

EARLY YEARS TEACHING: *The School Direct approach*

How to acquire sufficient practical experience is a conundrum facing all would-be early educators. Studying childhood development in the lecture theatre is a world away from witnessing it red in tooth and claw, in a working environment, and knowing how to translate theory into effective practice can be a challenge. In the worst cases, children lose out as a result. So what's the solution?

Well, for those seeking to gain Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) or Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) there's School Direct – a DfE-backed alternative to the more traditional university-based approach to training that instead allows graduates to learn in the kinds of settings they'll work in once they have qualified. One setting championing the approach is Everton Nursery School and Family Centre (evertonnurseryschoolandfamilycentre.org) in Liverpool, which offers the 'Tuition Fee' and 'Salaried' School Direct programmes leading to an Early Years (ages 3-7) QTS, plus in the case of the former, a PGCE too.

"It's a wonderful package," deputy headteacher, Jamie Wilson, tells us as we discuss what Everton has to offer those seeking to becoming outstanding teachers. "A QTS with a 3-7 specialism, with a PGCE – it offers endless opportunities. On top of that, as part of our Tuition Fee programme, we also offer an 'enrichment placement' that gives trainees the chance to spend time in settings that have children from birth to three, as well as opportunities for Key Stage 2 – so it covers the age phase before and after the 3-7 specialism too."

Rich experiences

So what does training to teach through School Direct actually involve? Those accepted onto one of Everton's programmes, Jamie tells us, benefit from three school placements over the course of a year, totalling 120 days. The first and last take place at a 'home' school, selected from Everton's Teaching School Partnership – here trainees experience working with two different age groups, across the

"We want the best, but we're not after the finished article; we're looking for people with a love for children and their learning."

Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. The middle placement takes trainees to a second, often contrasting school, where they will face new challenges while continuing to gain classroom experience with the 3-7 age range.

The placements are supplemented with theoretical learning sessions – the vast majority of which, from September 2015, will also be school-based – providing the subject knowledge trainees need to qualify. As demanded by the Tuition Fee programme's PGCE, trainees also have access to a partner university, which awards the qualification at the year's end.

"I wouldn't want to lose the theoretical underpinning that links the practice to the theory and vice versa. It's incredibly important and that's the reason why we train the PGCE and have university involvement – albeit from a distance," Jamie explains, "but I

think School Direct is the way forward in terms of teacher training. Crucially, it offers trainees the chance to be part of a community from the word go – they're absolutely immersed within the school environment."

Indeed, even before those who are accepted onto Everton's School Direct programme begin their induction, there are opportunities to experience the daily work of an 'outstanding' nursery school. A 'keeping warm' programme sees recruits invited in during the

preceding summer term, taking part in professional development opportunities and educational visits – "Already they're understanding what schools are all about," Jamie says.

Ready to work

Another benefit of School Direct at Everton is the opportunities for employment it presents. Information about those studying is shared with local schools, helping to place Newly Qualified Teachers in settings in need of their particular talents. Some trainees remain within the Teaching School Partnership itself, giving them the perfect head start to their careers.

Everton is still recruiting for its 2015/16 programmes. In total there are 36 places available on the Tuition Fee programme (ideal for graduates) and 16 on the Salaried programme (aimed at those currently working in education or career changers). School Direct is, Jamie suggests, a route that many are still unaware of, despite all it has to offer. If you are a graduate with aspirations to teach in the early years, the practical experience offered by this route to QTS is well worth considering.

