

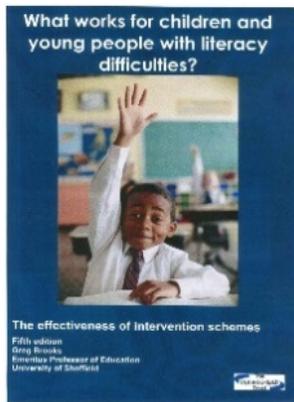
# Improving reading comprehension / Inference Training:

Inference training is both a group intervention and has classroom strategies for KS2 and KS3 to boost reading comprehension

[An information leaflet about inference training](#)



[Brooks 2016](#)  
[What works for children and young people with literacy difficulties?](#)



- **Boosting vocabulary**
- **Activating background knowledge**
- **Making inferences**
- **Integrating and building meaning**
- **Promoting enjoyment of reading**



[International Literacy Centre at the Institute of Education, London – article about Inference training](#)



**Information for trainers:**

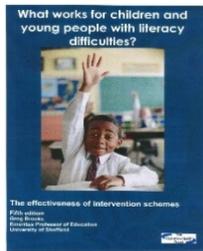
- [further reading about comprehension](#)
- [illustration of training module](#)



[Contact Leicester City Council trainers](#)  
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# Improving reading comprehension using classroom strategies and Inference Training for groups 2016

Professional development materials, class teaching strategies and a group intervention



<http://www.interventionsforliteracy.org.uk/assets/What-Works-5th-edition-Rev-Oct-2016.pdf>

Our training aims to help all pupils to improve their understanding and enjoyment in reading. However, it focuses particularly on the 10% of pupils in KS1-3 who *decode adequately but fail to get full meaning and enjoyment from their reading*.

The training contains three main elements. The **professional development materials** help schools explore ways of improving comprehension and enjoyment in reading and boosts adults' expertise of literacy teaching. This includes working with at least 20 pupils at each school to see which comprehension strategies pupils are using or neglecting. It also provides **best practice comprehension teaching and learning strategies that travel across the curriculum for class teachers in KS1/2/3**. Finally it offers **a group intervention of 24 lessons** for pupils in Y3-Y8 who need extra support with strategies that connect to ongoing teaching so pupils generalise their improved skills. Studies reveal that pupils with weak comprehension skills read in different ways to effective readers

Weak comprehenders may...



- Focus on individual words/sentences
- Attach most importance to decoding
- Have a passive style of reading
- Have lower expectations of text making sense and fewer comprehension monitoring strategies
- Read fewer books and are less sensitive to text structure
- Fail to activate background knowledge or visualise
- Neglect inference
- Find it hard to determine importance and make connections within a text resulting in weaker gist

Effective readers...



- Know that understanding is the goal of reading
- Activate background knowledge and working memory
- Integrate information/ideas and make inferences to get gist
- Have high expectations of text making sense
- Make predictions, ask own questions and watch out for "answers"
- Can visualise when appropriate
- Monitor meaning, notice breakdown and use breakdown strategies
- Read frequently and enjoy reading

## Professional development

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Our training materials contain engaging, professional development materials for school staff. Adults in school are generally expert readers who use comprehension strategies so automatically they are often unaware of how they actually do this. It is therefore often hard for staff to understand the difficulties some pupils experience. The training aims to improve adult awareness of the challenges some readers face across the curriculum, so that adults feel better equipped to help. It also includes a toolkit to have diagnostic conversations with pupils about texts to gain quick insights into what strategies pupils are using and neglecting. The trainer can work together with staff to gather 20-30 pupil profiles so outcomes can be analysed.

