



Welcome to SecEd's autumn NQT special edition. The next eight pages offer a range of advice to support NQTs as they approach the end of their first term. To get us started, **Chris Keates** explains the support and entitlements that all NQTs should be receiving

# Supporting our NQTs

growing and supporting new teachers and, most importantly, recognise that they need support, encouragement and working conditions which enable them to gain appropriate experience in their first school placement.

Many NQTs are positive about the support they receive during their induction year, but unfortunately not all have positive experiences. Some schools fail to provide the statutory entitlements.

Too many NQTs face excessive classroom observation with no feedback or constructive comment and others are allocated classes of pupils who are known to exhibit extremely challenging behaviour, even with the most experienced of teachers.

It is important that these concerns are raised and addressed at the earliest possible stage. For example, supportive and developmental observation, which includes meeting with the observer prior to the lesson to discuss the focus of the observation and receiving verbal and written feedback afterwards which highlights all the positives observed and constructively details the areas for development can make an enormous difference to a successful outcome to induction. But it is the quality, not quantity, of classroom observation which is important.

The NASUWT has a wealth of experience in supporting successfully NQTs in addressing all these issues of concern. But by far the most overwhelming concern raised with the NASUWT is excessive workload. Bureaucratic marking and assessment policies, data-driven target-setting and administrative burdens are the challenge for even the most experienced of teachers.

I am proud that the NASUWT has been the teachers' union which has moved to address this through our campaign to empower teachers to resist these unprofessional impositions which do nothing to enhance teaching and learning.

I am also pleased that as a result of the NASUWT presenting ministers with our detailed research on workload, combined with our action and lobbying, we secured Ofsted clarification guidance which dispels the myth peddled in too many schools that Ofsted requires a specific type of lesson planning and marking system.

The NASUWT was also instrumental in forcing the Department for Education (DfE) to recognise the problem of excessive workload. The DfE established working parties to look at lesson planning, marking and data collection and the reports from these review groups contain many useful recommendations that can be used to challenge unacceptable workload-intensive practices in schools – these reports should be on every teacher's reading list.

Newly qualified and indeed experienced teachers should be aware that triple marking is not required and there is no evidence that it aids pupil progress or raises standards. There are no requirements for marking of a particular type or volume.

There is no need to plan within an inch of your



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life. It is planned lessons, not lesson plans that are required. Weekly or daily plans should not be a routine expectation. Longer term planning should start from schemes of work provided by schools, not from blank sheets of paper. There is no requirement for lesson observations to be graded. If Ofsted no longer grades lessons, no school should either.

Evidence makes clear that assessment burdens are one of the biggest causes of excessive workload, particularly as schools have sought to address the removal of national curriculum levels.

Every teacher knows that good assessment is essential for effective teaching and learning. However, this should not lead to bureaucratic and wasteful tracking and record-keeping requirements that distract teachers from concentrating on teaching. This is why the DfE's review groups were clear that formative assessments are for the teacher to support the pupil, not to provide reporting for schools. Formative assessment data should not be collected. On summative data, the review group was clear that such data should not be collected more than three times per-pupil, per-year.

Requirements to produce mountains of lesson plans, "deep mark" every piece of work, constantly collect, analyse and input data should therefore be challenged.

So whatever the issue, whether it is NQTs facing the abuse of temporary contracts to see how a new recruit "turns out", barriers to meeting the requirements to complete induction, lack of access to training, expectations to teach outside specialisms or age ranges, pupil indiscipline or flouting of pay and conditions entitlements, the NASUWT is here to assist, providing individual confidential advice and professional representation.

The NASUWT has an extensive network of support for new teachers and provides comprehensive advice and guidance. Our NQT induction planner, which is free to members, guides NQTs through the induction year giving useful prompts, tips and advice. This is complemented by a programme of professional seminars for NQTs throughout their induction year.

At a time when there is a crisis in teacher supply, employers and governments cannot afford to fail to nurture the new talent in the profession. It is a precious resource.

Schools should recognise how valuable NQTs are and ensure that their professional needs are met. **SecEd**

• *Chris Keates is general secretary of the NASUWT. Visit [www.nasuwat.org.uk](http://www.nasuwat.org.uk)*

**A**s the end of term edges closer, NQTs are approaching this first key milestone in their induction year. On the journey so far there will have been the rewarding highs of being instrumental in children and young people making progress, demonstrating why teaching is one of the best and most satisfying of the professions. There will also have been the growing realisation of the intense demands and challenges of teaching.

The experience NQTs have in this first and crucial induction year is extremely important and it is for this reason that successive governments have recognised the need to put statutory provisions in place which are specifically designed to ensure that the induction year provides a structured and supported introduction into the profession. These provisions include:

- A reduction in timetabled teaching, in addition to the contractual entitlement of a minimum of 10 per cent guaranteed planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time.
- Teaching only the age range or subject for which they have been trained.
- An induction tutor or mentor.
- Not routinely to have to teach classes or children with especially challenging discipline problems.
- Teaching the same class(es) on a regular basis to establish a routine and a rapport with pupils.
- Receiving regular feedback and support on progress.
- The right to be given early warning of any perceived problems or difficulties with progress.
- Professional and timely communication about judgements on performance.

These induction entitlements are designed to continue the process of developing the skills and expertise needed to become a great teacher.

The experience in this first and important year should be one where good schools will harness, use effectively and celebrate the enthusiasm, energy, commitment, new ideas and talent that NQTs bring to the role.

The best schools recognise the importance of

Most NQTs will have doubts and stresses as they face the challenge of their first year in teaching. **Julian Stanley** offers some reassurance and some tips to help you survive

**T**here's no doubt that being an NQT is tough. When you're in the eye of the storm, it can feel like you'll never emerge on the other side – but hang in there!

First, if you feeling overwhelmed, you are certainly not alone. Talking to someone about your concerns can make a very real difference and there is plenty of support out there. We take around 30,000 calls to our free, confidential helpline every year and many of these are from NQTs. Our trained counsellors are here to listen and to support you 24/7. It is worth knowing that, from our experience, many of the issues you are grappling with are also issues facing most if not all of your peers. It really will get better as time goes on.

Dr Sara Bubb, senior lecturer at the UCL Institute of Education, reassures NQTs in a number of helpful short films on her website, that: "It will get worse before it gets better, but it really will get better."

After completing training feeling optimistic, she says NQTs' "idealism quickly turns to reality". New teachers commonly start on a high before confidence and positive feeling drops quite dramatically as they grapple with a heavy workload and challenging student behaviour in what is a very demanding introduction to your career.

But as Dr Bubb asks: "How many people fail the year? Is it a significant risk? No, it isn't. The whole system is set up to help you through a successful induction." The key is not to expect to be perfect – and to talk; as one helpline caller said: "It made me calmer and able to think more clearly."

## Knowing how and when to say 'no'

Both NQTs and more experienced teachers can find it difficult to say "no". You are likely to want to impress your employer and your colleagues and likely to be saying "yes" to everything asked of you, while trying to manage a complex workload. Many of the NQTs we help say they feel uncomfortable saying no because they don't want to disappoint others or don't want to be seen as being uncooperative, particularly in a new school.

But learning to manage and better protect your time from the outset of your career will pay dividends for your future. Effective communication is essential whether dealing with colleagues, school leaders or parents. It is first important to understand what your job description entails and then set realistic expectations of what you can and cannot do.

This will have benefits for everyone. You will feel better able to cope and others will be clear about what you are able to do – who wants to be the person who over-promises and then under-delivers?

Think too about how you can negotiate what you are being asked to do and try to offer alternative options. Could it be something you could do with someone else? Could there be someone you can recommend to work with on the task? Responses when asked to do something extra could include: "Thank you for considering me. I'll need to check my diary before I commit." Or "I appreciate you asking me. I'll need to think about it and respond to you when I have time."

Try to demonstrate positive communication skills: be aware of your body language, maintain eye contact and a neutral posture; avoid showing anger or disdain in your

# NQTs: You are not alone!

body language, tone or words; paraphrase statements made by others to show your understanding of their request. An easy rule of thumb is that "saying no to something allows you to say yes to something else".

