

Building on your strengths

A guide for Headteachers and Governors

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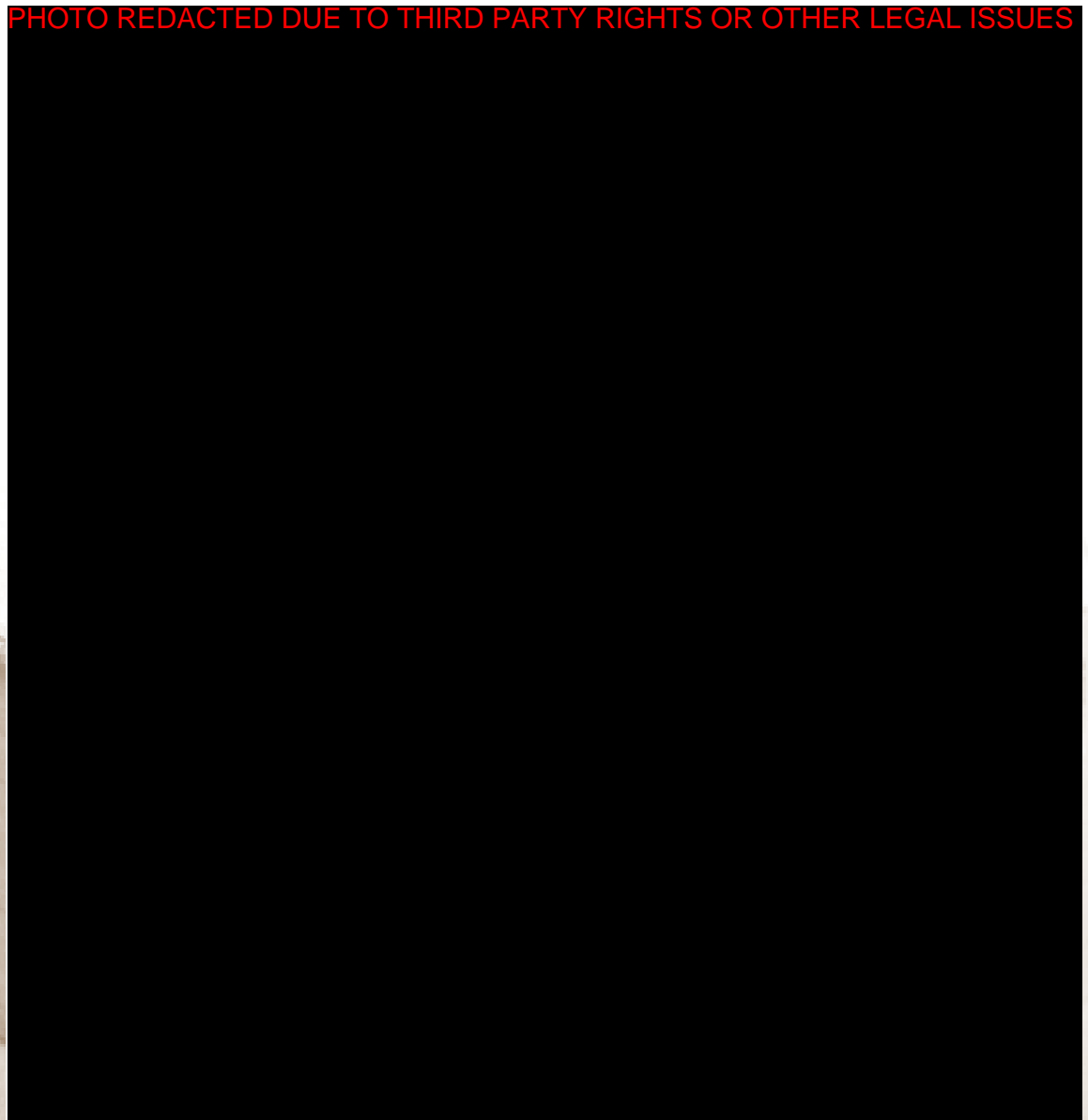
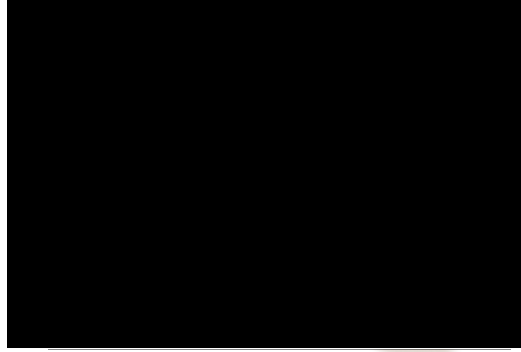


