

Role of the school principal and the school management authority

School principals have a pivotal role to play in leading a whole-school approach to school placement. They should do so in accordance with a policy which is formulated by the school management authority (Board of Management or Education and Training Board, as appropriate) and communicated to the whole school community (staff, parents and students). A template policy is available for download from www.teachingcouncil.ie, but it is open to schools to devise their own policy appropriate to the particular circumstances of the school.

It is a matter for the school management authority and principal to identify the school's capacity to facilitate student placement, in consultation with appropriate staff. It is the principal who assigns student teachers to co-operating teachers and who facilitates co-operating teachers in availing of discretionary time while student teachers are teaching independently.

The principal, where possible, should be available to student teachers for professional support and advice, and should facilitate a school orientation for him/her at the outset of the placement. He or she should advise the college/university in a timely manner of any serious concerns relating to a student teacher's practice or professional conduct.

Role of the co-operating teacher

Co-operating teachers should introduce the student teacher to: the pupils/students and their needs and attainments; the classroom; the plan of work for that class; class rules and procedures; and, the roles of other staff directly involved with the pupils/students in the class. They assign the teaching of areas of the curriculum to the student teacher while retaining primary responsibility for the progress of the pupils/students. Crucially, they afford the student teacher opportunities to observe their teaching (and that of their colleagues). In turn, they observe the student teacher's practice and provide feedback to the student teacher in an encouraging and sensitive manner.

Co-operating teachers should encourage the student teacher to seek advice and support where necessary, and support and facilitate the student teacher in: planning; critical reflection on his/her practice; the use of a variety of teaching methodologies; and, in engaging with and responding appropriately to feedback from pupils/students.

As the student teacher's competence develops, the co-operating teacher should allow him or her to teach more independently and may avail of discretionary time while the student teacher does so. This facilitates engagement with the student teacher at other times.

Co-operating teachers should work collaboratively with the student teacher, the college/university placement tutor and the school principal, and advise the principal of any serious concerns regarding a student teacher's practice or professional conduct.

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Role of the whole school community

Recognising the benefits of school placement for the school community, all members of that community should support student teachers on placement, and contribute to the development and implementation of the school's policy on school placement. Parents should be informed of the school's policy on school placement in a way that enables them to be supportive of student teachers while on placement.

Role of the student teacher and the placement tutors

Student teachers are expected to take a proactive approach to their own learning and to participate constructively in a broad range of placement experiences. They engage fully in the life of the school and seek and avail of opportunities to observe and work alongside other teachers. They are expected to seek and avail of support, and to engage with constructive feedback from their placement tutors, co-operating teachers and principals.

It is expected that student teachers will prepare and teach lessons in a supported environment commensurate with their stage of development. This should be done in line with college/university requirements and the policies of the host school (in particular homework, assessment and other relevant teaching and learning policies). In doing so, they should always be conscious that pupils'/students' needs are paramount and that a duty of care obtains.

At all times, a school community can expect that a student teacher will engage with it in a respectful and courteous manner, have due regard for the values and standards set out in the *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* and for the school's code of behaviour, child protection policy and other relevant policies.

Placement tutors observe the student teacher teaching, assess his/her practice for grading purposes and engage him/her in a dialogue when giving constructive feedback. They ensure that the student teacher is appropriately supported, and collaborate with the co-operating teacher(s) regarding, *inter alia*, good practice in class planning, and the use of teaching and learning resources. They support the student teacher and the co-operating teacher in engaging in reflective dialogue, and they engage with the co-operating teacher and principal, as appropriate, in relation to the student teacher's practice and experience.

Both the student teacher and the placement tutor must be cognisant and respectful of the characteristic spirit (ethos) of the school, school policies and practices, the school timetable and any special school-based arrangements.

Relationship between college/university and school

To have their programmes accredited by the Teaching Council, colleges/universities are required to design and implement school placement in collaboration with placement schools. This requires regular communication between the college/university and the school regarding the school placement. Good practice should be recognised, and when difficulties occur they should be dealt with in a timely manner.

As the relationships between the college/university and placement schools develop, further opportunities for collaboration, such as the provision of CPD for schools by colleges/universities, may provide a means of sharing professional expertise and knowledge while acknowledging teachers' work in facilitating effective placement. Similarly, schools may facilitate college/university personnel wishing to update their teaching experience.

School Placement for Student Teachers

A Quick Reference Guide for Schools

Introduction

This leaflet is intended to provide guidance for schools hosting student teachers on placement. It is based on the Teaching Council's *School Placement Guidelines*, produced in partnership with teacher and principal representatives, school management and parent bodies, colleges/universities, and other relevant stakeholders. Readers of this leaflet may also wish to refer to the Guidelines, which are available from the teacher education pages of www.teachingcouncil.ie

This guide is based on existing good practice. It recognises the goodwill of teachers and other partners, and the way they voluntarily and generously support student teachers with their time and expertise. It promotes enhanced collaboration between colleges/universities and schools, and seeks to avoid placing an undue burden on either.

What is school placement?

The term "school placement" replaces the term "teaching practice" as it more accurately reflects the range of teaching and non-teaching activities involved.

School placement is a critical part of initial teacher education (ITE) and is designed to give the student teacher an opportunity to experience teaching and learning in a real environment, to apply educational theory in a variety of teaching and learning situations and school contexts, and to participate in school life in a way that is structured and supported.

It comprises a wide range of teaching and non-teaching activities, and allows the student teacher to see at first hand the complexity of teaching and the variety of roles undertaken by teachers. School placement facilitates the development of the student teacher's capacity for self-reflection, sometimes in conversation with experienced teachers, known as co-operating teachers, and with the placement tutors appointed by the college/university. It also affords the student teacher valuable opportunities to seek and receive advice in a way that is structured and supportive.