## Behaviour management

Another common frustration for NQTs in particular (but

also for teachers at any stage of their career) is feeling under-prepared to manage poor behaviour. If approaches you are already using aren't working, try something new.

Our popular download *Managing Pupil Behaviour* is a practical guide, full of tips and advice to address disruptive behaviour. An issue for many, poor behaviour can be a barrier to learning and can easily threaten the health and wellbeing of teachers. Any strategy you choose to adopt needs to be clear and robust. A few key things to remember are: whatever the age of your students, create rules and express them positively. It shouldn't just be a list of don'ts. Remind your classes of any relevant rules before a potentially disruptive activity or if you are aware of "something brewing". This kind of response can drastically reduce inappropriate behaviour. Use your body language and tone of voice to clearly assert your dominance. Non-verbal "looks" can be very powerful.

Above all else, don't be too hard on yourself. You can't possibly get it all right from the start. Get one thing right before moving onto something else, and as you prepare for your first end-of-term break, take stock and congratulate yourself on getting here! **SecEd**

• *Julian Stanley is chief executive of Education Support Partnership.*

## Further information

- Contact the Education Support Partnership via [www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk](http://www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk) or you can speak to a trained counsellor on their free helpline: 08000 562 561.
- The free guide *Managing Pupil Behaviour* is among those that can be downloaded via <http://bit.ly/2g2ESFP>
- Dr Sara Bubb's website: [www.sarabubb.org](http://www.sarabubb.org)

## Ten tips from Anna (an NQT last year)

- 1 Be organised: have files and folders ready at the start of each term, whether physical or on a memory stick.
- 2 Build your network and workplace knowledge: go to the staffroom and meet other teachers. It is important to get to know your school/colleagues.
- 3 Look after your wellbeing: don't stop outside interests outside work. Hobbies and clubs are really important for retaining your sense of self.
- 4 Diet: eat well.
- 5 Exercise: get some wherever you can.
- 6 Sleep! Aim for a really early night at least once a week.
- 7 Share: bounce your ideas off other teachers and sound out how they fit with a school's policies; but never be afraid to try your own things out.
- 8 Be patient: it takes time to see results in the classroom. Be consistent with one approach and give it a while before changing. Some things will work, some won't.
- 9 Start interventions you can see are needed as soon as you can.
- 10 Last but by no means least: always ask when unsure about something – this is the year for consolidation!



With so many experienced teachers around you, the one thing that every NQT should do is ask for advice whenever they get the chance. Senior leader **Giselle Hobbs** offers five essential pieces of advice to new teachers everywhere

**R**ows of chairs are tilted forward, their occupants gazing adoringly up at you with scintillated smiles and rounded, curious eyes, as you wax lyrical about your favourite topic. Rapt, the students hang on every word, making frantic notes in their orderly, well-presented books. Sighing as the bell rings, they calmly pack up and leave, thanking you for the fantastic lesson as they trot out to break

This is what I imagined teaching would be like. I learnt rather quickly this was a fantasy.

My own experience as a student attending an independent girls' school (where there was no such thing as detention!) did not prepare me for the reality of teaching in a mixed comprehensive in modern Britain.

Students who disrupt, truant, bully, don't own pens, have tantrums and draw rather accurate drawings of the human anatomy onto any available surface, were a shock. It was enough to have me wondering if I'd made a terrible career mistake.

Did I really want to spend the rest of my life red-faced and yelling? Of course not, but I was committed to helping children and knew I had to find a better way of doing it. So I looked at what others around me were doing, asked colleagues, read books, and most usefully, went into a lot of lessons.

**‘I was unwittingly giving off the signal that ‘everyone knows this’ and therefore they felt embarrassed to let me know that they were struggling’**

### 1 Develop a teacher persona

When you're a teacher, you have to find a balance between being yourself and playing a role. Students will see through you if you act. I found I needed to "dial up" and exaggerate my tone – think of it as the difference between acting for film (camera up close) and acting for theatre (you've got to reach the back row!).

You might say: "Excuse me Fred, I'd really appreciate it if you wouldn't mind taking your seat please. It's just that the lesson has begun."

Putting on your teacher persona you need to be direct and firm but without being rude: "Fred, sit down. We need to start the lesson." Followed by a "thank you".

Students like and respect you if you are firm, fair, and get on with the lesson. I do not believe that old adage "don't smile until Christmas", but you need to show that you are assertive and in control. Seeing you lose control is fun for some students. Don't. Remain calm and set the sanction.

### 2 Challenge the behaviour; forgive the individual

I have been on the receiving end of my fair share of insults – about my appearance, ability to teach, personality, etc – and it is sometimes very difficult to cope with emotionally.

However, if you shut down and effectively decide never to forgive that student, they will be a thorn in your side for the rest of the year. Sanction the behaviour of course, but then give the child a fresh start next lesson.

When I started teaching a class who had been taught by a supply teacher for almost a year, I wasn't surprised to find the students were completely disengaged. One boy was particularly unresponsive, and expected me to politely ignore him while he played computer games in lesson.



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One day, I got fed up and lost my temper with him. The boy responded in kind by swearing and storming out of the class, which resulted in him receiving in a lengthy sanction.

I was really annoyed, but tried to put myself in his shoes. I visited him in our internal seclusion room and spoke to him without the rest of the students as an audience.

I was really honest, letting him know that I understood why he felt let down but that I saw capability and potential in him, and that I wasn't prepared to let him give up on himself.

In a moment of honesty rare for most teenaged boys, he explained that he felt like he would fail no matter how much effort he put in, so what was the point?

I asked him if we could give things another try and although he was reluctant, we worked together on a piece of writing and it turned out really well. I praised his efforts and called his home too; mum was thrilled to hear that he had done so well – especially after his blow-up!

Next lesson, I used a section of his work as an exemplar for the rest of the class, and he beamed with pride. That was the start of year 11; he went on to achieve five levels of progress at GCSE, and continued very successfully on to A level study in my subject. He now believes in himself, which makes the job worth it for me.

Students are not just learning maths at school; they are learning how to behave, and how to relate to other people, and sometimes this means giving them a second, third and even a fourth chance.

If you give a student a clean slate, often they will surprise you for the better. Sometimes they will even say sorry – and mean it.

### 3 Pitch work at the right level

In my very first half-term of teaching, I taught an awfully tough year 11 class who left me in tears. No matter how many different ways I tried to engage the students, they would just laugh, joke and roll their eyes at me – or worse still just sit there doing nothing.

My very wise head of department told me something sensible: students who misbehave in your classroom aren't trying to create a problem, they're trying to solve one. This is probably the most helpful thing I have ever been taught as a teacher.

If a student would rather jump out the window than stay in your English lesson, perhaps they're terrified that you will ask them to read aloud, and classmates will mock their lack of fluency. Issues such as this can be solved over time, but they take some unpicking. If you only take an authoritative approach, all you will achieve is reluctant compliance.

In my year 11 class, some investigation found that I was pitching the work way too high, and the students had no idea how to approach the tasks I was setting.

I was unwittingly giving off the signal that "everyone knows this" and therefore they felt embarrassed to let me know that they were struggling. Once I had "repitched" the work to their level and broke the tasks down, the students became more engaged and their behaviour in lessons improved.

To ensure your class understands the task at hand, ask one of them to explain it back to you, and you will find out if anyone wasn't listening or needs further guidance. Signs of low-level disruption are signs that you might need to intervene, remodel, or break a task down more clearly.

### 4 Break down barriers with your toughest students

To ensure every child has a bright future, you need to accept that some of those who need us most will fight tooth and nail against taking the help, because you can't fail if you don't try.

One of the most important struggles a teacher has to overcome is to reach those students who see no value in school. It is our job to help these students believe in themselves so they can realise their aspirations (which they mistakenly believe are embarrassing or ridiculous) and have faith in their own abilities.

If you want to crack your toughest nuts, you need to provide your students with consistent and positive messages about aspirations, opportunities outside the local community, and success. Using role models of all types can really inspire students.

