



Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann

INTO FOR STUDENTS

**A GUIDE TO SCHOOL-
BASED WORK**

INTRODUCTION

School-based work is one of the most important components of your teacher training course as it provides you with the opportunity to put into practice what will have been up to then untried theory. The elements of school-based work comprise daily prolonged contact with pupils of varying ages and ability ranges. Not only will you have the opportunity to obtain practical teaching experience but you will also be involved in all aspects of school life.

This guide from the INTO is designed to give you practical help and guidance, to supplement that available from your tutors and the teachers in the schools you visit.

IN SCHOOL

It is the responsibility of the student teacher to integrate as fully as possible into the life of the school to which he / she has been assigned always remembering you are a guest of the school. Your School-based work may afford you the opportunity to acquaint yourself with textbooks, facilities, audio-visual resources and organisation.

In all instances you should utilise the time available fully to participate in every possible aspect of the school while at the same time ensuring that you do so with the full knowledge and consent of the school principal and other teachers.

As part of your School-based work you should NEVER be asked to:

- ✓ Undertake supervision duties at break or lunchtime.**
- ✓ Take responsibility for the administration of first-aid.**
- ✓ Administer medicines.**
- ✓ Mark the main school register.**
- ✓ Cover when a permanent teacher is off sick or off for any other reason.**

It is very unlikely that you would be asked to do any of these things. If, however, you are concerned about the level of support you are receiving on your placement, then speak to your INTO School Representative, your tutor or INTO Northern Office.

SURVIVAL TIPS

The survival tips that follow could all be summed up by one message – “BE PREPARED!”

- ✓ On your initial visit to your placement school use the visit to meet the teacher(s) with whom you will be working and gather as much information as you can about the school and pupils/classes you will be teaching.
- ✓ Find out the school’s rules and routines e.g. times of sessions, break and lunchtimes, how teachers are addressed by pupils and parents.
- ✓ Ask what equipment and other resources will be available for your use.
- ✓ Ask for copies of the school’s code of conduct or behaviour / discipline policy, the school handbook or prospectus, equal opportunities policy and any plan of the school if it is a large or split site.
- ✓ Find out about your pupils, their individual needs and what work you will be expected to cover with them. Endeavour to learn pupils’ names quickly, always use their first names and adopt their pronunciation.

GENERAL CONDUCT

As a student teacher you should always bear in mind that you are a guest in the school. You should respect the authority of the principal and be prepared to co-operate fully with the teachers to whom you are assigned.

You should conform to the standards set by the school in terms of behaviour, dress and appearance.

ATTENDANCES AND ABSENCES

You should familiarise yourself with the school’s rules and be prepared to operate them. If you need to leave the school premises during school hours you should obtain the express permission of the principal. If you are unable to attend due to

illness or exceptional circumstances, you should inform the principal and your tutor/college as soon as possible.

CLASSROOM CONTROL

Good classroom control is a prerequisite for a good learning environment. The fear most commonly expressed by student teachers is that they will not be able to control their class. If you are apprehensive, don't worry, you are not alone.

In reality, classroom control is just another skill that you will gain with training and experience. This will not be achieved incidentally or accidentally. It will require preparation, consideration and persistence on your part. You should never hesitate to seek help and advice as to do so is not a sign of weakness. To pretend that no problems exist benefits no-one, neither you, the pupils concerned nor the other teachers in the school. The old adage still applies "It is easier to start by being firm (but fair) and to ease up later if appropriate."

THESE TIPS WILL HELP YOU STAY ON TOP:

- ✓ Have realistic expectations of your pupils.
- ✓ Be organised and methodical.
- ✓ Give clear instructions and check that everyone understands.
- ✓ Make sure you follow up any work you have set.
- ✓ If you need to correct any bad behaviour, make sure that it is the child's actions that you comment upon, not the child him / herself.
- ✓ Try to understand why an incident of poor behaviour has occurred and how you can prevent it in the future.
- ✓ Avoid labelling or targeting any one child for repeated sanctions.
- ✓ Make sanctions reasonable and avoid setting extra work as punishment / detention as this can convey the wrong

messages. Ensure that any sanctions are in line with school policy.

- ✓ If you want to impose a detention, always consult with the class teacher and make sure you follow school policy.
- ✓ Be aware of the school policy on the use of restraint (DE Circular 1999/9 Pastoral Care: Guidance on the Use of Reasonable Force to Restrain or Control Pupils). If you have to restrain a pupil, you should do so only to prevent harm to others or to the pupil him / herself, to prevent damage to property, or to restore order. Make a note of the incident and how you dealt with it. Tell the teacher responsible for the class. In all instances ensure that you inform the class teacher of any action you have taken. Corporal punishment is prohibited.
- ✓ If all else fails ask for help, either from the class teacher, the INTO School Representative or a trusted colleague. Remember, it does get easier and the Union is always available to provide advice and support.

IF PROBLEMS ARISE

- ✓ If there is an accident or injury in your class, seek immediate assistance from the class teacher. The incident should be recorded in the school's incident book. You should also inform your INTO School Representative.
- ✓ If you are confronted by an angry parent or feel threatened by a parent or pupil, try to remain calm. Where possible send for support. As a student teacher you should not be dealing with parents on your own. Make sure you tell the class teacher about the incident.
- ✓ Never leave the class unattended to take a badly behaved or disruptive pupil elsewhere. Instead, send for support from nearby.

- ✓ If a complaint is made about you, always seek advice from the INTO Representative immediately before speaking to anyone else about it. The INTO provides an unrivalled level of advice and support to members in difficulty.

It is very unlikely that any of these situations will occur on school placements. Following the basic rules of commonsense should see you successfully through your school placements and beyond.

Don't forget to thank the principal and staff for their time, support and guidance to you throughout your school-based work – you may be applying for a job in their school some day!

GENERAL ADVICE

Student teachers should always remember that school staffs are made up of individuals, each with their own likes, dislikes and sensibilities. As a guest in the school you should do nothing to cause upset. For example, if you take tea and coffee during your breaks an offer should be made to share the costs. Advice on such matters should be sought from the class teacher or your teacher tutor. Be careful whose mug you use!

CONCLUSION

This is a valuable experience for student teachers but it is up to you and your energy, enthusiasm and initiative to make it the best experience possible. Use the time wisely and learn all you can. Above all it is important that you remember to enjoy your School-based work!

The INTO has members in all types of schools in Northern Ireland and those members will always make the student teacher welcome within the school. They are available to provide help, advice and support while you are with them.

It is reassuring to know that as a student member of the INTO you have access to the very best professional support and legal protection.

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