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Benefits of school placement for the school

A well-managed school placement is beneficial for all those involved. It presents opportunities for sharing ideas and new methodologies, fosters discussion on teaching and learning, and offers opportunities for real engagement and learning among teachers throughout their careers.

From the school's point of view, the benefits of placement are many. Schools can develop as learning communities through the sharing of knowledge and skills, and through interaction with student teachers, and with colleges/universities. Co-operating teachers, in particular, can observe and be informed about a variety of approaches to teaching and learning, and some colleges/universities provide bespoke continuing professional development (CPD) programmes for such teachers, in acknowledgement of their role in supporting the student teacher. Pupils/students also benefit from a variety of enriching experiences through the structured participation of student teachers in schools.

Duration, structure and timing of school placement

Since 2012/2013, all undergraduate programmes of teacher education are now four or five years in duration, and from September 2014, all postgraduate programmes will be two years in duration. Typically, a student teacher on an undergraduate programme of four or five years' duration will spend at least 20 weeks of that programme based in schools. A student on a two-year postgraduate programme will typically spend 18 weeks of that programme in schools. In all cases, the Council requires that the second half of the programme should include at least one block placement for a minimum of ten weeks. Apart from that requirement, colleges/universities have considerable flexibility in determining the duration, structure and timing of the school-based element, and have been asked to have regard to the needs of student teachers and of the host schools in planning the timing of placements. They will provide schools with detailed information to facilitate school planning and to assist the co-operating teacher.

Appropriate placement settings

To ensure that student teachers experience a variety of teaching environments and settings, it is desirable that all recognised schools will be open to hosting student teachers on placement, though it is acknowledged that this may not always be feasible or appropriate.

Colleges/universities have been advised that, over the course of all of his/her placements, a student teacher (primary) should be exposed to a range of class levels and to multi-class teaching. At post-primary level, a student teacher should be exposed to both junior and senior cycles, to mixed ability teaching and, where appropriate, to examination classes. In planning for this, colleges/universities and schools should have regard to a range of variables, e.g., the timing of the placement in the school calendar, and the stage the student teacher is at on the ITE programme.

School placement activities

It is expected that colleges/universities and schools will work towards a position where student teachers will gain in the region of 200 to 250 hours of direct teaching experience over the course of the extended programme. Post-primary student teachers should not be timetabled for classes separate from the classes of their co-operating teachers.

Non-teaching hours in schools should be structured to allow for classroom observation, collaborative work with experienced staff, and engagement with the day-to-day life of the school. Where possible, the student teacher should be afforded an appropriate blend of the activities set out below, having regard to the stage they are at on a programme of ITE.

Activities a student teacher may participate in while on placement in schools

As well as direct teaching to a designated class, the school-based element should ideally include the following activities:

- planning for teaching, learning and assessment (assigned classes)
- assessment of, and for, learning (assigned classes)
- structured observation and feedback
- school-based orientation programmes
- professional conversations with experienced teachers
- critical reflection on practice, both individually and with colleagues, and
- structured and supported participation in school life.

The school-based element may also include some or all of the following:

- learning support and resource teaching
- attendance at staff meetings
- school-based research, relevant to the placement
- supported engagement with other professionals and with parents, and
- engagement with school-based continuing professional development and/or school development planning.

Supporting the student teacher

The provision of structured support for the student teacher is a key element of school placement, and colleges/universities will ensure that he or she is supported and assessed for grading purposes by placement tutors.

Co-operating teachers and school principals are also asked to provide structured support to student teachers but do not have a role in grading them.

The whole school community can provide important informal support to student teachers, for example, by the welcome it extends to them and by the efforts it makes to include them in general school life experiences, as well as by making school facilities available to them.

Student teachers on placement should be assigned a suitable co-operating teacher. In a post-primary setting, student teachers may have a number of co-operating teachers. It is envisaged that, over the course of all school placements on an ITE programme, the student teacher will move from a more supported experience in the classroom to teaching more independently. While student teachers are teaching independently, co-operating teachers will have discretionary time and this will facilitate them in engaging with student teachers at other times.

Structured support may include: the provision of advice and guidance; sharing ideas and approaches; co-planning; team teaching; opportunities for student teachers to observe teachers teaching; and, opportunities for the student teacher to have his/her teaching observed.

Observation and feedback

Research indicates that observation and feedback are the two most valued elements of structured support. Colleges/universities will provide guidance on observation and the provision of feedback, and will support placement tutors and co-operating teachers to ensure that it is implemented in a consistent manner. The placement tutor and co-operating teacher should collaborate, as appropriate, in relation to any recommendations made or advice given to student teachers.

Feedback should be:

- based on observed practice
- appropriate to the requirements and expectations of the particular placement
- provided in a timely fashion
- clear, fair and honest
- communicated in a manner appropriate to a discussion on teaching and learning, and
- provided in an encouraging and sensitive manner.

The observer should seek to engage the student teacher in critical reflection on his/her practice, so as to identify strengths, areas for improvement, and possible strategies for improving practice.

Supporting students who are experiencing difficulties

Support for student teachers who are experiencing difficulty in classroom practice is particularly important and should be given as early as possible in the placement so as to enable him/her to fulfil the requirements of that placement. While the college/university is primarily responsible for supporting such student teachers, a collaborative approach is important and is in the best interests of pupils/students.

Where serious concerns are identified in relation to a student teacher's practice or professional conduct, the principal should notify the college/university to facilitate early and appropriate interventions and supports.