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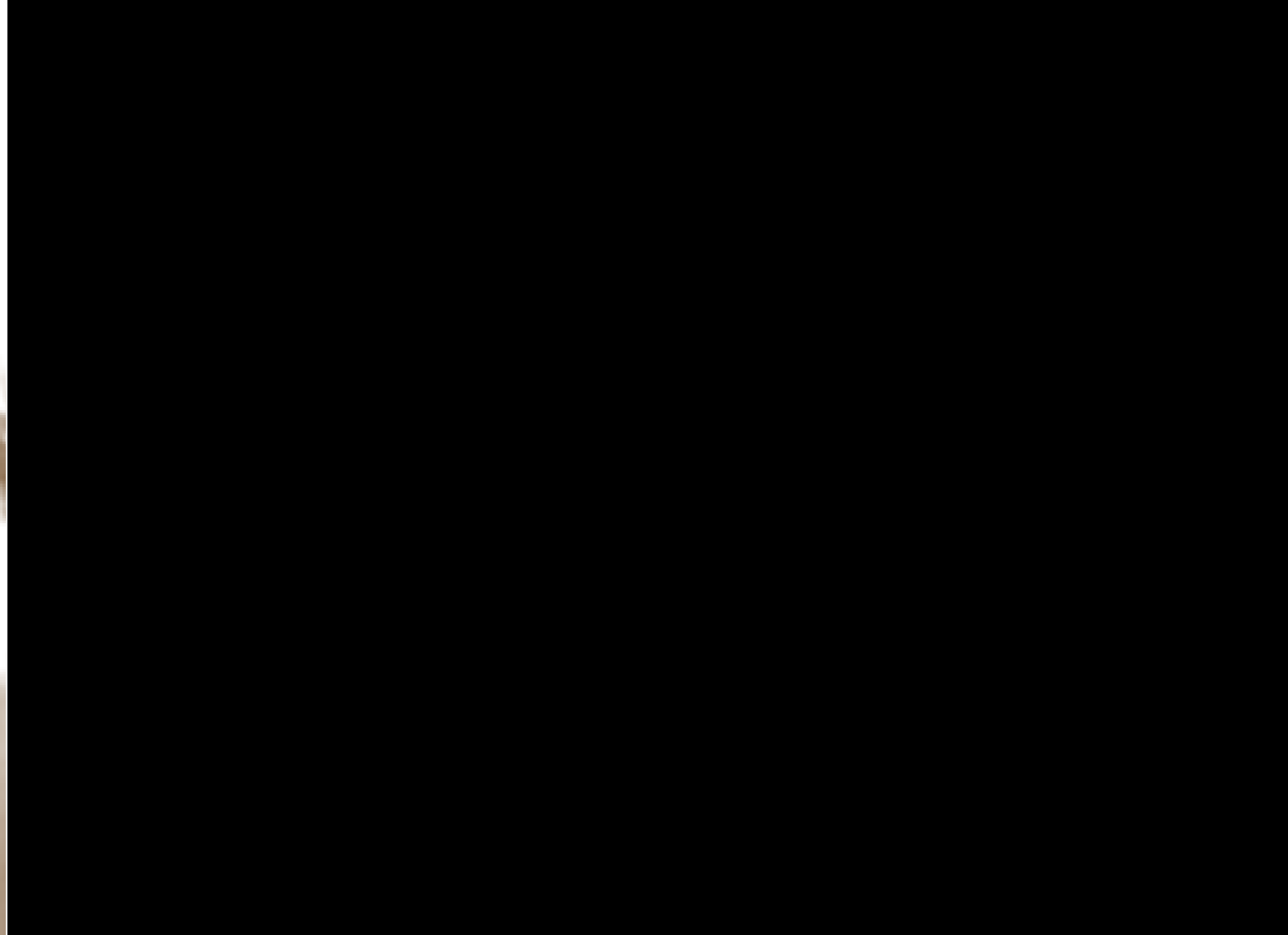


