GUIDELINES FOR LEARNING WALKS

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1.Introducction

MAGNO recognises that our learners are at the heart of all we do and are committed to properly understanding every aspect of their school experience. As part of this commitment the Senior Management Team (SMT) regularly undertake learning walks. During a walk the SMT watch and talk to students, teachers and others in a range of classes and other learning or social spaces in order to better understand the everyday experience of learners.

Learning walks can also be useful in identifying, sharing and developing good practice; providing feedback on aspects of learning and teaching receiving special attention (e.g. LSC); reviewing the use of resources; and in supporting teachers in reinforcing good behaviour. Learning walks can create additional opportunities for discussion between teachers and students and can therefore be carried out by any member of staff.

Learning walks are one part of the wider process of understanding and improving the student experience. The SMT will also regularly review learning and teaching in other ways; taking advantage of routine opportunities for drop-in classroom visits, discussions with students and scrutiny of their work.

2. Planning a learning walk

Learning walks will normally be carried out by the SMT or others nominated by them. They may cover a whole curriculum area, a sub-set of courses, a particular group of courses or a particular aspect of the student experience. A learning walk may be undertaken on a single afternoon or may extend over several days in order to take account of the experience of a wider group of students.

A walk is an opportunity to find out about the normal experience of students and teachers. Before a learning walk the SMT will identify a particular theme or question that the walk will address. The theme will typically arise from self-assessment, quality improvement planning, student feedback or feedback from other stakeholders but may also be identified through normal curriculum management duties.

Depending on the focus the SMT may announce that a learning walk is taking place or may undertake a walk without notice. Similarly, the SMT may or may not announce the theme of a learning walk.

3. Visiting classes during a learning walk

If a member of the SMT goes into classes as part of a learning walk they will normally spend no more than 15 minutes in any one lesson.

The SMT will behave unobtrusively during learning walks although they may talk to students where this is not disruptive to the lesson.

The SMT may make notes on strengths and areas for development in relation to the theme of the learning walk but will not grade individuals or individual lessons. Any notes will be shared with that member of staff.

Where it is not disruptive to the lesson the SMT may discuss the focus of the learning walk with the teacher at the end of a classroom visit.

Occasionally the SMT may arrange to meet with a teacher after the lesson for more detailed discussions, for example where the SMT identifies particularly good practice that could be shared more widely or another matter in need of follow-up.

If a learning walk highlights concerns about health and safety, safeguarding, equality, professional conduct or capability these will be addressed without delay and normal school procedures followed.

4. After a learning walk

The SMT will summarise the results of a learning walk in a short report. The report will not identify individual staff or students. The attached pro-forma provides an example framework for capturing and sharing outcomes.

The outcomes of a learning walk will contribute to school-wide self-assessment and quality improvement.

All notes, reports and related documents will be stored securely by the SMT.

Staff members will be offered feedback on an individual basis as part of professional development.

5. Themes for learning walks

The SMT will always undertake learning walk with one or more specific themes in mind. It will generally be helpful to underpin those themes with a number of specific questions that will act as prompts to managers during the walk. Learning walks are almost always most successful when approached in this way. Not all parts of a learning walk will shed light on

every question but by the end of a walk the SMT should aim to have reached secure conclusions about their themes.

Here are some examples of themes and questions that could be used on a learning walk:

Student's progress:
- Are different groups making the same/different progress?
- What new skills and knowledge are learners gaining?
- How well are students developing ideas and increasing their understanding?
- Are students making gains at a good rate in lessons and over time as shown in their work?
- How are weak/good literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills affecting students' progress?

Meeting individual students' needs:

- Are assessment strategies enabling students to work with sufficient support and challenge?
- Are activities pitched at the right level to challenge students of different abilities?
- How well does assessment identify strengths and diagnose next steps to improvement?
- How good is the dialogue and oral feedback? Do all students understand what is required from the lesson?
- Are expectations of behaviour sufficiently high?

Learning support:

- Are the social, emotional and learning needs of individuals met?
- What impact are any support arrangements having?
- Are resources sufficient? Are they well matched to needs to support learning?
- Have materials and learning approaches been adapted to meet individual needs?
- Do support plans should show evidence of initial assessment results, an agreement of support/adjustments, incremental strategies for independence, and evidence of reviews?

Quality of learning:

- What are different groups and individual students actually learning as opposed to doing?
- Are students consolidating previous skills/knowledge or learning something new?
- Can all students make the links between previous/new learning?
- Can students talk about what they are learning, as opposed to simply describing what they are doing?

Standards of work:

- Do students consistently produce work of a good standard?
- Are students working independently? Are they self-reliant – do they make the most of the choices they are given, or do they find it difficult to make choices? To what extent do students take responsibility for their own learning?
- How well do students collaborate with others? Do they ask questions, of each other, of the teacher or other adults, about what they are learning?
- Are students creative? Do they show initiative?
- How well do students follow routines/expectations?

Enjoyment of learning and attitudes:

- Are students engaged, working hard, making a good effort, applying themselves, concentrating and productive?
- Are students developing habits of good learning?
- Are students happy with their work? Are they proud of it?
- Are students interested in their work and in what they are learning? Or are they easily distracted?
- How smooth is the transition from teacher input to group work? Do students settle to work easily?

Assessment for learning:

- Are there any significant differences in the learning of different groups of students, or of any individuals?
- Are students actively involved in assessing their own learning and progress, setting targets, using peer and self-assessment?
- Are teachers sharing learning goals with students?
- Do students know what they are learning and why?
- Do students have targets and do they understand what they mean/what to do to achieve them?
- Do students know the standards they are aiming for?
- Do students respond positively to questions and contribute enthusiastically to plenary sessions?
- Does the teacher use questioning effectively, to find out what students know and understand; to promote further learning; to prompt thinking and reflection?

Behaviour for Learning:

- Are classrooms a caring, stimulating and secure environment in which everyone can operate safely?
- Are classrooms well organised, interesting and engaging?

- Do students demonstrate self-discipline and a sense of responsibility to others?
- Do students and teachers show courtesy and consideration towards each other?
- Do students value their opportunities for learning and the opportunities of others?
- Do positive behaviours receive praise?
- Are poor behaviours and conflicts addressed positively, quickly and effectively?

Other topics for learning walks could include:
- Active promotion of equality and diversity.
- Supporting Language communication in class.
- Using IT in the classroom.
- Supporting the development of subject specific skills and knowledge.