

Initial teacher education

Guide for effective student teacher placements

V1 draft

Published: July 2026

Contents

1.	Introduction	4
2.	Purpose	4
3.	Guiding Principles	5
	Connecting theory to practice (box out).....	6
4.	Roles and Responsibilities	7
4.1	ITE Provider	7
4.2	Placement School.....	7
4.3	Mentor Teacher.....	8
4.4	Student Teacher	8
	Reflective practice (box out)	9
5.	Mentor Selection and Development	9
5.1	Mentor Selection Criteria	9
5.2	Mentor Development.....	10
6.	Structure of the Placement Experience.....	10
	Placement matching (box out).....	10
6.1	Scaffolded Progression Model	11
6.2	Immersion in School Life	12
7.	Student Teacher Assessment.....	12
7.1	Assessment	12



The General Teaching Council for Scotland

We are the independent regulator for teachers in Scotland. We work to enhance trust in teachers in the public interest by setting, upholding and promoting high standards.

Website: www.gtcs.org.uk

Email: gtcs@gtcs.org.uk

7.2	Observation.....	13
7.3	Feedback	13
7.4	Triad Meetings	14
8.	Quality assurance.....	14
9.	Managing concerns.....	15
10.	System Level Supports	15
	References.....	16

1. Introduction

Assessed teaching practice is an essential part of a recognised teaching qualification in Scotland. GTC Scotland, as the independent regulator, determines what constitutes a recognised teaching qualification.

Assessed teaching practice takes place through school placements during initial teacher education (ITE). Effective placements help student teachers develop professional knowledge, skills, and identity through supported immersion in school life.

In Scotland, effective placements are a shared responsibility between ITE providers and schools, supporting meaningful teacher preparation that results in the achievement of the Standard for Provisional Registration.

Student teachers who have positive professional experience placements are more likely to stay in ITE; make a successful transition to teaching; and stay in teaching for the long term (Izadinia 2015, Darling-Hammond & Podolsky 2019, Podolsky et al. 2019, AITSL 2022, Truwit 2023).

2. Purpose

This guide sets out the standards, expectations, and responsibilities for consistent, effective, and equitable student teacher placements. It is for ITE providers and schools supporting student teacher placements. It applies to all ITE school placements, regardless of programme duration.

All ITE programme content, including school placements, is framed by the Standard for Provisional Registration, which must be achieved for registration with GTC Scotland.

This guide aims to:

- Set out what high-quality placements require.

- Clarify roles and responsibilities across the partnership.
- Support safe, developmental placements aligned with professional standards.
- Promote consistency with appropriate contextual flexibility.
- Strengthen future teacher development through meaningful placement experiences.

3. Guiding Principles

High-quality teaching occurs when teachers combine their learning of pedagogical theories with practice in the context of teaching standards. All placement arrangements must reflect the following principles:

1. **Structured immersion and scaffolded responsibility**

Placements should help student teachers connect theory and practice through observation, teaching trials, supervised practice and gradual assumption of responsibility.

2. **Equity and access**

All student teachers are entitled to high-quality experiences, regardless of background, personal circumstances or programme route.

3. **Collaboration**

Effective placement requires partnership between ITE providers, schools, and mentors. Strong school and provider partnerships matter.

4. **Strong mentoring**

The quality of mentoring is fundamental to a meaningful placement experience.

5. **Professional identity**

Student teachers must be supported to develop competence, confidence, and reflective capacity. Placements are key to early development of identity as a teacher.

6. **Consistency with flexibility**

Core standards apply across contexts while accommodating diversity of school environments and individual student teacher needs.

7. **Feedback**

Quality feedback from a skilled mentor should be specific, timely, developmental and linked to teaching standards.

8. **Relationships**

High-quality relationships with school colleagues beyond a mentor contribute to effective engagement and placement success.

9. **Focus on the practical**

Placements should focus on more practical skills that must be learned and practiced in a classroom setting, such as behavioural management and teaching diverse learners.

10. **Communication**

Open and clear communication should occur before, during and after placements.

