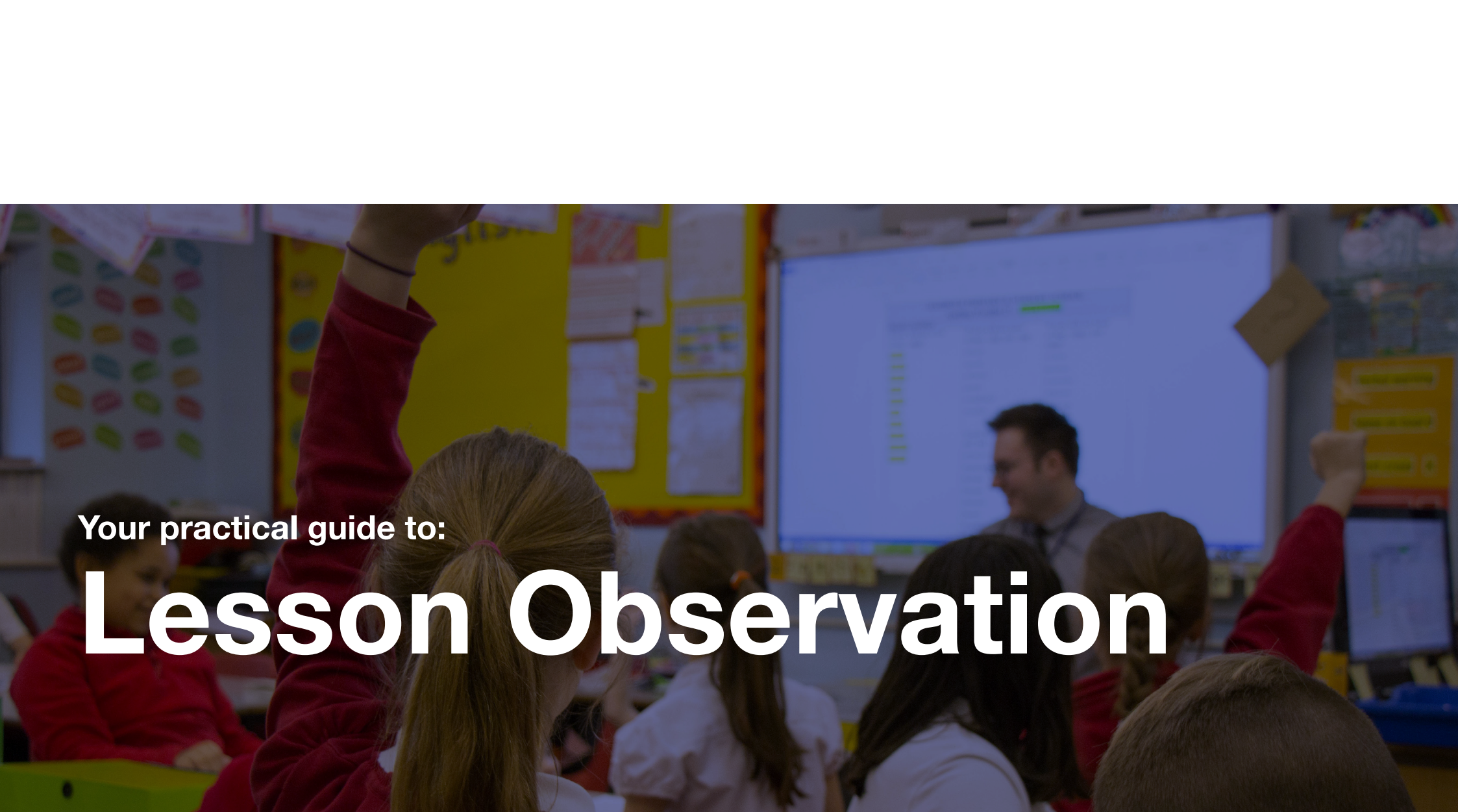


A blurred background image of a classroom. In the foreground, the back of a student's head with a ponytail is visible. To the left, another student has their hand raised. In the background, a male teacher stands near a large digital display showing a document. The classroom walls are decorated with various papers and posters.