Rewarding students with points if they answer questions in a class quiz correctly is a good way to encourage reluctant students to engage. These points give them an excuse to try, which keeps their reputation with their peers intact, but builds a habit of positive behaviour during lessons. Reward points are free; use them freely!

**‘Students are not just learning maths at school; they are learning how to behave, and how to relate to other people, and sometimes this means giving them a second, third and even a fourth chance’**

### 5 And finally...

Remember the moral purpose. Teaching isn't always going to be easy and you won't necessarily be thanked for your efforts but all teachers want their students to have the tools they need to achieve their goals.

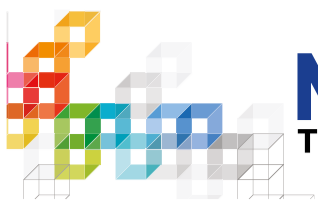
There is no one magical solution – you are going to need to try a lot of different strategies until you find the ones which work best for you. The key is – keep trying!

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• *Giselle Hobbs is the assistant principal at the Stockwood Park Academy in Luton, where she teaches English and media. She was a member of the Future Leaders leadership development programme in 2015.*

### Ambition School Leadership

The Future Leaders programme is one of the many programmes for leaders at all levels offered by Ambition School Leadership, a new charity following the merger of the Future Leaders Trust and Teaching Leaders. The two have joined together to offer a clear pathway for leaders at all levels, from middle leadership to multi-academy trust CEO. Find out more at [www.ambitionschoolleadership.org.uk/programmes](http://www.ambitionschoolleadership.org.uk/programmes)



There are six key 'conditions for learning' that teachers must work to develop in their classrooms and with their students. **Matt Bromley** explains...



# The conditions for learning

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**O**ccasionally, on my teacher-training courses and when the mood takes me, I ask colleagues to draw a picture of something familiar, something a child might doodle. A boat. A car. A desert island. A house.

I give them five minutes and ask them to work alone and in silence.

When the five minutes are up, I ask them to swap their drawings with the person sitting next to them so that they can peer-assess their artwork. At this point I reveal the assessment criteria.

If I had asked colleagues to draw a house, say, I might inform them that if they have included a front door, their neighbour can award them five points. If they have drawn a path leading up to that front door, they can have a further five points. If they have five or more windows, each with curtains, they can add another five marks. A chimney with two chimney pots gets them another five; a garage, five points; a driveway with a car parked on it, five points; and so on.

Trainees then calculate their partner's total score and equate this to a grade before handing it back. It is rare – unheard of, in fact – for anyone to get an A or a B. More often than not, colleagues get an E or an F.

Having shared the group's grades – in a deliberately public, humiliating manner – we discuss how this makes people feel and, invariably, trainees tell me they feel upset that their hard work and creativity has not been recognised.

Some say they feel angry and cheated because they were given a vague task and yet the criteria against which their work was assessed was specific and arbitrary. Others say they feel dejected and demotivated, unwilling now to dedicate any real effort to the next task because of the unfairness of the first. This inevitably leads us to the following conclusions...

**Once all six of these conditions for learning are in place, students will not only be able to learn but will also be able to transfer their learning from one context to another**

## Learning objectives

We agree that learning objectives and task instructions must be specific and that the objectives and the assessment criteria must correspond.

We also agree that the assessment criteria must be shared with students before they embark on the task and that, ideally, students should be involved in agreeing that success criteria.

For this task, for example, I could have engaged colleagues in a discussion about the features they would expect to find on an effective drawing of a house.

Such a discussion would not only have made it clearer how students would eventually be judged – therefore, ensuring greater chances of success and mitigating against feelings of unfairness and arbitrariness – but would also have ensured that students took ownership of the task and had a vested interest in completing it to the best of their abilities.

We also agree that the assessment criteria should allow for a degree of creativity and flair, and not be too prescriptive.

And, finally, we agree that feedback should be formative, focused on what students need to do to improve (your drawing was creative and had many good features but, next time, consider including ... for example); rather than summative and final (you got 20 out of 40, that's a grade E which isn't very good).

In short, we decide that it is important to share the "bigger picture" with students, to make explicit what they are learning, why they are learning it, and what success looks like.

## Practice and preparation

Next I ask trainees to think of something they are good at and to think about how they became good at it. I then ask them how they know they are good at it – on what evidence is their judgement based?

We decide that most people become good at things through practice, by learning from their mistakes, by experimenting.

People learn best when they engage in a process of trial and error and when they repeat their actions several times, making incremental improvements each time. After all, as the Danish nuclear physicist Niels Bohr once said: "(An expert is) someone who has made all the mistakes which it is possible to make in a very narrow field."

My colleagues and I also conclude that most people know they have a right to feel positive about their achievements because of evidence given in the form of feedback, particularly when it comes packaged as praise, and also as a result of receiving a reward for doing well.

People also know that they can feel positive about their achievements when they are asked to help others achieve the same end-goal and when they are able to see the results of their labours for themselves.

Conversely, I ask delegates to think of something they are not very good at and to consider why – what went wrong when they were trying to learn this thing and who, if anyone, was to blame? I then ask them to think about something they are good at now but didn't initially want to learn. What kept them going in lieu of motivation?

My colleagues and I conclude that, when learning fails, it is usually because the learner did not engage in a sufficient amount of practice, did not work hard enough or lacked focus. Perhaps the feedback the learner received was poor or else they did not act upon it, or at any rate did not act upon it in a timely manner. Perhaps the communication between the teacher and the learner was poor.

More often than not, though, learning fails when the learner lacks sufficient motivation, when they simply aren't interested in learning the thing being taught because it is not personally meaningful to them. So what, I ask, in the absence of motivation – when students do not have the want to learn – keeps students going until they succeed?

My colleagues and I usually conclude that it must be the need to learn – having a rationale, a necessity to learn, and therefore taking ownership of the learning – that keeps people going and helps them to overcome their lack of intrinsic motivation to succeed.

Finally, I ask colleagues to think of a time they have helped someone – ideally not a student in a school setting, but perhaps a friend or family

member – to learn something. To what extent, I ask them, did they understand the subject better once they had taught it to someone else? And did assessing that person's learning help them to understand the subject even more deeply?

Our subsequent discussions usually conclude that by teaching something to a third party we learn more about it ourselves because the act of teaching enables us to gain feedback and make better sense of a topic.

Teaching is also a form of learning by doing, of learning through practice. The fact we have to teach something to someone else also addresses the need to learn it (we have to learn it in order to teach it to someone else, after all) and we confront the want to learn all the time we are teaching – or indeed the lack of motivation.

When we prepare to teach something, we also develop pedagogical content knowledge (to complement our existing content knowledge). In other words, we learn to pre-empt students' questions and misconceptions, and we learn how to explain complex concepts in a way that makes sense to students.

Once we have taught something and we assess our students' learning to see if we have been successful, we learn it for ourselves even more deeply because we discover all the mistakes people can make and we discover all the different ways in which students can make sense of a topic. In short, we gain lots of feedback about how to teach the topic next time. Assessing someone's learning is also another means of learning by doing. And assessing someone else's learning forces us to define and redefine the standards of students' achievements.

Piecing all of these discussions together, and reminding my teacher-training colleagues of the initial task whereby they drew a picture of a house without knowing the criteria on which their pictures would eventually be assessed, I share with them what I term "the conditions for learning" – in other words, the state of affairs that must exist in order for our students to be able to learn effectively.

There are, to my mind, six conditions which must be in place in our classrooms in order for learning to happen. These are:

- 1 Intrinsic motivation.
- 2 Purpose.
- 3 Practice.
- 4 Feedback.
- 5 Metacognition.
- 6 Assessment.

Let's take a look at each of these six "conditions for learning" in turn...

## Intrinsic motivation

In order to create the conditions for students to

learn, we need to establish their want to learn – we need them to be motivated to learn. This involves them understanding why it matters that they learn what we intend to teach them.

## Purpose

In order to create the right conditions for students to learn, we need to establish their need to learn – we need them to have clear targets and to know why they need to learn what we intend to teach them and how they will use that learning later.

