

“The success of the ‘uncompromising aspirations’ vision of our school is heavily reliant on the development of inexperienced teachers.”

Neil Sutcliffe is the Induction Tutor at Carlton Bolling, an outstanding secondary school in Bradford. Carlton Bolling is an inner-city school, serving a community with high levels of deprivation. The school implements the ECF programme at scale, with 27 Mentors and 34 Early Careers; ECTs notably form 27% of the school’s teaching staff.

Deputy Headteacher, Ubaid Naseem says, “first you need a dedicated Induction Tutor with a clear vision and strategy.” For the past 3 years, Neil has been embedding Ambition’s ECF programme into the school’s ethos of ‘excellence for all’. “In the first instance, I looked very closely about what an ECF training provider could offer us, what their provision looks like and how it could match the needs of our school.”

Ambition’s ECF programme, delivered by Exceed Teaching School Hub, is central to this vision as a means of fostering the knowledge and skills of those new to the profession as well as developing Mentors into emerging leaders. The school has consistently high levels of ECF engagement. As a result of successful implementation of the ECF programme, Carlton Bolling made the decision to cascade instructional coaching across the whole school. The programme has been used as a powerful school improvement tool, identifying ECTs and Mentors as the Trust’s future leaders. This strategic approach is underpinned by three key factors:

1. Have a plan!

Neil explains, “planning and implementation have been a huge focus for us. The ECF is central to our Trust-wide CPD plan each year. Leaders across the Trust meet to discuss how ECTs will access this additional training and receive CPD that will have the greatest impact on their practice.” Neil and the team identify specialisms and expertise across the Trust to create bespoke CPD. In addition to weekly coaching, the needs of ECTs are identified through half termly informal observations serving as a training needs analysis. “These observations are ungraded and developmental. Based on the data from these observations, we plan and deliver bespoke training for ECTs to ensure they attend training which is the most meaningful for them.”

“First you need a dedicated Induction Tutor with a clear vision and strategy.”

Furthermore, Neil works with the Senior Leadership Team to identify which teachers have the skills and knowledge needed to join the Mentor Team. This includes teachers with a range of experience and specialist knowledge. Neil explains, “we’ve got a big teaching cohort, within that we have our Teaching and Learning Team. 95% of our Mentors are leadership postholders. We deliberately select leaders or potential leaders for Mentor roles. For example, we have Ellie Smith who has recently completed the ECF programme who we see as an emerging leader. We recognise that the Mentor role is a developmental opportunity for her.”

2. Create a culture of growth and development

ECTs at Carlton Bolling see the benefits of the granular approach advocated by Instructional Coaching. Shahanur explains, “with instructional coaching, focusing on the little changes helps me a lot. Luckily for me, my Mentor and I team teach a Year 7 class after the meeting so I can put this into practice straight away.” Jack Bloomfield adds, “When you’re just told what to do, it’s quite abstract whereas with instructional coaching it’s easier to put into practice as you are repeatedly shown what to do. I found deliberate practice awkward at first but now I’d find it harder going back to the old way of doing things.” The ECF programme has been empowering for both ECTs and Mentors at Carlton Bolling. Lauren Ross, Director of the English faculty and ECF Mentor says, “we have a ‘grow your own’ ethos in school. It was important for me to be a role model for teachers in my team and to have an insight into what ECT strengths and areas of development are, enabling me to have a good insight into the faculty.” Rebecca wanted to take on the role of a Mentor to develop her expertise. “When the new framework was coming out, there was a gap in my professional development which I was keen to develop. Half of my friends who used to be teachers are no longer teaching- the new approach to mentoring was needed. At Carlton Bolling, every staff member is reflective and is always developing, it’s embedded in our ethos. Knowing that every teacher in school is actively engaging with instructional coaching shows that we’re all developing as professionals in different ways.” Rebecca adds, “the culture here fits instructional coaching. Because Steplab is used by the whole school, ECTs don’t feel unusual. There is a danger with any ECT programme that it might cause ECTs to feel different but here, everybody has a coach. Coaching is the norm.”

3. Implementation and Quality Assurance

Leaders at Carlton Bolling have been incredibly thorough with their implementation of the ECF across the school and this is underpinned by regular, ongoing quality assurance. Neil says, “it is essential that Mentor meetings happen weekly, that’s the bread and butter of supporting our ECTs to improve.” Neil explains that meetings are timetabled for ECTs, and Mentors and they are rescheduled as and when they are needed in a fast-moving school environment. “Senior Leaders have stepped in to facilitate Mentor meetings when Mentors have had periods of absence.” This further demonstrates the commitment of all stakeholders to ensure ECTs receive the continued support they need, and that instructional coach is critical to this process.

“Neil and I have spent a long time matching ECTs to Mentors and thinking about who will work well together,” Deputy Headteacher, Ubaid, explains. Neil also says that when Mentor-ECT relationships are not as productive as planned, they are not afraid of changing Mentors as needed.

Neil holds half-termly meetings with ECTs and Mentors. These serve to deliver key messages and maintain high expectations but also allows Mentors and ECTs to give feedback and reflect on the coaching relationships. “Accountability is key, and we actively encourage feedback from ECTs and Mentors. Mentors hold ECTs to account and vice-versa. We recognise that these roles are not easy and are based on high-quality professional relationships.” ECTs and Mentors talk about how these meetings allow them to check in with each other and iron out any concerns or issues. In addition to

these termly meetings, Neil also provides a weekly bulletin for ECTs and Mentors. This allows them to celebrate successes by selecting a Mentor of the week. Mentor, Rebecca, explained, “it’s nice to have a moment to remember the impact of our role. The ‘Mentor of the Week’ is a small thing, but we know that our job is valued and important to the wider school community”.

Key Takeaways

1. Strategic Planning and Implementation

The success of the ECF programme at Carlton Bolling is attributed to meticulous planning and implementation. This involves incorporating the ECF into the school's CPD plan, identifying individual needs through observations, and selecting Mentors with appropriate skills and expertise. A strategic approach ensures that ECTs receive tailored training and support aligned with the school's goals.

2. Cultivating a Culture of Growth and Development

Carlton Bolling fosters a culture of continuous improvement, where both ECTs and Mentors benefit from instructional coaching. Emphasising small changes and deliberate practice, the school encourages active engagement in professional development. Mentorship roles serve as developmental opportunities, contributing to the overall growth of teachers and leaders within the school community.

3. Quality Assurance

The school prioritises ongoing quality assurance to ensure the effectiveness of the ECF programme. Weekly Mentor meetings, regular feedback sessions, and accountability mechanisms are in place to support ECTs and Mentors. Flexibility is maintained to adapt to the dynamic school environment, with a focus on maintaining high expectations and fostering professional relationships.

Special thanks to Ubaid Naseem, Neil Sutcliffe, Jack Bloomfield, Rebecca Tait, Natalie Davies, Lauren Ross, Samuel Ingleson, Tegan Smith, Ellie Smith and Shahanur Ali for their contributions.