Your practical guide to:

Lesson Observation

From summative to **formative observations**

There is often confusion between lesson observation as part of the accountability framework and observation for effective professional development. It's essential to ensure there is a clear distinction between the two.

Accountability is important, but it has to be intelligent accountability. Without context and where there is a mismatch between the intended and perceived purpose, observation as part of the accountability framework has limited value for improving teaching and learning. This challenge strikes the heart of why lesson observations must move away from performance management towards development, a significant cultural shift for many schools.

In February 2014, Ofsted's Mike Claddingbowl, made it clear that Ofsted would no longer be grading individual lessons during inspections. "Inspectors should NOT be arriving at judgements about individual lessons. They should NOT be telling teachers or the Headteacher that any individual lesson was RI, Good or Outstanding". This acted as a catalyst for many schools to stop grading lesson observations in a bid to make the shift away from making summative judgements. Instead, making observations part of a formative, developmental process.

In September 2017, at ResearchEd's Annual Conference, Ofsted's Chief Inspector reinforced that "Ofsted is absolutely right not to grade individual lessons now, and it would be great if all schools would stop doing it as well."

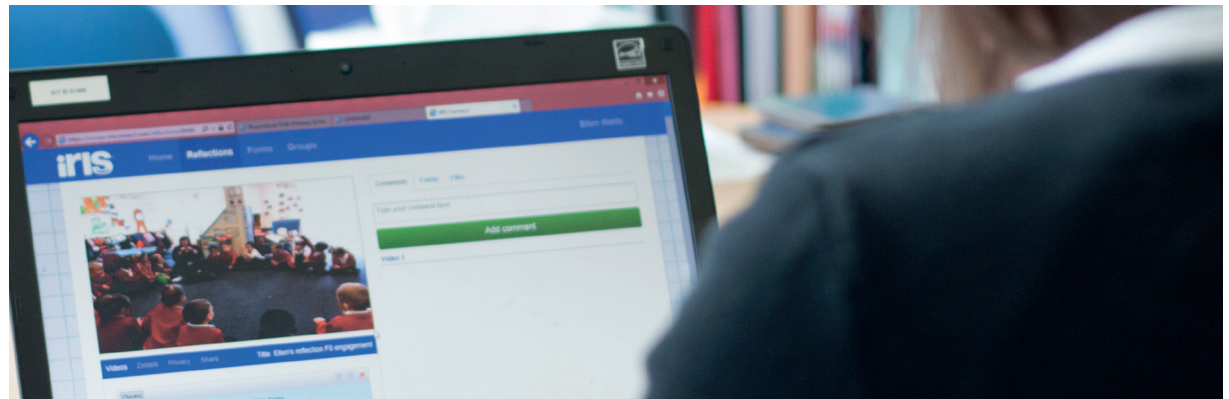
Pitfalls of grading

Ruth Butler's 1986 study, 'Effects of No Feedback, Task-Related Comments, and Grades on Intrinsic Motivation and Performance', looked at the impact of grades and feedback on student performance. The study found that students who received only comments on their work (no grade) consistently outperformed students that only received a grade.

Interestingly, students that received comments and a grade performed worst of all. If this is true for student learning, it probably applies to teachers too.

[The MET project](#) found that observation judgements varied more between observers than between the lessons observed.

10 months after this announcement, [a couple of informal surveys](#) showed that most schools were still grading observations. One theory for this is that finding alternative ways to monitor the quality of teaching and learning can seem a huge challenge. However, it is important that schools find a way to build a shared vision of what good teaching and learning looks like qualitatively and grow this over time.



