

Sharing Classroom Experience (Observations in Schools) – LNCT Agreed Advice to Schools (January 2026)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The sharing of classroom experience is part of on-going professional learning for teachers and is built on positive working relationships, collaboration, and collegiality. It is intended to identify and celebrate good practice and encourage teachers to develop their expertise and complement self-evaluation.
- 1.2 The sharing of classroom experience is amongst those strategies used to develop and complement the teaching and learning process and may assist staff to evaluate the quality of their teaching and identify areas of strength as well as for development as part of their ongoing professional learning.
- 1.3 Peer, self, and leadership evaluation plays a significant role in the process, where high-quality professional interaction and dialogue between colleagues leads to enhancement of the teaching and learning process.
- 1.4 Classroom visits play a key role in demonstrating high quality and effective practice, improving learning and teaching and assuring quality as part of school self-evaluation within the improvement planning process. Sharing classroom practice is a two-way process at the heart of collegiality and all visits should take place within a climate of trust and support, with collegiality at its core.

2. Rationale

2.1 Sharing classroom experience can:

- Help develop critical reflection
- Encourage professional dialogue amongst colleagues
- Allow sharing of improving practice
- Be part of continuing professional learning
- Provide additional support to individual teachers where appropriate

3. Establishing Arrangements

- 3.1 Effective sharing of classroom experience, resulting in positive benefits to teachers and learners, is most likely when:

- Staff are fully consulted and involved in agreeing the arrangements for the process including the balance of the team observing.
- School leadership teams should avoid 2 members of the senior leadership team observing at the same time unless there is a clearly defined and agreed purpose (e.g. for an individual's professional learning – such as a newly promoted member of staff - or for moderation purposes) and the teacher being observed agrees. These should be the exception and not the norm.
- All staff make a positive commitment to the process.
- There is an open and honest approach, based on mutual respect amongst colleagues.

4. Key Principles

4.1 Arrangements for sharing classroom experience shall ensure that there is agreement between observers and those being observed on:

- The nature of the process.
- The focus and purpose of the shared classroom experience reflecting school priorities.
- The roles and responsibilities of the participants.
- The balance of the observing team and their role (leadership team, teachers).
- The recording of any relevant information.
- Adequate and appropriate time required for the whole process.
- The range of feedback methods both individual and whole school.

4.2 These arrangements should be negotiated annually and should form part of the school annual calendar and working time agreement. In line with the GTCS Standard for Full Registration, each teacher should engage in **up to 2 formal, recorded observations within an academic session**. A QI observation may be used as one of the up to 2 formal observations a teacher may participate in during a year. If this is to be the case, there must be an understanding and agreement across the school of the formal focus, who will be involved and what formal feedback is to be provided. Additional observations may take place as part of the West Lothian VSE programme and/or an external inspection from HMIE. All schools should be informed in advance of the academic session of involvement in the VSE programme and can therefore plan for this to compliment the school annual calendar.

5. Good Practice

5.1 Prior to sharing experience, the participants should discuss:

- The focus of what is being shared and the intended outcomes.
- The role of each participant and the approach to the observation.
- Any relevant criteria to be used as a basis for discussion.
- The agreed recording format.

5.2 During the sharing of experience, participants should:

- Keep the intended learning intentions for the class and any agreed criteria in mind.
- Where appropriate, be involved in the lesson.

5.3 Prior to any professional dialogue session, participants should:

- Consider the points they will share during the feedback.

5.4 During the professional dialogue session, participants should:

- Engage in an open and honest discussion about the shared experience.
- Confirm shared evaluative judgements and recognise – and celebrate - good practice.
- Discuss any areas for development and where appropriate, agree on a plan of action.

5.5 Formal sharing of classroom experiences may be undertaken by others outwith the senior leadership staff as this develops reflection, encourages professional dialogue, shares good practice, identifies support strategies, and may provide additional support. Visits of this kind, for example peer observations, must adhere to the good practice principles set out above, particularly that staff are fully consulted and involved in agreeing the arrangements for the process.

