

# SAFETY AND WELLBEING GUIDANCE FOR PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS ON PLACEMENT DURING CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Student placements should continue during coronavirus (COVID-19) where safe and possible. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers and early childhood education and care (ECEC) services are encouraged to implement mechanisms to ensure students adhere to placement protocols, their mentor teachers' directions, and the detailed [health and safety advice](#) for early childhood services. This detailed advice has been developed with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), in line with Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) guidance.

The Department considers pre-service teachers are equivalent to staff who are delivering or supporting essential services and operations.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Are service providers required to take students on placements at the moment?**

While recognising the existing challenging circumstances due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, student placements in early childhood services can continue where this is safe and possible. Disruption to placements has an impact on individual students and the supply of new graduates into the early childhood education sector to work in services in the future.

While the Department of Education and Training (the Department) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) support the continuation of ITE placements, it is understandable that some service providers may not be able to support student placements at this time.

In line with placement protocols, mentor teachers' directions, and the [health and safety advice](#) we have developed with DHHS, placements should resume where possible. The Department considers pre-service teachers as equivalent to staff who are delivering or supporting essential services and operations.

### **Why is this important?**

Victoria's future early childhood teaching workforce is dependent on current ITE students maintaining access to a range of opportunities to build capabilities essential to teaching in early childhood. Students' timely graduation and registration is critical to their immediate opportunities for employment, but also to services' future workforce sustainability.

ITE student placements are an integral part of early childhood education and we are grateful that many early childhood services enable these students to gain vital experience on the job while working towards becoming early childhood teachers.

### **What measures should services put in place to ensure safety of students, children and staff? What requirements are suggested for pre-service teachers to fulfil before entering a service on placement?**

To support the safety and wellbeing of educators, teachers, children and families, it is recommended that all pre-service teachers on placements at ECEC services adhere to the following advice.

Pre-service teachers should:

- Read and abide by the DHHS guidance for children and staff to maintain good health and hygiene. Information on this can be found in the [physical distancing and transmission reduction fact sheet](#). Key information includes:
  - All staff and children who are unwell must remain at home.
  - Hand hygiene, cough etiquette and environmental cleaning and disinfection are the most effective way to reduce transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).
- Indicate if they have had a whooping cough, measles, mumps, rubella and annual flu vaccination. Pre-service teachers are encouraged to provide proof of any vaccinations on their first visit to the ECEC service.
- Familiarise themselves with the ECEC service's placement practice documents, and advice provided from ITE providers.
- Have a good understanding of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) publication [Staying healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services](#).

### Do students have to complete all their placement days?

Completing an accredited program of study requires completion of all approved activities (including professional placement).

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority's (ACECQA) agreed modification to supervised professional experience requirements for **final year** Early Childhood Teacher (ECT) students in 2020 are that:

- Undergraduate ECT programs must include at least 30 days of supervised professional experience in early childhood settings, including a minimum of 10 days with children aged birth to under three-years (0-35 months).
- Postgraduate ECT programs must include at least 20 days of supervised professional experience in early childhood settings, including a minimum of 10 days with children aged birth to under three-years (0-35 months).

These regulatory measures are temporary and have been applied as a result of matters arising from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. ITE providers are able to implement the regulatory measures according to their context and to the needs of their pre-service teachers on a case-by-case basis.

For combined early childhood and primary ITE programs, this must include at least 45 days in a school setting (primary context, see [Victorian Institute of Teaching \(VIT\) website](#)) and must meet [ACECQA's minimum requirements](#) of supervised professional experience in early childhood settings (in line with the above).

### FURTHER INFORMATION

The Department has established a dedicated coronavirus (COVID-19) advice line for early childhood staff. You can call the advice line during business hours on 1800 338 663 should you have further questions regarding safety and wellbeing and guidance regarding pre-service teachers on placements.

If you have further questions or require assistance regarding preparation of PSTs for placements and procedures, you can reach out to the relevant ITE provider's placement experience officers for help.