Observation: the bedrock of effective professional development

Research from Joyce and Showers (2002) looked at the components of professional development needed to help teachers bridge the gap between theory and practice. Their research demonstrated that skills transfer into classroom practice was much higher when teachers' professional development included theory, modelling, practice with feedback and contextualised coaching, findings that are still relevant today.

Training components and attainment of outcomes in terms of % of participants

Joyce and Showers 2002

	Training Outcomes		
Training Components	Knowledge of Content	Skill Implementation	Classroom Application
Study of Theory	10%	5%	0%
Demonstration	30%	20%	0%
Practice	60%	60%	5%
Peer Coaching	95%	95%	95%

Observation is a core component of all of the higher impact professional learning activities and, when part of ongoing professional development with built-in focused feedback cycles, it's a hugely powerful way of building confidence, motivating colleagues and cultivating a growth mindset in the teaching community of a school.

Observation shouldn't be seen as a stand-alone activity, it's central to:

- Objective [self-reflection/self-observation](#)
- Providing high quality feedback
- Coaching
- [Mentoring](#)
- Peer-observation
- Sharing within a community of practice

Think about the structures or professional development programmes that already exist within your school, for example lesson study, teaching triads or peer coaching. Lesson observation plays a key role in these. If it doesn't, it's likely that including some form of observation will make them richer and more effective professional learning activities, as long as those observations are developmental.



What is the reality of **observations in your school?**

Digging observation out of the summative rut can be a challenge. It requires a shift in culture and a drive from school leadership to facilitate a more open culture of collaboration.

Ask yourself these 8 questions about lesson observation in your school:

1. As part of the senior leadership, if you're honest with yourself, how do you feel about lesson observations at your school?
2. Are your teachers confident about letting people observe their lessons?
3. Are observations always centred around performance management or are they also used for professional development?
4. Does lesson observation feedback consist of tick boxes against criteria or a more contextualised meaningful discussion?
5. Do teachers get an opportunity to see great practice from around the school like you do?
6. Is there a fear of risk-taking or experimentation?
7. Are there pockets of outstanding practice, but a difficulty in sharing this across the school?
8. Are there opportunities for peer and self-review?



11 ideas to help you shift your observation culture

- 1 Create a shared vision about what great teaching and learning looks like** – how can a teacher move towards being better at what they do when they don't know what that looks like?

Giving teachers the opportunity to see great teaching in action is a powerful learning experience. Using video to build a bank of shared practice clips can help overcome time and cost barriers of releasing teachers from lessons to observe one another. Ensuring the data security and permissions of these videos is vital.

IRIS Connect customer?

Create a Group in IRIS Connect, and ask your lead practitioners to share example clips from their lessons so that all of your teachers have access whenever they need it, wherever they are.



- 2 Create a common language** – find ways to build a picture of the quality of teaching and learning over time using a range of data and intelligence sources. The observation process is then part of a range of tools to monitor quality and can be moderated in a way that builds trust. Deputy Head, Ross McGill (@TeacherToolkit), [wrote a blog](#) about how he approached this in his school in their move to formative observations.

- 3 Provide opportunities for regular peer observation** – observations are excellent learning opportunities for both the teacher and the observer.

a. *For the observer – you may wish to see a colleague modelling a particular teaching strategy to gain a deeper understanding of the strategies the teacher used and the decisions they made, making the tacit explicit.*

b. *For the teacher – you may wish to gain feedback and possibly coaching from your peer observer to help you to embed, develop or refine a strategy or practice.*

Andrew Hockley, a specialist in leadership and management, and researcher into the benefits of peer observation, released his **peer observation success criteria**.



Four key pieces of advice from this were to:

- Empower teachers by letting them shape the peer observation process
- Provide training in what to look for in observations as well as in giving and receiving feedback
- Make peer observation part of contractual CPD time to ensure it's regarded as important
- Highlight peer observation as an opportunity for both the teacher observing and the teacher being observed to learn

11 ideas to help you shift your observation culture

4

Consider cross department 360 observations – teachers in different departments may rarely cross paths in their day to day. Peer observation of a different subject specialist or students you teach in another setting may unlock plenty of interesting insights and learning opportunities.

