

supporting pupils, through supporting teachers in a setting in which knowledge and understanding may be shared and developed by professional peers.

- While other professional groups have been using systems of peer professional support and consultation, teachers who have considerable knowledge and skill rarely share this with colleagues. TSTs set up a forum for professional educators to share, manage and solve problems which arise from teachers' individual and immediate classroom concerns.
- In seeking assistance teachers make requests to the team who help them to define the problem/s, consider possible alternatives and try out practical strategies.
- In that TSTs develop structured approaches to collaborative problem solving with an emphasis on follow-up and review they differ from much of the informal peer support which is to be found in many schools. Teachers may often ask each other for advice. However these exchanges typically take place in the context of busy staff rooms in a very short space of time and rarely with any possibility of reviewing the effects of the advice. TSTs allocate a dedicated amount of time to a referring teacher, in a calm and peaceful setting in which issues may be discussed without interruption and in confidence.
- Crucially they embody the problem solving cycle in that teachers are offered the opportunity to monitor and review the situation through follow up meetings.

What are the advantages of TSTs

- as a school resource for collegial assistance and support.
- as a forum for teachers to share expertise and understanding
- as a way of enabling teachers to develop their approaches to children with special educational needs.
- as a support for the implementation of stages 1 to 3 of the Code of Practice
- as a system for schools to offer more effective provision for children with special educational needs in the context of Local Management of Schools.

In the context of devolved and perhaps dwindling resources for meeting SEN, questions of cost effectiveness spur the need for the development of services which make

the best use of what is available. TSTs offer the possibility of intervention that is distinctive by dint of the focus on teachers rather than children or school policy. They utilise the sadly under used potential resource which consultation and collective problem solving can offer teachers. They also provide a way in which a school may structure and organise its response to the Code of Practice. In so doing they may well enhance and refine the role and effectiveness of the SEN Co-ordinator. TSTs may support the formulation and review of IEPs as part of the practice of offering more general support to teachers. They may help schools to establish priorities in their negotiation for external support services. Issues raised in TSTs may also feedback into the institutional and SEN policy development planning process.

How do TSTs work ?

- Typically 3 teachers (the SEN co-ordinator, a senior teacher and another class teacher) serve as the core team, who call on outside support and advisory staff and parents when needed.
- Teams meet weekly or fortnightly with the teacher making a request for support - meetings last about 30 minutes each (usually during lunch time or after school). A team member usually collects relevant information about the teacher's concern before the meeting.
- Typically one case is dealt with per meeting, either a new request or a follow-up. Unless a case is closed a follow-up date is always agreed at which the situation will be reviewed.
- Teams keep confidential notes about cases to enable follow-up work and a log of meetings.
- Teachers involved in meetings need to have some time release from other responsibilities.
- The principle and practical aspects of TSTs need staff and head teacher support.

For TSTs to operate successfully it would seem that there needs to be a clear specification of the kinds of teaching problems which could be referred by teachers to the