

# Professional learning environments in primary and secondary contexts *What role do observations play?*

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# Approach

- Key areas
  - Needs analysis
  - Collaboration
  - Use of specialist expertise
  - Use of evidence
  - Leadership
- For each area, the quality and consistency of professional learning is assessed using a four point range:
  - Developing
  - Enhancing
  - Embedding
  - Transforming



# Methods

- Data collection methods included:
  - Group interviews with SLT
  - Individual interviews with a sample of staff
  - Focus group(s) with staff
  - Staff survey
  - Documentary analysis
- Triangulation
- We looked across the evidence and analysed this against research-based benchmarks

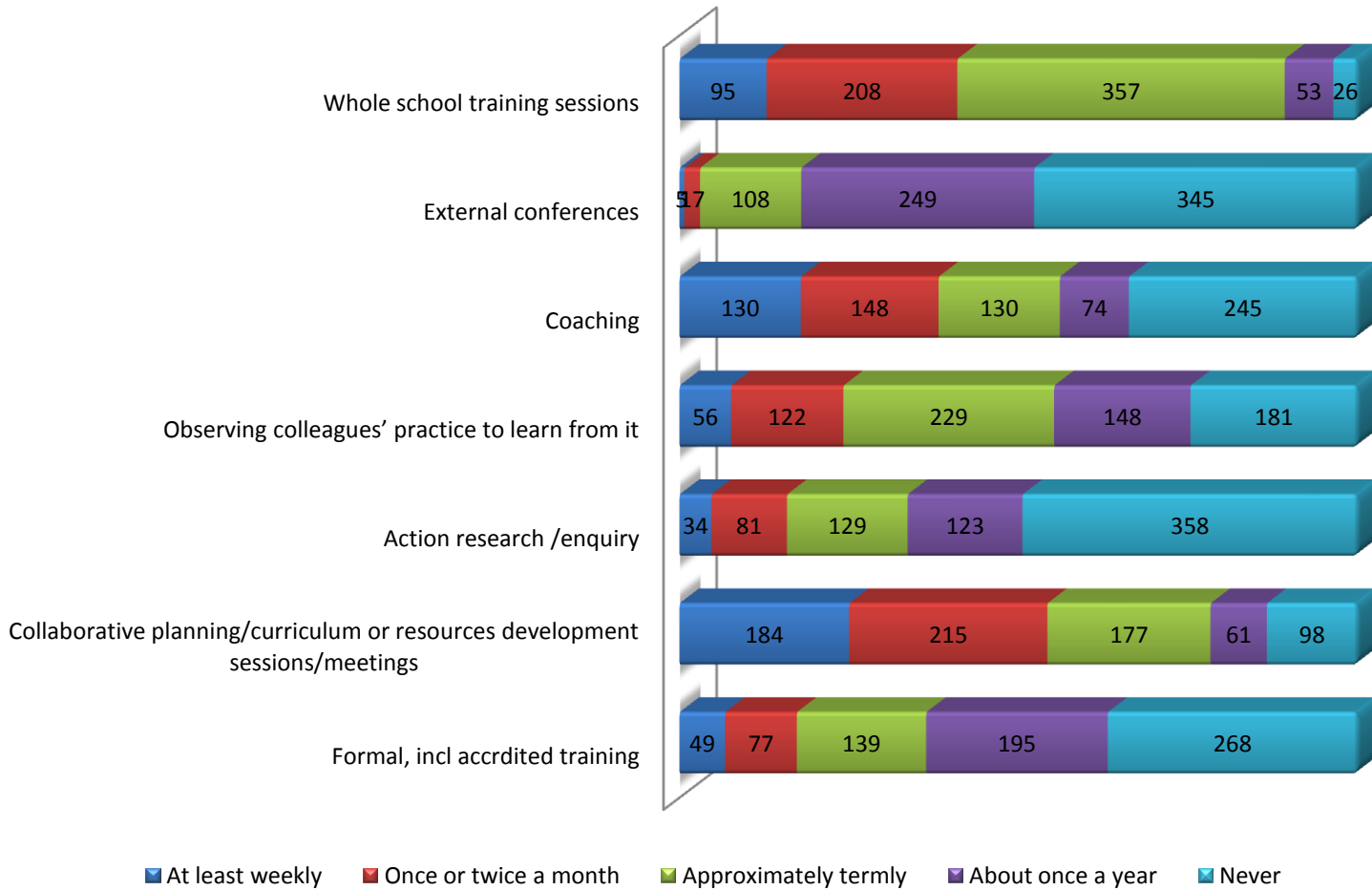


# Evidence behind this paper

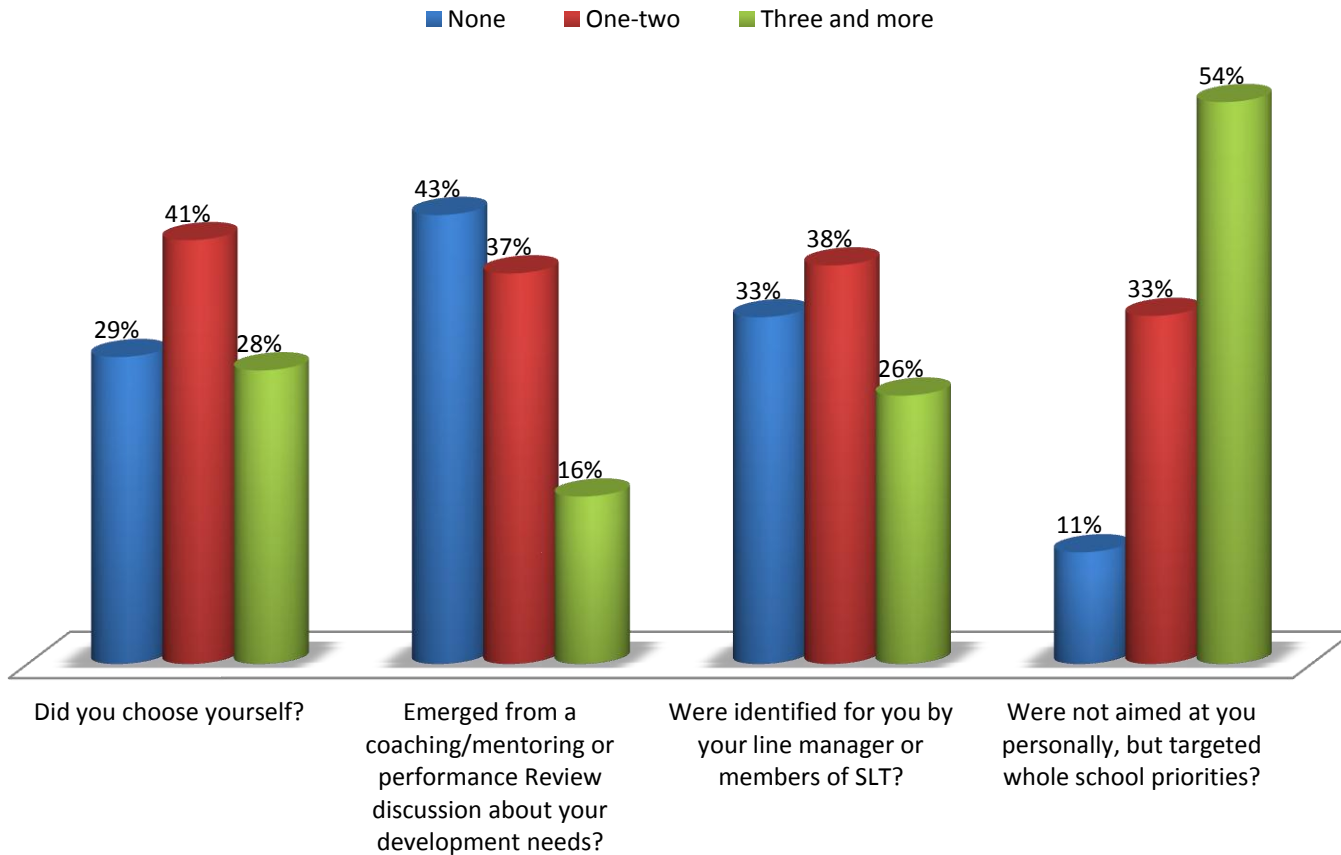
- **27 schools (14 secondary, 13 primary)**
  - 246 staff interviewed (152 sec, 94 pri)
  - 222 staff took part in focus groups (134 sec, 83 pri)
  - 785 staff responded to survey (650 sec, 125 pri)



