

School Direct Trainee Spotlight: Miss Shenton, Geography



What is life like as a teacher trainee at Ringwood School on the School Direct programme? Miss Shenton tells all in our new feature...

Who and what inspired you to want to become a teacher?

When I was at secondary school I always got on really well with my teachers and for me it was like a home from home. I am from a small family and went to a relatively small school so the two were interchangeable which was fantastic. My teachers were always so approachable and inspiring with their love for a specific subject and it was at that point I knew I wanted to become a teacher. My teachers definitely inspired me to get into teaching and want to become a teacher, as did my University lecturers. I have fantastic memories of being at school and university. To teach and to be in the position to be able to make a positive influence on someone else's life is just incredible. It did however take me a while to realise what I wanted to teach and how I would even start my teaching journey.

How would you describe your teaching journey so far?

When I look back the last few months have just been amazing! At secondary school I always had a passion for Art and Design, and thought if I were to teach, Art would be my subject. It was only when I entered Sixth Form and began studying Human Geography, I realised that Geography was my true passion. I studied a BA in Geography at University of London Royal Holloway, and went onto gain a Masters. It became very clear during my last year, I wanted to become a teacher but unsure which age group I wanted to teach; primary, junior or secondary. I even considered completing a PhD and becoming a lecturer! I decided to begin my teaching career experience with Early Years and whilst I enjoyed the experience I decided after 6 months it wasn't for me. I then started teaching English in a Foreign Language school and absolutely loved it, I was at the Language School for 8 months and loved going to work every day – but it wasn't teaching Geography. This really made me realise that I needed to find a route into teaching Geography at secondary school level. So on a rare 5 minute break from the Language School, I registered my details with UCAS on the Get into Teaching website and everything happened within a week which was quite incredible! What a week it was! The Get into Teaching website is fantastic and really helped to guide me through step by step everything I needed to do and when.

Which route into teaching did you choose and why?

I knew that I wanted to stay local to Bournemouth and I didn't want to go back to University after spending four years studying. I really wanted to do my teacher training in a school environment, so the School Direct programme was ideal for me. Once I had registered my details, Ringwood were the first school to get in touch and contact me, and within 24 hours I had been invited in for an interview. When I came in for my interview, it was amazing, and during the process I knew straight away that Ringwood was where I wanted to be. Ringwood is a large school but really does bring a personal touch to everything. I had to plan and teach a lesson to a small group of Year 7's which felt very natural and not like an interview at all. Within 24 hours I had accepted Ringwood's offer and started my teacher training on 5th September. The rest, as they say, is history! I couldn't quite believe that I had submitted my application in May 2016 and by the September I was at Ringwood School.

Has starting your teaching career lived up to your expectations?

So far, teaching at Ringwood has completely surpassed my expectations. It is even better than I thought it would be and whilst there are tough days and initially it is hard work and long days, every day is different and there is always a small thing which makes you think 'Yes I am doing this for a reason'. It is the best life choice I have ever made. Witnessing my Year 8 classes get excited about tectonics and come into class saying 'Miss, did you hear about that earthquake the other day?' is one of those little things which every teacher loves. Geography is such an interactive and engaging subject with so many real life events taking place that you can discuss and debate in the classroom. Every day I am picking up new teaching techniques from my mentor, department and school colleagues. Also being part of a Teaching Alliance means that I will also get to experience life at a different school soon as part of my second teaching placement.

How did you feel on your first day of term?

What a day it was! I don't think I have ever seen so many new faces at once. There are seven other trainees who are on the School Direct programme so it was reassuring to know that I wasn't the only new teacher in school at the start of term. There are 32 trainees in the Teaching Alliance and it is fantastic to know that there are other trainee teachers in the same position, who are likely feeling the same and going through similar experiences throughout the year. Whilst I am teaching on a reduced timetable at Ringwood for the majority of the week every fortnight I go to a school within the Alliance network, to observe lessons, focus groups, understand what good quality marking looks like (to name a few) which is great to get some variation and to see what other teachers are doing. I also get the opportunity to still go to the University of Southampton every fortnight. As a trainee teacher I have the same responsibilities as all other qualified teachers but by having a reduced timetable this allows me to complete my university work and training programmes.

What are you finding the most rewarding about teaching?

It's the little things in teaching which definitely make a difference every day. When a student suddenly grasps a new concept, you see their eyes light up when they get excited about a topic and when they are really pleased with their assessment results. Just a few small things, but they make all the hard work so worthwhile. I got my first student Christmas card today which made me smile. If my students think 'I had a really good lesson today and Miss Shenton is pretty cool' I will be happy. The student's curiosity is also quite wonderful to see especially when my teaching is helping to feed their curiosity.

What are you finding the most challenging?

All of the extra work which has to be done outside of school time. School doesn't finish at 3.20pm and so much has to happen once all of the students have gone home in order to make sure that lessons are delivered to the highest standards. Lesson planning, marking, keeping up with the latest news in Geography, University days and there is a lot of additional paperwork as a trainee but I know that it's not forever and it will all be worth it in the end!

What would you say are the most important traits of a great teacher?

From my experience so far, would have to be patience, enthusiasm and passion. They all sound very cliché and I'm aware that may sound like a bit of 'stock answer' but I am finding they are all so true. You really need to love what you do, have a true passion for your subject and this will then come through in every lesson you teach. You also need lots of drive and determination. Again if you love your subject, then you are naturally driven to want to educate students on how great it is and to instil a lifelong passion. Training to be a teacher is hard work but the rewards are immense. If you put in 100% you definitely see the impact whether it be during lessons or in your students overall progress.