

# Middle Management Team Role of Subject Co-ordinator St Christopher's International Primary School

Penang, Malaysia

There are four main aspects to the role of a subject co-ordinator.

- ⊗ Subject co-ordinators are expected to know their subject. They review the school's planning and provision for the teaching and assessment of their subject.
- ⊗ Subject co-ordinators are expected to support colleagues in their implementation of the policies and practices for their particular subject. They foster links with outside agencies arranging support and INSET for the school.
- ⊗ Subject co-ordinators are expected to monitor what is going on in their subject and how practice matches school policies. In doing this, they look for ways to improve the teaching and learning of their subject throughout the school.
- ⊗ Subject co-ordinators are expected to change the way their subject is taught. They work with colleagues to identify and manage changes that are necessary to improve the quality of teaching and learning.



*Expected to know their subject*



*Educational Visits..  
hands-on learning experience*

*Monitor what is going on their curriculum  
area.. look for ways to improve the  
teaching and learning*



*Support colleagues in their implementation  
of policies and practices*



## Monitoring

Monitoring is perhaps the most difficult part of your role. It's also a very important part and one, which has been emphasised by Ofsted. As subject co-ordinator, you're responsible for checking that your subject is being taught as well as possible and that children are learning and progressing.

Monitoring is meant to be a way of identifying action, which needs to be taken to improve the quality of education provided by the school. The danger is that it can be seen as judgmental and critical and that individual teachers can feel threatened.

**You can deal with some of the anxiety by remembering the following -**

➤ **You Are Monitoring A Subject – Not The Teacher**

You are a subject co-ordinator – your focus is on a particular subject. Monitoring is a way of extending your knowledge of your subject and you can use this knowledge to support colleagues.

➤ **Be Clear About What You're Looking For And Let Others Know Too**

You might want to find out how well a particular part of a school policy is being implemented, how well children are achieving in a particular attainment target, or how useful a particular set of books is in a certain year group. If you know what you're looking for, you can use your time to the greatest effect. If colleagues know what you're looking for, you're more likely to have their support and willing corporation.

➤ **Tact And Diplomacy**

People respond better to a little courtesy than to a heavy-handed approach. There's a world of difference, for example, between "I'll be looking at the different displays around school to see if we can share some of the ideas we're all using", and "You're no good at display so I'm going to come round and tell you what's wrong with what you do".

➤ **Monitoring A Whole-School Issue**

Monitoring needs to be embedded in the culture of the school and to be seen as a way in which teachers can work together to improve together. Neither establishing this culture nor the actual monitoring itself can be done by one person alone -

• **Monitoring Your Subject**

The role of the subject co-ordinator has changed dramatically in recent years. There is now an expectation that in addition to writing a policy and scheme of work, attending INSET, ordering resources and advising colleagues, you are also the frontline manager for your subject with responsibility for securing and improving standards in your curriculum area. This is the very clear message coming through not only from schools themselves but also from the DfEE's Improving Schools Programme (1995) and the Teacher training Agency's National Standards for Subject Leaders (1998)

• **How Well Are We Doing?**

• **How Do We Compare With Similar Schools?**

This involves making comparisons between our school's performance and that of similar schools. Core subject co-ordinators should be able to provide the Principal and governing body with comparative information for their subjects. Foundation subject co-ordinators should be able to make comparisons against the national picture by using the series of subject expectation documents (SCAA 1997) and Standards in the primary Curriculum (Ofsted 1998) and other more recently produced information.

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- **What More Should We Aim To Achieve This Year?**

- **What Must We Do To Make It Happen?**

- **Taking Action And Reviewing Progress**

- **Using A Range Of Monitoring Strategies**

As mentioned earlier, part of your role is to provide the school with information about the “health” of your subject. To do this you will need to employ a range of monitoring strategies, which provide you with accurate evidence. Your judgements will have to be made against a set of agreed criteria. It’s misleading to think that classroom observation is the only way to collect this information. Alternative monitoring strategies include –

- monitoring plans
- sampling children’s recorded work
- talking to children and colleagues
- analysing assessment results
- tracking children’s progress

Non-contact time is not essential for any of the above, though we do arrange release time for co-ordinators to carry out this aspect of their role. “Walking the job” is also a good way to find out about your subject. You can get a good feel of its profile by keeping an eye on displays inside and outside classrooms, noting if it appears in school celebration assemblies and by listening to informal remarks made by both children and colleagues about your subject.

