

University of Birmingham

Initial Teacher Education inspection report

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Introduction

1. This inspection was carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectors supported by a team of specialist inspectors in accordance with the *Framework for the Inspection of Initial Teacher Education (2008-11)*.
2. The inspection draws upon evidence from all aspects of the provision to make judgements against all parts of the inspection evaluation schedule in the framework. Inspectors focused on the overall effectiveness of the training in supporting high quality outcomes for trainees and the capacity of the partnership to bring about further improvements. A summary of the grades awarded is included at the end of this report.

Key to inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Explanation of terms used in this report

Attainment is defined as the standard reached by a trainee at the end of their training.

Progress is judged in terms of how well a trainee has developed professionally from their starting point to the standard reached at the time of the inspection or at a suitable review point.

Achievement is judged in terms of the progress made and the standard reached by a trainee at the time of the inspection or at a recent assessment review point.

The provider

3. The University of Birmingham is an established provider of initial teacher education. It offers primary and secondary teacher education courses. Successful trainees gain qualified teacher status and are awarded a masters' level postgraduate diploma in education with 120 credits.

A commentary on the provision

4. The following are particular features of the provider and its initial teacher training programmes:
 - the university's well deserved reputation of being a provider of excellent teacher training.

5. The following are particularly strong features in both programmes:
 - the exceptionally high level of consistency that exists across the training programmes ensuring outstanding equality of opportunity
 - the careful monitoring and tracking of trainees' progress and the well timed intervention strategies that provide trainees with exceptional levels of support and minimise their risk of failure
 - the schools' very high level of ownership of and involvement in the training partnership
 - the development of an exceptionally strong and skilled leadership team that has driven change and improvement successfully.

Provision in the primary phase

Context

6. The university works with approximately 90 primary schools, the majority of which are in and around Birmingham. The partnership provides a one-year, full-time postgraduate primary initial teacher education programme. It offers an early years course and a primary course. At the time of the inspection, there were 100 trainees.

Key strengths

7. The key strengths are:
 - the recruitment of high calibre trainees; the majority of whom have the potential to become outstanding teachers
 - the excellent primary leadership team, which has driven improvement and raised trainees' outcomes
 - the exceptionally well planned centre-based training programme that not only prepares trainees very well for their school placements but inspires them to deliver outstanding lessons
 - the high quality of the partnership and the exceptional consistency of training it provides to trainees
 - the excellent communication that exists between all partners.

Recommendations

8. In order to improve trainees' progress and attainment, the partnership should:
 - introduce a follow-up survey for trainees early in their professional career to determine the training programme's effectiveness at preparing them for teaching
 - maximise the value of link tutor visits to schools by completing joint lesson observations with mentors in order to moderate judgements.

Overall effectiveness

Grade: 1

9. The overall effectiveness of the university's primary training programme is excellent. The very high quality training programme ensures that trainees are prepared exceptionally well for the start of their teaching career. For the past three years, trainees' attainment overall has met Ofsted's criteria for being outstanding. The vast majority of trainees are successful in gaining employment in local schools.
10. The university has developed well organised recruitment and selection procedures that consistently identify applicants with the potential and attitudes needed to complete an intensive training year successfully. All groups on the two training routes make at least good progress from their starting points. In

addition, the number of trainees withdrawing from the course is well below the national average, which reflects on both the accuracy of the selection systems and the high quality support trainees receive.

