

SPOTLIGHT ON: Early Career Teachers



In Spotlight On, we catch up with our Early Career Teachers (ECTs) as they progress through the early stages of their career with us!

This time, we catch up with Connor Sims, Teacher of Geography from Outwood Academy Valley!

What first made you want to become a teacher?

I wanted to become a teacher as I enjoy helping people, and I needed a career change. I've had a very storied life, from living in Norway and Aberdeen, serving in the Royal Engineers to working in quarrying and civil engineering alongside competing up to a professional level in sports. All these experiences and personal ethos led me to reflect that I enjoy coaching and bringing others on, and what better way to build the future of communities and individuals than being a teacher?

"I absolutely love it. Every day is different and varied."

How are you finding teaching so far?

I absolutely love it. Every day is different and varied. I get to develop others' passion and enthusiasm for Geography. I get to deliver extracurricular sports clubs and offer enrichments to students to not only show pedagogy but a wider curriculum too. The department I work in is great. There is a wide range of experiences and expertise and everyone chips in to help and support each other.

How has your teacher training set you up for your first year as a teacher?

The University of Sheffield did an excellent job in preparing me for teaching. Through lectures and two ITT placements, the PGCE course was very good. My placements were varied, I did not necessarily enjoy the first looking back as it didn't suit my teaching style but my second placement set me up perfectly for my current position and the mentors you have, do a magnificent job - lean on their support!

What are your learnings so far?

I have learnt just how far confidence goes every day in little situations that can take you off guard. The students have a thirst for knowledge and will keep you entertained; they are funny and charismatic, and you really do have an impact on their futures.

"You just have to believe in yourself."

Could you share any tips/advice for other ECTs or trainee teachers?

You just have to believe in yourself. Every member of staff has bad lessons or is caught off guard, you just have to learn to roll with it. There's no such thing as a stupid question and don't be afraid to use the school's behaviour management policy, it is there to help you do your job!

"I've felt truly supported. I've never worked in a better team than the Humanities department I am in now."

How have you felt supported so far by the Outwood Family?

I've felt truly supported. I've never worked in a better team than the Humanities department I am in now. There are plenty of CPD opportunities on offer, you just have to volunteer for them and the management structure supports you in this. The OGAT vision is 'Students First' and that aligns with my morals - everything in society is about supporting others, whether you're a bin man or a brain surgeon and that structure is replicated in school.