## Class teaching and learning strategies

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The training draws on a range of current research and best practice about class and group strategies likely to improve reading comprehension and enjoyment. Separate sections of the training address issues at KS1, KS2 and KS3. We also outline how primary schools can improve pupil confidence and attainment in Year 6 SATs through whole school collaboration. In secondary schools the training suggests ways all subject teachers can work together to improve students' metacognitive strategies across the curriculum which particularly benefits Pupil Premium students

## A group intervention of 24 lessons-Inference Training

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The training offers a group intervention for pupils who need extra support to recalibrate how they read. Inference training, based on the work of Yuill and Oakhill, involves a teacher/teaching assistant having "instructional conversations" to help make comprehension strategies explicit. Four pupils work with an adult for 40 minutes, twice a week for 24 lessons. Through reading and interactive discussions, the group:

- Predict, ask questions/ think 'I wonder', and read on to find out
- Connect their background knowledge to the text
- Identify words/phrases they don't understand and use repair strategies
- Identify key words and phrases in the text and make connections between them to build a gist
- Generate inferences and the ability to infer word meanings
- Visualise important parts of a text and share personal responses to it

## The materials

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Our training materials include whiteboard resources for primary and secondary schools to use and a manual containing 75 text extracts with support notes for adults. The fiction, non-fiction and poetry texts include award winning titles which have been carefully chosen to offer rich conversation opportunities. Further readings of the texts are also recommended using multiple copies so that pupils can apply their skills to whole texts.

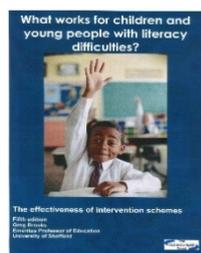
## Impact

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Inference training-the group intervention- featured in the 2007, 2013 and 2016 editions of Professor Greg Brook's study *What works for children and young people with literacy difficulties?* The study identified Inference Training as an intervention that offers **significant gains for pupils with weak comprehension skills**. The latest pupil impact data from 899 pupils in KS2 and KS3 shows that during inference training sessions, most pupils made over 12 months gain in reading comprehension age over the 12 week intervention.



## Training for Schools



Around ninety literacy specialists, some employed by LAs and others independent consultants, are **accredited inference trainers** and provide training to schools in England, as well as undertaking a wide range of other literacy work. (Training for these accredited trainers has been hosted by the Reading Recovery Centre at UCL or in Leicester.) **Training is generally school based and offers a menu from which schools can select.** The grid below outlines a menu of training which can be tailored to meet the needs of the school. **Items 1 and 2 from the menu below are essential initial training sessions and item 6 is an essential final one.** Between these, schools can choose CPD that fits their needs. Training is particularly effective when schools identify one member of staff to shadow/collaborate with the trainer and this person provides on-going support between and after training. Here's a Primary school example.

Training Menu	Approximate time	Training Menu	Approximate time
1. Characteristics of reading comprehension and 13 barriers	90 minutes	4. Classroom strategies to boost reading comprehension and enjoyment	Two 90 minute twilights with follow up tasks or one day
2. Trainer/teachers work with 20 pupils and have diagnostic conversations to see what comprehension strategies are being used and neglected across school	4 hours (Or items 1 and 2 can be undertaken in one day)	5 Helping pupils prepare for Y6 Reading SATs through whole school collaboration	2x 90 minute twilights or half day
3. How to deliver Inference Training- the group intervention	Half day (only for staff delivering the group intervention)	6. Follow up/coaching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For staff delivering the group intervention</li> <li>• And whole class teaching with trainer/class teachers</li> </ul>	Half day  Half day

## Costs of Inference Training

**The costs of the training** for a group of up to 30 teachers / Teaching Assistants are trainer costs plus £53.50 for the manual (plus postage), which contains 75 texts and resources. Generally schools purchase only a few manuals and trainers can mail hand-outs to schools before training. **The charge for accredited trainers varies from trainer to trainer, and has to be agreed individually.**

It is useful for schools to know what the costs per pupil are for any intervention used. An Inference Training programme is 24 lessons, each taking 40 minutes. We estimate **the cost of teaching** the group intervention per pupil is around £130 if delivered by a Level 2/3 TA or £300 per pupil by a

teacher. (Adults need 40 minutes teaching time for each lesson **and** 20 minutes planning/ recording, so allow 22, one hour adult sessions for a complete programme.)

## Acknowledgements and feedback from schools

Our professional development materials and class teaching approaches are based on a wide range of research and best practice including: *Almasi and Fullerton, Clarke, Truelove, Hulme and Snowling, Didau, Cain, Oakhill and Elbro, Gunning, Keene and Zimmerman, New National Curriculum, Ofsted, Tovani*. The group intervention-Inference Training - was adapted from the work of Yuill and Oakhill by Tony Whatmuff, with acknowledgement and thanks to colleagues.