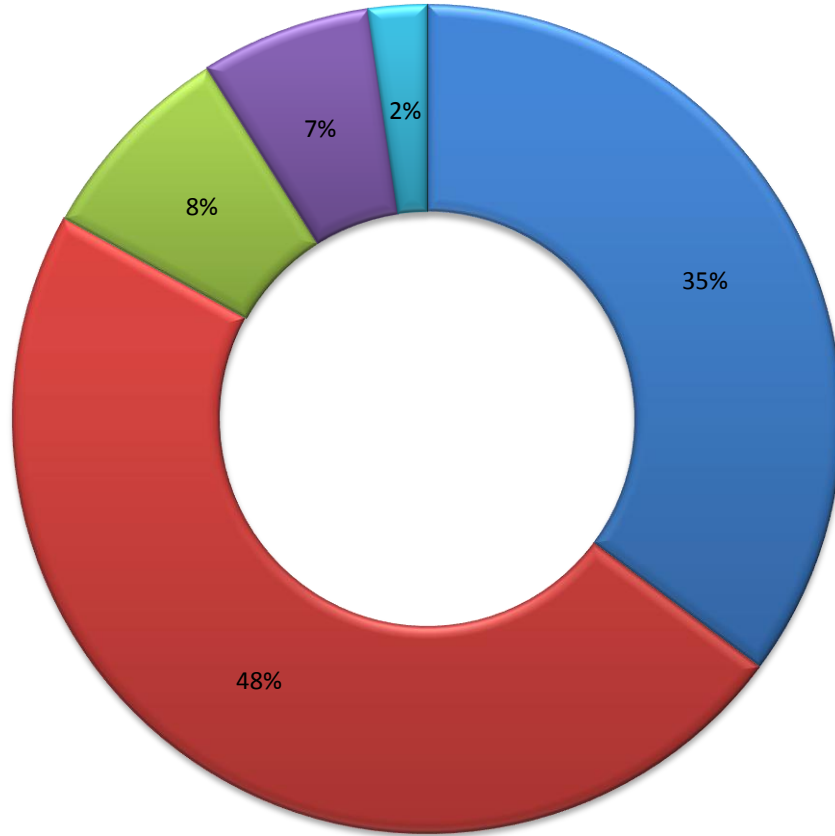
# Range of CPD available to staff



# Of the 5 recent CPD opportunities, how many



# Staff attitude to whole school CPD sessions



- I usually find them useful
- I sometimes find them useful for developing my own practice
- Might be helpful for some people but not particularly for me
- It's a bit of a waste of time
- BLANK



