teaching and learning policy about the practices they expect teachers to demonstrate in lessons. This enables all those observed, and particularly those staff who are less confident, to reflect on the key features required in lessons and how they can improve their practice.

How do schools record classroom observations effectively?

- 36 Schools vary greatly in the way they set out the forms they use to record classroom observations. In around 90% of very effective cases, senior leaders and peer observers ensure that the way they record the lesson observations matches the purpose of the observation. This allows observers to analyse the evidence from classroom observations and to draw out common strengths and areas for improvement in the quality of learning and teaching.
- 37 In many cases, senior leaders and teachers feel it is important not to create unmanageable paperwork. In a few cases, this leads to observation forms that mainly consist of a series of tick boxes against a list of criteria with small boxes alongside each one to write comments and to set development targets. These forms have the advantage of providing a quick oversight of strengths and areas for development. Sharply-focused observation forms can also be useful in helping observers to consider specific aspects of the school's work, for example when governors undertake learning walks or visit classrooms.
- 38 However, a tick-box approach has the disadvantage of reducing observations to a simple set of features and it provides little sense of the quality of learning and teaching in the lesson as a whole. A tick-box form is also often unhelpful in providing detailed feedback to the teacher on how to improve their practice. On the other hand, forms that are too open or unstructured can lead to a lack of focus on the key areas about which the observer is gathering evidence. In both cases, weaknesses in the recording of evidence undermine the observer's ability to make well-informed and accurate judgements about the quality of teaching and learning overall.
- 39 In many cases, schools design observation forms that allow the observer to record both qualitative comments and statistical information about pupils' learning and the quality of teaching observed. They also provide space for the observed member of staff to make a written comment about the feedback and a space to record agreed developmental targets. Overall, these forms are more useful in recording observations because they provide both the participants and the member of staff with oversight for whole-school analysis of observations with focused, detailed, first-hand evidence of the learning and teaching that took place.
- 40 Governors bring a range of valuable skills to the school, but their backgrounds usually means that they are not fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses of current teaching methods. In most of the schools visited, governing bodies allocate members of their teams to link with specific subjects, areas of learning or aspects of the school's work to help them gain first-hand knowledge. These particular activities improve communication between staff and governors and they help to inform governors' discussions on the school's strengths and areas for development.
- 41 In many cases, governors undertake 'learning walks', which means that they undertake a walk around the school to learn more about a particular focus. In most cases, governors are encouraged to use observation forms which are usually prepared by senior leaders. These forms help governors to focus on the key issues of the aspect they are researching. The written record of their observations provides governors with good first-hand evidence to discuss with the headteacher and the governing body and it also contributes to the school's self-evaluation.

- 42 In a very few cases, governors may accompany a senior member of staff to observe effective learning and good quality teaching. In this case, the senior member of staff undertakes the observation, but highlights for the governor what constitutes good learning and teaching in the lesson.

Case study 8: Observations by governors

Sandfields Comprehensive School is an English-medium comprehensive school for 11 to 16-year-old pupils in Neath Port Talbot local authority. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 40% which is well above the average of 17.7% for Wales. The school has 42% of pupils on the special educational needs register compared to 21.7% in secondary schools in Wales.

Increasingly, governors are visiting schools during the school day to gain more first-hand knowledge of and understanding about the school's provision, how well pupils are learning and the quality of teaching.

To help governors understand about how teachers plan to meet the different needs of learners in their classes, the school has introduced a system whereby a governor can accompany the headteacher, or one of the senior staff, to a classroom observation. Classroom observations are not only focused on learning and teaching in subject areas but also on the use made of pastoral time at the beginning of school in the mornings.

Senior leaders discuss the aims and objectives of the lesson with the governor beforehand, so that the governor has a context for the lesson. The senior leader carries out the observation, records the evidence and points for discussion with the teacher. During the course of the lesson, the governor may make their own notes for discussion and clarification afterwards. However, it is only the senior leader who makes any judgement about the quality of learning and teaching.

After the lesson, there is an opportunity for the governor to observe the senior leaders' discussion with the teacher. Following the feedback, there is an opportunity for the governor to discuss the lesson observation with the senior leader to clarify any queries or issues the governor may have.