*"The importance of evidence based practice in education is receiving increased recognition. Inference Training has a firm grounding in both the research into reading comprehension and the theoretical bases of comprehension. The programme provides sound and innovative ways to support children's reading comprehension and teaches them strategies that can be applied not only in literacy lessons, but across the curriculum"*

**Jane Oakhill**

*'You then set about training every teacher to be accomplished in teaching pupils the skills of reading comprehension. As a result, pupils are now practising these skills in all their lessons. These improvements in pupils' reading skills have made a positive difference to their abilities as writers.'*

**KS3 /4 Academy, Northwich**

**Ofsted, May 2016**

*"The training was outstanding. It contained a practical and overarching framework to help staff understand the challenges some students face in reading comprehension across the KS3 curriculum.*

*It also outlined practical classroom strategies to impact on student attainment."*

**Mick O'Leary, The Compton School, London. Director of Teaching School (Associate Head Teacher)**

*"The training was a great success and every member of staff made a point of saying it was very useful and practical and were keen to implement it in their own classrooms"*

**Bangabandhu Primary, Tower Hamlets, London. Amanda Drummond (Lead Teacher-Literacy and Language)**

### **Key Information about *Improving Reading comprehension and enjoyment 2016***

- Training consists of 3 components-professional development, whole class teaching strategies in KS1-3 and a group intervention which was highly recommended in Professor Greg Brooks'2016 study *What works for children and young people with literacy difficulties?*
- Training is usually school based and flexible to suit the needs of a school. Certain initial and final sessions need to be built in but between these schools can select from a menu.
- Training for accredited trainers has been hosted by UCL or Leicester City. Trainers undertake a wide range of work in addition to inference training.
- The group intervention is for pupils who decode adequately but experience comprehension difficulties. Four pupils work with an adult (trained Level 2/3 TA or Teacher) for 40 minutes a session, twice a week for 12 weeks (24 lessons).
- Pupils in the group intervention made an average of more than 12 months progress in comprehension age over 12 weeks.
- Schools need to select a member of staff to participate in some joint training and follow up.
- The training manual is only available to schools that access the training.

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## Inference training: origins and development

**By Tony Whatmuff,  
Reading Recovery teacher  
leader, Leicester**

Inference training is a group intervention for pupils in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 who decode adequately but fail to get full meaning and enjoyment from their reading. The techniques can also be used in guided and whole class teaching.

Evidence from researchers such as Nation & Snowling (1997) and Cain & Oakhill (2007) suggest one in 10 pupils who decode satisfactorily in Key Stage 2, read accurately but are poor comprehenders.

This article summarises the origins and development of the intervention and refers to future plans and research.

In 2004/5 large numbers of pupils in Leicester City LA seemed to have acquired age appropriate skills in decoding but were experiencing difficulties with reading comprehension and enjoyment.

This was evidenced by listening to the views of SENCOs, literacy consultants and class teachers across the city, as well as an analysis of Year 6 SATs papers. Schools used a range of interventions that focused on decoding but none that explicitly targeted reading comprehension.

My role at this time was Wave 3 lead for literacy and I looked at research into successful approaches to boosting reading comprehension. When I read Yuill & Oakhill's (1988) original research on inference training I decided it would be useful to trial the intervention which focused on:

- Elaborating on key words/phrases
- Question generating
- Adding a Sentence

### **Pilot**

Initially 20 Key Stage 2 and 3 pupils were sampled to see what kinds of difficulties weaker comprehenders were experiencing.

Pupils were asked to read around 250 words of their reading book and some unseen short texts.

Through conversations after the reading, I tried to examine issues in relation to:

- Applying background knowledge to text
- Vocabulary knowledge
- Integration of key ideas
- Inference making
- Ability to summarise

From the interviews I found that pupils usually experienced a cluster of comprehension difficulties rather than single ones, but that the application of background knowledge, integrating key ideas of a text passage and inference making were common problems.

In fact this proved to be in line with future research findings of Yuill & Oakhill (1991/2009), Cain & Oakhill (2007) and Cain (2011).

