

Some Practical Issues in Tutoring and Mentoring

The amount of support and guidance that student teachers receive in HEI and school will vary from course to course but there are some general principles which are worth considering when setting up a system that ensures they are encouraged to evaluate and reflect on their teaching and learning.

Student teachers will have tutors in both HEI and in their placement schools, the exact number will vary but there will be school and HEI based tutors for mathematics and, depending on the course, tutor(s) with responsibility for ensuring whole school issues are considered including pastoral care. The school based tutor with responsibility for whole school issues is likely to be a member of the school's senior management team who has responsibility for managing all aspects of ITE within school.

Tutoring Mathematics in the HEI

Student teachers are usually allocated to a HEI tutor for the duration of their course. Having direct contact with student teachers throughout the year, both individually and in small groups, allows progress to be reviewed, encourages issues to be raised and resolved whilst encouraging group cohesion and peer support.

Tutorials need to be fitted in at regular intervals so that reviews can take place according to events in the course timetable. It may be worth printing the schedule of tutorials and an outline agenda for each one in the Course Handbook. Different areas will assume importance as the year progresses.

Each tutorial (as a minimum) needs to cover:

- student teacher's personal agenda
- a review of progress against targets
- setting of revised targets

In addition, at the start of the course there needs to be an emphasis on:

- getting organised
- carrying out audits to establish training needs
- finalising an individualised training plan
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As the year goes by the focus will shift to:

- Assignments
- Teaching Practice
- QTS Standards

Towards the end the emphasis will move towards:

- reviewing school experience
- consolidating evidence
- dealing with final paperwork
- planning for the future

During each tutorial student teachers might find it helpful to take notes and then send a summary of what was discussed and agreed to their tutor by email.

In addition to the scheduled tutorials it may be useful to allocate a regular time (drop-in surgery) when tutors are likely to be available for ad hoc visits.

Early in the course a meeting at the HEI for school based tutors and student teachers can help to establish working relationships which are crucial to successful school placements.

Mathematics Mentoring / Tutoring In School

The role of the mathematics school based tutor is to take responsibility for the support, development and guidance (mentoring) of the student teacher during teaching practice. The structure of each practice will vary from course but certain aspects are likely to be similar and need organising in the same way. Departmental colleagues are also likely to work with the student teacher(s) and need to be familiar with the paperwork they have to complete, what expectations are realistic and when they need to raise alarm bells and how best to encourage critical reflection, offer constructive feedback and support.

The mathematics school based tutor is the person who best knows the student teacher's school based work and, in many courses, is the assessor of the student teacher against the QtT standards. Whilst most students make satisfactory progress, it is important that records are maintained which identify support and advice given, targets set and reviewed, progress made and that any causes for concern are registered with the HEI at the earliest possible opportunity.

The mathematics school based tutor is usually an experienced teacher committed to mentoring student teachers. In addition they may be Head of Mathematics, 2nd in Mathematics, an AST or Leading Mathematics Teacher. Ideally the school supports the mathematics school based tutor by providing sufficient time to allow a weekly meeting.

The mathematics school based tutor manages the student teacher's school experience: allocating an appropriate range of classes (both attainment and age), monitoring lesson planning and evaluation as well as providing guidance, support and challenge. Whilst student teachers need a range of experience it is not expected that they should have to work with 'difficult' classes without support. Similarly they should not be 'thrown in at the deep end', student teachers should assume responsibility for teaching as they are 'ready'.

Whichever classes student teachers are taking the class teachers are expected to observe their teaching and provide feedback. Prior to the start of the lesson the student teacher should brief the class teacher and give a copy of their lesson plan. After the lesson a follow-up discussion which explores positively:

- what did the pupils learn and how do you know?
- if you taught the lesson again what would you keep the same and what would you change?
- what will you do to follow up?

will help develop student teacher's skills of reflection and evaluation. If this isn't possible a few brief notes with a balance between things that went well and areas for development would be valuable. Different courses will have different expectations as to the number of formal observations completed each week, a minimum is likely to be one. These forms are best completed in discussion with the student teacher.

In addition to lesson observations and informal feedback in the staff-room, playground and corridors it is essential that each student teacher has a fixed, regular and formal meeting with their school based tutor every week to review progress and discuss teaching issues. When there is more than one student teacher in a department the quality of discussion in the weekly meeting is likely to be enhanced. However some individual time also needs to be found for each student teacher.

In the weekly meeting progress should be reviewed against targets and new targets set as appropriate. It is important not to overload students with too much too soon. A few clear targets are preferable to a wide range of woolly ones. In the initial months of the course it helps if discussion topics mirror those being undertaken by the student teacher in their HEI based studies, and ways are found of incorporating ideas into their teaching. A record of the meeting should be made. In many courses this is the student teacher's responsibility but the school based mentor may wish to retain a copy for their records.

HEI Based Tutor Visits During School Experience

The number of visits from the HEI based tutor will depend on the course and the student teacher's progress. The main purpose is moderation: is the standard being achieved by the student teacher commensurate with student teachers in other schools at the same stage of the course? In order to do this the HEI based tutor checks student progress by observing a lesson, discussing the lesson with the student teacher and scrutinising the student teacher's files. Many HEI tutors will do this with the mathematics school based tutor. Where this isn't possible s/he will have a conversation with the school based tutor to confirm what has been noted from the lesson observation and files, ensure the protocols are understood and deal with any issues (where possible).

The student teacher needs to be clear about the purpose of the visit and what documentation is required. The lesson plan needs to be available before the lesson and some find it helpful to leave it with school reception in order that the HEI based tutor can collect it on arrival. A written record of the lesson observation and subsequent conversation needs to be completed for both the student teacher's and tutors' records.

Many student teachers are anxious about visits from their HEI based tutor, despite the fact that it is the school based tutor who makes the recommendation about suitability for teaching and successful completion of the school placement. Very occasionally the HEI based tutor may feel that the school's recommendations are not wholly justified. Two key questions are: what does the student teacher think/feel? what is the evidence base? If there are concerns about a student teacher's progress which the school doesn't share it is important to raise these with the programme leader (or equivalent) and arrange for a further visit (possibly by someone who isn't involved).