

PAIRED PLACEMENTS PILOT: BRIEFING PAPER FOR PROFESSIONAL MENTORS

BACKGROUND

Following the Professional Mentors' Away Day last year when the idea of placing trainees in pairs within subject departments in schools was raised and explored in depth, we have been looking at ways of taking this forward across the partnership. Some individual schools and clusters have already started to trial this and generally the feedback has been very positive. The TTA is also interested in the paired placements model and has given us some funding to run a pilot.

RATIONALE FOR PAIRED PLACEMENTS

Placing trainees in pairs has a number of significant advantages, most of which were outlined at the Away Day. However to summarise:

From the trainees' perspective these include mutual support, peer observation and discussion, the sharing of ideas and learning from each other, the opportunity to work collaboratively, more support and training from both mentors and tutors through co-observation and joint feedback, quicker progress and development. From the schools' / mentors' perspective the benefits are the extra help brought in by having more than one trainee in the department, greater contact with college and therefore a greater feeling of partnership, joint observation and feedback for trainees resulting in a steeper learning curve which in turn is more beneficial to pupils, trainees settling into the department more quickly, making more contribution and being less reliant on teachers for ideas and support, more discussion in weekly mentoring session.

The model of paired placements which we are proposing is based on the already successful MFL model with which many of you are familiar. It is not just a case of putting two trainees into the same department; rather it uses the notion of pairing, of working with a partner as the basis for each trainee's training, development and progress. In other the words, each trainee's experience is centred around working with another trainee and the mentor in a variety of ways.

PROPOSAL

We are asking schools to volunteer to trial placing trainees in pairs within a number of different departments across the school. It may well be that individual course leaders will be talking to individual subject departments about exploring the possibility of taking pairs of trainees within that subject (still using the agreed model - see below) but what we are particularly interested in is looking at how effectively and successfully pairs of trainees in a number of different subjects can

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work within a school. Initially we would be asking schools to trial and evaluate this pilot over the A placement, with a view to extending it into the B placement should it prove successful.

HOW THIS WOULD WORK IN PRACTICE

The issues which are likely to cause concern are probably:

- Impact on timetable / teaching commitment
- Mentors' work load
- Does this mean we may not have trainees in some subjects?

IMPACT ON TIMETABLE / TEACHING COMMITMENT

The model (based on the MFL model and agreed by all course leaders) might look like this:

- Each trainee takes on a KS3 'adopted' class for which s/he is totally responsible. Initially this would entail observation, possibly teaching small slots and ultimately teaching whole lessons. This continues throughout placement A. The 'partner' observes / assists with this class and gives feedback.
- Each pair of trainees also shares a KS4 class (this takes place a little after the start of the KS3 teaching so that the teaching commitment is 'staged') between them. This means they collaboratively plan and deliver the teaching either by team-teaching / teaching lessons alternately or week by week. Again this starts off with observation, teaching small slots and ultimately teaching whole lessons. This continues throughout the A placement.
- In addition in the mini-block in January, each trainee picks up another class - normally KS3. This can either be on an individual basis, shared with their partner or shared with the class teacher. This then continues to the end of the A placement.

This means that a pair of trainees would teach between them 4-5 classes during the whole of the A placement.

In terms of hourage - this depends on how many lessons per week a subject has per year group but an example could be in the region of:

2 x 1hr lessons per week for the adopted KS3 class

2 x 1hr lessons per week for the shared KS4 class

2 x 1hr lessons per week for the 'extra' KS3 class

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This totals around 4 lessons per week (20% of an NQT's timetable) of whole class teaching by Christmas and 6 lessons per week (c 30%) by the end of January.

In addition to the whole class teaching commitment, each trainee might take on the following:

- Working with small groups of Year 11 pupils
- Observation of 6th form
- Supporting SEN pupil(s)
- Observation of partner's KS3 class plus the extra class if at all possible;
- Observation elsewhere in the department / around the school;
- Form Tutor attachment.

This means that the total contact time with pupils rises to around 9-10 lessons per week plus around 3-4 lessons observation per week = 12-14 lessons (c 60%).

The precise detail and timing of this would be agreed within subjects as appropriate.

MENTORS' WORKLOAD

The following points are taken from feedback from mentors who have experience of working with pairs of trainees:

- It is as easy to deliver the weekly mentoring session to two or more trainees as to one, and there is greater and often deeper discussion;
- In terms of observation and feedback, trainees observe and assist in each other's lessons and are therefore involved in joint observation and feedback. Therefore their learning is significantly greater and possibly quicker because they learn from their partner as well as from their own teaching. They also learn to give feedback to their partner so their powers of observation, analysis and reflection are greater;
- Trainees are more independent of their mentor - they can help each other with planning, ideas, resources, finding out answers etc. and therefore make fewer demands on mentors' time;
- There are often several trained mentors within a department.

DOES THIS MEAN WE MAY NOT HAVE TRAINEES IN SOME SUBJECTS?

At the moment the partnership is working beyond the capacity of the schools within it. This means having to find often fairly far flung placements, often at the last minute. It also means that there is no flexibility within the partnership to cater for unforeseen circumstances in schools e.g. staff changes, maternity leave, needing to have a 'year off' etc. We often have to ask schools to 'do us a favour' and take a trainee when you would really prefer not to. On top of this already very stretched

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situation, we are recruiting more trainees - not just in terms of the straight one and two year PGCEs but also via the undergraduate programme and the flexible-modular routes which will come on line next year. Therefore there will be a greater number of trainees overall but there should be a little more room for flexibility and choice.

ACTION

If you would be prepared to trial paired placements within a number of departments across your school (and we hope very much that you will!) could you please let your cluster co-coordinator know this and which subject departments would be involved as soon as possible after your cluster meeting and in any case by June 20th (June 27th for Lancaster, Chorley and Blackburn clusters). This information will then be passed on to us (and we will make sure that the school partnership office is aware of any differences between this information and what you may well have already submitted) so that we can then co-ordinate the schools involved and hold a more detailed briefing meeting for both professional and subject mentors in early July.

Please let us know if you have any further queries.

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