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THE TEACHERS’ STANDARDS IN THE CLASSROOM
THIRD EDITION

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Background

September 2012 saw the introduction of new Teachers' Standards which replaced the existing qualified teacher status (QTS) and Core Standards, and the Code of Practice for Registered Teachers in England from the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE). The new Standards set out the minimum requirements for teachers’ professional practice and conduct. Teachers’ performance is to be assessed against them as part of the appraisal arrangements for schools.

In drawing up the standards during 2011, the Independent Review of Teachers’ Standards was given the remit to develop new standards of competence, ethics and behaviour which reflect the trust and professionalism society should expect from its teachers (DfE, 2011a). To that end, the new Standards begin with a Preamble, a founding statement of expectations:

*Teachers make the education of their pupils their first concern, and are accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in work and conduct. Teachers act with honesty and integrity, have strong subject knowledge, keep their knowledge and skills as teachers up-to-date and are self-critical, forge positive professional relationships, and work with parents in the best interests of their pupils.*

(DfE, 2012a, p7)
What happens in classrooms

On a personal note, I have had the great privilege during the past decade to observe over 10,000 classrooms, from Mumbai to New York, Barcelona to Birmingham, Jeddah to Jarrow. At their best, these are the vibrant classrooms which teachers create because they are spending many of their waking hours within them. They are the places where young minds flourish. These sparkling classrooms are places and atmospheres which remain long in the minds and spirits of the learners.

When I joined Her Majesty’s Inspectorate (HMI) in 2004, David Bell HMCI advised me to reflect on the wisdom of a previous chief inspector, Martin Roseveare: You should remember that when you visit a school it is an everyday affair for you, but an unusual and important occasion for the school. I remind myself of those words every day I sign in to a school’s visitors’ book.

In the academic year 2013-14 I observed over 700 lessons as part of the National Education Trust’s school improvement services (www.nationaleducationtrust.net). Special, primary, secondary, state and independent, home and abroad - schools have welcomed me with warm hospitality and in the spirit of championing what is great, recognising what is good and suggesting a few even-better-ifs.

What did I learn during that year in classrooms?

• That childhood is safe in the nation’s primary schools.
• That in socially challenging schools, the teachers have to run just for the pupils to stand still.
• That great lessons are all about richness of task, rooted in teachers’ excellent subject knowledge and passion to share that knowledge with students.
• That pupils’ prior knowledge of a subject is endlessly surprising.
• That, in the best classrooms, IT is used like a pair of scissors, no more no less.
• That in the best classrooms IT is a useful tool for teaching and learning when used appropriately.
• That skilled early years’ practitioners have much to teach everyone else about the power of timely digression and intervention.
• That teachers spend hours marking, but too often pupils don’t do justice to that marking.
• That doing more of the same is not going to transform standards of attainment - doing differently can.
• That teachers may cry when you tell them they have taught a great lesson.
• That the best teachers are children at heart.
• That sitting in the best lessons, you just don’t want to leave . . .

In the best schools I visit there is a central paradox which runs through them like Brighton through a stick of rock. It is this: the schools are at one and the same time very secure in their values and ways of doing yet simultaneously restless to improve.

So too with the sparkling classroom practitioner who is absolutely in the grip of well tried, tested and effective practices yet simultaneously questing to improve their teaching of a particular topic or skill. The best teachers ask at the end of a day: what have I learned as a teacher today? What shall I do (a) the same and (b) differently next time?

What the Teachers’ Standards say

The Review considered a wide range of international and national evidence, including evidence submitted by key users of standards, before developing the Teachers’ Standards. The new Standards had to provide a benchmark of the minimum requirements that should be expected of trainees and teachers.

In essence, the Standards had to raise the bar and highlight the characteristics of good teaching. Above all, the Standards needed to be clear, simple and assessable, and identify the key elements of teaching and the expectations of professional conduct that underpin the practice of teachers at all career stages.

The Review was clear, however, that the Standards should not define the award of QTS and the end of a teacher’s induction period as two separate career stages, principally because the induction period should be about consolidating ITT and demonstrating consistency of practice. Trainees and teachers should demonstrate that they meet all of the Standards, which define the level of practice at which all qualified teachers should be expected to perform.

The Standards do not prescribe in detail what good or outstanding teaching looks like; this should be determined by ITT providers, head teachers and teachers, using their professional judgement as relevant to context, roles and responsibilities. The Standards should assist them in making such decisions by providing a clear framework within which such judgements can be made.

The Review also recommended that the Post-Threshold, Excellent Teacher and Advanced Skills Teacher standards should be discontinued, and advocated the introduction of a Master Teacher Standard (see Chapter 10 and DfE, 2011b). This Standard is made up of five core domains (modelled on international best practice) within which very good teachers can demonstrate their abilities:
Introduction to the Teachers' Standards

1. Knowledge
2. Classroom Performance
3. Outcomes
4. Environment and Ethos
5. Professional Context

It was the Review Group's view that the Teachers' Standards, and the proposed Master Teacher Standard, would provide a new progressive career framework for teachers to both raise the prestige of the profession and improve teacher quality.

From my personal standpoint as one of the lead authors, the Teachers' Standards are a once-in-a-generation opportunity for teachers across the country to unite behind a set of professional expectations which are focused unequivocally on the classroom. If all teachers meet these expectations, we shall have a profession of which society can be rightly proud.

