

Guidance Note on School Placement 2020-2021

Update regarding Protocol for School Placement Tutors Visiting Schools

School placement is a core element of initial teacher education programmes for both student teachers and their higher education institutions (HEIs). In turn, the observation and assessment of student teachers is a key component of school placement.

All student teachers must be observed and assessed on school placement prior to achieving qualification from HEIs.

In the context of Covid-19, the preference is that at least one observation be conducted in real time and in the same learning environment as the student teacher, where this can be done safely. The Teaching Council and the Department wish to clarify that virtual supervision arrangements already in place at post-primary level can continue to operate in adherence with the *Guidance Note on School Placement 2020-2021* issued in August 2020. HEIs will liaise with schools in respect of protocols they have developed in relation to virtual supervision arrangements.

It is acknowledged that on-site visits may be limited to exceptional circumstances in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and in the current school year 2020/2021. These circumstances may vary between primary and post-primary. HEIs will liaise with schools and stakeholders in this regard.

This protocol clarifies the arrangements that should be adhered to in order to ensure that such on-site visits can take place safely. Given the significant challenges for schools due to Covid-19 and to ensure that public health guidelines are adhered to, the following protocols apply for the remainder of the 2020/2021 school year in relation to placement tutors visiting schools to observe and assess student teachers during their school placement:

1. The Department and the Teaching Council confirm that in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and for the 2020/2021 school year only, HEIs may prioritise student teachers for on-site visits in schools. Such prioritisation will include student teachers who have not been observed on school placement since the commencement of their studies, particularly those in their final year of study, as well as a small number of individual cases where the HEIs determine that on-site observation is warranted.
2. A School Placement Visit Protocol (see below) has been developed to guide schools and HEIs in ensuring that where such observations happen on-site in line with the guidance above, they can happen safely and in accordance with national health guidance in place at the time and the school Covid Response Plan.
3. In keeping with the *Guidance Note for School Placement 2020-2021*, and in the context of the guidance above, student teachers may be observed and assessed by other alternative arrangements provided for in the guidance note.

4. HEIs are strongly encouraged to form regional panels of placement tutors on a collaborative basis. This would mean that one panel of tutors would conduct placement visits on behalf of some or all HEIs in a particular geographic area. While this may not be possible in the current school year, HEIs are advised to consider such contingency arrangements in advance of the 2021/2022 school year. HEIs are also encouraged to ensure that students undertake placement over a block of weeks rather than alternative arrangements (e.g. one day a week) for the 2021/2022 school year.

School Placement Visit Protocol:

- HEIs will plan school placement visits in consultation with school management.
- HEIs will ensure that all placement tutors have completed Covid-19 induction training.
- HEIs will prioritise which student teachers will be visited so as to minimise the impact on schools.
- HEIs and the Teaching Council have agreed that in light of the exceptional circumstances, student teachers may be observed by only one placement tutor while on placement, unless the HEI determines that observation by an additional tutor is warranted.
- The following guidance has been approved for placement tutors to ensure that they can visit schools safely and in accordance with public health guidelines. These protocols are based on similar protocols developed by the Department of Education Inspectorate (*'Safe Return to On-Site Work: Draft Guidance for Inspectors in Early Learning and Care (ELC) Settings, Schools and Other Settings'*).
 - i. Placement tutors will schedule the school visit in consultation with school management in advance.
 - ii. Placement tutors will request the details of the school's specific arrangements for visitors.
 - iii. Placement tutors should complete a Covid-19 health declaration before each visit to a school.
 - iv. Placement tutors will visit no more than 1 school per day.
 - v. Placement tutors will comply with the school's Covid-19 Response Plan including the following:
 - a. Complete the school's Contact Tracing Log for visitors.
 - b. Maintain physical distancing requirements as set out in the Department's guidance to schools.
 - c. Use face coverings
 - d. Clean/sanitise digital and other work devices after each school visit.
 - vi. Placement tutors will conduct post-observation feedback to student teachers off-site with student teachers i.e. either in a separate venue socially distanced, over the phone or via video call.
 - vii. Placement tutors will have minimised interactions with other persons while on site.