Connecting theory to practice

To better link theory and practice, a well-designed placement will typically include time and opportunities for:

- Lesson planning - to allow for the additional time student teachers need to prepare, to improve their confidence.
- Performance reflection – to allow for self-reflection and deliberate, incremental performance improvement.
- Mentor feedback – to benefit from detailed and personalised observations, and suggestions for actions.
- Peer collaboration – to benefit from others’ experiences, to improve skills and likelihood of programme completion.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 ITE Provider

All ITE providers in Scotland are HEIs and all programmes of ITE are accredited by GTC Scotland in order to be recognised teaching qualifications.

ITE providers must:

- Establish partnership agreements with placement schools outlining shared expectations
- Support mentors and provide appropriate advice.
- Liaise regularly with school staff
- Ensure that monitoring, evaluation, and quality assurance systems are in place, understood and used effectively
- Support student teachers with clear assessment frameworks aligned to professional standards

4.2 Placement School

Placement schools should be selected through a fair, quality-assured process that considers school capacity, mentor availability, phase or subject alignment, inclusive professional culture, and the developmental needs of each student teacher.

Schools hosting student teachers must:

- Demonstrate a strong, supportive teaching, learning and professional learning culture
- Provide access to teaching spaces, resources, and broader school activities.
- Ensure timetables allow for a scaffolded progression from observation to lead teaching
- carefully select and prepare mentors
- Maintain a safe, inclusive, and professionally appropriate environment.
- Leadership commitment to hosting and supporting student teachers

4.3 Mentor Teacher

A mentor teacher plays a central role in supporting student teachers' professional growth by modelling effective practice, providing structured guidance and feedback, and helping them connect professional standards with classroom experience.

Mentors must:

- Demonstrate teaching quality and coaching ability
- Collaborate, plan and co-plan
- Provide regular observation, and feedback
- Facilitate opportunities for and model reflection and professional dialogue
- Participate in triad meetings with the student teacher and ITE supervisor
- Support the student teacher in meeting learning outcomes

4.4 Student Teacher

Student teachers are responsible for actively engaging in all aspects of placement, seeking and acting on feedback, reflecting on their progress, and demonstrating developing professional competence in line with the Standard for Provisional Registration.

Student teachers must:

- Actively engage in all aspects of planning, teaching, assessment, and reflection
- Understand the components of the Standard for Provisional Registration they are working towards and uphold the standards of conduct expected of teachers
- Seek and act on feedback
- Contribute respectfully to the life of the school community
- Understand school policies prioritising those relating to child protection and safeguarding

Reflective practice

Reflective practice benefits student teachers by helping them analyse their teaching, recognise strengths and areas for development, connect experience to professional standards and theory, and make informed improvements to their practice over time.

Student teachers must engage in reflection using a reflective journal or log and other methods such as post-lesson self-evaluation, video or audio review, peer discussion and learning conversations. Using a range of reflection prompts across these methods is helpful:

- What went well in this lesson, and what evidence supports this?
- What did learners understand, and how do I know?
- Which learners needed additional support or challenge, and how did I respond?
- How effective were my explanations, questioning and instructions?
- How did my planning support learning and engagement?
- What classroom routines or behaviour strategies worked well?
- What would I adapt if I taught this again?
- How does this experience link to the Standard for Provisional Registration?
- What feedback have I received, and how will I act on it?
- What is one specific next step for my practice?

Student teachers must also engage in structured reflection with mentors where they link reflections to professional standards and teaching goals and demonstrate growing self-awareness, adaptability, and critical thinking.

5. Mentor Selection and Development

Research indicates that mentor teacher quality is a significant predictor of placement quality and later teaching effectiveness (see Goldhaber et al, 2020)

5.1 Mentor Selection Criteria

Mentors should be selected through a transparent, quality-assured process that considers teaching effectiveness, coaching skills, professional standards knowledge, interpersonal capability, and capacity to provide regular, developmental support.

Mentors must:

- Demonstrate strong instructional effectiveness
- Possess the interpersonal skills necessary to support adult learners
- Show commitment to professional development, self-reflection and coaching
- Understand, uphold and model teaching standards
- Have the support and time to commit to effective mentoring

5.2 Mentor Development

Mentors should be supported through clear expectations, dedicated time, relevant training, access to ongoing professional development, and regular guidance from both schools and ITE providers.

