



partnership **development** schools

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Mentoring in ITT

Manor Leas Infant School – A Case Study

Our school

Manor Leas Infant School has approximately 180 pupils on roll from a mixed catchment area. It is a modern school that was rebuilt approximately 25 years ago. It is 8 miles south of the city of Lincoln and situated close to the A46. Staffing consists of the head teacher plus 7 teachers (including the deputy head and a job share), TAs, ICT technician, midday supervisors, caretaker, cleaners and office staff.

At Manor Leas Infant School, all teachers have experience of mentoring or being mentored. This is embedded in the school's performance management framework and involves all staff. The school believes that its teachers can gain valuable learning experiences from others as well as imparting knowledge themselves. They evaluate and develop their own practice according to what trainees bring to the school, such as up-to-date knowledge of national initiatives and new teaching strategies, as well as the energy and enthusiasm demonstrated by the majority of trainees.

Teachers and TAs have become more reflective practitioners, are receptive to new ideas and have developed their listening and questioning skills. The ITT co-ordinator (Head Teacher) has over 15 years experience of working with trainee teachers and the school has appointed a Lead Mentor who currently works closely with Bishop Grosseteste University College, Lincoln (BGC). The Headteacher has been involved in the interviewing of trainees and the Lead Mentor has been involved in an outreach tutoring role. The school has a comprehensive prospectus information pack which is given to trainees at the time of induction, including an ITT policy.

Mentoring at Manor Leas Infant School

Mentoring activities are widespread throughout the school, due to the school's longstanding partnership with BGC and staff's keenness to work alongside trainees. This has led to the school being an active participant of the Partnership Development Schools project, funded by the TDA.

The school uses the mentoring process for mainly supporting the development of trainees and NQTs. However, there is a culture of openness where all staff know they can seek support and advice from colleagues. Both new and experienced mentors have been given relevant training by BGC and are fully supported by the school's ITT co-ordinator and Lead Mentor.

NQTs are mentored by experienced members of staff who teach in the parallel class or in another year group. New members of staff, or teachers who have changed their area of responsibility, are mentored by an appropriate member of staff who has relevant experience. The school is committed to the development and support of TAs; which includes mentoring. As part of our performance management process, all staff are given relevant training or other school based support, which is highlighted during review meetings.

Mentoring trainees

At Manor Leas Infant School, most trainees join our school for a six week placement to complete their penultimate or final placement. Each trainee is assigned a class and the class teacher takes on the role of mentor. The mentoring of trainees then takes on a formal process during the block placement. Each week the trainee will have a specific focus which is based upon their developmental needs. This is accompanied by an observation. Depending on the focus this can be completed by the Headteacher, subject leader or class teacher/mentor. This is followed by a debriefing session.

Prior to the start of an observation a focus is set which is identified by the trainee and mentor. All lesson observations are linked to the professional standards and recorded on pro-forma provided by BGC. The focus may be based on a pre-arranged set of topics (e.g. differentiation, working with other adults) or from issues identified in a previous observation.

A written feedback form is given to all relevant parties, which includes agreed targets that are set by the trainee with the support of the mentor.

It is essential that verbal feedback is given as soon after the observation as possible. To maximise the success of this feedback, the mentor has to pay particular attention to ways of maintaining the motivation and self esteem of trainees. Ways to do this can include accentuating the positive from the lesson. By prompting a shared discussion about the ways forward, concentrating on taking time to listen, the trainee can be supported and suggestions can be made as to who might be approached for advice and help.

Trainees maintain a log of their observations and record the various activities which have been agreed by the mentor. Weekly summary sheets are also completed to show progression towards meeting the relevant standards.

What Skills and Attributes do Mentors Need?

CUREE have identified these skills and attributes to which the school agrees;

- Empathy;
- Objectivity
- Ability to build confidence and trust – to act as a critical friend;
- Ability to use questioning skills effectively in order to draw out longer and more detailed responses;
- Good communication skills;
- Willingness to be able to tackle difficult issues;
- Ability to give feedback which is practical and specific so it can be acted on;
- Good relations with other staff;
- Clear knowledge of what the role entails;
- Ability to convey a sense of mentor learning at the same time;
- Awareness of problems likely to face the mentee and an ability to judge when to involve other(s), either for additional support or for coaching in specialist skills.