As a result of working with these pupils, and undertaking a literature review of reading comprehension, I made additions to Yuill & Oakhill's model.

**Table 1**

School	Key Stage	Group	No. of pupils	Time: Weeks / Sessions	Impact
School 1	KS2	A	38	8 / 15-24	average gain 20+ months comprehension Neale
	KS2	B	35	8 / 24	average gain 12 months comprehension Neale
	KS2	C	23	5 / 24	average gain 12 months comprehension Neale
School 2	KS2	A	6	9 / 12	average 13+ months Neale comprehension
		B	6		
School 3	KS2		18	7 / 14	average 19+ months Neale comprehension
School 4	KS2		80	6 / 18-24	94% made progress 92% made 2+ sub levels 29% made 3+ sub levels 26% made 4+ sub levels
School 5	KS3		4	8 / 8	average gain 4.5+ months Neale comprehension
School 6  (used inference training plus vocabulary enrichment, play reading etc)	KS3 (Y7/8/9)	A	45	14-16 / 16	average gains: 12+ months RA 10+ months RA 15+ months RA  (Revised Kirklees/Vernon Reading Test)
		B	48		
		C	23		
<b>Total number of pupils:</b>			<b>326</b>		

Activating background knowledge and predicting, word definitions and question generating were incorporated into the lesson.

A subsequent working day with five other colleagues resulted in 'get visual' being added.

The final lesson components are shown below:

- Activating background knowledge about the topic before text reading/later predicting from title
- Word definitions (vocabulary) and elaborating on key words/phrases
- Question generating
- Add a sentence
- Get visual (pupils quickly draw/write key words/comments about text extract)
- Write gist as 10 word headline and summarise

The impact of inference training was evaluated by Jo Puttick, a local lead consultant, using the Neale Analysis.

An experimental group of 57 pupils in Year 5 and 6 received inference training for six weeks and a comparison group of 18 did not have the intervention.

On average the experimental group made 13.5 months gain in reading comprehension compared to 4.1 months in the comparison group. This data was included in 'What works for pupils with literacy difficulties' (Brooks, 2007).

A number of subsequent small scale studies were undertaken, including a pilot programme by Bernadette Hall (National Association of Language Development in the Curriculum, 2007).

The findings were that pupils with English as a second language showed impressive gains in reading confidence and enjoyment, with average reading comprehension gains of 18 months over 3 months.

Between 2009-2011 further data was collected for 326 pupils who received inference training (see table 1 above) in Key Stage 2 and 3.

- Average gains for 134 pupils in 6 groups tested using the Neale Analysis (comprehension) were 13.4 months (sessions varied from 8-24 over 6-8 weeks)
- 92% of pupils tested using National Curriculum measures made 2 sublevels progress (80 pupils)

Inference training featured in Greg Brook's (2013) 4th edition of *'What works for children and young people with literacy difficulties'* and found inference training showed remarkable gains in reading comprehension.

In the last 12 months some refinements have been made to inference training, both through working with pupils and due to the suggestions of Jane Oakhill at Sussex University.

The vocabulary focus has been strengthened using a semantic framework technique, placing more emphasis on pupils summarising the gist of the extract. Around 20 new texts extracts have been added.

As 35 Reading Recovery teacher leaders are now accredited trainers of inference training, we are in a position to increase the impact data for the programme. This can be done by using the IDEC site and/or using the grid in the manual and sending it to me for collation.

There are also plans in the future to undertake further research into the impact of inference training and produce case studies of schools using the approach.

