

Early Investment, Lasting Impact: What Matters Most in ITT & ECT Support

What you prioritise in ITT and ECT support becomes your culture

In every school, early career teachers are shaping their professional identity. One conversation, one decision, one lesson at a time.

Those early months and years aren't a holding pattern. They're a foundation. And what's prioritised during ITT and ECT support, the habits, messages and expectations, doesn't just influence the teacher. It shapes the school's future culture.

That's why early investment matters. Not just for retention, but for the kind of professionalism we grow.

Support That Builds Confidence

Strong support is essential. But it's easy, and understandable, to interpret support as protection:

- Pre-prepared lessons
- Reduced timetables
- Light-touch QA
- A focus on routines over reasoning

In some cases, these things help reduce cognitive load and build confidence. But if they become the whole offer, there's a risk that new teachers don't get the space to develop the professional thinking they'll need later.

Support isn't just about comfort. It's about clarity, growth, and confidence.

Early Experiences Shape Long-Term Habits

Teachers learn not just from what they're told but from what's modelled, valued, and repeated.

If early experiences focus mostly on "getting through" rather than thinking through, teachers may internalise a message that delivering content is more important than understanding it, or that routines matter more than reflection.

By contrast, when schools make space for:

- Curriculum conversations with purpose
- Mentoring that supports professional judgment
- Reflective planning and adaptation

...teachers start to see themselves as professionals, not just practitioners. And that mindset carries forward — into classrooms, teams, and leadership.

Leadership Questions That Matter

1. What do early career teachers learn about our values from their first term here?
2. Are we supporting mentors to grow reflective thinking, not just routines?
3. Do our QA and CPD systems reinforce curiosity and growth?
4. What habits are we helping our early career teachers build — and are they sustainable?
5. What would a former ECT say they learned about teaching here — beyond behaviour and pacing?

Strategic Actions to Build Professional Confidence

1. **Strengthen mentoring through coaching**
Equip mentors with time, training and support to guide thinking — not just logistics.
2. **Use induction to reinforce purpose**
Early experiences should show not just how things work — but *why* they matter.
3. **Offer space for reflection, not just delivery**
Encourage ECTs to think about pupils' responses, learning processes, and what they'd do differently.
4. **Involve early career teachers in curriculum understanding**
Help them explore why lessons are structured as they are — not just how to deliver them.
5. **Recognise the long-term impact of habits**
Every structure, planning, meetings, feedback, sends a message. Be intentional about what it teaches.

Final Word

Supporting early career teachers isn't just about retention — it's about growth.

What you prioritise early becomes normal. And what becomes normal shapes your culture.

By investing in professional thinking, inclusive understanding, and values-aligned habits, schools can grow teachers who are not just confident today — but equipped to shape the future.