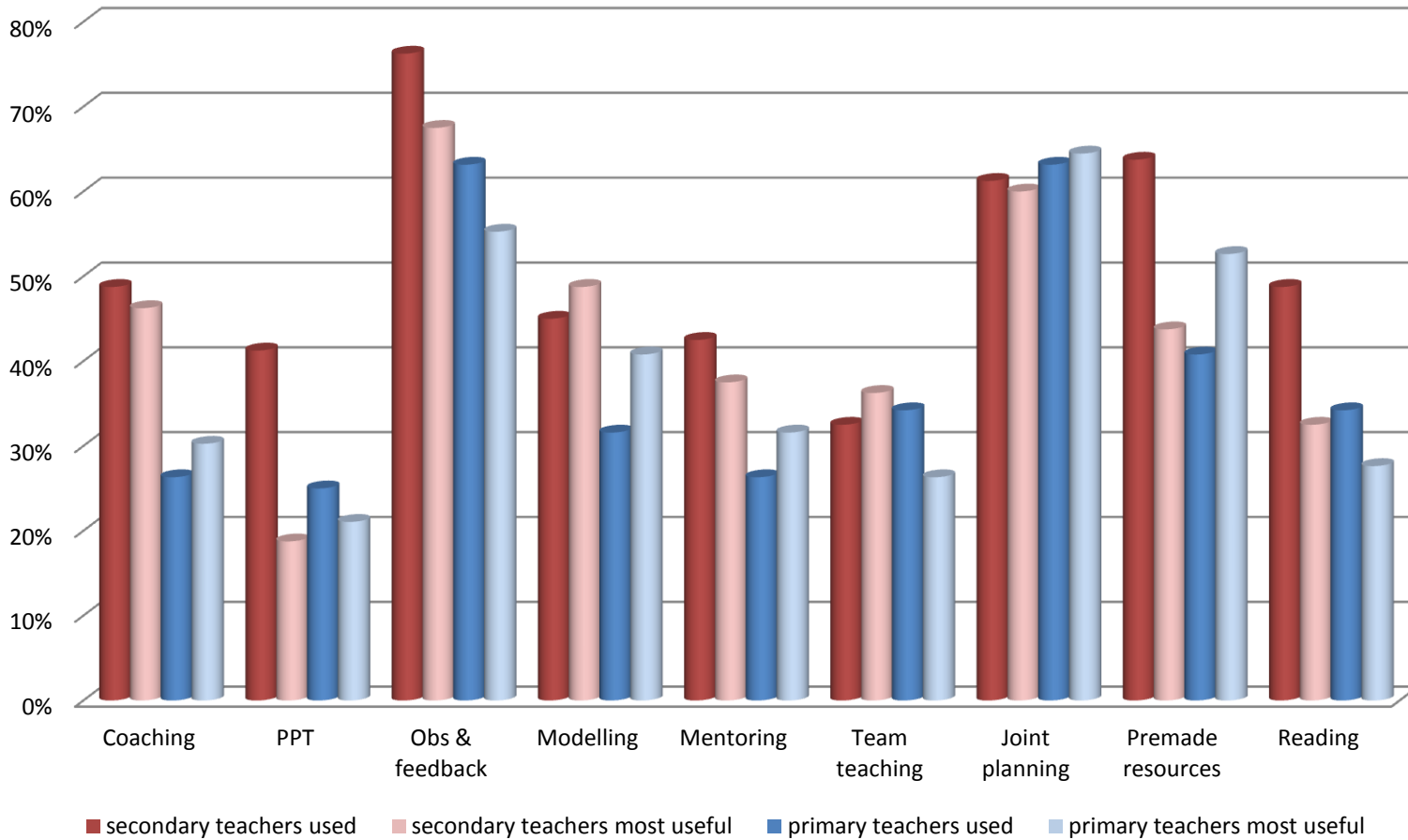
# Observations

- Regular and frequent
- Referred to by school leaders and practitioners as (some of) the most powerful learning and development opportunities
- **But which ones?**





# CPDL processes (used and useful)



# Types of observations: who observes and what for

- School leaders observe
  - Performance management observations (graded)
  - Observations with feedback
  - Learning walks/ walk-throughs, etc
- Staff observe own (video) and peers' practice to learn from it
  - Learning from (model) practice
  - Enquiry



# Teachers *being observed* by leaders

- Formal observations commonly take place on a termly basis
- Valuable when:
  - Respectful and non-threatening
  - Feedback – constructive
  - Leaders perceived as/are specialists

*Colleagues particularly valued the feedback they receive which is personalised, focused on what and how to improve and 'non-judgemental'.*

- Around 20% of secondary staff and 35% of primary staff view observations purely as an accountability measure



# Teachers *being observed* by leaders (2)

- Learning walks – termly (but can be as often as weekly)
- Usually thematic
- Used for CPD diagnostic and evaluation purposes. Monitoring of T&L across the school
- Outcomes are rarely clear to staff or useful to them in their professional learning