## Practice

In order to create the conditions for students to learn, we need to ensure they are afforded opportunities to learn by doing, and to learn from their mistakes (what we call "the open loop").

## Feedback

In order to create the conditions for students to learn, we need to ensure they receive – and produce – information about what they have mastered and what they still need to practise.

## Metacognition

In order to create the conditions for students to learn, we need to ensure that they are afforded opportunities to explain key concepts to each other and learn by teaching, thereby taking ownership of their own and each other's learning. In practice, this means that students need opportunities in lessons to self-monitor, self-assess, and self-adjust their work, individually and collectively, as the work progresses.

## Assessment

In order to create the conditions for students to learn, we need to involve them in making judgements about their own and other's achievements against specific and explicit learning outcomes.

## Conclusion

Once all six of these conditions for learning are in place, students will not only be able to learn but will also be able to transfer their learning from one context to another – which, I would argue, is the measure of true learning.

• *Matt Bromley is an experienced education leader, writer, consultant, speaker and trainer. He is the author of several books for teachers including Leadership for Learning and Teach. His latest book, Making Key Stage 3 Count, is available now. You can find out more about him and read his blog at [www.bromleyeducation.co.uk](http://www.bromleyeducation.co.uk). Follow @mj\_bromley. To read his previous best practice content for SecEd, visit <http://bit.ly/1Uobmsl>*



It is no secret that teaching is a stressful profession and learning to handle the pressure will be key to a successful and long career at the chalkface. **Dr Stephanie Thornton** offers some advice

# Handling the stress

only a hazard for the individual's mental and physical health, but a threat to the success of our school system. A stressed and distressed teacher is not the best for pupils – and such distress can affect the young. The rapid turnover of staff undermines continuity and the development of expertise.

In an ideal world, headteachers would be free (and have the extra staff and resources) to reduce the burden of work on individuals, to ensure that line managers addressed the audit processes in wholly sensitive and constructive ways, and to build a culture that enables teachers to share worries and concerns without feeling judged or embarrassed, ensuring access to emotional as well as practical support.

Alas, this is not easy and learning to manage one's own stress is still a vital survival skill for any teacher. But how does one manage stress more effectively?

## Identify the problem

Surprisingly, it is easy to fail to recognise when stress first starts to get out of control. Any demanding task calls forth adrenaline, a heightened activity. And often, the resulting energy generates a sort of joy. It is when that joy begins to slip away, when the buzz becomes hyperactive, when energy is replaced by fatigue that stress takes over.

Recognising that border early may allow us to stop, draw breath and regain calm. But often we miss the early warning signs, or are unable to step back from the problem causing them. Stress escalates into physical problems, from fatigue to high blood pressure, and mental problems, from depression and anxiety to even breakdown. We lose concentration, become irritable and exhausted, carrying the stress home with us from work. Anyone working in a stressful environment, as teachers do, should monitor themselves for the warning signs of stress building up.

## Disruption

Disrupt stress as soon as possible: as you feel stress mount, simple things such as deep, controlled breathing may offer immediate help in restoring a sense of calm. On a larger scale, cultivate relaxation. Different techniques work for different individuals, but a hot bath, a brisk walk, laughing with a friend, a game or a puzzle may distract and allow space for calm.

## Label the stress

Articulate the reasons for your stress: all too often stress attaches itself to every aspect of a challenging situation, so that everything becomes amorphously stressful (even the mere sight of the school building may come to trigger anxiety). Narrowing down, defining what it is that actually triggers your stress and what is actually either neutral or even actively pleasurable in your work offers a powerful foundation for re-orienting to the work environment in a more discerning way. Treasuring little moments of calm throughout the day can be a powerful way to diffuse stress.

## Change something

Can you change the situations that trigger your stress?



Image: Adobe Stock

Ideally one would fix the problem – job done. But fixing the problem may call for a creative solution: if one cannot reduce targets, are there more efficient ways of organising time and effort to reduce the load? If one cannot avoid an abrasive manager, is there a strategy that would reduce the stress – such as a more assertive response, or better self-confidence? Websites like Mindtools offer online support for boosts of these kinds

## Your response

Can you change your emotional response? What we can't alter we must accept. Acceptance can be negative, a wallowing in resentment that achieves nothing but ratchets up stress. Or it can be positive: re-conceptualising the situation to accept that it is as it is, re-conceptualising ourselves to accept that we are nonetheless okay. It is when we set very high standards for ourselves and others, and are intolerant of imperfection, that we are most susceptible to stress. Does whatever is triggering your stress matter so very much, in the grand scheme of things?

## Build resilience

Some individuals are naturally resilient, shrugging off the setbacks, struggles and conflicts of the day quite easily. Most of us are less resilient, easily

stressed by such things. Sometimes that is quite simply because we are exhausted by the chronic stress of an inescapable situation – short on sleep, not eating well, not exercising, perhaps smoking or drinking more – all of which exacerbate stress. The remedy is obvious. But sometimes the problem is more psychological: a lack of self-confidence, a low self-esteem which makes us vulnerable to stress. It is hard to build self-esteem at the best of times. Stress undermines us, makes us feel that we are not coping, further damaging self-esteem. Treat yourself with kindness and forgiveness, and nurture your sense of worth.

## It's good to talk

Talk it over with a colleague, a friend, a partner, your union – or with one of the many agencies offering support to teachers, such as the Education Support Partnership or other charities.

• *Dr Stephanie Thornton is a chartered psychologist and former lecturer in psychology and child development.*

## Useful websites

- Education Support Partnership: [www.education-supportpartnership.org.uk](http://www.education-supportpartnership.org.uk)
- Mind: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)
- Mindtools: [www.mindtools.com](http://www.mindtools.com)

Lessons may not always go to plan, but young teachers can and should learn from these experiences, explains **Kathy Oxtoby**

# Learning from a difficult lesson

listening and clear communication breaks down, so too will effective teaching and learning."

A challenging lesson doesn't have to be a "bad" experience and lessons can be learned that can actually enhance the quality of teaching and learning: "The word 'bad' is a most unhelpful term when it comes to teaching," Ms Lovewell continued. "Be clear that students and teachers are not 'bad' – defining them as such is destructive and lacks a progressive, constructive mindset. One must clarify that behaviour may need adjustment, and teaching skills may need improvement."

Meanwhile, Mr Stanley emphasises that one difficult lesson (or day) does not equal failure. Rather than aiming for the ideal lesson, he advises teachers "not to punish yourselves, but take time out to reflect on what worked well and what did not work, and learn lessons from that experience".

After a difficult lesson it can be tempting, particularly for beginning teachers, to rely more on rigid lesson plans and to give out more hand-outs. However, Mr Stanley recommends that teachers should "give themselves permission to deviate from rigid plans and to go with the flow of a lesson".

If a teacher is feeling frustrated, either with themselves or the class, they should "slow down, breathe and take a moment to consider what to do next, such as throwing out the lesson plan, or changing the energy of the room by getting students to work in small groups", he adds.

Kiri Tunks, a secondary school teacher based in Tower Hamlets, east London, agrees – rather than

being hamstrung by planning, "sometimes there is joy in responding to the moment and trying something different in the classroom". Having back-up activities – "an emergency pack of strategies to pull out" – is helpful for teachers if a lesson isn't going to plan or if technology isn't working, she added.

And if the internet is down, or other aspects of the lesson are going wrong, it helps to acknowledge those mistakes with the class, rather trying to pretend all is going to plan. "If you try and present yourself as perfect you're setting yourself up to be laughed at. It's good to teach children that making mistakes is okay – it's all part of the learning process," Ms Tunks continued.

Feedback is a helpful way to enhance the learning of both teachers and students after a lesson. Mr Stanley suggests that if teachers know a class well that organising student mini-focus groups or whole-group reflection can help when looking at what worked well and what could be done differently. But in order to have the ability to obtain feedback from students, teachers need to build strong relationships with their classes.

