Welcome to SecEd’s autumn NOT 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 support and entitlements that all NQTs should be receiving.

A range of induction entitlements in addition to the contractual entitlement of a minimum of 10 per cent guaranteed planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time should be receiving entitlements that all NQTs end of their first term. To get some reassurance and some tips to help you survive.

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.

Here’s no doubt that being an NQT is tough. When you’re in the eye of the storm, it feels like you’ll never emerge on the other side — but hang in there!

First, if you feel overwhelmed, you are certainly not alone. Talking to someone can be a huge help. There may be something different and there is plenty of support out there. We’ve signed up to the NASUWT’s confidential helpline every year and many of these are from NQTs. Our trained counsellors are here to listen and to support you.

The NASUWT has been the teachers’ union which has moved to address this through its campaign to empower teachers to resist these unprofessional impositions which do nothing to enhance teaching and learning.

The NASUWT was also instrumental in forcing Ofsted to remove its requirement that lessons must be observed in order to fix the problem of excessive workload. The DfE established working parties to look at lesson planning, marking and the amount of data collection and the report of its review groups contains many useful recommendations that can be used to tackle the problem of excessive workload. But as a result of the NASUWT’s presentation with ministers in a detailed research on world practice, we’ve got our act together and have secured Ofsted clarification guidance which dispels the myths peddled in too many schools that Ofsted requires every lesson to be observed, and allowing teachers choice as to which lessons they selected.

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 assessment burdens. The DfE’s review groups were clear that formative assessments are for the teacher to support the pupil, not to provide reporting for schools. Effective 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.

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 say “no” is vital to your career. Many of the issues you are grappling with are also issues faced by more experienced teachers. It is important that you understand and uphold your own teaching and personal standards. There are no requirements for marking a pupil’s work and there are no requirements to mark or assess formative or summative work.

Newly qualified and indeed experienced teachers should be aware that triple marking is not required and the DfE no longer requires it as part of its performance management.

There is no need to plan within an inch of your life. It is planned lessons, not lesson plans that are required by Ofsted. These induction entitlements are designed to establish a routine and a rapport with pupils.

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.

The NASUWT has a wealth of experience in supporting successfully NQTs in addressing all these issues of concern. But far by the most overwhelming concern raised with the NASUWT is excessive workload. Bureaucratic marking and assessment tasks, data collection and administrative burdens are the challenge for every teacher.

I am sure 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.

The NASUWT has a wealth of experience in supporting successfully NQTs in addressing all these issues of concern. But far by the most overwhelming concern raised with the NASUWT is excessive workload. Bureaucratic marking and assessment tasks, data collection and administrative burdens are the challenge for every teacher.

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 is used to challenge at the highest level and least conducive verbal and written feedback afterwards which highlights all the positives observed and constructively details the areas 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 far by the most compelling concern raised with the NASUWT is excessive workload. Bureaucratic marking and assessment tasks, data collection and administrative burdens are the challenge for every teacher.

Our popular download Managing Papl Behaviour is a practical guide, full of tips and advice to address inappropriate behaviour. It is a useful resource 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 dramatically 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 on to something else, and as always for your first end-of-term break, take stock and congratulate yourself on getting there!

Julian Stanley is chief executive of Education Support Partnership

Further information

- Contact the Education Support Partnership via www. education-supportpartnership.org.uk or you can speak to a trained counsellor on their free helpline: 08000 562 561.
- The free guide Managing Papl Behaviour is available at those that can be downloaded via http://bit.ly/2ZEF5FP
- Dr Sara Bubb’s website: www.sabaubb.org

NQTs: You are not alone!

Another common frustration for NQTs in particular (but 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’s policies; but other teachers can offer advice.
3 Look after your wellbeing: don’t stop outside interests work. Hobbies and clubs are really important for retaining your sense of self.
4 Diet: eat well.
5 Exercise: get somewhere where you can play sport. Aim for a really early start and aim to exercise at least once a week.
6 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.
7 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.
8 Start interventions you can see are needed as soon as you can.
9 Shake up your ideas and see how they fit with the school’s policies; but never be afraid to try your own things out.
10 Interventions you can see are needed as soon as you can.
Five essentials for the NOT

1 Develop a teacher persona

When you’re a teacher, you have to find a balance between being yourself and pretending to be someone else. Students will see through you if you act false. 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 turning your seat round.”

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 give with lenient levels. 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. So instead of the behaviour of course, but then give the child a fresh start next lesson.

When I started teaching, I always felt I had been taught by a supply teacher for almost a year. I was new and didn’t know how to act. Students who disrupt, shout, bully, don’t own pens, have tantrums and draw rather accurate drawings of the teacher 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

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 a lengthy sanction.