11. One of the key factors in the success of the training programme is the partnership between the university and the schools with which it works. It is a partnership in the true sense of the word. Headteachers are committed to their schools working in equal partnership with the university. Staff from partnership schools work closely with university colleagues to select and recruit suitable applicants from the high number of applications received. To ensure suitable candidates from under-represented groups are not disadvantaged the university's selection systems are flexible enough to take account of non-traditional qualifications and applicants' wider experiences. As a result, the current recruitment of trainees from these groups is improving to above the national average.
12. The high quality training ensures that the overwhelming majority of trainees' needs are met very successfully. The training programme is organised extremely well. The theoretical content is entirely up-to-date and relevant. The centre-based training sessions are delivered by an exceptionally strong team of knowledgeable and experienced tutors. Their input is enhanced by presentations delivered by visiting experts who succeed in raising trainees' aspirations by inspiring them to become outstanding practitioners in their own right. For example, a visit by a local authority adviser significantly raised trainees' awareness and understanding of the importance of promoting community cohesion and enthused them into wanting to work with pupils from diverse backgrounds.
13. The theoretical element of the training programme ensures that trainees are prepared very well for working in partnership schools and, ultimately the start of their teaching career. The school-based training complements and adds to the university's high quality input. This is partly because of the schools' high level of ownership of and involvement in the training partnership. It results in an exceptionally high level of consistency in the quality of the school-based training across the partnership, and demonstrates how well school mentors are trained. In fact, in most schools, the majority of teachers are trained mentors. They play a leading role in the overall success of the training programme by working closely with and challenging trainees to reach and exceed their potential.
14. The trainees observed teaching had clearly benefited from working in three contrasting schools during their training year and gained good experience against all the Standards. Their determination to do well and their enthusiasm for teaching and passion to make a difference to pupils were clear. Almost without exception, the trainees ensured that pupils made good progress in the observed lesson and enjoyed learning. Of particular note was their strong knowledge and good understanding of how to teach phonics and early reading. The high quality training they had experienced had clearly enabled them to apply their skills very successfully in the classroom environment. All those who had been formally observed teaching a phonics lesson during their school placement

had done so successfully. The overall judgements made by the partnership were corroborated by inspectors.

15. The arrangements for monitoring and assessing trainees' progress work very well. School-based tasks are planned very carefully to build on trainees' theoretical knowledge and extend it into the practical setting. The tasks link exceptionally well to the formally assessed assignments. The assignments themselves are marked rigorously and trainees are provided with detailed and informative feedback. When the written work is not of the standard required, trainees are given intensive support tailored to their individual needs and circumstances, enabling them to succeed. Formal lesson observations are completed during each placement to ensure that trainees make sufficient progress. The feedback is comprehensive and linked clearly against relevant Standards. It also identifies particular strengths and areas requiring further development. There is a particularly high degree of consistency across the partnership with good quality feedback offered to trainees. Nevertheless, the opportunity to carry out joint lesson observations between the school mentor and the university's visiting tutor is not always taken. As a result, not all mentors have benefited from having a professional discussion about the recently introduced grading system, which is used to judge trainees' work and their teaching characteristics against the Standards.
16. The end of teaching placement reports provide an accurate summary of how well trainees have performed; they are used to determine their readiness to move to the next phase of training. Trainees meet regularly with their personal tutor to discuss current levels of performance and to determine further development priorities. This information is shared with the receiving school, ensuring a strong sense of cohesiveness to each individual trainee's training programme.
17. School-based mentors have a very good knowledge and understanding about their role and responsibilities. They are very well informed about developments taking place across the partnership. The university's systems to keep in touch with the partnership schools work very effectively. As a result, the quality of communication is excellent.
18. Since the last inspection, trainees' access to resources has improved and is now excellent. Centre-based training takes place in spacious rooms that provide a learning environment tailored to promoting high quality primary practice. The schools also provide excellent training facilities. For example, in addition to providing high quality teaching opportunities, trainees' focused visits to observe practitioners demonstrate excellent teaching in subjects, such as phonics, is a strength of the provision.
19. The training programme's strong promotion of equal opportunities is evident across all facets of the course. Trainees are prepared particularly well for teaching pupils from a culturally diverse society. In addition, the quality of support provided to support individual trainee's well-being is exemplary; it is one of the main reasons why so many trainees complete the course successfully. In addition, although a very small numbers of trainees defer or withdraw from the

course for personal reasons, the majority return to complete their training at a later date.