ITE providers and schools must ensure mentors receive:

- Training in giving constructive feedback and conducting observations.
- Guidance on assessing student teacher progress against standards.
- Support in facilitating reflective practice.
- Access to ongoing professional development and updates on programme expectations.

6. Structure of the Placement Experience

Placement structure should provide a planned, scaffolded progression from observation and supported practice to increasing teaching responsibility, while ensuring meaningful immersion in the wider life of the school.

Placement matching

Placement matching should consider student teacher needs, mentor availability, phase or subject alignment, school capacity and access to strong support where required.

6.1 Scaffolded Progression Model

A scaffolded progression model means that student teachers build responsibility gradually during placement: they begin by observing and understanding the school context, then move into supported planning and co-teaching, before taking on increasing responsibility for lesson delivery, classroom management and assessment with ongoing mentor guidance and feedback.

The benefits of a scaffolded progression model are that it helps student teachers build confidence, competence and professional judgement gradually, while ensuring they receive appropriate support, feedback and challenge before taking on greater responsibility for planning, teaching, classroom management and assessment.

Mentors support scaffolded progression by setting clear expectations, modelling effective practice, gradually increasing teaching responsibility, providing timely feedback, and adjusting support in response to the student teacher's developing confidence, competence and professional judgement.

Scaffolded progression steps include:

1. Orientation and observation: student teacher becomes familiar with the school context, routines, learners and mentor practice.
2. Focused observation: student teacher observes specific aspects of teaching, such as questioning, differentiation, behaviour management or assessment.
3. Supported planning: student teacher contributes to lesson planning with mentor guidance.
4. Small-group or starter activities: student teacher leads short tasks or works with small groups.
5. Co-teaching: student teacher shares delivery of lessons with the mentor.
6. Supported whole-class teaching: student teacher teaches full lessons with mentor observation and feedback.
7. Increasing independent teaching: student teacher takes responsibility for a sequence of lessons or a class, with planned mentor support.
8. Review and consolidation: student teacher reflects on evidence, receives feedback and agrees next steps linked to professional standards.

6.2 Immersion in School Life

Immersion in school life benefits student teachers by helping them understand the wider professional role of teachers, build relationships across the school community, connect classroom practice with whole-school responsibilities, and develop confidence, belonging and professional identity.

- Key elements of school life immersion include:
- Staff meetings and briefings
- Planning and moderation activities
- Pastoral care and duty roles
- Collaboration with colleagues
- Engagement with learners and families, where appropriate
- Participation in extracurricular activities
- Involvement in whole-school events
- Understanding school policies, routines and culture
- Professional dialogue and reflection with school staff
- Contribution to the wider school community

7. Student Teacher Assessment

7.1 Assessment

Assessment of student teachers should be cumulative, evidence-based and aligned to professional standards, drawing on observation, planning, teaching, reflection, professional dialogue and, where appropriate, evidence of pupil learning.

It should combine formative feedback and summative judgement using shared criteria understood by the student teacher, mentor and ITE provider. Balance matters – assessment that is formative enough to support progress and robust enough to ensure achievement of standards.

Assessment must be:

- based on multiple sources of evidence
- aligned to professional standards
- both formative and summative
- supported by clear rubrics or criteria
- informed by mentor, tutor and student teacher evidence
- reviewed through structured triad meetings
- supported by reflective portfolios or logs
- subject to moderation and quality assurance
- used to improve both the student teacher's progress and the placement programme

7.2 Observation

Observation provides evidence of developing practice, supports timely feedback and reflection, and informs fair, standards-aligned judgements about progress.

Mentors and tutors should use planned, focused observations with agreed criteria to identify strengths, next steps and support needs.

7.3 Feedback

Feedback helps student teachers recognise strengths, identify next steps and improve practice through reflection and action.

- It should be timely, specific, evidence-based, developmental, standards-aligned, balanced and actionable.
- Feedback should be delivered through professional dialogue that agrees focused priorities and reviews progress.

