

Collegial engagement in classrooms

The Department of Education and Training (DET) and the Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) are committed to supporting and promoting a professional, collaborative approach to school improvement to achieve the best possible outcomes for Queensland state school students.

The implementation of school improvement strategies often involves the mentoring and coaching of teachers and the implementation of a range of professional development activities designed to ensure effective teaching practices are being used in classrooms.

The purpose of this statement is to provide school leaders, heads of program and classroom teachers with advice and clarity about what constitutes a collaborative approach to supporting teachers to improve teaching and learning practices that maximise student learning outcomes.

DET and the QTU acknowledge education leaders use a range of strategies to engage with students and teachers in the classroom. One approach that promotes the development of effective pedagogical practices is the use of classroom collegial engagement in the form of classroom observation and feedback. These practices may occur within a one-to-one or team context and/or as part of a mentoring or coaching relationship. The collegial nature of these approaches help build a culture of shared responsibility and professionalism. School leaders are instructional leaders and as such should be involved in classrooms as part of their responsibility for optimising school performance.

Both DET and the QTU acknowledge that many schools in Queensland successfully operate accepted models of collegial engagement based on agreed procedures, professional trust and mutual respect. This is our objective. Models of classroom observation and feedback should be the subject of consultation with teaching staff. The consultation process must involve consideration by the local consultative committee (LCC) in schools required to establish an LCC.

Collegial engagement models should recognise the following fundamental principles:

1. DET and the QTU recognise the benefit of education leaders' positive engagement with teachers in the classroom to strengthen and support teaching practice and contribute to improved student outcomes.
2. Classroom teachers have a right to teach in an environment that recognises their professional expertise, the exercise of professional judgement and the diverse range of effective teaching practice.
3. The contribution to teaching practice and involvement not only acknowledges the role of principals but also of others in promotional positions and peers to this process.
4. Observation and feedback can be reciprocal in nature and should be utilised, so that where appropriate, observers

should themselves be available for teachers to observe them in their practice.

5. Classroom observations should be used as a collaborative process to recognise and professionally support teachers to reflect and build on their teaching practice.

Models of collegial engagement should be accommodated into the normal routine of the school with consideration being given to the workload implications of teachers and schools leaders to ensure ongoing sustainability of the practices.

DET and the QTU agree that highly effective models of collegial engagement involve negotiations between the teacher and the observer relating to the focus and intent of observations, their timing and frequency, feedback protocols and follow up actions.

Consequently models of collegial engagement should include agreement on:

- the purpose of the collegial engagement in consideration of the school context
- forms of collegial engagement to be undertaken – e.g. classroom observations, walk-throughs, peer coaching, classroom profiling, instructional rounds, model lessons, peer and instructional coaching
- who will undertake the collegial engagement (i.e. who will be the observers, this is not limited to school leaders)
- the nature and form of feedback
- frequency of collegial engagement – a scheme of collegial engagement should include no more than four observations a year (i.e. one per term), unless otherwise mutually agreed
- timing of the engagement and associated protocols – prior notice should be given and the timing of the engagement should be agreed.

The involvement of school leaders and teachers in models of collegial engagement is intended to maintain a positive, collaborative presence in the school's teaching and learning. School culture should be one that is built on trust and collegial engagement. It helps ensure the importance of classroom practice and pedagogy is recognised and prominent and then is a collegial approach to teachers' ongoing professional development. Models of collegial engagement are not intended to take the place of informal classroom and ad hoc interactions by school leaders.

Collegial engagement is not to be used for the purpose of assessing teacher performance. As such, models of collegial engagement are entirely separate to the procedures for managing unsatisfactory performance and evaluating teachers for probationary or teacher registration purposes.

DET and the QTU also recognise the number of smaller rural and remote schools in our system and actively encourage teaching principals and classroom teachers in those locations to support each other in a professional capacity through observation at nearby schools.