

How Good is Your School's Learning Environment?



A guide for school leaders on creating an
excellent environment for learning

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Learning Environments

What makes an excellent environment for learning?

As school leaders, we know just by walking around the building that one classroom can be very different from the one next door. The way the learning space is organized, the prevailing ethos and relationships, the nature of resources, the style of teaching, the level of learner engagement, can vary considerably from one classroom to another. This means that the experiences of learners can be very different depending on the space that learning and teaching takes place.



Scotland's national quality improvement framework, HGIOS 4, captures much of this in Quality Indicator 2.3 *Learning and engagement*, focusing on:

- Ethos of achievement
- Values and diversity
- Leadership of learning
- Learning skills
- Learning resources

The quality of learning and engagement, however, is only part of what constitutes an excellent environment for learning. The following chart contains 13 features of excellent learning environments, which might be used:

- as part of school self-evaluation of learning and teaching
- in the development of a learning and teaching policy
- as a basis for giving feedback on lesson observations
- as part of teacher reflection and professional learning

A full online audit of 2.3 Learning, Teaching and Assessment is available using the Impact program. For more information visit: www.hashtag-learning.co.uk

1 Ethos of achievement	Achievement and success are key features of the learning environment. Relationships between teachers and learners are positive and nurturing. There are high expectations of achievement, attendance. Achievement is, valued and celebrated. Praise is regular, well-judged and genuine.
2 Values and diversity	The learning environment promotes equity and diversity. Staff demonstrate compassion and support for all learners and treat all learners fairly, equally and with respect.
3 Leadership of learning	Pupils take responsibility and lead aspects of their learning, success and achievements. They can work independently, undertaking tasks without teacher intervention. They make responsible choices about how they learn. They are able to identify and select resources required for learning tasks. They have a say in determining how learning is assessed.
4 Teaching approaches	Teachers use a well-balanced range of teaching approaches including direct and whole class teaching, individual learning, pairs, trios, groups and teams, practical activities and hands-on tasks, investigation and research and use of learning technology.
5 Active learning	Pupils are meaningfully engaged in the learning process, the classroom work is pupil-centred and requires learners to be active participants in that process. Tasks and activities develop different thinking skills including analysis, problem solving, critical thinking, evaluation and creative thinking.
6 Visible learning	Learning intentions and success criteria are shared. Feedback, both oral and written, is a regular component of day-to-day teaching. Feedback is positive and focuses on next steps in learning and how to close the gap. Learners demonstrate metacognition and apply skills for learning.
7 Pace and Challenge	The tasks and activities undertaken by pupils have an adequate level of pace, challenge and risk. Learning tasks are based on the unknown rather than the known, uncertainty rather than certainty, and challenging pupils to work outside their comfort zones and take risks in their learning.
8 Creativity	The nature of tasks and activities promotes creative thinking in pupils. Learners are encouraged to think outside the box and develop imaginative responses to problems and challenges.

9 Digital learning	The use of ICT and digital technology is integral and meaningful within the learning process.
10 Learning resources	resources used for learning are varied and stimulating. They cater for a range of different learning styles and preferences and they promote active learning.
11 Language for learning	Learners are encouraged think about and evaluate their learning. Teachers promote metacognitive skills in young people and foster a language for learning – ie, a vocabulary and terminology that enables all stakeholders to reflect upon learning and teaching experiences.
12 Connected learning	Pupils are helped to make connections and link their learning across different curricular areas and contexts. They have opportunities to join up their learning within cross-curricular themes or activities. They are able to apply their skills and knowledge to unfamiliar contexts. They are able to connect their learning with skills required for learning, life and work.
13 Assessment	A range of approaches to assessment are evident. In addition to summative tests and exams, assessment techniques might include comment-only marking, open-book assessments, self and peer assessment techniques and the use of learning technologies.

Evaluating the Quality of Learning and Engagement

The chart on the following page shows an audit for evaluating the quality of your school's Learning and Engagement (Theme 1 from HGIOS Quality Indicator 2.3)

The full audit of QI 2.3 can be accessed online.

Use the **Impact** online quality improvement tool to complete the traffic lighting exercise and record strengths and weaknesses.

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Theme 1: Learning and engagement

Ethos of achievement

Relationships between teachers and learners are positive and nurturing.	
Relationships between learners and their peers are positive and supportive.	
There are high expectations of achievement, attendance and behaviour.	
Learner achievement is recognised, valued and celebrated.	
Positive behaviour strategies focus on reward and encouragement.	
Praise is regular, well judged and genuine.	

Values and diversity

Staff demonstrate compassion and support for all learners.	
Staff treat all learners fairly, equally and with respect.	
Staff recognise, promote and value diversity.	
Staff promote equality of opportunity and access.	
Staff recognise and address discrimination.	

Leadership of learning

Pupils are able to take responsibility for their learning, success and achievements.	
Pupils are able to work independently, undertaking tasks without teacher intervention.	
Pupils are able to make responsible choices about how and where they work.	
Pupils are able to identify and select resources required for learning tasks.	
Pupils are able to express views, ask questions and challenge where appropriate.	
Pupils are involved in deciding learning intentions and success criteria.	
Pupils have a say in determining how learning will be assessed.	
Pupils lead whole school and extra curricular activities.	
Pupils learn by making contributions to the broader life and work of the school.	

Learning skills

Pupils have a well-developed language of learning.	
Pupils recognise and understand how they learn best.	
Pupils are able to set targets in their learning.	
Pupils can reflect on their learning and identify next steps.	
Pupils are able to identify problems or barriers to their learning.	
Pupils work well with others in pairs, groups and teams.	
Pupils are able to learn through investigation and research.	
Pupils are able to solve problems and make decisions.	
Pupils can select and organise appropriate resources for learning tasks.	
Pupils can develop rubrics to evaluate performance against success criteria.	
Pupils can use visual organisers, eg, mind maps, flow charts, spider diagrams, and KWL grids.	
Pupils can present their learning, eg, through PowerPoint, performance, demonstration, showcases.	
Pupils can use reflective tools such as learning logs, achievement folios and personal profiles.	

Learning resources	
Learning resources are engaging, motivating and support learning.	
Learning resources are differentiated according to the abilities and needs of learners.	
Pupils have opportunities to work with a variety of tools and equipment.	
Pupils access a variety of ICT equipment including computers, tablets, smart-boards and cameras.	
Pupils access a range of educational software and web-based resources as part of learning.	
Pupils develop and apply skills associated with using the Internet.	
Pupils learn within the wider school environment, eg school grounds, the local community.	
Pupils learn through visiting places of interest, field trips, and social outings.	
Pupils learn by visiting other educational establishments, eg, learning councils, and schools in the cluster.	
Pupils learn from visiting speakers and specialist agencies.	

Full audit online at: www.hashtag-learning.co.uk