This observation strategy is useful in helping governors to understand the day-to-day work of the school and to have first-hand knowledge of new initiatives. This puts the governor in the position of being able to act more effectively as a critical friend to the school and to provide appropriate challenge.

- 43 A few schools use digital media to record lessons, or parts of lessons, to share effective practice across the school and with other staff with whom they work in collaboration, such as teachers in transition partners and cluster schools, in professional learning communities or at regional 'effective practice' conferences. Video recordings provide a good stimulus for providing professional discussion as teachers can see how the teacher presents and develops aspects of the lesson and the pupils' response.

- 44 Where recordings are used for sharing effective practice, observers agree with the member of staff concerned that they are happy to be recorded. Video recordings are also a very useful tool for feedback and discussion with the teacher observed, as it provides the teacher with a view of pupils' learning that is not always visible to them while they are teaching or supporting pupils' learning. The teacher observed may wish to view the whole lesson, but for the purposes of feedback and discussion the observer may only wish to focus on particular aspects of the lesson. However, the use of video is most effective when supported by an observation form that focuses on the key areas of the observation, and where the observer can record their evidence and the observed member of staff can record their response and negotiated developmental targets.
- 45 None of the schools visited considered the use of video as appropriate for formal observations, such as performance management or whole-school monitoring observations

How do schools ensure consistency and fairness in classroom observations?

- 46 Nearly all schools use an evaluative scale of judgements for formal classroom observations. All the schools visited make separate judgements about the overall performance of pupils' learning and the quality of teaching. In many schools where classroom observation is at its most effective, each judgement links to an extended descriptor, which clarifies the features relating to each judgement. A few schools develop their own extended judgement descriptors, but other schools use judgement descriptors developed by the local authority or consortia in conjunction with schools.
- 47 In many cases, schools use the judgement words and descriptors set out in Estyn's guidance on the Common Inspection Framework. In other cases, particularly if the school is involved with training teachers, they use judgement matrices produced by the teacher training centres for the standards for qualified teacher status. However, the judgement descriptors that underpin the judgement words in teacher training are not always appropriate for serving teachers, as their prime purpose is to measure the progress of student teachers who are training to attain an initial teaching qualification. A few schools develop matrices linked to the Revised Professional Standards for Education Practitioners in Wales (Welsh Government Circular 020/2011, issued in September 2011). This document sets out professional standards for higher-level teaching assistants (HTLAs), practising teachers as well as the leadership standards for headteachers and all staff. In other cases, schools use matrices produced by the school or education consultants.

Case study 9: Securing consistent judgements about teaching and learning

Mary Immaculate Roman Catholic High School is an English-medium school for 11 to 16-year-old pupils in Cardiff local authority. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is 29% which is higher than the average of 17.7% for Wales. The school has 36% of pupils on the special educational needs register compared to 21.7% in secondary schools in Wales.

The headteacher identified that, in order to improve pupils' standards of achievement substantially, it was necessary to discuss with staff what good and excellent teaching looked like. As a result of discussions, staff agreed on the 10 features of an

'excellent' lesson and they agreed to make "the 'best' practice, daily practice". The 10 features that they agreed would form part of an excellent lesson are:

- 1 presenting the class with the 'big picture' and measureable objectives at the beginning of the lesson;
- 2 having high expectations of all pupils in the class;
- 3 engaging and speaking to every pupil in the course of the lesson to ascertain their understanding;
- 4 ensuring that, in planning the lesson, teachers catered for pupils' different learning needs through the task set, through the outcome pupils achieve and by effective questioning to help pupils develop their thought and work;
- 5 using positive language to produce a positive and encouraging environment for learning;
- 6 making the best use of time and pace in lessons;
- 7 using different ways to present new work: for example, through visual, audio and kinaesthetic stimuli;
- 8 checking in the course of the lesson that all pupils make progress;
- 9 ensuring pupils know how to improve; and
- 10 reviewing the learning regularly.