# Teachers *observing*: Learning from looking

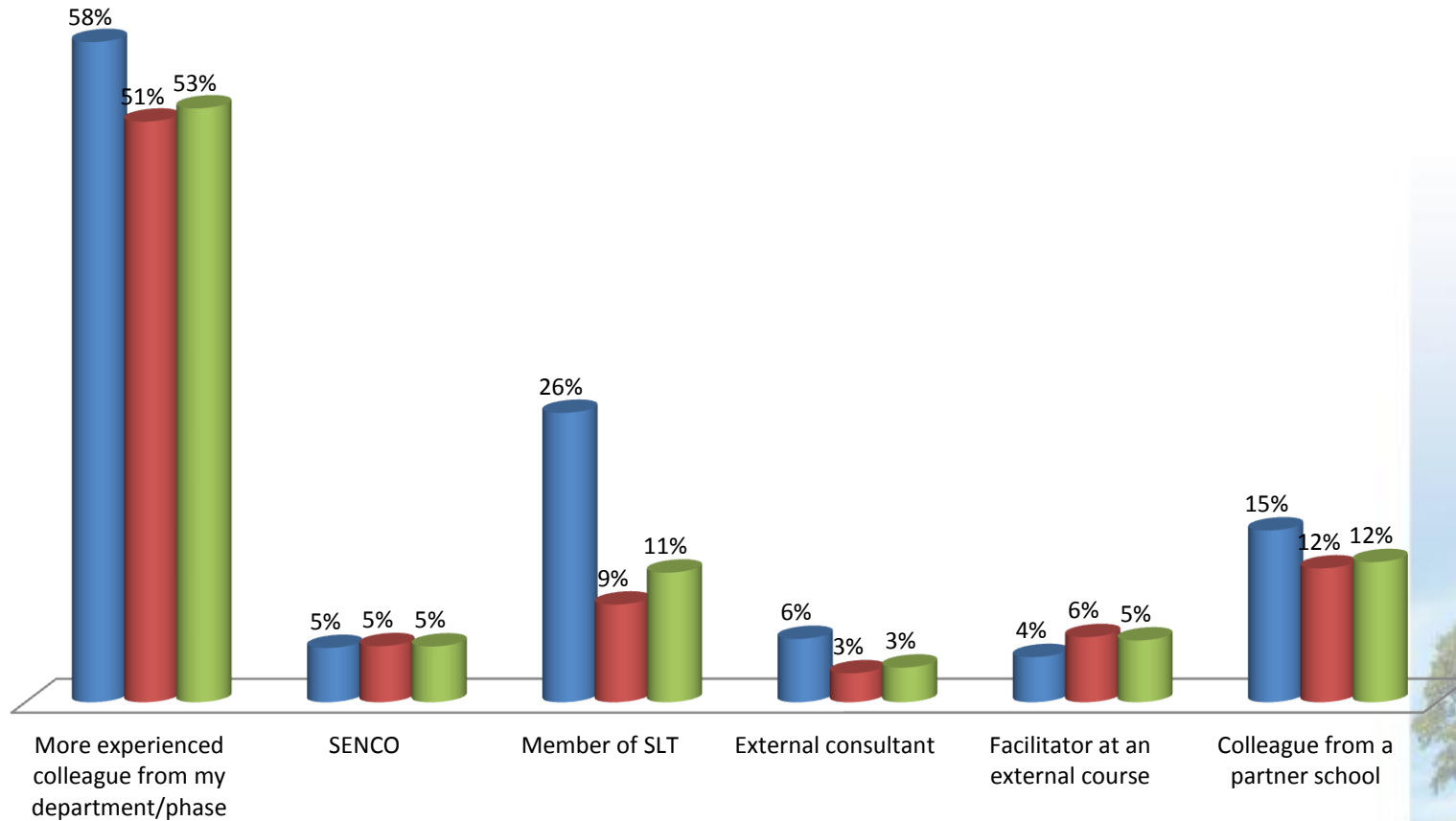
- Main models:
  - Open-ended
  - Focused (as part of formal training or informal)
  - Part of (collaborative) enquiry
- Where?
  - Within own department/phase
  - Other department/phase
  - Other schools
- **Frequently done in teachers' own time**