"Without doubt one of the best ways for teachers to improve their skills is by learning from other practising teachers. The AST scheme offers a genuine opportunity for schools, at all levels, to benefit from just such a 'hands-on' approach to professional development, while also providing highly skilled classroom teachers with a set of exciting, new challenges. Challenges that capitalise on their genuine enthusiasm for developing and sharing new and more effective ways of working.

"All educational initiatives should ultimately be judged on the positive contribution that they make to children's education and, with the active support of Headteachers and Governors, ASTs can really make a difference to school improvement, which is strongly welcomed by Governors."

Christine Gale | Chair | National Governors' Council

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Unlocking classroom experience

Your People

A new way of working

Headteachers and Governors are faced with a host of constantly evolving challenges as part of the ongoing management of their schools. How do you attract and retain key teachers? What can be done to increase staff motivation? Are there more effective ways to raise achievement levels? How can the school broaden its skills and knowledge base? And what can be done to enhance the school's profile and reputation?

The Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) programme is designed to address just such issues, and much more. It is a key part of the Government's plans to strengthen the teaching profession by promoting better leadership, better rewards, better training and better support.

It offers a new career path through which excellent classroom practitioners can continue to teach without having to take on management responsibilities. In return they are rewarded for providing other teachers with the opportunity to learn from their best practices, build on their strengths and address any development needs.

The role of AST's

Like any teacher, the main role of an AST is to provide excellent classroom teaching and 80% of their time is spent working with their own classes.

But they will also undertake a range of additional duties to help raise teaching and learning standards in their own and other schools, such as:

- leading professional learning groups
- advising on classroom organisation and teaching methods
- providing model lessons
- spreading good practice based on educational research
- producing high quality teaching materials
- advising on professional development
- establishing professional learning teams in schools
- helping to support performance management
- supporting teachers experiencing difficulties
- helping with the induction and mentoring of newly qualified teachers
- participating in initial teacher training.

Making the right choice

By definition an AST is an excellent teacher who achieves the very best standards of classroom practice and who is paid to share their experience with other teachers.

Anyone in maintained schools who wants to stay as a classroom practitioner and who has the professional and inter-personal skills needed to satisfy the AST assessment standards can apply. This includes part-time and peripatetic staff and those currently holding management responsibilities.

"The AST role is primarily to do with modelling or 'walking the talk'. A lot of the work is, therefore, 'grass roots', practical stuff that most schools would do anyway, but the difference is that the AST scheme provides you with the funding and the time to really focus resources in such areas."

Addressing your concerns

Your Questions

“All of the teachers in my school are ‘excellent’. Why single one out?”

The job of an AST is exactly the same as any other post, such as a Head of Department - it is a career option, not a "perk", with very specific aims and objectives. Suitable candidates will almost certainly already be recognised by colleagues as having the particular professional and inter-personal skills needed to be successful in the role.

“The school already conducts a lot of the activities of an AST. What’s the difference?”

Some of the typical functions of an AST do cover areas that most schools already undertake. But instead of these being performed on an ad-hoc basis or squeezed into the already busy schedules of teachers, the AST role ensures that dedicated time is available to provide structured and consistent support for teaching and learning.

“Can the school have more than one AST?”