To support consistency of judgement in formal observations, the school then adopted a matrix with extended descriptors for Excellent, Good, Adequate and Unsatisfactory judgements against each of the agreed features of an 'excellent' lesson.

The use of the matrix helps senior leaders and all staff develop a common understanding about the quality of learning and teaching. The matrix provides 'best fit' statements which allow observers and those observed to use a common language to discuss the success of the lesson. This common understanding and common language is an effective tool for senior leaders when moderating the outcomes of observations and setting next step targets with staff.

As a result of the school's strategy to develop a common understanding of the key features of excellent practice and the matrix against which to make judgements, pupil outcomes have significantly improved across the last three years.

- 48 The use of extended judgement descriptors in conjunction with judgement words is vital in helping to secure a consistent approach to making reliable and valid judgements of teaching and learning. A consistent approach helps to achieve fairness for all staff in the judgements made during classroom observations. However, consistency and fairness only occur when all staff understand the judgement words and their associated descriptors.
- 49 In many of the most effective examples, senior and middle leaders allocate time for observers to moderate together the observations they have undertaken. They provide clear guidance about the main issues to check and, most importantly, they ensure that written comments reflect the judgement descriptor and the judgement awarded. In most cases, for example where observations contribute to departmental or subject reviews, senior leaders make sure that they share an overall view of strengths and areas for development with relevant staff as soon as possible. This helps staff to prioritise their efforts, to address common issues quickly and to provide professional development where needed.

Appendix 1: Evidence base

This report uses evidence from visits to schools, scrutiny of relevant documentation and interviews with headteachers, staff, pupils and governors.

Inspectors identified nine primary schools and 10 secondary schools inspected in the last three years which, in most cases, received good or excellent judgements for:

- standards;
- the quality of teaching;
- the quality of leadership and improving quality; and
- the school's prospects for improvement.

Inspectors also identified a small number of schools which are on an improvement journey to raise standards of pupils' learning and where the quality of teaching had improved to good or excellent from being adequate at their most recent inspection.

Inspectors also interviewed university staff in a teacher education department involved in a project to improve classroom observation techniques and two of their partnership schools.

Inspectors' visits took place in autumn 2013. They visited both English-medium and Welsh-medium schools across Wales.

Appendix 2: Welsh Government protocols for classroom observation

Classroom observation – Purpose and protocols

Classroom observation can be an important tool in raising standards through supporting practitioners in sharing and developing their skills and so improving outcomes for learners. While there is no upper limit placed on the number of occasions in which observation may take place, it is essential that the emphasis is firmly placed on the quality of experience rather than quantity.

To ensure that observation is purposeful, supportive and developmental, all those involved in arranging, carrying out, or participating in observation should observe the following guidance which sets out the purpose and protocols that characterise effective practice.

Scope and purpose

What is meant by ‘Classroom observation’?

‘Classroom observation’ refers to all occasions when learning and/or teaching activities are observed for a specific purpose someone other than the class teacher and support staff normally attached to the class.

Principles and protocols

Classroom observation should observe the following principles:

- All those involved in each observation should have a shared understanding of its specific purpose. Disputes about observation procedures, etc., should be dealt with through the school’s established resolution processes and/or recognised collective issue resolution processes where applicable.
- Where practicable and appropriate, efforts should be made to combine observations for different purposes so that the most efficient use is made of opportunities for classroom observation.
- Careful choice should be given to the observer so it reflects the purpose of the observation.
- Observation should support and develop learning and teaching – there should be limited disruption to normal classroom activity.
- Observations should be planned in advance so that those involved have adequate notice.
- Observation should be objective, developmental and supportive and conducted with professionalism, integrity and courtesy.
- Successful observation requires preparation and appropriate consideration.
- As part of the school’s overall arrangements for classroom observation those involved in observation should seek to agree in advance the nature and any timing of any feedback to be provided and with whom it is to be shared.
- Planning and feedback arrangements should take account of directed time and statutory terms and conditions of employment.