The capacity for further improvement and/or sustaining high quality

Grade: 1

20. The university's quality assurance arrangements are excellent. The procedures to monitor the quality and effectiveness of the provision are comprehensive and robust. Every element of the training programme is evaluated to determine its impact on the overall quality of the course and, ultimately, the trainees' outcomes. The final evaluation of the training programme occurs as trainees complete the course providing a clear overview of trainees' high levels of satisfaction with the provision. To determine trainees' level of preparedness for teaching, once they have entered the profession, the provider is considering introducing a further follow-up survey as a strategy to identify where further refinement to the training is needed.
21. External examiners' reports are rigorous and evaluative and support the university's quality assurance process. They are used to determine the programme's quality and to benchmark the programme against other providers as well as identifying how particular elements can be strengthened. The internal evaluation systems are also highly effective. All those involved in the training are included, which ensures there is a very clear analysis of each component's contribution. This level of attention to detail has brought about significant improvement. For example, since the previous inspection, the quality of the training has been strengthened, so that it fully meets the overwhelming majority of trainees' needs. The accuracy of all the university's self-evaluation judgements was substantiated by the inspection.
22. Across the partnership, there is a united determination that both training programmes should be of the highest quality possible. This strong drive for improvement is evident in how focused the primary leadership team is when it comes to anticipating and responding to change. The team responded rapidly to developmental points, raised in the previous inspection report, to strengthen aspects of provision. For instance, the arrangements for briefing and developing school-based mentors were reviewed and changes introduced. The result was a significant increase in attendance at meetings and, importantly, the trainees benefited from receiving very consistent levels of high quality school-based training, which ultimately resulted in higher levels of trainees' attainment.
23. The close working relationship with partnership schools makes a strong contribution to the overall responsiveness to any changes introduced. Developments are often initiated through the primary partnership committee, which includes headteachers and senior staff from partnership schools, meeting to identify where changes are required in response to local and national initiatives. A recent example focused on the need to develop trainees' knowledge and understanding of planning and teaching lessons using a themed approach. All partners worked together to introduce a focused week into the training

programme, which immersed trainees in researching and practising this approach to teaching. The outcomes of this initiative were extremely positive, with trainees overwhelmingly describing the event as one of the highlights of the course.

24. The current improvement plan focuses on key priorities that have arisen from the extensive evaluation process and from consideration of emerging local and national priorities. The focus on strengthening trainees' ability to teach phonics and early reading is an example. The actions taken are extensive and involve partners from across the partnership. The close working relationship that exists between the university and partnership schools has ensured that trainees have benefited considerably from their training and, at the time of the inspection, almost all had been observed teaching early reading skills successfully during their school placements.
25. Over time, the university has made substantial improvements to the quality of its provision, which have brought about a trend of improvement in trainees' outcomes. This excellent track record provides robust evidence of the primary leadership team's outstanding capacity for improvement.

Provision in the secondary phase

Context

26. The secondary provision delivers a one year, full-time training course in eight subjects. These are English, mathematics, geography, history, modern languages, physical education, religious education and science (biology, chemistry and physics). There is also a two year mathematics course with the first year devoted to enhancing subject knowledge. All courses train teachers for the 11-18 age range. At the time of the inspection there were 265 trainees.
27. The secondary partnership works with approximately 90 schools, about half in the Birmingham local authority and the rest in surrounding authorities. Relatively low numbers of new schools join the partnership each year. There are over 200 mentors and many are former trainees or were educated in local schools. Many schools have employed former trainees as members of staff.

Key strengths

28. The key strengths are:
 - the excellent systems for recruiting trainees with the necessary personal qualities and the capacity to cope with the rigours of the academic work, thus ensuring they make rapid progress from the start
 - the wide and imaginative range of strategies used to promote trainees' subject knowledge, enabling them to enthuse and engage their pupils very successfully
 - the very high quality training, which has a clear focus on research and makes excellent use of formative assessment
 - the excellent relationships and channels of communication that exist, ensuring exceptionally high levels of consistency across the partnership and between subjects
 - trainees' outstanding attainment, which ensures they quickly gain employment and are very well prepared to make an excellent contribution to the quality of education delivered in schools.