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Name	LA or self employed	Area able to train in	Contact e mail
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Leicester City Council trainers

Michelle Deeming	LA	Leicestershire, East Midlands	<a href="mailto:michelle.deeming@leicester.gov.uk">michelle.deeming@leicester.gov.uk</a>
Linda Dawson	LA	Leicestershire, East Midlands	<a href="mailto:linda.dawson@leicester.gov.uk">linda.dawson@leicester.gov.uk</a>

National trainers

1.	Alison Jones		Cornwall, Exeter, Torbay, Plymouth	<a href="mailto:alison.jones@babcockinternational.com">alison.jones@babcockinternational.com</a>
2.	Claire Warner	self employed	Devon, Cornwall	<a href="mailto:clairewarner01@gmail.com">clairewarner01@gmail.com</a>
3.	Diane French	LA	Dorset and Hampshire West	<a href="mailto:d.e.french@dorsetcc.gov.uk">d.e.french@dorsetcc.gov.uk</a>
4.	Rebecca Shore	LA	Portsmouth, Hampshire	<a href="mailto:rebecca.shore@portsmouthcc.gov.uk">rebecca.shore@portsmouthcc.gov.uk</a>
5.	Emma Tarrant	LA	Hampshire	<a href="mailto:emma.tarrant@hants.gov.uk">emma.tarrant@hants.gov.uk</a>
6.	Louise Zahra	LA	Brighton	<a href="mailto:louise.zahra@brighton-hove.gov.uk">louise.zahra@brighton-hove.gov.uk</a>
7.	Jennifer Harrison	self employed	South East / East Sussex	<a href="mailto:jenniferfharrison@btinternet.com">jenniferfharrison@btinternet.com</a>
8.	Christine Cork	self employed	S E England, Kent (S E & Maidstone, Medway)	<a href="mailto:target.literacy@btinternet.com">target.literacy@btinternet.com</a>
9.	Heather Retter		South London, Bracknell, Sutton, Surrey, any reasonable distance from Guildford	<a href="mailto:heather.retter@babcockinternational.com">heather.retter@babcockinternational.com</a>
10.	Catherine Clarke		London – south-west/west	<a href="mailto:c.clarke@oriel.aspirations.org">c.clarke@oriel.aspirations.org</a>
11.	Karen Akroyd	LA	London Borough of Merton	<a href="mailto:karen.akroyd@merton.gov.uk">karen.akroyd@merton.gov.uk</a>
12.	Sue Jamal	LA	London Borough of Merton	<a href="mailto:sue.jamal@merton.gov.uk">sue.jamal@merton.gov.uk</a>
13.	Viv Pratt	LA	London Borough of Merton	<a href="mailto:viv.pratt@merton.gov.uk">viv.pratt@merton.gov.uk</a>
14.	Nafisa Shehu	LA	London Borough of Merton	<a href="mailto:nafisa.shehu@merton.gov.uk">nafisa.shehu@merton.gov.uk</a>
15.	Eileen Pike	self employed	Greenwich/Lewisham/Bexley	<a href="mailto:epike.mail@gmail.com">epike.mail@gmail.com</a>
16.	Alison Woodward	Braintcroft RR centre	London	<a href="mailto:awoodward@braintcroft.brent.sch.uk">awoodward@braintcroft.brent.sch.uk</a>
17.	Alex Bousoulengas	National Literacy Trust/ self employed	London	<a href="mailto:alex.bousoulengas@literacytrust.org.uk">alex.bousoulengas@literacytrust.org.uk</a> <a href="mailto:abousoulengas@hotmail.com">abousoulengas@hotmail.com</a>
18.	Sue Shallcross	LA / Self Emp	Haringey Enfield Barnet	<a href="mailto:sue.shallcross39@gmail.com">sue.shallcross39@gmail.com</a>
19.	Elpidageorgiou		North London – Enfield, Barnet, Haringey	<a href="mailto:elpidageorgiou@hotmail.co.uk">elpidageorgiou@hotmail.co.uk</a>
20.	Charlotte Lea-Robbins	school based	London and outer counties	<a href="mailto:clearobbins@mbrookbrent.sch.uk">clearobbins@mbrookbrent.sch.uk</a>
21.	Natalie Tembo	school based	Brent (London)	<a href="mailto:ntembo@mbrook.brent.sch.uk">ntembo@mbrook.brent.sch.uk</a>
22.	Carmen Lewis	LA	London	<a href="mailto:carmen.lewis@towerhamlets.gov.uk">carmen.lewis@towerhamlets.gov.uk</a>
23.	Kathy Ewers	LA	Essex Suffolk Thurrock Southend Herts	<a href="mailto:kathy.ewers@eesforschools.org">kathy.ewers@eesforschools.org</a>
24.	Karen Stanley	LA	Cambridgeshire	<a href="mailto:karen.stanley@cambridgeshire.gov.uk">karen.stanley@cambridgeshire.gov.uk</a>
25.	Jane McLeod	LA	Cambridgeshire/Peterborough/Suffolk/Norfolk/Beds/ Herts	<a href="mailto:jane.mcleod@cambridgeshire.gov.uk">jane.mcleod@cambridgeshire.gov.uk</a>
26.	Sue Howard	LA	Peterborough, Lincolnshire	<a href="mailto:sue.howard@peterborough.gov.uk">sue.howard@peterborough.gov.uk</a>
27.	Laura Bloomberg		Harrow, Barnet, Enfield, Herts, Bedfordshire, Bucks	<a href="mailto:laurabloomberg@hotmail.com">laurabloomberg@hotmail.com</a>
28.	Elsa Steel		Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Luton	<a href="mailto:elsa.steel@btinternet.com">elsa.steel@btinternet.com</a>
29.	Kimberly Waring Paynter	self employed	Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire	<a href="mailto:kimberly.paynter@virgin.net">kimberly.paynter@virgin.net</a> <a href="mailto:KWP@oxfordliteracy.co.uk">KWP@oxfordliteracy.co.uk</a>

