

Schools put 'Big Brother' CCTV cameras in classrooms to monitor teachers' performance

Schools are installing CCTV cameras and microphones in classrooms to spy on teachers.

The surveillance technology is being used to check that pupils are being taught well and to expose poor teachers.

But the approach has provoked fury among teaching unions, who say the tactics smack of Big Brother.



Watched: Deputy Head Drew Povey observes a lesson at Harrop Fold School

Under the system, special training classrooms have been equipped with 360-degree cameras and five microphones.

Some cameras are so powerful they can pick up what pupils are writing in their exercise books or what's on their computer screens.

Teachers can be given live feedback from senior staff through a concealed earpiece.

The best lessons will be put on to a DVD and used as a training tool for other staff.

Although taking part in the monitoring sessions is voluntary, school heads say they expect the majority of their staff to participate.

But union officials fear reluctant teachers will be compelled to take part.

They claim the filmed lessons could be used to get around existing agreements on how often senior teachers can sit in during lessons.

Under national guidelines, teachers are only allowed to be monitored for three hours a year.

Dr Mary Bousted, head of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, said she had 'major reservations' about the use of the technology to monitor staff.

'It does seem a bit Big Brotherish,' she said. 'Although schools say that the process is voluntary, it would be quite difficult to stand up and say no if other people are agreeing to it.'

Chris Keates, general secretary of the NASUWT teachers' union, said: 'We do not support the use of cameras in this way and see no professional security or educational benefits to such systems.'

Dozens of schools around the country are employing the scheme, including Harrop Fold School in Worsley, Manchester.

Headmaster Antony Edkins insisted he would not be spying on teachers and that monitoring was 'constructive' rather than 'judgmental'.

Mr Edkins said: 'This is not Big Brother in any sense. We are using the technology as a coaching tool. It allows teachers to get the benefit of an extra pair of eyes. 'Having someone in the class can put off teachers. But allowing a coach to remotely watch everything that is going on and give feedback has been really useful. I have used it, both as a coach and as a teacher, and found the feedback was useful.'