

Repeat after me

Faced with a number of challenges, can teaching schools follow the success of teaching hospitals and improve professional standards? Sam Corrigan discovers a spirit of optimism among those at the forefront of the initiative...

Among the ambitious projects the Coalition laid out in its Education White Paper was a pledge to change the way in which new and existing teachers are trained, moving towards an all together more practical, classroom focused model. This September, the proposals began to take shape, and a new teacher training initiative took its first tentative steps in the world of education.

The training schools programme has been launched with 100 schools throughout the country - 36 primary, 57 secondary and seven special schools. The initial decision on the schools that would be granted teaching school status was taken by the National College for School Leaders (NCSL) who outlined stringent application criteria, based on outstanding OFSTED reports, to ensure the scheme was developed in the best schools available.

Leading the way

Acting as hubs for training in the local teaching community, the teaching schools will be the main proponents of outstanding practice for their ancillary schools; helping to deliver immersive teacher training in the classroom to ensure trainees get a more hands-on insight into the best

practice in their field. As Steve Munby, Chief Executive of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), points out, the thinking behind the new

initiative is that outstanding practice begets outstanding practice. "This move to more school-centred training and development is significant as it puts the profession in charge of developing great teachers and leaders. These teaching schools should be proud as they will be championing outstanding teaching practice for the benefit of pupils beyond their own school gates so that all pupils can experience education at its best."

This belief in the scheme is one that is echoed by Stephen Hillier, Chief Executive at the Training and Development Agency (TDA), who highlights the collaborative nature of the training initiative. "Working with each other and with universities, teaching schools will base their training on the latest advances in subject knowledge, pedagogy and research. Teaching schools will be innovative and will be a catalyst for improvements in training and professional development right across the school sector."

Continuing on

The teaching schools programme has not only been devised to improve Initial Teacher Training (ITT) but also CPD. This move is based upon the realisation that teaching practice should always be re-evaluated and professional development toward leadership cannot be a solely organic process. As Nansi Ellis, Head of Education Policy and Research at the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, points out, any approach to teacher training must recognise it is an ongoing process and can never be fully delivered in a single ITT year. "It is very difficult - I would probably say impossible - to provide everything that a student teacher needs in a year's training - this is particularly true for primary teachers who must teach all subjects. We need a system that recognises that ITT is only the start, and should lead into proper systems of continuing professional development."

Teething trouble

CHALLENGES THAT TRAINING SCHOOLS MAY NEED TO OVERCOME INCLUDE:

➤ An Outstanding Ofsted rating is necessary to become a teaching school. If this doesn't change, there is a view that already successful schools - often in affluent areas - will benefit most from the initiative, whereas areas of the country with fewer Outstanding schools could fall

“ The *benefits* of success are too great to squander because we moaned about money. In general, all *schools* need to realise that they are responsible for their school *improvement* more than ever and will need to take investment in this areas more *seriously* ”

PAUL STONE, HEADTEACHER AT KIBWORTH CE PRIMARY SCHOOL

This would involve developing an understanding of what teachers need on their first days in the classroom, choosing to leave some things until later in their training, in the knowledge that a framework of continuing development will be available, and funded, once teachers move on from their ITT and from their first schools."

This focus on CPD is one thing that appealed to Tammie Prince, Principal, at Green Lane Primary Academy. Tammie lauds not only the hands-on nature of the scheme but also its commitment to a teacher's career as a whole. "The new system uses the expertise of teachers and leaders in a large variety of schools and academies. It benefits from

further behind.

➤ It is yet to be seen how closely training schools will work with universities. There is the possibility that by focusing on classroom practice, ITTs will miss out on important teaching theory that underpins their professional role.

➤ Unless teaching schools can find ways to generate their own income, the core funding may not be enough to ensure the success of the initiative.

➤ Independent schools can apply to become training schools. As training schools are encouraged to find ways to fund their activities, this could mean that money could be diverted from state education into the private system.

the first-hand knowledge of what's working right now and it gives the opportunity for those who are training to get a hands-on experience of what is real and meaningful. It also looks after educators from the beginning of their career all the way to the end of their career. It looks at someone as a whole person, it looks at their career from the time they consider going into education all the way to the time that they retire, supporting and developing that person through the whole time."