Ms Lovewell explained: "Work at developing respect and trust. Learn about what lights up your students – know their hierarchy of values and tap into these to inspire learning."

However, while teachers can use these different strategies to learn from a difficult lesson, when students are being disruptive, behaviour management is crucial to getting a lesson "back on track". This may involve taking a pause if there a low-level disruption and reasserting classroom management strategies and school

policies. What is important is to be consistent, says Ms Tunks: "Don't be afraid to recognise a problem and to take steps to get back on an even keel!"

• *Kathy Oxtoby is a freelance journalist and former secondary teacher.*

## Further information

- The Education Support Partnership provides independent, confidential support to help teachers deal with a range of issues. Visit [www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk](http://www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk)
- The Teacher Sanctuary provides advice on teachers' wellbeing: <http://theteachersanctuary.com>

## Dealing with a difficult lesson

- 1 Take time to reflect on what worked well and what did not work; learn from that experience.
- 2 Acknowledge mistakes with the class, rather than pretending all is going to plan. Teach children that making mistakes is part of the learning process.
- 3 Organising student mini-focus groups can help when looking at what worked well and what could be done differently.
- 4 Build strong relationships with classes and understand what activities work for them.
- 5 Even if a lesson feels like it is going wrong, try to enjoy it, because with every lesson there is always something new to learn that you could use again.



How well do you use your classroom to support teaching and learning? From seating plans to learning displays, **Adam Riches** and **Roy Watson-Davis** offer some practical advice

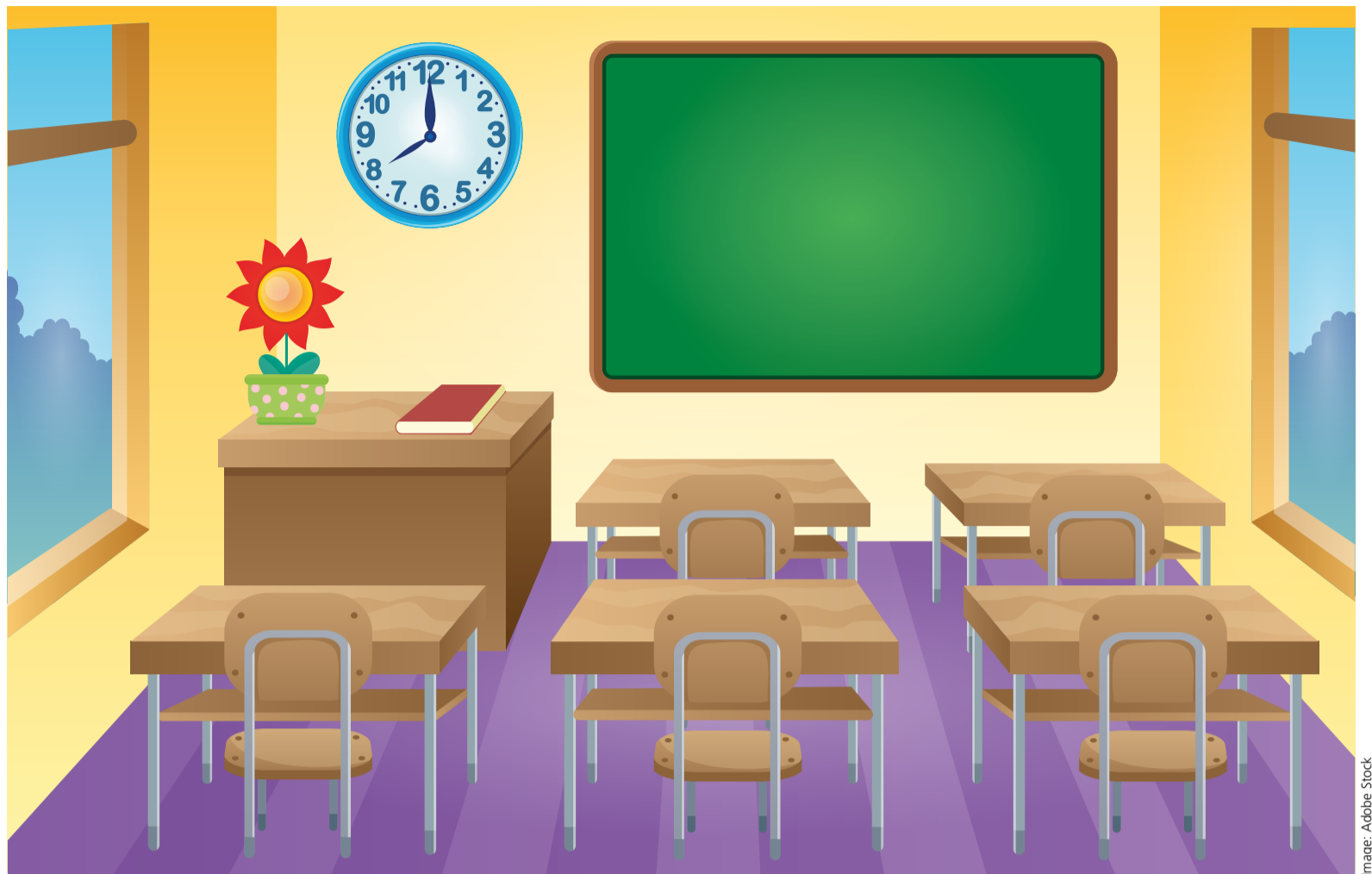


Image: Adobe Stock

**W**e all sit and ponder our seating plans sometimes and think about how we could use them to solve specific problems or challenges.

There is a lot of debate about the most advantageous way to organise your classroom. Many factors will contribute to where objects are placed and there are a number of things in any classroom that can be changed to your advantage.

**The desks**

One of the most important factors of classroom set up is where the desks are placed. Each set up has distinct advantages and disadvantages and there is no system that is absolutely perfect. Below are some of the approaches that provide distinct advantages over the traditional row format (with illustrations below too).

**Two by Two**

*Pros: Easy group work, free movement for teacher, good presence and visibility at the front of class.*  
*Cons: Pupils can distract each other, limited visual access to displays, no space for tutorial time.*

**The Island**

*Pros: Excellent tutorial space, central point of contact, safe for pupils to question.*  
*Cons: Not constant visual contact with teacher, more difficulty with group work, pupils need to move a lot.*

**Four by Four**

*Pros: Effective differentiation, group tasks take no rearranging, easy support and access.*

**The Horseshoe**

*Pros: Open forum for questioning and lecturing, everyone engages with each other, teacher can reach everyone.*

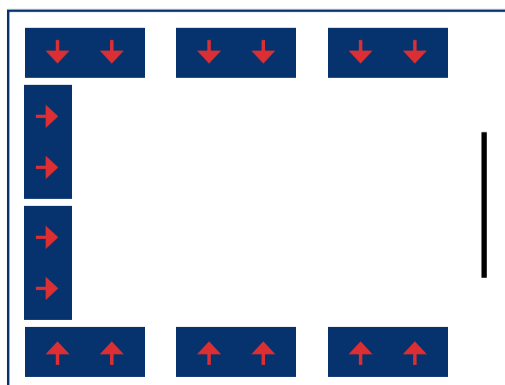
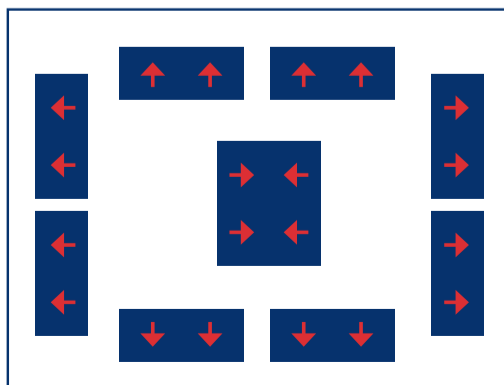
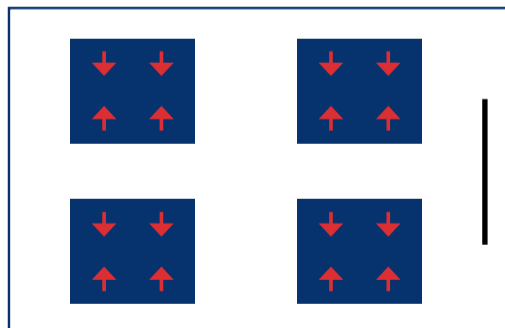
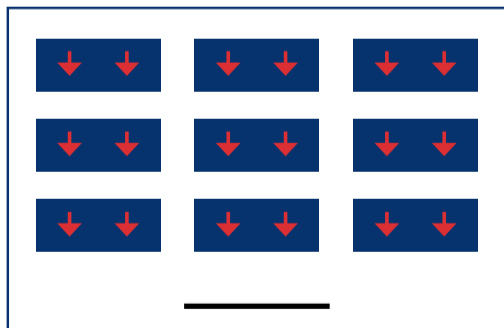
*Cons: Possible distractions, group work can be a difficulty.*

**Experimentation**

Taking into account the diversity of pupils you teach, experimenting with the layout of the room can be an effective way of managing behaviour and can help to boost learning.