5

Ask your teachers what they want – ask what your staff find valuable and what they don't. What type of development opportunities do they need? Who would they like to observe and who would they value feedback or coaching from? Engaging teachers in decisions will create buy-in to the process and avoid wasting time and money on activities that teachers don't enjoy or find useful. An informal [survey of 1,000 teachers](#) showed the CPD they want and value; what about your teachers?

6

Focus on specifics, not generalisations – developmental observations should look at specific teaching strategies or elements of a lesson rather than the lesson as a whole. For example, look only at questioning, feedback, wait time or a specific student's learning. This will ensure that the follow up discussion or feedback is focused on specific areas for improvement.

7

Take the opportunity to record and revisit – the effectiveness of feedback diminishes over time following an observation. In the busy life of a teacher, it's near impossible to accurately recall specifically what happened in a lesson last week. Recording lessons and feedback allows you to revisit and learn from the experience time and time again, turning one lesson into multiple learning opportunities. Deputy Head at Haileybury Imperial and Service College, Stephen Campbell, has written a blog about a [teacher's perspective on using video for lesson observation](#).

IRIS Connect customer?

Use the time-stamped comments tool to add contextualised feedback to a lesson video and increase dialogue around teaching and learning.



11 ideas to help you shift your observation culture

8 Equip teachers with effective discussion points – developing a set of questions that will keep post-observation discussions focused and to help the teacher dig deeper into teaching and learning can be a helpful resource. Read Headteacher, Tom Sherrington's blog on [observing a sequence of lessons](#) for some excellent question ideas.

9 Improve observation feedback – make sure your staff are provided with the tools and training to provide effective developmental feedback. Objective setting, focusing on specific observable behaviours, identifying next steps and putting the teacher's development at the centre of observation feedback is vital. Read Coach and Education Consultant, Mike Fleetham's, [5 tips on making observation feedback formative](#).

10 Enable self-observation – *"it is the actual experience of being more effective that spurs them to repeat and build on the behaviour"*.
(Michael Fullan, 2012)

Seeing yourself as your students and an observer sees you helps you to gain much more insight into the impact you have as a teacher. This deeper understanding makes professional conversations and observation feedback more productive.

Using video is like holding a mirror up to your teaching practice and is a very powerful tool for teacher reflection. [Read more about improving self-reflection](#).

11 Widen your professional learning network – why restrict the observation process to within your school? If you want to use observations as a developmental tool, then look beyond your school gates. Use your links with other schools to share practice, peer observe and collaborate with teachers in other schools. If you're part of a Teaching School alliance or multi-academy trust, [download this FREE Practical Guide to Collaborative CPD for MATs](#).

IRIS Connect customer?

You could add these questions to a number of **Forms** and share them with your colleagues to help analyse their video reflections and gain a more objective insight into the teaching and learning.



IRIS Connect customer?

Create a **Group** to tap into and share excellence with teachers beyond your school. If you're part of an Academy Trust or a close knit partnership with other schools, you may wish to consider enabling even deeper collaboration with your teachers via IRIS Connect.



What is IRIS Connect?

Our video reflection and collaboration platform provides teachers with every professional learning activity that research shows is vital for improvement.

Join our community and get all the tools and support you need to revolutionise teacher professional learning.

Discover the impact we're having across schools by reading our [case studies >](#)

Book A Demo

To find out more:

www.irisconnect.co.uk | info@irisconnect.co.uk | 0333 1362 484 | @IRIS_Connect



"I don't personally feel there is another tool as effective or that gives you as much return on investment as IRIS Connect does. It's a truly powerful tool for professional learning." - Paul Collin, Lead Practitioner of Teaching and Learning

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discover. develop. share.