Is funding adequate?

As with many aspects of education, funding is a major concern for the programme and this concern is one that the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) recognise as potentially detrimental to the scheme. Brian Lightman, General Secretary of the ASCL commented: "Training teachers and providing

professional development costs money and the amount of money that has been allocated for teaching schools is very limited and our concern is that is won't be adequate enough to deliver the ambitious vision that has been attached to these schools. We're very much behind the initiative but you don't get anything for free. Funding is in very short supply in all aspects of the education system and that could jeopardise the success of the scheme."

Despite this caveat, Brian did go onto tell us that he believes that school leaders who are spearheading the initiative on the ground will strive to deliver the best training they can with the funding available. This sentiment is echoed by headteachers at some of the newly designated training

The background of the page features a series of white silhouettes of people in various professional and educational settings. In the foreground, several people are seated around a table, some looking at laptops. In the background, more silhouettes show people standing and talking, or sitting at desks. The overall scene suggests a collaborative work environment or a classroom. The silhouettes are set against a background of horizontal stripes in shades of purple, blue, green, and orange.

The facts

- > The 100 teaching schools are made up of 36 primary, 57 secondary and seven special schools from across the country.
- > More schools will have the opportunity to apply to become teaching schools with a second wave coming up for designation in 2012.
- > There will be further opportunities for schools to apply as the national network grows to 500 teaching schools by 2014.
- > Each of the new teaching schools will receive core funding totalling £190,000 over four years.

Further information can be found at nationalcollege.org.uk

schools and Paul Stone, headteacher at Kibworth CE Primary School, told *Teach Primary*: "Funding is always a worry for schools and I don't see this changing. However, we need to learn to be more creative and innovative to make this initiative work. Although some might view this as more work and unfair, I am happy to take this on as the benefits of success are too great to squander because we moaned about money. In general all schools need to realise that they are responsible for their school improvement more than ever and will need to take investment in this area more seriously."

Having received their initial funding, which totals £190,000 over the first four years, the schools will be expected to generate additional income as they develop and start delivering

training services. However, this challenge does not phase early adopters such as Tammie Prince. "I don't have any major concerns at the moment," she explains. "We knew going into it how much money would be available for the first four years so what we're looking at is developing a sustainable system that doesn't require a great amount of money. If you build a structure properly, funding shouldn't be an issue."

Gary Mason, headteacher at Matthew Arnold Primary School, also alluded to the need to set up an infrastructure that will see the teaching schools generate the requisite funds through the training they provide. "Funding is always an issue. The initial start up funds for the first four years should enable us to put in place a system which will generate the funds to maintain the operations of the teaching school."

Front line views

With this shift in the delivery of teacher training currently in its nascent stages, how successful it will prove is yet to be seen. But what we've garnered from some of the headteachers on the front line of this initiative is that they believe the move is a positive one that can have a profound effect on education in this country.

Richard Sutton-Smith, headteacher at Claremont Primary School sees huge potential in teaching schools. "Longer term we need to consider that the great teaching hospitals must have started this small and this ambitious," he says. "I would hope that when someone writes about the history of education in 2112, they recall the year that the concept of teaching schools was started, and praise the pioneering spirit of the leaders and staff who put their time into the project."

Ultimately our goal should be that that, as yet unborn, chronicler is able to say that this initiative evidentially made a difference to the lives of children and professionals."

Paul Stone was also positive about the future, adding: "It is a chance to be part of shaping our profession with a real opportunity for schools to take a lead role in developing teachers, spotting talent and working together. I think the advantage for pupils will be dramatic because they will have teachers who are much better prepared and trained than ever before. I think the future is very exciting and a little scary because as a profession we can't afford to get this wrong. I know because of the productive and effective partnerships that we have the challenges we face will be surmountable and will be tackled as partners, which eases my initial fears and makes me really excited about the future of education in this country."