6. Record Keeping

6.1 The date of every shared experience should be noted with any agreed focus, purpose and outcomes recorded on the agreed formats.

7. Role of Sharing Classroom Experience through an authority supported Validated Self-Evaluation (VSE)

7.1 VSE is a process which aims to build the capacity of schools to evaluate their own performance and improve the quality of outcomes for learners and families. The SLT and staff will plan and participate in the Sharing Classroom Experience

during the VSE. VSE team members will be provided with the agreed school formats for recording and summarising observations of learning, teaching, and assessment. While it is good practice to give brief verbal feedback to staff that have been observed as soon as possible after the shared classroom experience, this process is about the school and not individual teachers.

8. Guidance for using Learning Walks

8.1 A learning walk is a focused, purposeful walk-through of learning spaces and classrooms. It is designed to give a real-time picture of what learning looks and feels like across the school.

Fundamentally, learning walks ask:

“What is it like to be a pupil in this school today?” and “Are we seeing what we think we’re delivering?”

Over time, these short snapshots build an evidence-informed picture of school life. Learning walks contribute to whole school improvement in a more connected way. They are not about the teacher in the room — they are about the experience of the learner and the systems that support them.

8.2 What learning walks can do:

- Focus on specific agreed areas (e.g. environment, engagement, motivation etc.) and provide overall feedback.
- Spot what is consistent — and what is not — across learning spaces and classrooms.
- Understand how curriculum content is coming to life.
- Reflect on whether key priorities are visible in action.
- Pick up on ethos, relationships, values, and culture.

8.3 What learning walks are not:

- Not a lesson observation.
- Not a form of individual scrutiny with individual feedback.

8.4 How and why might we use a learning walk?

- Collaboration - where a learning walk is used in addition to the two planned observations, this is a voluntary process which affords all staff the opportunity to participate to observe or to be observed.

- Planned - learning walks should be planned for, with - and in agreement with - those participating.
- Thematic — each learning walk should have a clear focus (e.g., challenge, transitions, engagement) which is agreed collaboratively prior to the learning walk taking place.

9. Collaborative School Improvement (CIA) (Secondary only)

9.1 A CIA is a way in which the secondary schools support each other with improvement, understanding and building capacity around QI 3.1 (Improving Wellbeing, Equality, and Inclusion). They provide a forum for schools to discuss with each other how they feel they are doing with aspects of the quality indicator - the annual focus is agreed by the DHTs Support. The school also identifies an area they would like to improve and use the opportunity to discuss this with the team within a professional and supportive environment. The team tends to involve DHTs Support, at times with support from a QIO depending on the theme. Schools know in advance when their CIA is to support planning. CIAs tend to include learning walks, class visits, and focus groups with a collaborative focus on one of the QI themes.

9.2 What a CIA can do:

- Focus on specific agreed areas and provide overall feedback.
- Support a school to ensure they are meeting its statutory duties.
- Provide feedback how well learner needs are being met through both universal and targeted support to support further improvement – this could include aspects of pupil shadowing if appropriate.
- Support a school to identify future professional learning needs of staff.
- Reflect on whether key priorities of wellbeing, equality and inclusion are visible in action and coming to life.
- Pick up on ethos, relationships, values, and culture as well as wellbeing for all.
- Opportunity to build capacity and confidence across the system.
- Identify cross authority professional learning needs.
- Support the school self-evaluation summary.
- Opportunity for schools to share best practice.

9.3 What CIAs are not:

- Not VSEs.
- Not a forum for scrutiny – focus is on collaborative improvement with the school and for the school.
- Not formal lesson observations.
- Not a form of individual scrutiny with individual feedback.

9.4 What would be best practice for a CIA?

- Focus agreed in advance with the school and the team and shared with all staff.
- Learning walks/class visits/pupil shadowing should be made in agreement between the school lead and the teacher/support staff.
- Ideally not take place in the same session as an authority VSE going forward.
- Include PTs/PTCs Support as team members going forward to build capacity.
- Feedback provided by School Leadership team to staff following discussion with the visiting team.
- Some areas may be followed up with the school if further support is required.