Key quotations from the Teachers’ Standards document

The Teachers' Standards are published in a self-contained eight-page document which should be read by all teachers (DfE, 2012a). The following list of key quotations is particularly relevant to trainee teachers. The source of each quotation is indicated.

The new standards will apply to the vast majority of teachers regardless of their career stage. The Teachers' Standards will apply to: trainees working towards QTS; all teachers completing their statutory induction period; and those covered by the new performance appraisal arrangements.

(para 3, p2)

The new standards define the minimum level of practice expected of trainees and teachers from the point of being awarded QTS.

(para 5, p2)
The new standards will need to be applied as appropriate to the role and context within which a trainee or teacher is practising. Providers of initial teacher training (ITT) will assess trainees against the standards in a way that is consistent with what could reasonably be expected of a trainee teacher prior to the award of QTS.

(para 6, p3)

Head teachers (or appraisers) will assess qualified teachers against the standards to a level that is consistent with what should reasonably be expected of a teacher in the relevant role and at the relevant stage of their career.

(para 7, p3)

The new standards are presented as separate headings, numbered 1 to 8, each of which is accompanied by a number of bulleted subheadings. The bullets, which are an integral part of the standards, are designed to amplify the scope of each heading.

(para 13, p4)

The bulleted subheadings should not be interpreted as separate standards in their own right, but should be used by those assessing trainees and teachers to track progress against the standard, to determine areas where additional development might need to be observed, or to identify areas where a trainee or teacher is already demonstrating excellent practice to that standard.

(para 13, p4)

Appropriate self-evaluation, reflection and professional development activity is critical to improving teachers’ practice at all career stages. The standards set out clearly the key areas in which a teacher should be able to assess his or her own practice and receive feedback from colleagues.

(para 14, p4)
As their careers progress, teachers will be expected to extend the depth and breadth of knowledge, skill and understanding that they demonstrate in meeting the standards, as is judged appropriate to the role they are fulfilling and the context in which they are working.

(para 14, p4)

**REFLECTIONS**

1. Make sure you have a clear understanding of these key quotations, and how they apply to your first year in teaching.
2. What record-keeping are you developing to ensure you are:
   - tracking progress against the Standards
   - determining areas for development
   - identifying your best practice?
3. What systems are securely in place to ensure you have prompt and timely feedback on all aspects of your developing practice?
4. Are you clear about the ‘sign-off’ procedures relating to your meeting of the Standards?

**The Preamble to the Standards**

**PREAMBLE**

Teachers make the education of their pupils their first concern and are accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in work and conduct. Teachers act with honesty and integrity, have strong subject knowledge, keep their knowledge and skills as teachers up-to-date and are self-critical, forge positive professional relationships and work with parents in the best interests of their pupils.

(DfE, 2012a, p7)

The Preamble summarises the values and behaviour that all teachers must demonstrate throughout their careers. At one level it is perhaps a statement of the obvious, and such a description has not previously been applied to the teaching profession in this country.
Yet preambles such as this are no stranger to other professions. They have long been an integral part of conditions of service for doctors, lawyers, accountants, architects and others.

By way of comparison, the reader may be interested to glance over the following, drawn from different professions, and reflect on the various expectations which are set down, for the trainee and the experienced professional alike.

**Lawyers**

*In a society founded on respect for the rule of law the lawyer fulfils a special role. His duties do not begin and end with the faithful performance of what he is instructed to do so far as the law permits. A lawyer must serve the interests of justice as well as those whose rights and liberties he is trusted to assert and defend, and it is his duty not only to plead his client’s cause but to be his adviser.*

A lawyer’s function therefore lays on him a variety of legal and moral obligations (sometimes appearing to be in conflict with each other) towards:

- the client;
- the courts and other authorities before whom the lawyer pleads his client’s cause or acts on his behalf;
- the legal profession in general and each fellow member of it in particular;
- the public for whom the existence of a free and independent profession, bound together by respect for rules made by the profession itself, is an essential means of safeguarding human rights in face of the power of the state and other interests in society.

(From the European Lawyers Code of Conduct, [www.barstandardsboard.org.uk](http://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk))

**Architects**

*You are expected at all times to act with honesty and integrity and to avoid any actions or situations which are inconsistent with your professional obligations. This standard underpins the Code and will be taken to be required in any consideration of your conduct under any of the other standards.*

*You should not make any statement which is contrary to your professional opinion or which you know to be misleading, unfair to others or discreditable to the profession.*
Where a conflict of interest arises you are expected to disclose it in writing and manage it to the satisfaction of all affected parties. You should seek written confirmation that all parties involved give their informed consent to your continuing to act. Where this consent is not received you should cease acting for one or more of the parties.

Where you make or receive any payment or other inducement for the introduction or referral of work, you should disclose the arrangement to the client or prospective client at the outset.

(From the Architects Registration Board code of conduct, www.arb.org.uk/professional_standards)

Doctors

Patients need good doctors. Good doctors make the care of their patients their first concern: they are competent, keep their knowledge and skills up to date, establish and maintain good relationships with patients and colleagues, are honest and trustworthy, and act with integrity.

(From Good Medical Practice, General Medical Council, 2012, www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/good_medical_practice)

REFLECTIONS

1. In what ways are the above similar and different in their expectations and values?
2. How do they compare in content with the Preamble to the Teachers’ Standards?
3. Is there anything you would amend about the Preamble to the Teachers’ Standards?