Yes. There is no specific limit on the number of ASTs a school may have, although nationally it is anticipated that they will represent between 3 to 5% of teachers.

“How do I know that this isn’t just another passing fad?”

The Government is committed to increasing the number of ASTs - it has provided funding to create a total of 5,000 AST posts by September 2002. In addition, there is no fixed time limit for AST posts; decisions will depend upon the priorities of schools and LEAs.

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“Our teachers recognise the role that (our AST) is playing in supporting the needs of the school as a whole, so everyone benefits.”

Shahed Ahmed | Headteacher | Hallsville Primary School

"Why would we want an 'inspector' in my school?"

ASTs do not operate independently of the school and do not report on or judge performance. Under the direction of the Headteacher, their role is to work as an integral part of the school's team providing unbiased advice and practical guidance whenever and wherever it is needed to improve overall teaching standards.

"Why should we 'lose' one of the school's best teachers when they're on outreach?"

The AST role is about recognising and rewarding excellent classroom practitioners. Without this career development route you might “lose” them altogether. By appointing an AST you can attract or retain an excellent teacher for 80% of their time - rather than losing 100% of it. And don't forget that they will also bring a lot of new ideas and approaches gained from their work with other teachers back into the school.

"Who provides the teaching cover when the AST is on outreach?"

Without doubt effective pre-planning is essential. Schools that already employ ASTs have developed a number of innovative approaches to provide consistent teaching cover and ensure that the education of their children does not suffer. These include the re-deployment of existing resources, the use of part-time staff, such as recently retired colleagues, and the scheduling of lessons to incorporate time for outreach. The AST scheme gives you the flexibility to determine the most effective approach for your school.

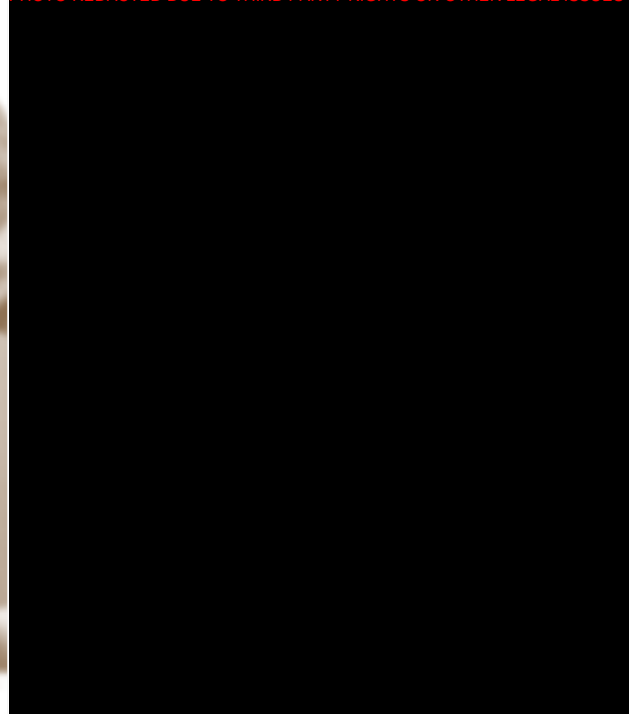
"Our school is performing well. Why would we want an AST?"

Congratulations! In that case, one or more of your staff may be ideal as an AST, helping to share the good practices that you have developed, honing the teaching methods that you use, building closer relationships with other schools and generally raising the profile of your school.

"The AST programme helped us to retain a key member of our teaching staff by offering them a fresh set of professional challenges, without having to move into a management role. There is no doubt that the AST scheme has raised Bedgrove's profile."

Barbara Capstick | Headteacher | Bedgrove Infant School

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How your school will benefit

Your School

The AST scheme can play a vital role in overcoming many of the key challenges faced by schools today:

1. Attracting and retaining key teachers

Many teachers want to progress in their careers, but do not want to move into a management role. The Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) scheme is the only career path that enables teachers to continue spending the majority of their time working in the classroom.