In addition, for observations involving judgements on the performance of individual practitioners, the following principles should also apply:

- Only a person holding QTS can carry out observation of teaching for the purpose of teachers' performance management (including NQT and GTP assessment) and as part of capability procedures.
- The nature, purpose and amount of observation as well as the areas to be focussed on should be determined at a planning meeting.
- The scope of teaching observed will need to be well balanced to reflect the range of a teacher's work, but should not be excessive in total.
- It is important that total time of observation is limited to no more than is required to form sound and evidenced judgements as frequent observation sessions are disruptive and counterproductive.
- Careful consideration is required at the planning meeting of the timing and observation sessions to be carried out during the academic year. This requirement should also include the requirements of the appraiser to adequately prepare, carry out and report back on each session. In order to reduce bureaucracy in schools, some appraisers, for example to link each session to natural breaks in the academic year such as terms.
- At least five days observation should be given of observation for these purposes.
- It is important that the observed sessions should proceed in as normal an atmosphere as possible.
- Constructive oral feedback should always be given as soon as possible after the observation and confirmed in writing within five working days. Teachers should be given the opportunity to add their own written comments to this feedback. All those with access to information gained from this process should respect its confidentiality and ensure that the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1988 must be followed at all times.

Purposes of classroom observation

The purposes of observation can be grouped under the following areas (these are not necessarily exhaustive or exclusive).

1 To **observe the learning** of individual learners and/or groups of learners, for example:

- tracking progress of individuals and/or groups across the curriculum
- learners' experiences in different settings
- awareness-raising for governors

2 As part of continuing **professional development**, for example:

- sharing effective practice
- shared learning and collaborative development
- peer observation
- as part of coaching and mentoring arrangements
- specialist guidance or advice – such as on teaching techniques, curriculum areas, use of ICT equipment, etc.

3 To **monitor the quality of teaching**, including:

- as part of the annual performance management cycle as defined in the school's Performance Management Policy
- as part of capability procedures as defined in the school's Capability Policy
- as part of the statutory induction process for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) as defined in Welsh Government regulations and guidance
- as part of the Graduate Teacher Programme (or other teacher entry programmes) as defined in Welsh Government regulations and guidance
- for the purposes of making judgements about teaching and learning in the school as a whole
- as part of inspection arrangements

Appendix 3: Different types of classroom observation

Sharing effective practice among staff

This type of observation usually takes place where senior or middle leaders have identified effective practice through other types of observation and judge that other staff in the school would benefit from seeing this practice. In many effective cases, senior and middle leaders timetable the observation session and also a session whereby the observer and the observed member of staff can discuss the lesson prior to and after the event. In other cases, staff may organise their own sessions because of staff room discussions about teaching ideas that are having a beneficial impact on pupils' learning.

Developing particular teaching methods, skills and innovative ways of teaching

Observation happens in these circumstances most often where senior leaders are trying to improve practice across the whole school, or members of a professional learning community are trying to measure the impact of new ways of working in the classroom. Where senior leaders are trying to develop greater consistency of teaching across the school, they may ask members of staff to work in pairs or groups of three to demonstrate particular ways of working to each other, or they may bring in a consultant to demonstrate specific ideas. In these cases, senior leaders ensure planning is in place to allow time for staff to discuss the lesson before and after the observation as well as to ensure time for the observation itself. Where staff are part of a professional learning community, staff in the professional community will often organise their own time to observe and to develop their ideas.

Quality assuring form tutor time in secondary schools

In a few secondary schools, senior leaders monitor the time pupils spend in forms with their tutor at the beginning of the day. In these schools, there is a clear programme of personal learning for staff to deliver in the form tutor period. The focus of observations is to judge how far there is equity of provision in these sessions across the school. Senior leader or heads of year normally carry out these observations following a planned and shared programme.

Quality assuring off-site provision for which the school has a responsibility, for example 14-19 provision

Nearly all secondary schools recognise that the school remains responsible for its pupils and for their learning experiences when pupils go off-site to other providers to learn as part of 14-19 provision. Many secondary schools are developing shared observation practices with their colleagues in other sectors, such as further education colleges, where pupils attend as part of their 14-19 learning. In many cases, senior leaders or heads of year from the secondary school have devised common observation tools. They undertake joint observation of the provision and they moderate their judgements of the learning and teaching together. They provide joint feedback to the lecturer after the observation.