# Who do practitioners learn from?

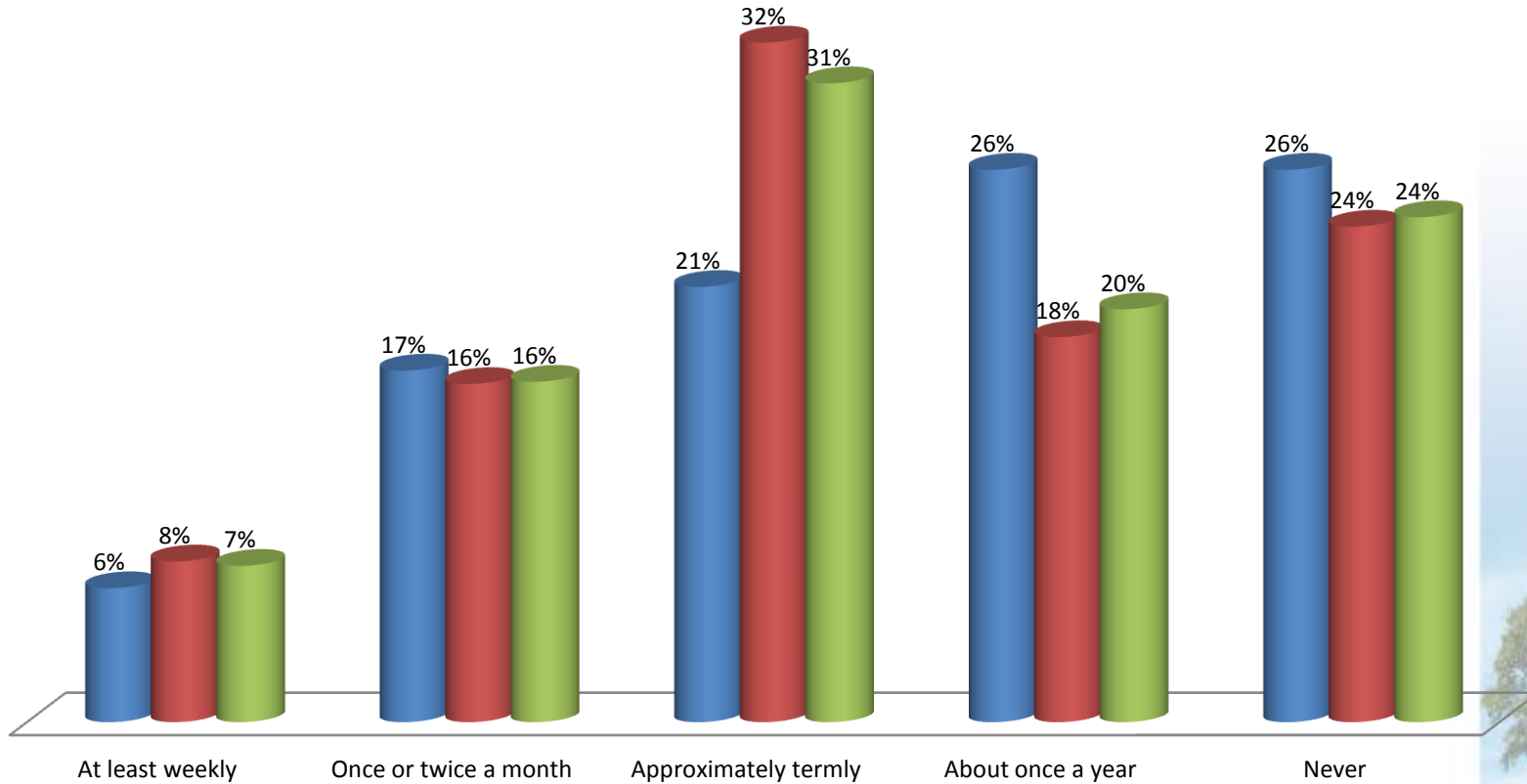
■ Primary ■ Secondary ■ Overall





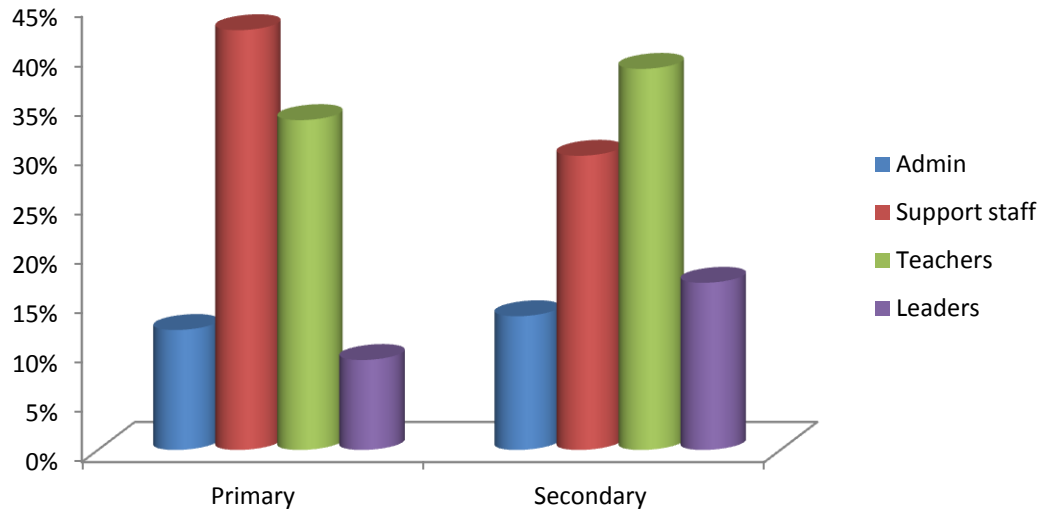
# How often do practitioners observe colleagues' practice to learn from it?

■ Primary ■ Secondary ■ Overall



# Those who **do not** observe others' practice

Around a quarter of staff report they do not have opportunities to learn from observing others





# Learning from looking

- Works well when
  - Reciprocal
  - Focused (on learning as well as teaching)
  - Draws on other evidence too
  - Includes debriefing – to secure depth
- In around a quarter of the schools leaders invited colleagues to observe their own classroom practice



# Learning to observe

- Most commonly, training in observing was available to middle leaders
- Only in 3 schools, SLT formally trained in lesson observations, observed in pairs, moderating judgements
- In two schools staff could develop their observation skills



# Tools

- Observation schedules/proformas exist in most schools – for PM observations
- Feedback tools/proformas – in some schools
- Ofsted criteria (even for peer observations)
- Tools scaffolding observations for professional learning virtually non-existent



# Some examples:

## Learning from looking

- Sub-groups within each TLC identify an area to work on, plan lessons together, observe each other and provide feedback after the observation
- If teachers have a particular area they want/need to strengthen they observe colleagues who excel in this area
- Staff can observe colleagues following on from a training session, in order to see a teaching strategy put into practice
- There are opportunities to observe teachers in other schools



# At another school...

- Colleagues have the freedom to select their 'looking for learning' partners
- They agree on a limited number of foci, selecting them from the seven areas of the observation framework
- The observer takes notes, paying particular attention to how a small sample group of children respond to their teacher's practice; interviews the children after the lesson and provides feedback to the teacher
- Useful:
  - observer's feedback
  - insights into how individual pupils learn and respond
  - practice being modelled.



# Some examples: PM observations

- Staff rotate their “Link” or line manager specifically in order to widen the pool of people whose observations they can draw upon. This is seen as a natural way of reaping the full learning benefit of performance review-based observation
- Observations are carried out by the SLT in the autumn and spring terms and peer observations are carried out in the summer term. The SLT observations are focused on standards and whole school priorities, whilst the peer observations are focused on individual teachers’ development needs.



# Some examples:

## Learning to observe

- Staff are invited to observe a lesson, and can compare their observations with a qualified inspector. One session prompted reflection on approaches to grouping, pupil dynamics, and use of resources for independent learning
- The drive to ensure quality and consistency of observations involved SLT working with an external specialist provider and then embedding their learning through an extensive in-house training programme for middle leaders and paired observations



# Contact details

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