2. Improving staff motivation

The recognition and reward of good practices and key skills has a considerable motivational effect on the AST and other teachers. The injection of new ideas and challenges can also stimulate greater creativity and dynamism amongst staff, pupils and the school as a whole.

3. Raising achievement levels

Feedback on new approaches gained by the AST from other teachers and schools can result in an overall improvement in teaching and learning standards - helping to raise levels of educational achievement.

4. Broadening the skills base

The AST role is a unique opportunity for teachers to develop and enhance both the depth and range of their skills through their work with other teachers and ASTs and their participation in local and national professional development initiatives.

5. Increasing the school's prestige

Given its high priority within government, the AST programme has attracted considerable attention from the teaching profession, school governing bodies and parents. The appointment of an AST can positively enhance a school's local and national profile by demonstrating the school's commitment to improving teaching and learning standards.

6. Developing inter-school co-operation

Through their outreach work ASTs can foster close working relationships with other educational establishments, including feeder schools, providing the foundation for new initiatives such as resource sharing and collaborative learning projects.

7. Creating a 'snowball' effect

An AST can help an individual teacher overcome a particular issue. But the effects of that work do not end there. With every problem solved or best practice shared there is a cumulative or "snowball" effect that will benefit the school and its pupils for many years to come.

"The AST scheme provides a means of nurturing professional development, while keeping teachers motivated, challenged and satisfied. And it keeps them on the staff! ASTs also play a key role in ensuring that the school is continually moving forward through the sharing of ideas. They enable the school to raise standards right across the board."

Taking the next step

Your Decision

To help you in deciding if your school could benefit from the appointment of an AST here are a few simple steps you can take:

1. Consider suitable ASTs

There is almost certainly someone within your school who could be a candidate to become an AST. It may be a key member of staff who needs a new challenge. Or a teacher who is already supporting their colleagues in their own time and has the necessary professional and inter-personal skills to succeed as an AST.

Alternatively, you may have vacancies. So, why not consider employing an AST to inject some fresh impetus. As with any other job, all you need to do is decide what key skills your school needs and then advertise accordingly.

2. Talk to your LEA AST Co-ordinator

If you think your school could benefit from employing an AST then talk to your LEA's AST Co-ordinator who can explain more about the Authority's strategy and funding for the appointment of ASTs.

3. Contact other Headteachers

To find out more about the practicalities of employing an AST, including possible options for providing teaching cover, you can discuss the scheme with other Headteachers who are currently using ASTs. For details please contact your LEA's AST Co-ordinator.

4. Read more online

The DfES AST web site contains everything you need to know about the programme aims, selection requirements and application process as well as details of AST-related events. You can access the site at:

www.dfes.gov.uk/ast/

5. Obtain the AST information pack

This information pack describes in detail, what an AST is, what being an AST involves and what benefits they can bring to your school and to others in the locality. It also explains the purpose of the programme and includes brief details of the assessment process and funding arrangements. To obtain a free copy please contact the DfES Publications on:

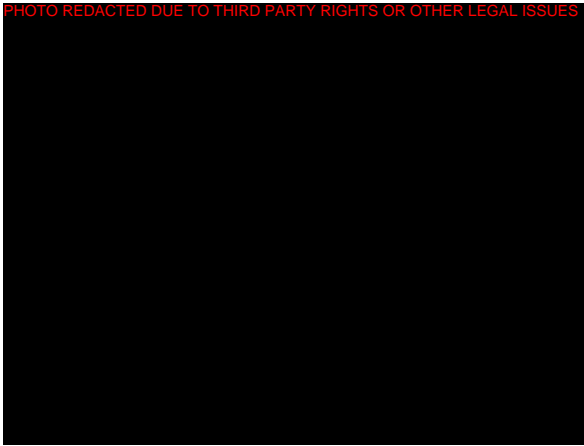
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**It's your school and your decision -
but working together we can
create our future.**

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www.dfes.gov.uk/ast