Overall effectiveness

Grade: 1

29. Trainees develop as highly reflective practitioners who are able to determine the next steps in their development for themselves. They have appropriate personal qualities and are skilful at building positive relationships with their pupils. Their understanding of issues relating to equality permeates their teaching. The development of trainees' excellent subject knowledge drives the training and is a major strength of the programme. Trainees understand how pupils learn, and can talk knowledgeably about pupils' progress. They demonstrate good knowledge of the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, which is developed through well-chosen assignments.

30. Selection arrangements are excellent. They result in completion rates which have increased over the last three years and are now high. The few withdrawals are generally for personal reasons. The proportion of minority ethnic trainees recruited to the programme is well above average. The proportion of trainees successfully gaining employment is high; schools actively seek to employ trainees from the programme, because they trust the quality of those they recruit, knowing from experience that they will make an excellent contribution to the school's overall quality of teaching. When they have finished their training, many go on to complete their Master of Education award. The research they undertake for their dissertations frequently benefits their schools, with several striking examples of improvements in pupils' outcomes, thus reinforcing the positive impact of these trainees in the professional community. The excellent, rigorous interview process generally involves mentors.
31. A key strength of the training is the design and quality of the assessed work, which engages trainees in research, reading and professional development. This is further strengthened by the excellent feedback trainees receive on their written assignments. The positive impact of working towards the Standards, combined with master's level writing is seen in the high quality of trainees' practice in the classroom. Furthermore, trainees develop a deep understanding of the practical application of the Standards. One trainee described this approach as, 'learning to become a really good teacher and picking up the Standards on the way'. The quality of the assignments is so good, that they have been combined into a booklet for dissemination among partnership schools. Former trainees confirm that the rigour of the course increases their confidence in taking on additional responsibilities from an early stage in their careers.
32. High quality assessment procedures permeate the training and subject leaders and mentors model excellent practice in formative assessment. As a result, trainees develop good skills in using assessment for future learning. The trainee progress report form is a central and crucial document, valued by trainees and mentors alike. It records strong evidence verifying that trainees make rapid progress towards the Standards. Following lesson observations, trainees receive very good feedback where they are supported and encouraged to reflect on the pupils' learning. The high quality of dialogue with mentors embeds the targets for trainees firmly in their thinking, so that they require only brief notes to remind them. The summative targets at the end of each placement are well-written and fully understood.
33. Trainees have access to excellent resources, including those needed for educational research. Good use is made of the expertise that resides in partnership schools for delivering parts of the training. Additional resources are deployed well to support trainees with special personal circumstances, such as for child-care. Throughout the course, trainees enjoy a high level of personal contact with their tutors, mentors and senior mentors. Excellent use is made of regular and routine email contacts. Trainees report receiving almost instant responses to their communications and feel their tutors are always 'on-call'. The wide range of schools in the partnership, which are good places in which to train, allows great flexibility for the provider when personalising placements.

34. The relationships with partner schools are very strong. Excellent communication ensures that there is an exceptionally high level of consistency in the quality of training delivered across the partnership. Schools value their strong links with the university's subject departments. Throughout the centre-based training, the modelling of very effective teamwork supports trainees to develop excellent relationships when in their classrooms. Trainees rate their mentors very highly. The mentors' skills are developed through highly regarded centre-based training. Mentors are very committed to their role, seeing it also as a valuable opportunity for their own personal career development and, as a result, attendance levels at briefings and training events are very high. School leaders understand the value of the role well and ensure that the mentors have sufficient time to do the job.
35. When trainees move from one teaching placement to the next, the transition is managed very effectively. The face-to-face transition meetings, that take place between the mentor and trainee, work well as an opportunity to discuss development targets and associated training opportunities. Trainees are very positive about the coherence of the programme and the links between subject assignments and the whole school issues programme. Regular joint observations between mentors and subject tutors support and maintain the consistency and quality of mentoring.
36. Trainees' awareness of issues regarding equality and diversity is exceptional. Assignments on this subject are undertaken early in the training so as to ensure trainees remain focussed on the importance of meeting the needs of all pupils in their care. Deliberately diverse teaching placements include multi-cultural settings, which ensure trainees gain very good practical experience of working with pupils who speak English as an additional language. A particular strength of the training is how well trainees are prepared to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The recruitment of trainees from under represented groups, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds is very good and above average compared with both national and regional averages. Personal support for trainees is very good and extends beyond the course and into their teaching careers. Trainees report receiving very high levels of personal support, which ensures they are enabled, in a very timely way, to succeed.