Sharing effective practice with other schools

Schools are increasingly sharing effective practice with other schools in their local region through their cluster of local schools, or more widely through the family of schools. In most cases, senior leaders plan visits to other schools carefully so that the time is well used. Classroom observation is often a feature of such visits. In many of the best cases, teachers not only observe other classes, but have planned time to discuss the observation with the teacher and the pupils. To ensure good use of the experience on return to school, senior leaders ensure that there is planned time where the teacher can share the experience with other staff, for example through a staff meeting.

Developing aspects of practice with teachers through internal and external professional learning communities

The development of internal and external professional learning communities is helping schools to develop effective teaching practice which raises pupils' standards of achievement. This approach often helps all members of staff to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding of effective teaching. When staff work collaboratively in a professional group, it helps them to reflect more carefully on their work and to see themselves as part of a team working to a shared goal. Where teachers organise the professional learning community well by setting clear goals and time spans in which to complete the work, staff gain more satisfaction from working in the profession. In many cases, classroom observation forms a part of the professional learning community's activities. In many of the most effective cases, the members of the community agree common principles about observations and ensure that they create a classroom observation form specific to their needs. While members of the professional learning community develop observation plans, the lead person normally liaises with senior leaders to put the observation timetable in place within a given period of time.

Understanding effective practice in other sectors: primary/secondary, secondary/further education

This type of observation takes place when schools try to narrow the gap between sectors. Many primary and secondary schools develop joint arrangements where they seek to make transition from primary school to secondary school a smooth experience for pupils, not only in terms of administrative systems, but also in terms of learning. To do this, most primary feeder schools liaise with their local secondary schools to organise a programme of transition events in the last term of Year 6. Teachers from the primary and secondary schools take the opportunity to observe each other teach Year 6 and Year 7 classes. This helps teachers to understand how teaching may differ between primary and secondary schools and to try to bridge the gap between the two sectors for their pupils. In a few cases, secondary schools work with further education colleges and universities to help Year 13 pupils move smoothly into the next stage in their learning.

Mentoring and coaching serving teachers, support staff and trainee teachers

Where senior leaders have identified a need to improve the quality of teaching in a class, they often arrange for staff who have a strength in the area of concern to provide a planned programme of mentoring or coaching opportunities.. In many cases, this includes classroom observation where the observer undertakes classroom observations of the teacher over several sessions and provides feedback that focuses on professional development and avoids any judgement on the quality of teaching. A key feature of this type of classroom observation and feedback is the opportunity for the observed teacher to improve their practice through professional dialogue with a colleague. In mentoring, the focus is on the exchange of ideas, while in coaching the focus is on the observer posing questions and allowing the member of staff to develop their own practice through reflection and experimentation. The technique used will depend on the observed member of staff's stage in their own professional development.

In initial teacher training, mentors observe trainee teachers on a very regular basis in line with the teacher training centre's requirements. Feedback in these sessions focuses on incremental proficiency in the trainees' ability to become competent in achieving the standards for qualified teacher status. In the most effective cases, as the trainees' abilities develop, mentors move from providing feedback to helping trainees to reflect on and to develop their own practice through skilful questioning.

Tutors observing newly-qualified teachers and those on the Masters in Education Programme

The Welsh Government offers newly-qualified teachers the opportunity to continue their professional learning during the early stages of their career through a Masters in Education Practice qualification. The key focus of the higher degree is for teachers in their early years in the profession to secure rapid and effective development in teaching practice through regular observation and further study. In most cases, tutors are external to the school. They visit the school on a regular basis to observe the teacher in line with the programme.

Helping governors to develop their understanding about pupils' learning and the life and work of the school through first-hand experience

Governors have an important role in overseeing and steering the direction of the school. While governors bring many useful skills to a school, in many cases they do not have an in-depth understanding of the day-to-day work of schools. To help them to develop their understanding, nearly all governors take on a role linking them to an area of the school's work. In most instances, it is now common for governors to visit the school regularly (at least once a term) and to undertake a 'learning walk' or observe a lesson alongside a senior member of staff who explains aspects of the classroom for them. These visits are most effective when the governor has a well-focused observation schedule. Gathering first-hand evidence helps governors to understand the complexity of the work of the school and to make better informed judgements about issues raised at the governing body.