The best way to ensure that your information is as secure as possible is to use a range of complementary monitoring strategies. This way you should be able to build up a complete picture of subject standards and strengths and weaknesses, and to use your findings from each different strategy to confirm the others.

You should select a range of strategies that help to answer the following questions –

... what do your colleagues intend to teach? Find out about the *intended curriculum* by talking to colleagues and monitoring plans.

... what is actually being taught? Find out about the *taught curriculum* by observing practice.

- **Monitoring Plans**

Monitoring plans will give you a range of information on –

- any gaps or overlaps in curriculum coverage
- whether progression and differentiation are evident
- whether learning objectives are clear and appropriate
- whether the planned teaching activities will help all children to realise the learning objectives
- whether evaluation and assessment are used to inform future plans

As with all other strategies, when monitoring plans you will need to have an agreed set of criteria to use when making your judgements. Some of the following might be a useful starting point.

- does the plan refer to NC learning objectives?
- is the main focus for each lesson identified?
- does the plan address the needs of all pupils?
- is the finished work that is expected from each child outlined?
- is the method of classroom organisation appropriate for the task?
- are the children offered a variety of learning experiences?
- has assessment of previous learning taken place and informed the next stage of planning?

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It's useful to have a simple checklist or proforma to use for monitoring. This way you can be reminded of the criteria and use it to keep a record of your findings before you start to pull them together for a more formal whole-school report.

**Findings, Feedback And Recommendations**

Using the information you have gained to improve practice is a vital part of the monitoring process. If nothing happens as a result of monitoring then your school is wasting a lot of time, energy and money! A short report should be written outlining your findings. The same format and headings will be used by all staff to make the reports easier to read and to write.

This report should then be submitted to you school's curriculum manager (Deputy) for consideration. They will have an overview of the school's priorities and know just what is possible to achieve out of all your recommendations. The following suggestions are headings that could be used for each section of a report –

**Introduction** – containing brief information on the subject of your report and the time span and personnel involved and who the intended audience is

**Monitoring And Criteria** – a reference to the agreed criteria and the range of strategies used in the monitoring process.

**Main Findings** – the main findings in order of importance, remembering to include both positive and negative findings.

**Recommendations** – suggestions for improved practice. These should be quite specific and could refer to particular groups of children, classes, year groups or key stages. Some recommendations might refer to classroom practice, others might be concerned with plans, schemes of work or assessment records. In addition to stating who is involved, also include ideas for how and when the improvement could happen. Try not to criticise practice or say it should get better unless you can suggest ways forward and offer support.

Finally, feedback will need to be given to individuals at each stage of monitoring, in addition to whole-staff feedback as part of the final recommendations. It is useful to have certain rules built into your feedback procedures, such as when, where and how it is given. Another useful rule is that no individual teacher is identified during whole-school feedback.

Most schools ensure that hard and difficult messages are given to individuals when necessary, but that positive feedback is always included as well. Always remember that you are the advocate for the child and the whole point of monitoring is not to prove that certain things are happening but to improve your school and the education of all the children in it.

## **Changing**

As a subject co-ordinator, you will identify changes, which need to be made in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning in your subject. But managing change isn't easy. It's like walking a tightrope. On the one hand your school has to develop, on the other hand you run the risk of upsetting people who need to change what they are doing.

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## Effective Observation

### ⊞ **Know What You Want To Find Out**

Observation is more than walking into a classroom and having a look around. Before you even start, you need to be clear what is you want to find out.

**Your reason for observing might be on of a number of possibilities, including the following. To find our about current practice –**

- Perhaps...
- you are new at the school
  - you are new to the responsibility
  - classroom observation is a new venture
  - the school is due to be inspected
  - you are planning some new development

**Through observation, you can find out yourself what actually happens. You become informed and, as a result, you are able to take future decision from a position of knowledge.**

### ⊞ **To Monitor Policy Implementation**

If your school already has a policy document for your subject, you need to know the extent to which to which it is being implemented so that you can see whether -

- practise reflects policy
- teachers understand what is expected
- policy or practice needs to be changed

### ⊞ **To Monitor Attainment**

The most important part of your role is to affect children's standards. To do this, your first need to know what standards are actually like. There are many ways to find out, for example –

- collecting in sets of books
- analysing test scores
- looking at teachers' records

But perhaps the best way of judging standards is to see and talk with children at work in the classroom. Once you have a clear picture of how children are doing, you can come to some conclusions and make suggestions about how standards can be raised.