Name	LA or self employed	Area able to train in	Contact e mail	
30.	Susie Spolander	Self employed	Oxfordshire, Midlands, South – anywhere reasonable travel distance	susie@primarysupportteam.co.uk
31.	Sue Tomalin		Northamptonshire	sue.tomalin@btconnect.com
32.	Sharon Hellyer		Wiltshire, Swindon	sharonhellyer7@gmail.com
33.	Debbie Miles		Bristol	debbie.miles@bristol.gov.uk
34.	Jan Armstrong	LA	Bristol	jan.armstrong@bristol.gov.uk
35.	Beverly Brown	LA	Warwickshire	beverlybrown@warwickshire.gov.uk
36.	Jean Hutchison	LA	Warwickshire	jeanhutchison@warwickshire.gov.uk
37.	Caroline Gale	LA	Warwickshire	carolinegale@warwickshire.gov.uk
38.	Susannah Boyle	Self employed	West Midlands, anywhere within reason anywhere reasonable travel distance	smbconsulting@hotmail.co.uk
39.	Kalvinder Bains	School based	Birmingham	k.bains@benson.bham.sch.uk
40.	Sarah Trevalen	LA	Dudley, Sandwell, Birmingham, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Telford, Shropshire	sarah.trevalen@dudley.gov.uk
41.	Alicia Simpson	LA		alicia.simpson@dudley.gov.uk
42.	Lynne Palmerini	LA		lynne.palmerini@dudley.gov.uk
43.	Tony Whatmuff	self employed	East Midlands, London	anthonywhatmuff@gmail.com
44.	Ruth Roberts	school based	Coventry	rroberts@willenhallprimary.org
45.	Emma Kehoe		Leicestershire (ASD specialist)	ejk6@msn.com
46.	Jo Puttick	self employed	Leicester/ Midlands	jo.puttick@virgin.net
47.	Liz Honeyman	school based	Leicester	ehoneyman@parks.leicester.sch.uk
48.	Paula Burrell	LA	Nottinghamshire	paula.burrell@nottscc.gov.uk
49.	Nicola Lawson	LA	Nottingham/shire, Lincolnshire, Derbyshire	nicola.lawson@nottscc.gov.uk
50.	Mia Sneyd	self employed	Nottingham, Midlands	msneyd@creativeclassroom.org.uk
51.	Helen Spoons	School Leader	Nottinghamshire	helenspoons@btinternet.com
52.	Nicola O'Donnell	LA	Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire	nicola.odonnell@derbyshire.gov.uk
53.	Janice Gullon	LA	Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leics & Staffs borders	janice.gullon@derbyshire.gov.uk
54.	Julie Parker	LA	Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leics & Staffs borders	julie.parker@derbyshire.gov.uk
55.	John LeGood	LA	Derbyshire	john.legood@derbyshire.gov.uk
56.	Karen Krence	LA	Derbyshire	karen.krence@derbyshire.gov.uk
57.	Steve Cunningham	LA	Derbyshire	stevecunningham2611@gmail.com
58.	Mark Dobson	school based	Derbyshire	dobsonm7@dallimore.derbyshire.sch.uk
59.	Michelle Brough	LA	Derbyshire, Staffs, Wolverhampton, Walsall	michelle.brough@derbyshire.gov.uk
60.	Vicki Hardy	school based	Walsall	vhardy@walsall-wood.walsall.sch.uk
61.	Ben Wilkinson	school based	Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire	bwilkinson@kirkhallam.derbyshire.sch.uk
62.	Sheena Cowley	school based	Derbyshire	sheenacowley@hallamfields.derbyshire.sch.uk
63.	Alex Grady		Staffordshire, Wolverhampton, Nottinghamshire	alexg@nasen.org.uk