If you teach a class that requires group or individual tutorial time, the Island layout allows the teacher to bring pupils to the centre of the room while the others in the class continue with work. Because they are facing away from the rest of the class, distraction is minimised. In addition, the teacher can oversee them while engaging in a tutorial with the selected members of the class – although possible, this kind of interaction is simply a pain in a normal row format.

**Alternative seating plans: (clockwise from top left) Two by Two, Four by Four, The Horseshoe and The Island**



# Using your classroom

In complete contrast, if you are teaching a discussion-based subject, a Horseshoe layout offers distinct advantages. The pupils are able to interact with every other member of the class, the teacher can circulate with ease and pupils have a good view of the whole room while working.

**What about your desk?**

The pupils' desks are one thing, but what about the teacher's desk? So many classrooms still follow the most draconian layout of teacher in front of the board, pupils facing them. How is that logical? Why put a seven-foot wooden object in front of the central point of the class? As a teacher you barricade yourself behind this desk. Movement becomes more difficult and it creates a barrier between you and your class.

Doesn't it make more sense to put your desk at the back? Pupils can approach you during a task if they are unsure of something without having to stand and feel as though they are on show to the rest. What's more, it makes your room a more "all encompassing" learning environment.

Who said the front needs to be the front? It limits your display options, it is boring and it most certainly does not help with behaviour management. Don't think it will work? Try it. Take your desk out of the room all together and see...

**The pupils**

Boy-girl-boy-girl? No. Well yes, but it is not quite as simple as that. And what's more, it does not need to

be as consistent as that (assuming your school doesn't have a policy that demands it).

We have all observed the teacher who sits the naughtiest boy next to the nicest girl – don't do it. Let's take one of the classroom four set-up examples we have illustrated: Four by Four. The distribution of (a hypothetical but typical class) may go like this...

Think about the needs of the pupils when you think of seating them. For example, for those with fragile confidence or other social anxiety issues, place them as near to the door as possible and leave the door open. This will subtly manage their fight of flight feelings by allowing them, subconsciously, to have an "out" and not to feel trapped or boxed in.

For pupils with ADHD or similar then the standard teacher response is to isolate them, usually at the "front" of a class virtually facing a wall to keep them away from distractions. It rarely works (cue wriggling in seat etc). Why not sit them at the desk with the liveliest view? This is usually in the middle of the room when you cluster your tables in groups of four or six pupils. This helps address their need for distraction, and actually can help them focus better in the lesson.

Shy or quiet pupils? Seat them together and make sure you access them regularly. Really low-ability boy? Then sit him with three of the brightest girls, with his back to his mates or on the opposite side of the room. The girls will help the boy, and also he will have limited opportunities to get involved with his friends in the class.

It doesn't work the other way around though, as the weakest girl with three high-ability boys fails – boys are usually competitive learners and don't really help. Girls are generally social learners and can learn and interact with others far better.

The rule is, as always, know your class. Seating in groups also means teaching pupils how to work together; role cards can help, for example IT Specialist, Team Leader, Art and Pictures, Materials and Books, Teacher Link. Rotate the cards so that no pupil can dominate the group. The Teacher Link role is an ideal way to manage group work – only the pupil with that card can speak to the teacher.

**The displays**

Too many classrooms only have displays on boards made of ply, neatly decorated with sugar paper, a frilly border and the work of pupils from three years before. Bin it. It isn't helping anyone. Displays need to be useful. They need to help the learning of the pupil – but how?

The first thing to do is move away from the board. Make your room a 360 degree experience. Make it memorable. Use your room to guide your kids through their exam; key words/vocabulary, phrases, concepts, graphs pictures, models of work with annotations – honestly the possibilities are endless.

Plan out your space and decide what you are going to have on each surface. Yes surface. Don't stick to just the walls! Ceilings (with care!), windows and desks are all fair game for some kind of learning display.

**Why put a seven-foot wooden object in front of the central point of the class? As a teacher you barricade yourself behind this desk**

Will you ever stop little Jimmy gazing out of the window during period 4 on a Friday? No? Okay, write 10 key words on that window and at least try to give him something of relevance to look at!

Putting up some great display resources is one part of it. Then you need to use them. Bring the displays into the lesson. Make them part of the learning. The more you engage with displays, the more memorable they become. In the exam, pupils will remember their classroom if they are trained to.

And it does not only improve the learning experience of your pupils, a good display will improve your teaching experience. Displays that model work or a paragraph structure for example save reams of time and frustration. Just imagine not having to repeat concepts that have been covered (sometimes many, many times) before!

Of course displays come at a price – financially and time-wise. Spread the load between members of the department. There is nothing to say that resources can't be consistent across English rooms or history rooms, in fact it is beneficial if they are!

Make your classroom memorable by putting random things on the walls or above the board. One colleague had a witch's broomstick, one a selection of album covers, another antique tools hanging from the ceiling on wire. One of the authors had a number of three-foot high inflatable Daleks...

**Reality**

There is no classroom in the world where at least some change in layout would not improve the learning environment. The above is not an exhaustive list of ideas, but hopefully it gets you thinking about what might work for you and your own class.

• Adam Riches is head of key stage 5 English language and the whole-school literacy coordinator at Northgate High School in Ipswich. Follow him @teachmrriches. Roy Watson-Davis is head of history and politics at a school in Suffolk. Follow him @roywatsondavis



Supporting SEN in the mainstream classroom is a key duty for all teachers, but one that can feel like a huge challenge for NQTs. Expert **Michael Surr** offers his advice and reassurance

# Supporting SEN pupils

place to start is to ask yourself: why didn't it go so well and what can be done differently next time? What can I do to improve? And, if the lesson went well, reflect on why it effectively engaged the class. This will enable you to develop provision to help all students in your classroom.

Don't forget that part of being a reflective practitioner means thinking not only about the students, but also your own practice: for example, is there anything that you need to adapt regarding delivery?

The graduated approach is central to SEN support, as outlined in the SEND Code of Practice, but it is something that teachers do anyway. It consists of four steps in a cyclical process – assess, plan, do, review.

First, you need to assess students' needs either formally or informally, through observation and looking at work in books for example.

Second, use this information to plan for their needs, thinking about what kind of provision and resources will help them to achieve successful learning outcomes. This can be something as simple as looking at where they sit in the classroom and working out if this needs to be changed to help engage with them better, or more complex planning, such as using IT to photograph homework or classwork or record lessons, and then making it available on the virtual learning environment, so that students can refer back to it when they are at home.

Third, implement the plan and, finally, review it: what worked well, what could be done to make it more impactful?

As well as using the graduated approach, to help you meet individual needs it can also be a useful cycle for wider reflection. In one secondary classroom that I visited, I saw a student with SEN who found it hard to sit still, so the teacher had given him a clipboard so that he could stand up to work and move around if he needed. Although this may seem a little obscure, it demonstrates the graduated approach in action. The teacher had identified a need (assess), planned a possible solution (plan), put the solution into practice (do) and then evaluated the success or otherwise of the intervention (review).