### ⊞ **To Monitor Curriculum Coverage**

Curriculum plans often look fine on paper. You can spend a lot of time of preparing topic outlines, curriculum maps and schemes of work that specify what should be covered by each class. In the reality of the classroom, things don't always work exactly as intended.

Through observation, you can check that -

- teachers understand what is expected
- the work is appropriate for the age and ability of the children
- children are able to build on what they have done in the past.

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⌘ **Establish Your Criteria**

Your time is precious. If you are able to spend time observing in classes it presumably means that you have been “released” from your own class. It also means that money is spent to give you this opportunity. You need to make the most of the time spent in observation – and this means being focussed.

You know what you want to find out; make sure you also know what you would like to see happening. You might produce a list of questions or perhaps a list of statements describing good practice. You can then use your list as a check to help you focus on what you need to see.

It can help you to be a little more objective in what you are doing. It’s also a lot easier to do this before you carry out the observation than afterwards when you will realise that these are things you need to know but didn’t find out at the time.

The criteria make it possible for you to make judgements about what you see. Your evaluation of the lessons you observe will help you fulfil your responsibility for your subject. It will make it possible for you to help your colleagues to teach the subject better and to help the subject better and to help the children achieve at a high level.

*Your task is to evaluate. This means that you go beyond a description of what actually happens and make informed, reasoned judgements about what you see. If doesn't, however, mean that you are making a personal assessment of your colleagues' teaching ability.*

⌘ **Tell Your Colleagues What You Will Be Doing**

Most teachers are becoming more used to other people seeing them at work. Yet the very idea of being observed can be threatening. Before you start a programme of observation, tell colleagues what you will be doing and why and how you will be doing it.

Make sure that everyone knows the purpose of the observation, the criteria you will be using and what you will do with the information you gather. It’s probably wise to say what you won’t be doing as well. You won’t be appraising and you won’t be inspecting.

If at all possible, you should also meet the teacher individually before the lesson. Then you can go through the purpose, criteria and process again. The teacher can also tell you about what will be happening and how it fits in with what has happened before and what will happen next.

⌘ **Carry Out The Observation As Professional As Possible**

It is a privilege to watch someone else at work. It is also a great responsibility. We can learn a great deal and we can help other people to learn. When you are observing a colleague teaching, remember that –

- ... he or she is probably nervous
- ... the lesson does not stand in isolation, it must be seen in context
- ... it’s easy to be judgmental
- ... you have a specific purpose and should focus on that
- ... you should be guided by the declared criteria rather than your personal preferences
- ... it is more reliable to make notes at the time than to try and remember things later.

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*Observation can be participant or non-participant*

*In participation observation you get involved in what is happening. In non-participant observation you “stand back” and take not part in proceedings.*

*There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches and what you do will depend on the culture of the school and on the purpose of the observation. You should be aware, though, that it is very difficult to know what is going on if you are really in the thick of things.*

*It is also difficult to know what would have happened if you had not been involved. Your very presence is bound to have an effect on the teacher and the children, but you should try to keep this to a minimum.*

*It is probably best to stay fairly detached/. But you will almost certainly want to talk to the children about what they are doing. Without that contact, you will not be able to gauge their attainment and their response to the lesson.*

⊞ **Provide Feedback**

After you have observed your colleague at work, arrange to meet with him or her as soon as possible to discuss the observation. On this occasion –

... reiterate the purpose of the observation and the criteria you used

... describe what you saw

... explain the evaluation you made in relation to the criteria

... say what you have learned about the way your subject is taught and learned

... make any constructive suggestions based on what you have seen, stressing that they are only tentative observation and that you were not assessing your colleague’s teaching. Remind him or her that the observation was only part of a much greater process and the information gathered will be used alongside all the other information.

*Although many teachers find the feedback useful, in some schools there is an agreement that there will be no individual feedback – emphasising that the observation is about the subject and not about individual teachers.*

*For the same reason, it is not usual for subject co-ordinators to report to headteacher about their observation in particular classrooms.*

⊞ **Report On Your Findings**

When you have completed your observations, use you notes and your evaluation to compile an overall picture. Always remember your original purpose of the observation and the criteria you have used.

Produce a report for presentation to the headteacher and the teaching staff as a whole. Use your findings to produce recommendations for future action.

You will probably want to make sure that one of your recommendations is that once action has been taken there is another round of observation to check on its effect.