With these skills and attributes in place school based mentors agree that a successful mentoring relationship develops when the trainees demonstrate;

- Willingness to use procedures;
- Willingness to ask for help and accept support;
- Appreciation of the role of mentor and themselves;
- Good listening skills;
- Willingness to act on advice and to try things out;
- Ability to admit/recognise own mistakes/ areas for development;
- Good interpersonal skills
- Ability to reflect on own experience.

What Are the Roles and Responsibilities of the Mentor?

All mentors have the responsibility to fulfil their role and provide the necessary guidance and support specific to the needs of the trainee, NQT or colleague. Therefore they need to;

- Ensure that trainees are fully informed of school policies, procedures and processes;
- Induct the trainee teacher into the class, providing information relating to the children, classroom organisation and the assessment framework;
- Provide the trainee teacher with appropriate experiences within the classroom including the teaching of groups and whole classes;
- Arrange suitable opportunities for trainee teachers to observe good practice and access the expertise of specialist staff;
- Support trainee teachers in achieving Qualified Teaching Status (QTS) by setting appropriate targets using the documentation provided by the ITT training provider;
- Arrange formal feedback meetings with trainee teachers to support planning, teaching and reflective evaluation (minimum once per week);
- Ensure that the trainee teacher engages in the whole life of the school, attending staff meetings and appropriate in-service events, attending parents' evenings and engaging in extra-curricular activities.
- Communicate any concerns about trainee teacher's performance at an early stage to the trainee teacher, ITT tutor and Head Teacher.
- Attend meetings and training courses with ITT training providers.

Over the years the various school based mentors alongside the Head Teacher have identified a range of challenges or obstacles to the mentoring process. These have included the age of the trainee in comparison to the school based mentor. This can be an issue which over time dissolves as the relationship develops. The trainee will see the vast amount of knowledge and experience the mentor has to offer when they are 'doing it for themselves'.

Some trainees can come from work based backgrounds where the thought of being mentored appears to be insignificant to their already acquired life skills. Although these are vital in teaching the trainee will soon learn that the role of a teacher is very different from other professional careers.

At times the trainee can have issues of being over self-critical of their teaching or professional conduct. This is overcome by putting in place achievable targets and providing appropriate support networks to help them improve their self esteem and therefore overall role.

All of these factors can result in the reluctance to accept criticism or act upon advice given. Here the mentor needs to ensure they remain professional and seek the advice of the ITT tutor and Head Teacher who can offer support.

Outcomes of Mentoring

All teachers have experienced professional benefits through their involvement in mentoring activities. Teachers are continuing to be learners, energised by the enthusiasm of trainees who are embarking on a new career. In particular:

- They experience the opportunity to carry out joint observations with an ITT tutor and/or Head Teacher, comparing notes on completion;
- Head Teacher participates in initial interviews for trainees and so become familiar with the quality standards;
- Through performance management based targets mentors identify development needs and attend training days at which they gain knowledge and understanding;
- Mentors share experiences amongst themselves and evaluate their own practice.

Conclusion

As a testimony to the success of the process, three current staff at Manor Leas Infant School were previously trainees of our partnership HEI provider. Both HLTAs have trained with the support of BGC and two of our TAs have completed the Foundation degree and successfully been appointed as teachers in other schools. All BGC trainees have had 100% pass rate while on placement at our school and we have been highlighted as a school to support those trainees who need to resit placements.

Mentoring has become an important part of our performance management and all staff are encouraged to set themselves mentoring targets. This can be through supporting BGC trainees, NQTs, or more recently

HLTAs becoming mentors to other teaching assistants. All staff who take on a subject responsibility set relevant targets. This can include taking on the lead role in the implementation of new strategies and frameworks and supporting colleagues. With mentoring and coaching securely placed in performance management the school can effectively work as a team with benefits for all; achieving individual professional development alongside improving the school as a whole.