The outcome of this particular intervention was that the student concerned appeared more engaged and was able to get something down on paper. The others in the class, although distracted at first, soon began to ignore the fact that one of their peers was standing up.

## Developing provision

Within the SEND Code of Practice, it is a requirement that parents should be engaged at every stage. Parents know their children, so we need to listen to and involve them (and the students themselves). This can lead to successful strategies for use both in the classroom and at home.

When it comes to seeking support and opportunities



Image: Adobe Stock

for CPD, NQTs should be proactive. However the school's SENCO should be the first port of call. They are the people that provide the strategic leadership for SEND in the school and will have lots of knowledge and experience. In addition, read your school's SEN report (you'll find it on the school website), as this will include information about your school's approach and provision for supporting learners with SEN.

Other NQTs can also be an invaluable source of support and advice, as they are facing the same pressures and challenges as you. It is important, too, that as an NQT and a professional you aren't just the consumer, but that you also give back your learning to support colleagues. Likewise, other colleagues in your setting are likely to have copious amounts of experience, which is a fantastic resource that should be tapped into. Most of us regularly peruse social media, and this too is a highly valuable resource.

In terms of external sources, there are a huge number of places that NQTs can turn to, including nasen. We offer useful resources on the website, including the Focus On SEND training, which is a free course, developed with funding from the Department for Education, for mainstream classroom and subject teachers to help develop good-quality practice for

SEN. There is also the SEND Gateway which brings together all sorts of different information, provision and providers from the world of SEN.

## The teachers of the future

It is really important as an NQT to remember that you do not have to be an expert in all types of SEN. And, as part of the graduated approach, you should not be afraid to try something new – just like giving a student a clipboard may have seemed ridiculous, your ideas could actually really improve a student's engagement with learning. Never think that you can't make a contribution, although you might be surrounded by colleagues with various levels of experience and knowledge, you may just spot something that they have not, so don't be afraid.

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• *Michael Surr is education development officer with special needs association nasen. To sign up for the Focus On SEND course, visit <http://oln.nasen.org.uk/> or for more information on nasen, visit [www.nasen.org.uk](http://www.nasen.org.uk)*

## Further information

The SEND Code of Practice, DfE, June 2014 (updated May 2015): <http://bit.ly/1bkEn81>

**W**ith the Department for Education's (DfE's) latest statistics finding that more than 1.2 million pupils in the UK have SEN, NQTs need to be prepared to not only teach these pupils, but support them too. However, as an NQT, you have lots of brand new learning that is there to be shared, and you can – and will – have a hugely positive impact on the children you are teaching, including those with SEN.

## Behaviour

Behaviour can often be a significant issue or concern for NQTs. Challenging behaviour could be a symptom of an underlying cause such as learning difficulty or social/emotional issue, so ensure you consider these possible reasons when developing your approach to behaviour management.

For example, a child with SEN may act out if the work is too difficult because they cannot access what they are being given, so using the graduated approach of "assess, plan, do, review" (see later) will help to identify any changes that might be needed to help the child to engage more effectively with work.

## Distinguishing between labels and needs

It is important that we distinguish between labels and needs. A label can be a good starting point, but it won't necessarily establish the specific kind of support or provision that a particular young person needs.

So, for example, provision for dyslexic students may include providing them with different coloured paper. However, while this might help some children with dyslexia, it won't help all of them, so it is important to recognise that all students have different needs in the mainstream classroom; every child is unique, so we need to look at the person as well as the label.

In fact, most of the needs you come across are not going to have a label anyway. For instance, some learners may have a general learning difficulty, in which case there will not be a specific label, which is why it is really important to follow the graduated approach.

## The graduated approach

Being a reflective practitioner is essential. A good

# Strategies for effective student feedback

Effective feedback is key to effective learning and therefore effective teaching. **Adam Riches** and **Roy Watson-Davis** offer some advice

**O**ne of the most time-consuming tasks faced by teachers is marking. Books, assessments, exams, you name it as a teacher you will need to mark it.

The process of feedback and marking is one that is debated a lot. There are proponents of the minimalist approach – putting the focus on assessments – and there are proponents of the feedback for progress approach.

Regardless of your standpoint, there is a strong correlation between progress and feedback. No marking equals less progress, but does more marking mean more progress? Actually, no it doesn't.

More marking leads to more stress, more work and more work-filled weekends. What teachers need to think about is the effectiveness of their marking.

Setting targets has been a rather fashionable trend in the field of marking in recent years. This approach gives the pupil a direct area to work on. Great in theory, but how do they work on "expanding their answer" or "showing their working

out?" Well they don't know either. If they did know, they would do it and we would all be happy. If you like the target approach, try these things to ensure your time is not wasted:

- Clear achievable targets with a timeframe for completion/evidence to be shown – get the pupils to self-evaluate their performance towards their target at the end of each week. It saves you going back through work.
- Forward target-setting – at the top of each lesson, the pupil writes their target and this reminds them to work on this area in the lesson.
- Starter and plenary time where pupils do peer activities regarding targets set by the teacher.

These ideas ensure that the most is made from your valuable input. Target-setting is brilliant if used correctly and supported during classroom learning.

Another effective way of feeding back to pupils about work is by using written questions. The idea is simple: read a pupil's work and then ask them a question or a series of questions about it.

These questions can be literacy-based, testing technical knowledge, synthesis questions, hypothetical questions or simply one-word questions. The possibilities are endless. Using Bloom's questioning taxonomy to vary the questions, teachers can tailor feedback to individual pupils. This helps with differentiation and it also allows you as a teacher to focus on any weaknesses in a piece of work.

The primary aim of this method is to get the pupils to think about what they have written and to reflect on it, while simultaneously extending their learning.

Remember, time needs to be given to respond to your feedback. A good time for this is during starters or plenary activities.

This form of feedback can be used in conjunction with other methods but there are some clear advantages over other ways of marking.

These advantages include: instant response to feedback; non-intrusive method of questioning; differentiated feedback tailored to individual pupil needs; variety of learning extensions possible; quick and easy to do for the teacher; can be reversed (pupils ask you questions); linked in with feeding forward (what is your target for next lesson?); builds a rapport with the pupils; can act as a settler for the start of lessons.

Disadvantages, however, include that time must be given to allow pupils to complete the questions, that some pupils will not understand the questions you have asked them, and that you may have to look back over pupils' books.

This feedback method also gives you a great opening for some in-book dialogue. This can be really effective in the classroom, especially with pupils who are less likely to share their concerns with you. Building a dialogue in their books also builds trust. Remember the feedback doesn't always need to be about the work, you can question the pupils on how they are getting on too!

Marking codes are a hugely under-used resource. As a teacher, saving time annotating while not jeopardising the quality of your marking is a hard balance to hold. Marking codes allow you to get through work effectively and quickly, often reducing the written word count on your part significantly. If your department doesn't have a marking code policy, make one of your own. As long as the pupils understand it, that is all that matters. Try something like these five simple codes:

- Sp: spelling error.
- C: incorrect use of or missing capital letter.

- P: incorrect use of or missing punctuation (including incorrect or missing apostrophes).
- //: new paragraph needed.
- Squiggly underlining: Grammatical error/does not make sense/can't read.

Once you marked the work, get the pupil to work through and find the error you have indicated in the margin. Again, this makes feedback a shared exercise. If your students are not interacting with what you have written it is simply not effective marking.

A hugely effective albeit more time-consuming method of feedback is face-to-face tutorials. Research has shown that face-to-face interaction is often the most popular type of feedback in the eyes of pupils. It is a great opportunity for them to speak directly to you about their work. A great way to do this is to allocate pupils a time-slot and then give them a sheet to fill in as you speak.

This ensures they have a written record of the exchange and they can refer back to it at any time they wish. Although this method may seem time-consuming from the outset, in theory it will reduce your written marking time, so it can be a very useful tool during class revision time.

Ultimately, if you can get pupils responding and interacting with your marking it constitutes good feedback. Effective feedback is a crucial element of pupil progression and an even more important part of keeping you as a teacher sane.