7.4 Triad Meetings

Triad meetings bring the student teacher, mentor and ITE tutor together to review evidence, align expectations and agree next steps linked to professional standards.

Key outcomes include agreed strengths, development priorities, support actions and assessment judgements.

The student teacher reflects on evidence, the mentor provides school-based feedback, and the ITE tutor supports consistency with programme expectations and standards.

Effective triad meetings should use a shared agenda, review evidence in advance, centre student teacher reflection, agree clear actions and record outcomes.

8. Quality assurance

Quality assurance ensures placements are safe, consistent, equitable and effective, and that assessment decisions are evidence-based, standards-aligned and used to improve placement quality. ITE providers should collect feedback, monitor outcomes and maintain partnership records.

- Consistency and equity: comparable expectations and quality across placement settings.
- Robust assessment: evidence-based, standards-aligned and moderated judgements.
- Early support: timely identification of concerns and mentor development needs.
- Student teacher voice: feedback used to strengthen placement experience and support.
- Partnership accountability: shared review of provider, school and mentor responsibilities.
- Continuous improvement: using placement data to identify strengths, risks and system learning.

9. Managing concerns

Concerns should be addressed early, fairly and supportively through evidence, dialogue, agreed actions, targeted support and escalation where needed.

Student teachers should raise concerns through agreed routes, with prompt responses and recorded actions where appropriate.

Mentor-student communication should be clear, respectful, confidential where appropriate, action-focused and followed up.

10. System Level Supports

System-level supports should recognise mentors, resource mentor training and placement administration, coordinate partners and provide clear escalation routes.

All partners must commit to:

- Regular review of placement data and stakeholder feedback
- Updating processes and expectations in response to evidence
- Sharing effective practice across the partnership
- Ensuring the guidance remains relevant and responsive

References

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). (2024). *Australian Professional Experience Guidelines*. AITSL.

Izadinia, M. (2015). *A closer look at the role of mentor teachers in shaping preservice teachers' professional identity*. **Teaching and Teacher Education**, **52**, 1–10.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.08.003>

Aspden, K. M. (2017). *The complexity of practicum assessment in teacher education: An examination of four New Zealand case studies*. **Australian Journal of Teacher Education**, **42**(12).
<https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2017v42n12.8>

Brondyk, S. K. (2024). *Engaging in continuous improvement: Implications for educator preparation programs and their mentors*. **Frontiers in Education**, **8**, Article 1259324.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1259324>

Goldhaber, D., Krieg, J., Naito, N., & Theobald, R. (2020). *Making the most of student teaching: The importance of mentors and scope for change*. **Education Finance and Policy**, **15**(3), 581–591.
https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp_a_00305

Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Darling-Hammond, L., & Bishop, J. (2019). *Strategies for attracting and retaining educators: What does the evidence say?* **Education Policy Analysis Archives**, **27**(38).
<https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.3722>

Khales, B., Zaidan, A., & Ihmeideh, F. (2025). *The impact of using practicum portfolio on early childhood student teachers' reflective practice*. **Australian Journal of Teacher Education**, **50**(1).
<https://doi.org/10.14221/1835-517X.5906>

Mackie, L. (2018). *Understandings of mentoring within initial teacher education school placement contexts: A Scottish perspective*. **Professional Development in Education**, **44**(5), 622–637.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2017.1398179>

McCormack, B., Baecher, L. H., & Cuenca, A. (2019). *University-based teacher supervisors: Their voices, their dilemmas*. **Journal of Educational Supervision**, **2**(1), 22–37. <https://doi.org/10.31045/jes.2.1.2>

Mpofu, N., & Maphalala, M. C. (2018). *A comprehensive model for assessing student teachers' professional competence through an integrated curriculum approach*. **The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa**, **14**(2).

Ronfeldt, M. (2021). *Links among teacher preparation, retention, and teaching effectiveness*. National Academy of Education. <https://doi.org/10.31094/2021/3/1>

Truwit, M. (2023). *Increasing teacher preparedness through effective student teaching*. EdResearch for Action, Overview Brief #27: Teacher Preparation and Professional Learning.

