

DROP-INS

AT A GLANCE

WHAT IS A DROP-IN?

A drop-in is a 5–15 minute informal, unannounced visit by a leader, coach, or peer to observe a specific teaching aspect and provide immediate, constructive feedback. The purpose of a drop-in is to get a snapshot of teaching and learning in action without interrupting the flow of the lesson.

WHY DROP-INS

Build a positive culture: Show staff they're supported, not judged

Affirm and motivate: Reinforce progress by naming and celebrating improvements

Promote incremental change: Encourage steady, manageable growth in practice

Create shared language: Align staff around what world-class teaching looks like

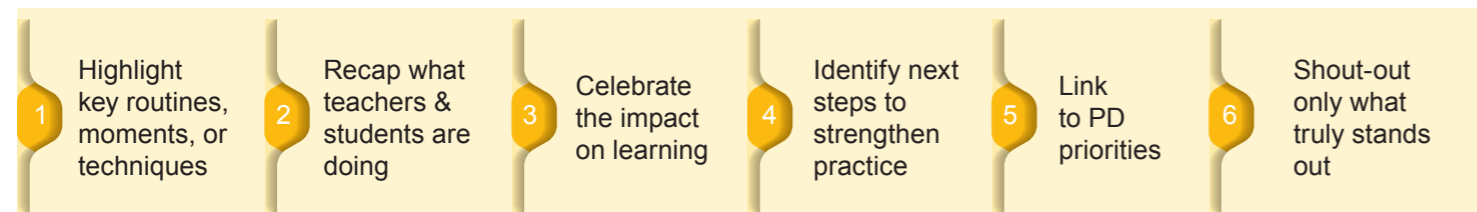
WHAT MAKES A GREAT DROP-IN?

A great drop-in is purposeful and connected to the school's CPD focus or the specific developmental needs of the teacher being observed. This ensures that the drop-in feels relevant, targeted, and supportive. Feedback should be immediate, concise, and rooted in what was actually seen, highlighting specific routines, moments, or techniques that made a difference. Using clear sentence frames like "It was effective when you... As a result... Next time, try..." helps recap and celebrate strengths while also identifying meaningful next steps.

DROP-INS TO DRIVE TEACHER GROWTH

Frequent, low-stakes drop-ins enhance instructional improvement through timely, specific feedback (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). They foster professional dialogue, encourage reflection (Coe et al., 2020), and drive evidence-based practice (Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021). Aligning drop-ins with structured frameworks ensures consistency and progress tracking. By focusing on teacher actions and student responses, they shift feedback from vague praise to data-driven coaching, strengthening teaching and student outcomes (EEF, 2021).

HOW TO WRITE A DROP-IN COMMENT



RECAP & CELEBRATE

Describe, don't judge – Focus on what happened rather than making evaluative statements

Go granular – Highlight effective practice by naming the specific step, using shared language from the *Teach Like a GEM* playbook. "It was effective when you... [describe specific step/moment]"

Give concrete evidence – Include specific teacher and student actions or quotes to support observations and specify the *cause*

Link to learning – Clearly state the impact on student learning. "This meant students could/showed... [describe the effect]"

Celebrate school-wide (shout-outs) – When truly standout practice is observed, use shout-outs to recognise and celebrate exceptional moments across the school. For example: "You absolutely smashed it when... [highlight the specific standout moment]"

Tag it – Use tags to highlight focus area

DROP IN COMMENT: NON-EXAMPLE

It was effective that your class were so focused and well behaved today. It was a joy to see year 3 so engaged in their descriptive writing and focused on their use of WOW words. Student work was also presented beautifully with titles and dates underlined and handwriting quite near. I was SO impressed. Great stuff! Keep up the good work.

Next time, think about how to stretch your more able learners. Are they being challenged? Also consider how to simplify resources for SEND learners so they find them easier to follow. Are your displays currently too cluttered? Come and talk to me about this.

NEXT STEPS

Build on strengths – Root next steps in observed evidence, linking them to school, department, or teacher-specific PD priorities

Make next steps actionable – Suggest one next step that is precise and can be easily implemented; use the 'suggest a step' feature on Steplab

Frame suggestions flexibly – Use a reflective approach since drop-ins offer only a partial lesson view. "Could you try X by...?"

Frame next steps as tentative suggestions rather than directives. Use a non-judgemental, coaching tone that invites reflection and ownership. For example, instead of saying "You should try...", consider phrasing it as "You might explore..." or "One next step to consider could be...". This approach respects the teacher's expertise, encourages collaboration, and supports a growth-focused culture.

DROP-INS

After every drop-in observation

Supports teacher growth with specific, constructive feedback

Highlights effective practice with next steps

Reflective and growth focused

Cause + effect (impact) + next step
"It was effective when you... Next time, try..."

The teacher who was observed

"It was effective when you cold-called students to check understanding. This meant all students stayed engaged. Next time, you might consider pausing a bit longer to allow more thinking time."

SHOUT-OUTS

After observing very exceptional or stand-out practice

Celebrates outstanding teaching moments

Recognises very exceptional teaching worth sharing publicly

Positive and affirming

Cause + effect
"You smashed it when... The impact was..."

School-wide recognition

"You smashed it when you used a 'silent signal' to refocus the class instantly. Every student was back on task in seconds. Brilliant classroom culture in action!"

FREQUENCY

PURPOSE

FOCUS

TONE

STRUCTURE

AUDIENCE

EXAMPLE

DROP-IN COMMENT: EXAMPLE

During your guided reading session, you used targeted questions really effectively to check for understanding and extend student thinking. It was clear that students were engaged and could explain their reasoning well. I noticed a few students were not answering the questions. One next step to consider could be to build on that strength by incorporating more opportunities for students to engage in peer-to-peer dialogue (habits of discussion) by gradually introducing different talk tactics. This ties in with our department focus on developing student-led discussion and aligns with our whole-school priority on promoting oracy. Take a look at the step below (specified via Steplab 'suggest a step' feature).