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

I was really honest, letting him know that I understood why he felt let down but 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 example 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 put their hands on their desk 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. Yes, such things can be solved over time, but they take some unpacking. 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 “retitched” 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, rearrange, 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 strategies 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!

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!

• 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

SecEd • November 24 2016

With so many experienced teachers around you, the one thing that every NOT 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.

Regular showers of chairs are tilted forward, their occupants gazing adoringly up at you with scavenged 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, doing, asked colleagues, read books, and most usefully, of doing it. So I looked at what others around me were 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.

Students who disrupt, truant, bully, don’t own pens, have tantrums and draw rather accurate drawings of the teacher 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.

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 a lengthy sanction.

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

I was really honest, letting him know that I understood why he felt let down but 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 example 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.

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 strategies 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!

• 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

SecEd • November 24 2016
There are six key ‘conditions for learning’ that teachers must work to develop in their classrooms and with their students. Matt Bromley explains…

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 should be shared with students before they embark on the next task because of the unfairness of and arbitrariness. Others say they feel upset that their hard work and creativity has not been recognised.

Some say they are angered 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 upset that the work they have invested in is highly valued and equated this to a grade before handing it back. It is rare – unheard of, in fact – for anyone to get an A or B more often than not, colleagues get an E or F. Teachers need to ask themselves!

Practice and preparation

Next I ask trainees to think of something they are good at and to think about how because 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 remind 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.
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 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 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 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 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.

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.

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. 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.

Teachers are stressed. In fact, one report from Cardiff University published a while back by the Health and Safety Executive found that teachers top the league table for occupational stress, with 41 per cent reporting high levels of stress at work – significantly more than the second most stressed profession (nursing, at 31 per cent) and double the average across occupations (20 per cent). Why are so many teachers so very stressed? It is not hard to identify the key cause of pressure that might well explain this.

Workload, for one. A recent survey found that teachers in England work on average 54.1 hours a week, those in Scotland 45.6 hours – the difference probably reflecting the English way of national academic testing, which Scotland doesn’t. That workload can cause stress: teachers don’t have too little time to prepare properly for lessons or to keep up with the marking and paperwork the job now demands – and that work can eat into teachers’ family life and school holidays.

But British teachers carry smaller workloads than their colleagues in many other countries. Yes, they may work more than 50 hours a week, yet report more stress. Workload is certainly a major factor, but not the whole story. Pupil behaviour can be challenging, whether it is a matter of unruly excess or the actual abuse that seems to be ever more common.

And again, the evidence suggests that pupil behaviour is not the main cause of teacher stress: the Education Support Partnership helpline received only half as many calls complaining of pupil behaviour as complaints about time management and colleagues, for example.

As easy to tackle as teacher stress may be, the reasons why many teachers feel routine work is already too much and add to the stress. They spend 63 per cent of their day managing behaviour, compared with 75 per cent of their day managing the classroom environment.

Some may still be looking for practical solutions: something they could do to help. But British teachers carry smaller workloads than their colleagues in many other countries. Yes, they may work more than 50 hours a week, but it feels increasingly likely that the problem of stress is that which complicates the problem.

Can you change the situations that trigger your stress? Can you change your emotional response? What does your stress actually trigger you to do? What is actually triggering your stress and what is actually responsible for your stress response? How can you influence the stress you feel in your job?

I don’t think it’s realistic to expect a quick fix. Stress is a complex issue. What’s to be done? Something certainly needs to be done.

In the ideal world, headteachers would be free (and indeed required) to consider the wellbeing of their staff to the same extent as they do for the children they teach and work with. Realistically, that’s not likely to happen – it can be hard to take.

As well as practical support, combined with the lack of autonomy, is a surefire way to undermine confidence and/or offer remedial support, are less likely to feel supported.

It is not difficult to identify the key cause of pressure that might well explain this.

Workload is certainly a major factor, but not the whole story. Pupil behaviour can be challenging, whether it is a matter of unruly excess or the actual abuse that seems to be ever more common.

And again, the evidence suggests that pupil behaviour is not the main cause of teacher stress: the Education Support Partnership helpline received only half as many calls complaining of pupil behaviour as complaints about time management and colleagues, for example.

As easy to tackle as teacher stress may be, the reasons why many teachers feel routine work is already too much and add to the stress. They spend 63 per cent of their day managing behaviour, compared with 75 per cent of their day managing the classroom environment.

Some may still be looking for practical solutions: something they could do to help. But British teachers carry smaller workloads than their colleagues in many other countries. Yes, they may work more than 50 hours a week, yet report more stress. Workload is certainly a major factor, but not the whole story. Pupil behaviour can be challenging, whether it is a matter of unruly excess or the actual abuse that seems to be ever more common.
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.

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**: Not constant visual contact with teacher, more safe for pupils to question.

**The Island**

- **Pros**: Excellent tutorial space, central point of contact, safe for pupils to question.
- **Cons**: Not constant visual contact with teacher, more safe for pupils to question.