Establishing the quality of a candidate's teaching when applying for a post at the school

In nearly all schools visited, headteachers have introduced an observation activity in the selection procedures for short-listed candidates to help them to make an informed judgement about the quality of the candidate's teaching. In many cases, candidates teach a lesson to a class at the school on the day of interview. Headteachers try to take into account that the candidates have not had the chance to establish a teaching relationship with the pupils in the school. Other headteachers prefer to visit the candidates' schools in order to see them teach in a context that is more familiar to the candidates. Many headteachers in both scenarios seek feedback from pupils as to their impressions of the lesson. Most headteachers feel the first-hand evidence they gain from the observation task is important in helping them to appoint effective teaching staff.

Tracking individual pupils to observe their learning experiences and progress

Individual pupil trails take place for a variety of reasons. The most common reasons are to monitor the activities pupils with additional learning needs or more able and talented pupil experience in a day. The focus is on the pupil's learning and their interaction with other pupils in the class. This type of classroom observation is very useful for additional learning needs co-ordinators as it helps them to identify the types of learning activities which best meet pupils' learning needs and whether pupils receive enough appropriate challenges in their work. In line with the initial teacher training centre's requests, senior mentors often organise pupil trails for trainee teachers in the early part of their training. This helps trainee teachers to understand how individual pupils experience the school day and to observe the types of learning activity to which they respond the best.

Monitoring pupil behaviour

In a few schools, pupil behaviour can be challenging. In these schools, to support staff and to improve pupil behaviour, senior leaders monitor pupils' behaviour through a range of means; for example noting how many times a teacher has to remove a pupil from a class. Senior leaders also monitor pupil behaviour by planned walks around the school, ensuring good behaviour around the school and in classes. Staff know the programme of walks in advance and they know that senior leaders are there to support them when pupils present challenging behaviour.

Monitoring school objectives

At the beginning of the school year, senior leaders plan specific times to monitor progress towards targets in the school improvement plan. Not all monitoring of school objectives will include classroom observation. Senior leaders may use other monitoring tools, or a combination of tools, such as book scrutiny or pupil questionnaires. However, in many cases, monitoring will include classroom observation; for example if a school is trying to improve pupils' assessment for learning techniques in the classroom.

Subject/department/year group reviews

In most cases, reviews of subjects, skills, areas of learning or year groups in primary schools and departmental and year group reviews in secondary schools take place as part of an on-going programme of review over a number of years. Senior leaders nominate specific areas or aspects of the school for reviews in the academic year. In the course of the review, senior leaders look at the area's performance overall and they also look specifically to review performance in relation to whole-school targets set out in the school improvement plan. In many cases, the reviewing team not only includes senior leaders with line management responsibilities, but also middle managers from other areas of the school. This helps to develop consistent understanding of the school's expectations and performance.

School review

School review usually takes place when senior leaders want to review the work of the school and to determine the success of specific strategies. The school usually undertakes this form of review with the local authority as it allows the local authority to update its understanding of the school's progress and whether there is a need to provide any level of support. In a few cases, where there is a need to raise levels of performance in the school, headteachers bring in the services of a consultant to provide an independent external view of the school's work. As well as scrutinising pupils' attainment data and the school's plans and documentation, reviewers also undertake classroom observation to provide first-hand evidence of teaching and learning.

Performance management

This type of observation takes place as part of the annual review of a member of staff's performance. It focuses on whole-school and individual performance management targets where these relate to raising pupils' standards of achievement. The observation focuses on how well planning, teaching and assessment impacts on pupils' standards of achievement. The outcomes of performance management observations allow senior leaders to understand the strengths and areas for development of individual staff, while the whole-school outcomes, drawn from collating the general messages from individual observations, allow senior leaders to understand the strengths and areas for development in teaching for the staff as a whole.

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