Name	LA or self employed	Area able to train in	Contact e mail
64. Glenys Gill	LA	Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire	glenys.gill@stoke.gov.uk
65. Sue Francis	LA	Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire	sue.francis@stoke.gov.uk
66. Gareth Davies		Cheshire, North West	gareth@literacycounts.co.uk
67. Lindsey Howard	self employed	Cheshire, North West & Wales, Shropshire	lindseyhoward@walnuttreelearning.co.uk
68. Megan Dixon	Aspire Educational Trust	Cheshire NW Shropshire	mdixon@aet.cheshire.sch.uk
69. Shirley Johnson	One education		shirley.johnson@oneeducation.co.uk
70. Julia Fletcher	school based	Cheshire, Warrington, Manchester	julesfletcher@btinternet.com
71. Jan Owens	self employed	Greater Manchester & North West	jan.ey2p@gmail.com
72. Anne Ashton	LA	Oldham, Manchester, Salford, Bolton, Huddersfield	anne.ashton@oldham.gov.uk
73. Fiona Botterill		Manchester, Trafford, Salford	fionabotterill@gmail.com
74. Khalid Irshad	LA	Stockport, Trafford, Oldham, Tameside, Manchester Greater Manchester	khalid.irshad@stockport.gov.uk
75. Natasha Nield	LA		natasha.nield@stockport.gov.uk
76. Helen Onion	LA		helen.onion@stockport.gov.uk
77. Julie-Ann McCulloch	LA		julie.ann.mcculloch@stockport.gov.uk
78. Lisa Leach	self employed	Rochdale, Greater Manchester, Calderdale, Lancashire	lleducation123@gmail.com
79. Steve Dawson	LA	Leeds, Bradford, N Yorkshire, Greater Manchester	steve.dawson@leeds.gov.uk
80. Karen Pickles	LA	Huddersfield, Kirklees, Wakefield, Bradford, Calderdale	karen.pickles@kirklees.gov.uk
81. Anne Hulley	LA	Sheffield	anne.hulley@sheffield.gov.uk
82. Teresa Heathcote	self employed	Sheffield, Doncaster,	teresa.heathcote@yahoo.com
83. Tara Chappell		Sheffield	fuzzyhatuk@yahoo.co.uk
84. Janet Phillips	self employed	Hull and surrounding areas	janet.phillips@swan.karoo.co.uk
85. Allison Potter	LA	Tees Valley, Sunderland, Tyneside	allison_potter@middlesbrough.gov.uk
86. Gill Kemp	LA	North Tyneside, Newcastle, Northumberland	gill.kemp@northtyneside.gov.uk
87. Eve Morton	LA	North Tyneside, Newcastle, Northumberland	eve.morton@northtyneside.gov.uk
88. Anne Vernon	Joint Dioceses of Durham and Newcastle	North Tyneside, Newcastle, Northumberland	anne.vernon@drmnewcanglican.org
89. Marie Kilgallon	Self employed	North East, North Yorkshire	marie@mariekilgallonliteracy.co.uk
90. Liz Dyer	LA	North Yorkshire, York (and neighbouring areas)	elizabeth.dyer@northyorks.gov.uk
91. Julie Hall	self employed	North East, Tees Valley	julie.hall59@btinternet.com
92. Lisa Bolton	LA	Guernsey	lisa.bolton@gov.gg

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