

Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers

Updated 2nd Edition 2016



**The Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers published by the Teaching Council
in accordance with section 7(2)(b) of the Teaching Council Acts, 2001-2015**

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Foreword

The Teaching Council is the professional standards body for teaching. The role of the Teaching Council is to promote and regulate the teaching profession. This includes establishing and promoting professional standards and supporting teachers' learning. Its establishment in 2006 represented a milestone in the development of teaching as a profession in Ireland, and had been advocated for by many in Irish education over several decades.

This also occurred against the backdrop of wider trends in professional standards in the late 1990's and earlier part of this century. This period saw the establishment of teaching councils in a number of countries around the world, with a similar remit to that of the Teaching Council here in Ireland. Professional standards, as opposed to a purely regulatory approach, are about the whole story of teaching and learning.

The Council's work over the last 10 years shows how important its dual mandate is in supporting professional practice in a holistic and sustainable way. Teachers teach so that others can learn. But the Code also acknowledges that teachers are learners too, and your learning needs to be supported and acknowledged.

Teaching and learning are vital for social and economic progress. By choosing this profession which is charged with leading these processes, you are assuming a great responsibility to lead learning for all learners in your care.

The Sahlberg International Review Report on Initial Teacher Education (2012) noted that Ireland was very fortunate in the calibre of people who were seeking to enter the profession. Ultimately, a common goal across the education community must be to ensure that new entrants to the teaching profession have the best possible start to their careers, and that teaching in Ireland continues to attract and retain high calibre teachers.

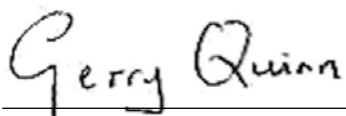
The Council works on the premise that advocacy and regulation are interdependent. This Code of Professional Conduct sets out the standards that teachers should adhere to at all stages of their career. It also describes a vision of what good teaching should look like. In this dual purpose, it epitomises the dual mandate of the professional standards body for the teaching profession.

Today, there are over 90,000 registered teachers in Ireland, serving education at primary, post-primary and further education levels. With almost 4,000 schools involving close to a million pupils/students, the contribution which the teaching profession makes to society is profound. Having a well-established tradition of service in Ireland, the profession enjoys high levels of public confidence and trust, as evidenced by research undertaken by the Teaching Council and other organisations.

Among the many important developments initiated in recent years to strengthen and underpin teaching in Ireland was the adoption of the Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers in 2007. This was done in accordance with Section 7(2)(b) of the Teaching Council Act, 2001 which provides that the Council shall "establish, publish, review and maintain codes of professional conduct for teachers, which shall include standards of teaching, knowledge, skill and competence".

The Council approved a 2nd edition of the Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers in 2012 following an extensive consultation process. This updated 2nd edition now takes on board recent amendments to the Fitness to Teach (Part 5) sections of the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015.

The Teaching Council is committed to ensuring that the Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers is promoted and observed so as to maintain public trust and confidence in the teaching profession.



Gerry Quinn
Chairperson



Tomás Ó Ruairc
Director

July 2016

Glossary

Pupil/Student

The Code applies to registered teachers at primary and post-primary levels as well as in the further education sector. The term “pupil/student” denotes learners at primary, post- primary and further education levels.

Parent

The term “parent” denotes parents and legal guardians.

Teacher

The term “teacher” denotes a teacher registered with the Teaching Council.

Poor Professional Performance

A failure by the registered teacher to meet the standards of competence (whether in knowledge, skill or the application of knowledge and skill or both) that can be reasonably expected of a registered teacher.¹

Professional Misconduct

Disgraceful or dishonourable conduct either in the course of the registered teacher’s profession or otherwise than in the course of the registered teacher’s profession if the conduct is of such a serious nature as would bring the profession of teaching into disrepute.²

1 Poor professional performance is defined in section 2 of the Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015.

2 The definition of professional misconduct comes from case law in the area of professional regulation.

Introduction

The teaching profession has a distinguished record of service in Ireland. This Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers reiterates and makes explicit the values and standards that have long been experienced by pupils/students through their participation in education.

Purpose of the Code

The Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers applies to all registered teachers. Its purpose is threefold:

1. It serves as a guiding compass as teachers seek to steer an ethical and respectful course through their career in teaching and to uphold the honour and dignity of the teaching profession.
2. It may be used by the education community and the wider public to inform their understanding and expectations of the teaching profession in Ireland.
3. It has an important legal standing and is used by the Council as a reference point in exercising its investigative and disciplinary functions under Part 5 of the Teaching Council Acts, 2001 - 2015, dealing with fitness to teach.

Existing nationally agreed procedures for dealing with difficulties and complaints at school level will continue to operate. The Council believes that, in most cases, these will offer the best means for resolving problems as they arise in the day-to-day operation of the education system.

Only complaints which are of a serious nature relating to registered teachers can progress to an inquiry. For further information regarding the grounds on which a complaint may be made, please see Page 9.

