

## **SCHOOL OBSERVATION TASKS**

### **POSTGRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN EDUCATION (MASTER'S LEVEL) SECONDARY COURSE**

Below are key questions to focus your observations in the Primary and Secondary phases. You should complete a written response of 300 - 500 words to each prompt / question (please use continuous prose rather than note form i.e. not bullet points).

*On the pages that follow we provide supplementary guidance for your observations and responses to these prompt / questions. These are suggestions only, and you will no doubt find that further issues and questions arise or that you develop your own methods of collating observation notes.*

# Supplementary Guidance for School Observation Tasks

## Primary Observation

### 1. Teaching and Learning

Use your time in the Primary school to observe different classes and age groups of children at work. This will help you to gain some important insights into teaching and learning. You may wish to refer to the following prompts for observation and reflection (although there is no need to address each and every point). **You could consider:**

- *How adults support children's learning using resources and different activities*
- *The similarities and differences are there in teaching and learning in different age ranges*
- *The kinds of strategies do you see being used to manage children's behaviour in a positive manner*
- *How teachers encourage children of different ages to take responsibility for their learning and behaviour*
- *How your observations of teaching and learning challenge assumptions about teaching and learning in the Secondary phase...consider: teaching style, curriculum, organisation, conceptions of learners and learning.*

Take time to find out about the curriculum for your specialist subject and, if possible, arrange to see your subject being taught. You will find it interesting and helpful to look at the National Curriculum to see what is taught in Key Stages 1 and 2: [www.gov.uk/national-curriculum](http://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum)

### 2. Literacy and numeracy

Literacy and numeracy are core skills that have a bearing on all subject specialisms. Observe an individual child (or small group of pupils) over a series of lessons or a day. Describe the range and balance of literacy and numeracy activities experienced by the pupil(s) over this time, and the demands they make on the pupil. If you are able to make any links with your secondary specialism you should do so.

- *Try to speak with the class teacher to see if they can suggest a pupil or small group of pupils that it may be interesting to observe over the course of the day. It may also help to learn a little about the pupil(s).*
- *It might help to draw up a time-chart, observing the engagement of the pupil(s) with activities every ten minutes or so, making a brief note at each interval. This leaves you chance to observe other aspects of learning in the classroom.*

- *Try to get a sense of the attitudes and motivations of pupils, for example, in relation to tasks which they seem to find hard or which they seem to enjoy. Try to account for this.*
- *Do some literacy and numeracy skills seem to be taken for granted? Which are addressed explicitly by the teacher or other adults in the room?*
- *Which skills being developed are most pertinent to those fostered in your own subject area?*

### **3. Finding out about how children learn to read before coming to secondary school**

It is important for Secondary school teachers to develop some understanding of how children learn to read. During your time in the Primary school try to find out about the school's approach to helping children to learn to read. In particular, try to find out about the following:

- the general approach to reading
- the role of phonics (linking letters with sounds) in teaching children to reading in the context of speaking and listening activities
- helping children understand and build vocabulary
- how the school supports children in developing a love of reading

## **Secondary Observation**

Below are four key questions to focus your observations. You should complete a written response of 300 - 500 words to each question (please use continuous prose rather than note form i.e. not bullet points). There is no need to address each and every prompt.

### **1. How do teachers typically structure lessons in your subject area?**

*You may find a table along the lines of this one helpful for gathering notes during the course of observation.*

| <b>Specific examples of:</b> | <b>Beginning of lesson</b> | <b>Transitions from one activity to another</b> |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| <b>what the teacher does</b> |                            |   |
| <b>what the teacher says</b> |                            |   |
| <b>what the pupils do</b>    |                            |   |

- *How do teachers start a lesson?*
- *Are lesson objectives introduced? If so, how?*
- *How do teachers get pupils to start an individual or series of tasks?*
- *What types of activity appear to create most problems for  
a) the teacher and b) the pupils?*
- *How are group activities set up and managed?*
- *How is time distributed, and momentum created and maintained?*
- *What factors seem to influence the working atmosphere in the classroom?*
- *How do teachers conclude a lesson?*
- *What role do resources play in structuring the lesson?*

### **2. With reference to two lessons (each representing a different key stage) that you have observed in your subject area, how do you ascertain that pupils are learning? (This task will help to inform your first PGCE Master's Level assignment)**

*It is often difficult to see that pupils have made progress in learning. Sometimes they may not appear to learn exactly along the lines of stated learning objectives, but this does not discount the possibility that they have learnt other things. Often their learning may be something other than 'subject knowledge'.*

- *What evidence can you draw on to say that a pupil has made progress in learning? Did you see a significant moment in the lesson when this occurred? A moment when a pupil suddenly understood a concept, or was able to perform a task that they couldn't do previously? This 'moment' is known as a 'critical incident'.*
- *Could you make a distinction between progress in knowledge, understanding and skills?*
- *What do pupils' answers to questions reveal about their learning? Do pupils ask questions themselves?*
- *What can pupils' mistakes or misconceptions tell you about their level of understanding?*
- *To what extent can whole-class question and answer phases provide a good indication of everybody's progress?*
- *How do you gauge progress and learning during pair or group work?*
- *How do you set about considering learning in activities that do not leave a record or product, written or otherwise?*
- *Are some forms of evidence of learning favoured over others? Are some more valuable?*
- *Have you witnessed any instances where it is problematic to ascertain whether or not learning occurred?*

**3. With reference to the practice of the teachers you have observed, what sort of teacher would you like to become?**

- *Have you seen skills you would like to emulate?*
- *Would you bring to your teaching anything you haven't seen?*
- *What values do you want to embody or represent?*
- *Will you differ from class to class?*
- *What makes a good colleague?*

**4. On the basis of your experience so far, how would you advise others to approach observing learning and teaching?**

*We ask this question because observation can be difficult!*

- *What were the difficulties you experienced and how did you respond to them?*
- *How did you decide where to look, and when?*
- *To what extent did you switch between observer and participant roles?*
- *Did observing pose any ethical questions?*

- *What are the benefits of having focussing prompts, and what are the disadvantages?*
- *How has your experience of schools before this period of observation influenced your approach and the manner of your response?*