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• *Adam Riches is head of key stage 5 English language and the whole-school literacy coordinator at Northgate High School in Ipswich. Follow him @teachmrriches. Roy Watson-Davis is head of history and politics at a school in Suffolk. Follow him @roywatsondavis*



Every week, SecEd's NQT diarist reports on their trials and tribulations in the classroom. For this special edition, we asked last year's diarist, who is now in their second year at the chalkface, to offer some advice to this year's NQTS

# Advice from year 2



Image: Adobe Stock

**S**o you have survived your first half-term – almost!  
It will have been a slog. During the last three months, you will have had just one week of “rest” (read: marking, planning, sending emails, making resources...). But the end of term is nigh and soon there will be just two terms left, not that you are counting.

### You are a real teacher

You are starting to feel like a real teacher and the good news is that you feel that way because you are!  
It is often very easy to still feel like a trainee in your NQT year – you have immersed yourself in your new school and you are still learning the ropes and at the same time you are trying to ground yourself and get students used to who you are and your expectations.

But, the first thing I think it is important to remember is that you are a fully fledged teacher – just

**“ I am now much more comfortable with prioritising tasks and making sure I have a clear plan of what I am going to do and when it will be completed. Remember, it is okay to not do any work when you get home if you don't feel like it ”**

as much so as Mr Jones who has worked at the school for the last 35 years. In the eye of the students you are exactly the same – some weirdo who decided to leave school, go through yet more education and eventually end up back in a school. Why would you do that?!

We all know why. On a normal day you love teaching, standing in front of a bunch of students passing on your love for your subject.

Of course, we don't always feel that way. If you have not already got to the end of a lesson (or a day) and sat pondering what on earth you are doing with your life then you are a far better teacher than I. We all have those days and that's okay.

### Classroom management

Speaking from year 2, one of the most important pieces of advice I can give you is to learn to forget about the previous lesson. I guarantee you that whatever incident might have happened last lesson is completely forgotten about by the students as soon as they leave your classroom.

In my NQT year I used to get stressed during lessons about students' attitude towards me and then I would hold onto that feeling all week long. By the time it came round to teaching that group again I would feel anxious and be thinking only about what had happened in that previous lesson.

However, you have to remember that whatever behaviour you see in your classroom it is often not targeted at you. Usually students are affected by

things outside of the classroom, things that you don't even know about.

It is important to remember that students are half-baked! They aren't fully cooked like you or I. We have to give them a bit of leeway to be children and learn from their mistakes.

If there has been an incident or problems, I always try and start my lessons like nothing happened last lesson. I give each student a fresh start and I really think that has helped me to grow as a teacher and it certainly helped me to form strong student-teacher relationships throughout my NQT year.

### Workload

Another thing to remember is that there is always more to do. This is something that bothered me during my training and NQT year. I love to be organised and like to have an empty to-do list at the end of the day. However, I have some bad news for you. This is not possible as a teacher. There is always something that needs to be done. You have to learn to prioritise your school life. Have a group tomorrow and you haven't marked their tests? Top of the list. Need to add something to the literacy display? Does it need doing right now? Then relax a bit.

I am now much more comfortable with prioritising tasks and making sure I have a clear plan of what I am going to do and when it will be completed. Remember, it is okay to not do any work when you get home if you don't feel like it!

### Talk to the students

The best thing about my NQT year was the students. Don't just ask them questions in lessons, don't just teach them – take the time to talk to them as well.

I was fortunate in that I started teaching in the school that I trained at. I knew a few groups already by this time last year. Now I know most of the students in school and it is great.

Ask them about the weekend. Ask them if they saw the most recent Game of Thrones episode. Most of the time I love my job. That isn't because of the marking or planning. It is because of the students in school. They are such a mixed bunch of young adults and they make every day different and I wouldn't change that for the world.

Also, go to your school play. Go to watch the orchestra perform. Go to a football game. I never knew I taught so many talented students. Every student is great at something and it is lovely to see them in their element.

Most importantly relax. You are no longer being watched every hour of the day. You have your own groups and responsibilities. Ask for help if you need it.

Relax and enjoy every moment. **SecEd**

*• This article has been written by SecEd's NQT diarist from the 2015/16 academic year. He is now a second year teacher of science at a school in the Midlands.*

## Diary of an NQT: Looking back on my first term

SecEd's NQT diarist this year is a teacher of citizenship, RE and humanities. As she approaches the end of term one, she reflects on her highs and lows so far

**W**e are nearly in December and my first day as an NQT in September now seems light-years ago.  
The routine of school, marking, assessments, planning, more marking, weekend (and repeat) has taken over my life and I have become one of those teachers who counts down to the next holiday. I am not proud of it but really, how else are we to survive?!

My first months as a qualified teacher, while at times stressful, have seen many fantastic moments. Realising that the year 9 class I had dreaded teaching when I first saw them on my timetable are now my

favourite class to teach, was a particular highlight. In my PGCE year I struggled with the behaviour of a very similar class to the one I have now. I found myself in constant battles and the students and I never had a really positive relationship.

This year, the equivalent class are my absolute favourites. They engage in the topics, they want to debate and absolutely love any opportunity to share their opinion.

Classes now feel relaxed but with an underlying understanding of my expectations, and I teach the lessons feeling as though everyone in the room is enjoying themselves (including me).

Last lesson, one girl put her hand up and said “Miss, you're my favourite teacher”. I thanked her of course, thinking she enjoyed the political debates, the engaging lessons... but no: “Yeah Miss we like you cos you dress well,” another pipes up.

Not quite the reasoning I was hoping for, but with that class, I'll take anything for them to engage with me in a positive way!

Another highlight of the year so far came just a few days ago when I was told that all the hours I had put in to creating specially designed SEN lessons for a particular girl in my year 10 RE class had been paying off. She had had her uncle phone up the school to tell them what I had been giving her in class and to say that so far this year, RE was the only subject she was able to understand and engage with – because of these resources.

While I suppose it is not a good thing if she is unable to access other lessons, to hear that the hard work I have put in is actually making someone's life at school better was a real high.

In the rollercoaster of school life, where there are highs, there are of course lows as well. Being bogged down with hundreds of baseline tests to mark was definitely a low point. Feeling the heavy weight of all that marking made the first few weeks a real test (if you'll pardon the pun).

For now, the pressure of assessment marking has died down, but as we come to the end of units, I know the next bout of assessment marking is looming.

Another thing that has really started to get to me is the fact that my organisation is beginning to crumble. I could cope with teaching, planning, marking, data, meetings and tracking. But as soon as I took over a new form after half-term, all my systems fell apart. My to-do lists got too long and too complex.

Now I feel as though every day I forget to do something important. I feel so bad when someone in my form asks me the same question for the third time and I know I still haven't found the answer.

That is definitely something I want to improve upon in the next two terms. I don't want to forget to do things. I need to come up with a better system, rather than relying on scribbled notes in my planner. Perhaps a weekly to-do list (rather than daily) would

be better now. I also want to be the best form tutor I can possibly be. I want to be able to give them my time and energy so we can do fun things. I want to organise charity events and create great assemblies for them to share with the year group. I don't want the form to become just another thing I have to do in the morning.

In the last few weeks, I have also been working on being a good mentor for the student teachers that are taking my lessons. Until now, my responsibility has been to check their plans, observe the lessons and give them feedback. Although I have found that difficult at times, on the whole it has been okay and I no longer see it as a burden. That's lucky I suppose, as I have just been informed that from February, I will be taking over as the student teacher's official mentor. I am flattered that my line manager thinks I am capable of that, but also apprehensive about how much extra work it will entail. Time will tell...

For now I will worry about organisation and becoming the best form tutor I can be. I'm sure there are many other things I could improve upon this year, but by taking these steps first, I think I'll feel more confident in myself as a competent teacher, tutor and mentor. **SecEd**

*• SecEd's NQT diarist this year is a teacher of citizenship, RE and humanities at a school in the Midlands. You can read her regular diary entries every week in SecEd or via [www.sec-ed.co.uk/blog](http://www.sec-ed.co.uk/blog)*

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