Structure of the Code

Having regard to the three purposes set out above, the Code begins by setting out the ethical foundation for the teaching profession. This is encapsulated in the values of Respect, Care, Integrity and Trust that are reflected throughout the Code. These core values underpin the work of the teacher in the practice of his or her profession.

The Code then sets out the standards which are central to the practice of teaching and expected of registered teachers. The standards identify teachers' professional responsibilities and are framed as statements under six separate headings: values and relationships; integrity; conduct; practice; professional development; collegiality and collaboration. The standards reflect the complexity and variety of teaching and serve to guide professional judgement and practice.

Context

The Code is in accord with the Council's Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education, which envisions the teacher as a reflective practitioner whose key role is to educate. It also sees teachers as members of professional learning communities and advocates a role for the profession in supporting student teachers and newly qualified teachers. The Code has also been developed in the context of the Council's future role in relation to continuing professional development.³

In adopting and promoting the Code, the Teaching Council has particular regard for the broader context in which teaching takes place.

The Council is mindful of the rights of pupils/students, including their right to have a voice in matters affecting them.

The Council is also mindful of the rights of parents and the rights of teachers and of the responsibilities that accompany those rights. A valuable synergy has been developed between parents and teachers and this has great potential to benefit pupils/students and their education.

3 At the time of publication, the Teaching Council is committed to developing a national framework and guidelines for CPD in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

The Council recognises the civic and social value of education and the profound contribution that the teaching profession has made to the social, cultural and economic development of Ireland over many decades. It also recognises the key role of teacher educators in ensuring the quality of teaching. It believes that education, the teaching profession and the process of teacher education merit the active attention and support of the State and the community.

The Council is also conscious of the myriad factors beyond teachers' control which have a bearing on their work including:

- the engagement of parents and the wider community
- the commitment and engagement of pupils/ students
- the availability of resources and supports
- opportunities for teachers' professional development
- the accelerated degree of educational change
- the pace of legislative change
- economic and societal factors.

The Council believes that the Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers provides an ethical foundation along with explicit standards of conduct to be observed at all times, having regard to the broader context set out above.

In conclusion, the Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers encapsulates the fundamental ethics that inform the work of teachers. The core values and professional standards that teachers subscribe to are expressed in terms that are accessible to educators and to all others with an interest in education. Since the education system reaches into virtually every home in the country, and affects so many so deeply, it is crucial that the teaching profession's value system and professional standards are clear and readily understandable.

The Teaching Council believes that the adoption of this Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers will enhance and deepen the confidence and trust that society places in teachers.

Standards of Teaching, Knowledge, Skill, Competence and Conduct

The role of the teacher is to educate. The following ethical values underpin the standards of teaching, knowledge, skill, competence and conduct as set out in this Code.

RESPECT

Teachers uphold human dignity and promote equality and emotional and cognitive development. In their professional practice, teachers demonstrate respect for spiritual and cultural values, diversity, social justice, freedom, democracy and the environment.

CARE

Teachers' practice is motivated by the best interests of the pupils/students entrusted to their care. Teachers show this through positive influence, professional judgement and empathy in practice.

INTEGRITY

Honesty, reliability and moral action are embodied in integrity. Teachers exercise integrity through their professional commitments, responsibilities and actions.

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TRUST

Teachers' relationships with pupils/students, colleagues, parents, school management and the public are based on trust. Trust embodies fairness, openness and honesty.

On behalf of the teaching profession, the Teaching Council sets out the following standards that apply to all registered teachers regardless of their position.

1. Professional Values and Relationships

Teachers should:

- 1.1 be caring, fair and committed to the best interests of the pupils/students entrusted to their care, and seek to motivate, inspire and celebrate effort and success
- 1.2 acknowledge and respect the uniqueness, individuality and specific needs of pupils/students and promote their holistic development
- 1.3 be committed to equality and inclusion and to respecting and accommodating diversity including those differences arising from gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race, ethnicity, membership of the Traveller community and socio-economic status, and any further grounds as may be referenced in equality legislation in the future
- 1.4 seek to develop positive relationships with pupils/students, colleagues, parents, school management and others in the school community, that are characterised by professional integrity and judgement
- 1.5 work to establish and maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect in their schools.

2. Professional Integrity

Teachers should:

- 2.1 act with honesty and integrity in all aspects of their work
- 2.2 respect the privacy of others and the confidentiality of information gained in the course of professional practice, unless a legal imperative requires disclosure or there is a legitimate concern for the wellbeing of an individual
- 2.3 represent themselves, their professional status, qualifications and experience honestly
- 2.4 use their name/names as set out in the Register of Teachers, in the course of their professional duties
- 2.5 avoid conflict between their professional work and private interests which could reasonably be deemed to impact negatively on pupils/students.