**The Horseshoe**

- **Pros**: Effective differentiation, group tasks take no rearranging, easy support and access.
- **Pros**: Easy group work, free movement for teacher, central point of contact, good presence and visibility at the front of class.

- **Cons**: Not constant visual contact with teacher, more safe for pupils to question.

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

**Cons**: Not constant visual contact with teacher, more safe for pupils to question.

**Pros**: Excellent tutorial space, central point of contact, safe for pupils to question.

**Cons**: Not constant visual contact with teacher, more safe for pupils to question.

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

**Cons**: Not constant visual contact with teacher, more safe for pupils to question.

Using your classroom

In complete contrast, if you are teaching a discussion-based subject, a Horseshoe layout gives 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 almost draconian layout of teacher in front of the board, pupils facing him. How is that logical? Why put a seat-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 feal 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).

The desks are a good example of something where we could make a change and it creates a barrier between you and your class.

**The displays**

Too many classrooms only display on boards made of ply, neatly decorated with sugar paper, a fully 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 above does not mean that displays are no longer mandatory, the displays, 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 random things on the walls or above the board. One colleague had a selection of random things on the walls or above the board. One colleague had a selection of random things on the walls or above the board.

**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 @ARiches

• Roy Watson-Davis is head of history and politics at a school in Suffolk. Follow him @roywatsondavis

Image: Adobe Stock
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.

W
ith the Department for Education’s (DfE’s) latest statistics revealing 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 condition or learning difficulty. As an NQT, identifying any changes that might be needed to help the child engage means that you are taking your first steps toward helping the child. This can be really tough, as it is difficult to know what the problem is or how to fix it. There will be lots of encouragement and support, as they are facing the same issues. As well as using the graduated approach, to help you meet individual needs it can also be a useful cycle to follow, as you can keep revisiting the areas you have identified and adjust the support accordingly.

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 recognize 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 place to start is to ask yourself: why didn’t it go so well? and what can be done differently in the future? 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 your teaching skills with the students in your classroom.

Don’t forget that part of being a reflective practitioner means thinking not only about the students, but also your practice. For example, are there anything that you need to adapt regarding gender?

The graduated approach is central to SEN support, as outlined in the SEN Code of Practice. It is a requirement to always follow the graduated approach in action. The teacher had identified a need (assess), planned a range of different approaches (plan), and then evaluated the success or otherwise of the intervention (review).

So, for example, in a mainstream classroom, if the student concerned appeared more engaged and was more aware of what he needed, 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

Another effective way of feeding back to pupils is simply: read a pupil’s work and then ask them a question or a series of questions about it. This ensures they have a written record of the feedback and can refer back to it when they are at home.

The graduated approach is central to SEN support, as outlined in the SEN Code of Practice. It is a requirement to always follow the graduated approach in action. The teacher had identified a need (assess), planned a range of different approaches (plan), and then evaluated the success or otherwise of the intervention (review).

The graduated approach is central to SEN support, as outlined in the SEN Code of Practice. It is a requirement to always follow the graduated approach in action. The teacher had identified a need (assess), planned a range of different approaches (plan), and then evaluated the success or otherwise of the intervention (review).

Don’t forget that part of being a reflective practitioner means thinking not only about the students, but also your practice. For example, are there anything that you need to adapt regarding gender?

The graduated approach is central to SEN support, as outlined in the SEN Code of Practice. It is a requirement to always follow the graduated approach in action. The teacher had identified a need (assess), planned a range of different approaches (plan), and then evaluated the success or otherwise of the intervention (review).

The graduated approach is central to SEN support, as outlined in the SEN Code of Practice. It is a requirement to always follow the graduated approach in action. The teacher had identified a need (assess), planned a range of different approaches (plan), and then evaluated the success or otherwise of the intervention (review).
Advice from year 2

Remember, it is okay to do things outside of the classroom, things that you don’t even know about.

Talk to the students. I can assure you that the 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 that in the school that I trained in 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.

• 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.
ARE YOU A NEW TEACHER?

Do you want to benefit from an extensive programme of support for newly qualified teachers?
Join the NASUWT to receive your FREE membership, followed by reduced subscription rates.

New teacher membership includes:

- **Starting Out** – a FREE, quick guide to essential information you need on appointment, including salary, conditions of service and registration.
- **A personal Induction Planner** – FREE, to support you through the key milestones of induction – unique and only available through the NASUWT.
- A FREE advice and support service – local networks of serving teachers and a dedicated advice line only a phone call away between 8am and 6.30pm weekdays.
- FREE seminars for new teachers, with a particular focus on positive pupil behaviour management.
- FREE information, advice booklets and briefings on issues affecting teachers.

For more information, visit www.nasuwt.org.uk.