



Performance and Development for Teachers in NSW Public Schools

Observations of professional practice

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The observation of classroom practice is an important component of the process, and is an essential element of the Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework. The observation should be negotiated, linked to the teacher's goals and the appropriate Standards, and undertaken in a collegial and supportive manner.

Observation processes are to be negotiated in a collegial, mutually respectful manner, undertaken by an agreed colleague and documented.

Performance and Development Framework, p6

Key principles of observations

Effective feedback is:

- goal-referenced – tells teachers if they are on track or need to change course
- tangible and transparent – supported by easily understandable data/evidence
- actionable – concrete, specific, useful data within control of the teacher
- timely – facilitates reflection and reduces anxiety
- ongoing – provides opportunities for teachers to alter their practice to better achieve their goals
- consistent – information that is stable, accurate and trustworthy
- linked to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

How to arrange observations of classroom teaching practice

- Observations could be peer to peer, supervisor to teacher, or teacher to supervisor.
- Observations of teaching practice may already be established as a program in a school. A teacher with support from school leadership may add to such a program, or establish informal observation arrangements with peers.
- The time and place of the observation should be negotiated, taking into account the necessary release time for the teachers involved. Time for the pre-observation planning and post-observation feedback should be negotiated within a short timeframe of the actual lesson or activity so that professional learning opportunities from the experience are maximised.
- An agreed colleague may be a teacher who wishes to observe your lesson for her/his own professional learning. You may wish to approach a colleague and ask if she/he will observe your lesson or activity based on their experience with the subject or stage group, classroom management, the use of programs, special needs within the classroom, or other specific areas.

- When a colleague agrees to observe your lesson or invites you to observe hers/his, it would be beneficial to agree on the pre-observation planning meeting, the actual observation and the post-observation meeting at the same time so appropriate arrangements can be made.
- It is important that the teacher contextualises the lesson or activity for the observer during the pre-observation planning meeting. This would include familiarising the observer with the class or group and the planned lesson or activity. The teacher should also familiarise the observer with the professional goal/s that will be addressed in the lesson or activity. The relevant standard descriptors from the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers can also be referenced, as appropriate.
- The teacher and observer should also agree how the observation will take place. For example, will the observer engage in some team teaching? Will the observer work with individual students / small groups? A checklist approach, akin to the 'sit at the back of the room, clipboard inspections' of the last century, is counterproductive to effectively supporting a teacher's professional learning and not in keeping with contemporary professional practice.
- An agreement on confidentiality should be reached as to how openly observations will be discussed with peers.
- Remember that observations do not have to be live. Lessons could be filmed so others can observe practice based on the video recording. A teacher could use the video recording for her/his own self-reflection.

The level of experience of the teacher will inform the number of observations of teaching practice. There needs to be a minimum of two documented observations per year. In the context of a supportive culture, additional peer observations can be a valuable part of a quality professional learning plan.

Performance and Development Framework, p6

- Generally, an early career teacher may require support through lesson observation more than an experienced teacher. Where additional observations are negotiated by a teacher or supervisor, it is important to establish the purpose of the observation and how it links with the professional goal/s or Standards, as appropriate.
- A Performance and Development Plan (PDP) may include a collaborative approach to programming and/or lesson planning among teachers and/or supervisors. Observing the teaching of these lessons or programs and engaging in effective feedback to inform the effectiveness of the planning can be a valuable professional learning activity. This could include two or more teachers from the same or different faculties or stage groups.

Reflection questions

- For which goals would classroom observation be useful as a source of feedback to improve practice and/or to provide evidence of progress?

- What does the observation need to focus on to support or inform progress towards achieving goals?
- What questions will be asked of the observer in the feedback session to ensure that information is received that will assist progress towards achieving goals?

Observations of leadership practices

Documented observations by the supervisor of leadership practices of executives and principals are to be conducted.

In the case of executives and principals with teaching responsibilities, the colleague will undertake and document a mix of structured observations of both teaching practice and management/leadership practices, as agreed between the executive or principal with the supervisor. This may occur throughout the annual cycle.

Performance and Development Framework, p6.

Executives and principals with teaching responsibilities may wish to use standard descriptors from different career stages of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, as appropriate.

Further reading

AITSL

Engaging in performance and development:

www.aitsl.edu.au/professional-growth/support/performance-and-development-support/engaging-in-p-d

Looking at Classroom Practice:

www.aitsl.edu.au/classroom-practice

BOSTES

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers:

www.nswteachers.nsw.edu.au/DownloadDocument.ashx?DocumentID=1122

Great Teaching, Inspired Learning:

www.nswteachers.nsw.edu.au/great-teaching-inspired-learning/

DEC

Performance and Development Framework for Principals, Executives and Teachers:

<https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/about-us/our-reforms/pdp/pdp-framework-15116.pdf>

Classroom observation: a professional learning strategy – module from the Classroom Teacher Program:

<https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/ctp/index.htm>

(Note: link is behind the staff portal)

Other

www.education.vic.gov.au/teachers/profdev/observations.aspx