3. Professional Conduct

Teachers should:

- 3.1 uphold the reputation and standing of the profession
- 3.2 take all reasonable steps in relation to the care of pupils/students under their supervision, so as to ensure their safety and welfare
- 3.3 work within the framework of relevant legislation and regulations
- 3.4 comply with agreed national and school policies, procedures and guidelines which aim to promote pupil/student education and welfare and child protection
- 3.5 report, where appropriate, incidents or matters which impact on pupil/student welfare
- 3.6 communicate effectively with pupils/students, colleagues, parents, school management and others in the school community in a manner that is professional, collaborative and supportive, and based on trust and respect
- 3.7 ensure that any communication with pupils/students, colleagues, parents, school management and others is appropriate, including communication via electronic media, such as e-mail, texting and social networking sites
- 3.8 ensure that they do not knowingly access, download or otherwise have in their possession while engaged in school activities, inappropriate materials/images in electronic or other format
- 3.9 ensure that they do not knowingly access, download or otherwise have in their possession, illicit materials/images in electronic or other format
- 3.10 ensure that they do not practise while under the influence of any substance which impairs their fitness to teach.

4. Professional Practice

Teachers should:

- 4.1 maintain high standards of practice in relation to pupil/student learning, planning, monitoring, assessing, reporting and providing feedback
- 4.2 apply their knowledge and experience in facilitating pupils'/students' holistic development
- 4.3 plan and communicate clear, challenging and achievable expectations for pupils/students
- 4.4 create an environment where pupils/students can become active agents in the learning process and develop lifelong learning skills
- 4.5 develop teaching, learning and assessment strategies that support differentiated learning in a way that respects the dignity of all pupils/students
- 4.6 inform their professional judgement and practice by engaging with, and reflecting on, pupil/student development, learning theory, pedagogy, curriculum development, ethical practice, educational policy and legislation
- 4.7 in a context of mutual respect, be open and responsive to constructive feedback regarding their practice and, if necessary, seek appropriate support, advice and guidance
- 4.8 act in the best interest of pupils/students.

5. Professional Development

Teachers should:

- 5.1 take personal responsibility for sustaining and improving the quality of their professional practice by:
 - o actively maintaining their professional knowledge and understanding to ensure it is current
 - o reflecting on and critically evaluating their professional practice, in light of their professional knowledge base
 - o availing of opportunities for career-long professional development.

6. Professional Collegiality and Collaboration

Teachers should:

- 6.1 work with teaching colleagues and student teachers in the interests of sharing, developing and supporting good practice and maintaining the highest quality of educational experiences for pupils/students
- 6.2 work in a collaborative manner with pupils/students, parents/guardians, school management, other members of staff, relevant professionals and the wider school community, as appropriate, in seeking to effectively meet the needs of pupils/students
- 6.3 cooperate with the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills and other statutory and public non-statutory educational and support services, as appropriate
- 6.4 engage with the planning, implementation and evaluation of curriculum at classroom and school level.

Complaints relating to registered teachers

Existing nationally agreed procedures for dealing with difficulties and complaints at school level will continue to operate. The Council believes that, in most cases, these will offer the best means for resolving problems as they arise in the day-to-day operation of the education system.

Only complaints which are of a serious nature relating to registered teachers can progress to an inquiry.

Complaints can be made by anyone to the Teaching Council in relation to a registered teacher on one or more of the grounds which are set out below in section 42(1) of the Teaching Council Acts, 2001 – 2015.

The grounds include professional misconduct, poor professional performance, conduct contrary to the Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers and in certain circumstances, convictions.

All complaints will be considered in accordance with the Teaching Council Acts, 2001 – 2015 and procedures and rules approved by Council. A hearing may be held in relation to a complaint, if deemed appropriate.

Section 42(1) of the Teaching Council (Amendment) Act, 2015:

A person (including the Council) may make a complaint to the Investigating Committee in relation to a registered teacher, and the Committee may consider the complaint, where that complaint concerns any of the following matters in relation to the registered teacher:

- (a) that he or she has failed to comply with, or has contravened, any provision of this Act, the Act of 1998, the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004, the Education and Training Boards Act 2013 or any regulations, rules or orders made under those Acts;
- (b) that his or her behaviour constitutes professional misconduct;
- (c) poor professional performance;
- (d) that he or she has engaged in conduct contrary to a code of professional conduct established by the Council under section 7(2)(b);
- (e) that his or her registration is erroneous due to a false or fraudulent declaration or misrepresentation;
- (f) that he or she is medically unfit to teach;
- (g) that he or she has been convicted in the State of an offence triable on indictment or convicted outside the State of an offence consisting of acts or omissions that, if done or made in the State, would constitute an offence triable on indictment;
- (h) that he or she has failed to comply with an undertaking or to take any action specified in a consent given in response to a request under section 43(6).

For further information on the complaint process, please refer to the Professional Standards section of our website, www.teachingcouncil.ie

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