

Reflection Prompts for Leaders of Professional Learning: Placement-based learning – ITE

Introduction

These reflection prompts are designed to help leaders of professional development think critically about how practicum¹ can be embedded within a wider PD strategy. They draw on the same research base featured in the summary document and reflect common messages: practicum is most effective when it is in-person, well-structured, relational, and aligned to broader school and trust priorities.

In addition to the research evidence, these prompts are shaped by the Education Endowment Foundation's [A School's Guide to Implementation \(2024\)](#). They reflect the guidance around adopting behaviours that drive effective implementation, attending to contextual factors that influence success, and following a structured but flexible process. The prompts are informed by the EEF's four implementation phases - Explore, Prepare, Deliver, and Sustain - to provide a manageable and sequenced approach.

The prompts are not exhaustive, but they can support strategic planning, help leaders strengthen practice-based professional learning, and guide reflection as you consider how practicum might form part of your approach to teacher development.

Phase 1: Strategic Alignment & Awareness

- What are the most pressing teacher development challenges in our context (e.g. building adaptive expertise, strengthening professional identity, supporting early career teachers), and what evidence or perspectives have helped us identify these?
- How well do our current professional learning approaches provide opportunities for teachers to practise, rehearse, and reflect in authentic classroom settings?
- Why is practicum a priority now, and how does it connect to wider school or trust strategies (e.g. improving teaching quality, embedding coaching cycles, supporting retention)?
- What evidence have we used to identify practicum as the most appropriate lever for teacher learning?
- How do we define practicum in our context (are we referring to ITE placements, school-led CPD, or both) and have we clarified what this means for our staff?

¹ Practicum is the structured, school-based element of **professional development where teachers and trainees refine their expertise through direct** classroom experience. **It may also be understood as part of a wider system, where programme structures, curriculum frameworks, and daily tasks are aligned to connect theory and practice.** It is most often linked to initial teacher education (ITE) but is also used to describe high-quality professional development in schools and trusts.

- What risks or assumptions do we need to surface (e.g. treating observation as sufficient without rehearsal and feedback; framing practicum mainly as assessment rather than growth)?
- How will we communicate the purpose and benefits of practicum clearly to staff, governors, and external partners?

Phase 2: Design & Preparation

- What specific teaching skills, professional judgements, or aspects of teacher identity are we aiming to develop through practicum, and how will we see evidence of that growth?
- What practicum model best fits our context (e.g. ITE-style staged progression, peer observation and rehearsal, team teaching, Lesson Study), and how will we adapt it for different staff groups?
- How will the design ensure that practice is rehearsed, feedback is timely, and reflection is built into the cycle, rather than treating practicum as observation alone?
- What structures (e.g. protected time, mentoring, collaborative analysis of practice) will support sustained engagement?
- How will practicum be embedded across our wider CPD strategy, rather than standing as a one-off exercise or compliance task?
- What adaptations will be needed across different phases or roles (e.g. early career teachers, subject leaders, teaching assistants, early years staff)?
- How will we involve those closest to the work (teachers, mentors, and even pupils) in shaping, testing, and reviewing our practicum approach?
- How will we plan to monitor and review teacher behaviours, classroom practice, and the longer-term impact on staff culture and pupil experience?

Phase 3: Launch & Communication

- How will we introduce practicum in a way that values existing PD efforts while signalling a shift towards deeper, practice-based learning?
- What messages will help staff see practicum as integral to improving teaching, not as an extra requirement or add-on?
- How will we avoid framing practicum as assessment or compliance, and instead communicate it as a developmental, practice-driven approach?
- What examples, case studies, or teacher experiences can we share to show why practicum matters and how it benefits both staff and pupils?
- How will we prepare staff for honest reflection, moving beyond surface-level confidence to genuine professional growth?
- How will we equip leaders and mentors to model effective practicum behaviours, for example: modelling practice, giving timely feedback, and engaging in joint problem-solving?
- How will we manage resistance constructively and empathetically (e.g. perceptions of extra workload, scepticism about relevance, or memories of overly evaluative observation)?

Phase 4: Evaluation & Iteration

- What indicators will show whether practicum is improving teaching quality, professional identity, and pupil experience?

- How will we avoid relying only on teacher self-reports and instead track real classroom change (e.g. lesson observations, rehearsal records, pupil engagement data)?
- What role will pupil feedback or experience data play in evaluating the impact of practicum on learning and relationships?
- How will we capture both short-term shifts (e.g. use of specific teaching strategies, quality of feedback) and longer-term patterns (e.g. adaptive expertise, confidence, staff culture)?
- What opportunities will we create for staff to revisit, reflect on, and refine their practice over time, rather than treating practicum as a one-off cycle?
- How will we engage staff honestly in evaluating what's working and what needs to change, without creating a sense of blame or surveillance?
- How will we support mentors, facilitators, and PD leads to keep improving their own design and delivery of practicum-based learning?

Phase 5: Scaling & Embedding

- Before continuing or scaling, what have we learned about what makes practicum effective here — and where are the risks of drift, superficial use, or treating it as compliance?
- How can we embed practicum principles into core school systems (e.g. curriculum planning, appraisal, coaching cycles) so they become part of everyday practice rather than a standalone activity?
- How will we grow internal expertise (e.g. skilled mentors, peer facilitators, subject leads) to reduce dependency on external partners or university supervisors?
- How will we ensure practicum continues to reflect diverse staff and pupil needs, rather than defaulting to a single fixed model?
- What structures (e.g. rehearsal routines, lesson study groups, subject networks) will help deepen and spread practicum-based learning across the school or trust?
- How will we phase any scale-up so that depth, fidelity, and relevance are protected while reach is expanded?