The capacity for further improvement and/or sustaining high quality

Grade: 1

37. Very strong leadership has ensured the quality of the provision has remained consistently high since the previous inspection. Change is managed exceptionally well. As a result of the very focused leadership, trainees' outcomes have improved. For example, the proportion of trainees graded outstanding at the end of the course has increased and the proportion that are judged satisfactory has reduced. It is also important to acknowledge that trainees rarely fail the programme. In addition, the number of trainees withdrawing before the end of the course is lower than average and an above average percentage gain employment teaching. Trainees, completing the Training and Development

Agency's end-of-year survey, report much higher levels of satisfaction with the training programme than is the case for similar providers and when compared against the national average.

38. The course leaders use their analysis of trainees' outcomes to evaluate the effectiveness of the provision accurately. At the end of each placement audits are conducted and the results are fed back to the schools in the spirit of true partnership. Senior mentors are aware of the relevant improvement priorities in the secondary provision's development plan. The evaluations are based on systematic reviews and slotted into the university's monitoring programme, allowing the secondary team to see itself within the bigger picture. Subject reviews build upon very detailed and helpful reports from external examiners, who are given clear and explicit requirements to ensure the programme's quality is maintained.
39. Flexible and creative use of external funding allows innovation and experimentation and ensures rapid response to suggestions for improvements, or to any emerging issues. To meet the demands created by change the secondary course leaders are skilled at identifying and securing the necessary developments and resources, thereby ensuring that trainees continue to receive high-quality training. Subject leaders have high levels of expertise and national reputations within their fields, resulting in practitioners with very high subject expertise and at the cutting edge of developments in their subjects. Schools are already waiting to explore future funding changes through creative partnership agreements with the university.
40. Debate and discussion among programme leaders inform the development planning. Following this, the phased and carefully timed introduction of changes allows all partners to be fully involved and supportive of developments. For example, the use of Ofsted criteria for grading trainees is being developed in line with the ethos of the course. Developments are then tracked through the various groups and committees. This very secure development planning, leads to improvement and is fully inclusive of all partners. The provider agrees that there is scope for making the process even more explicit so as to support further development in uncertain times, but the consequences of the current system are outstanding.

Summary of inspection grades¹

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding; grade 2 is good; grade 3 is satisfactory; grade 4 is inadequate.

Overall effectiveness

		Primary	Secondary
How effective is the provision in securing high quality outcomes for trainees?		1	1
Trainees' attainment	How well do trainees attain?	1	1
Factors contributing to trainees' attainment	To what extent do recruitment / selection arrangements support high quality outcomes?	1	1
	To what extent does the training and assessment ensure that all trainees progress to fulfil their potential given their ability and starting points?	1	1
	To what extent are available resources used effectively and efficiently?	1	1
The quality of the provision	To what extent is the provision across the partnership of consistently high quality?	1	1
Promoting equalities and diversity	To what extent does the provision promote equality of opportunity, value diversity and eliminate harassment and unlawful discrimination?	1	1

Capacity to improve further and/or sustain high quality

		Primary	Secondary
To what extent do the leadership and management at all levels have the capacity to secure further improvements and/or to sustain high quality outcomes?		1	1
	How effectively does the management at all levels assess performance in order to improve or sustain high quality?	1	1
	How well does the leadership at all levels anticipate change, and prepare for and respond to national and local initiatives?	1	1
	How effectively does the provider plan and take action for improvement?	1	1

¹ The criteria for making these graded judgements are in the *Grade criteria for the inspection of ITE 2008-11*; Ofsted November 2009; Reference no: 080128.

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