



The National Association of  
School-Based Teacher Trainers

## **NASBTT Opinion Piece**

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### **How can we provide meaningful SEND training for trainee teachers?**

Ever since the Carter Review of Initial Teacher Training in 2015, which reminded us that “good teaching for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) is good teaching for all children”, practitioners and policy-makers have highlighted the variability in coverage of SEND in Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in this country.

It is clear, however, that the need for thorough, sustainable SEND training is greater than ever. An alarming number of teachers feel unprepared or unsupported to teach pupils with SEND, which raises urgent questions about the suitability and accessibility of existing training and CPD. Typically, exit interviews and the Newly-Qualified Teacher (NQT) survey reveal that trainee confidence is weakest in terms of their ability to teach children with a range of needs.

You could argue that this is unsurprising – I would be suspicious of any experienced teacher who could honestly say they had high confidence in managing every possible need they might encounter, never mind trainee teachers and NQTs who are just embarking on their journeys – but it reinforces what we know about SEND training in ITT: that it is highly inconsistent.

The issue has been that there is a lack of expertise among ITT providers (School-Centred ITT providers, School Direct Lead Schools and Higher Education Institutions specialising in teacher training) to develop structured and sustainable programmes with a clear SEND input. What was missing was an easy-to-use resource that was flexible for different providers, and could fit in with their planning and accountability cycles.

The provision of meaningful SEND training for trainee teachers is something we take very seriously, and that is why we championed the development of a practical resource to help ITT providers equip a new generation of teachers with the skills and knowledge to teach well for SEND: giving them the ‘how to’ and helping them explore wider principles with their trainees, with the understanding that learning is never complete.

This starts with an audit, which is useful in helping providers to identify what they ‘don’t know they don’t know’. Our experience has been that there is huge support among providers for the idea of high-quality SEND training, but with a crammed Initial Teacher Education (ITE) curriculum it can be difficult to know what can be achieved and how best to achieve it. This tool helps with that process, giving a clear picture from which to develop their provision. ITT providers are used to this process of reviewing and adapting. Each year they gather exit data, performance data, outcomes, trajectories, feedback from school placements and feedback from their NQTs and ultimately use this information to review and adapt their provision.

The materials in the toolkit, and especially the audit, feed into this review process where the measurable impact is recorded both in terms of the progress of the trainees themselves (in this case in relation to their confidence and competence in teaching children with a range of needs) and in the process made by children in their care.

In summary, based on our experience, a robust SEND curriculum for ITT/ITE needs to include:

- **the graduated approach.** This is non-negotiable. Trainees need to be able to explain this clearly for the NQT interviews.
- how to **measure the impact of interventions.** This is about how they use data. At initial training stage it may be support staff and the SENCO who provide data, but teachers need to know what questions to ask and how to interpret the answers.
- the **milestones in a child or young person's development**, and how to determine whether or not these are being reached.
- the **four broad areas of need** and specific needs within each area. Trainees can never fully know this, but a well-designed programme will give them the skills they need to research more as they progress in their career.
- **subject knowledge** (at secondary level) and **different pedagogical approaches to SEND.** This is about trainees developing their ability to spot when a pupil is underperforming and discern if this reflects a special educational need.
- **partnership and multi-agency working.** This means working collaboratively with children and young people, parents and families, support staff and external practitioners.

Moving forward, we are heartened by the Department for Education's plans to ensure an entitlement to sustained CPD for all early career teachers. We believe that accredited training providers are perfectly placed to offer this support to early career teachers, building on the strong foundation of ITE. We hope that the plans for the Early Career Framework, which we should know more about before the Christmas break, will provide scope for this toolkit to be used in the continuing development of SEND expertise.

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NASBTT represents the interests of schools-led teacher training provision in relation to the development and implementation of national policy developments. Our members include SCITT providers, School Direct Lead Schools, Teaching Schools, HEIs as well as a range of other organisations involved in the education and professional development of teachers. We have 195 members representing almost 7,000 individual trainees.

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