

The Alban Federation

Initial Teacher Education inspection report

Inspection Dates: 26 – 29 November 2012

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors in accordance with the *Framework for inspecting initial teacher education from September 2012*.

The inspection draws upon evidence from within the ITE partnership to make judgements against all parts of the evaluation schedule. Inspectors focused on the overall effectiveness of the ITE partnership in securing high-quality outcomes for trainees.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: Grade 1 is outstanding; grade 2 is good; grade 3 is requires improvement; grade 4 is inadequate

	Employment -based routes
Overall effectiveness How well does the partnership secure consistently high quality outcomes for trainees?	1
The outcomes for trainees	1
The quality of training across the partnership	1
The quality of leadership and management across the partnership	1

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The employment-based route

Information about the employment based partnership

1. The Alban Federation provides employment-based initial teacher training for graduates. The Federation consists of a partnership of six secondary schools, which have recently become academies, located in St Albans and Harpenden. The partnership aims to address the need for high quality recruits to schools in the locality, with a particular focus on shortage subjects.
2. The lead school of the Federation is Sandringham School. The headteacher of the school chairs the Federation board. Two of the partnership schools are Teaching Schools and lead The Alban Teaching Schools Alliance. This consists of an additional nine local schools and the University of Hertfordshire. The Federation has applied to the Teaching Agency to change its status to become an accredited provider of school-centred initial teacher training from 2013-14.
3. At the time of the inspection, 12 trainees were following a full-time programme and one trainee a part-time programme. Training covers the 11-16 age-range and is offered in a range of subjects linked to the specialist status of the partnership schools. Subjects currently offered include mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, modern languages, English, music and physical education.

Information about the employment-based ITE inspection

4. Inspectors observed seven lessons taught by trainees, three by newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and one by a former trainee in four of the partnership schools. Ten of these observations were undertaken jointly with mentors.
5. Both inspectors spent a half-day observing centre-based training sessions on special educational needs in two partnership schools, which were led by professional mentors, special educational needs coordinators and teaching assistants.
6. Inspectors also held discussions with individuals and groups of trainees, NQTs and former trainees working in partnership schools; trainers, leaders and managers; subject and professional mentors; head teachers and members of the Federation board including a local authority representative.
7. One inspector observed a staff development 'learning lunch' for teachers, trainees and NQTs, led by advanced skills teachers, in one of the partnership schools.

8. Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentary evidence including information related to recruitment and selection, statutory safeguarding and compliance with the initial teacher training criteria, tracking and assessment, trainees' teaching evidence and assignments, analysis of outcomes for trainees, evaluations and improvement plans, external moderator reports and the Federation's website.
9. Inspectors also took account of the responses to the trainee online questionnaire, which most trainees had recently completed.

Inspection Team

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Overall Effectiveness

Grade: 1

The key strengths of the employment-based partnership are:

- the consistently outstanding outcomes for trainees including their high levels of attainment, well-honed teaching skills and exceptional completion and employment rates
- the self-motivated, highly-reflective trainees who take responsibility for their own professional development
- the rigorous and innovative recruitment and selection practice that secures a strong field of well-qualified applicants
- the very high expectations and exemplary commitment, throughout a collegiate partnership, of high performing schools which deliver consistently high-quality individualised training
- the exceptional formal and informal systems of communication, comprehensive documentation and trusting relationships which allow the partnership to act cohesively and respond rapidly to emerging needs and national priorities
- the significant attention paid to developing trainees' subject knowledge, behaviour management skills, their capacity to promote students' literacy and their ability to match work to the needs of all students, which has a very positive impact on increasing trainees' confidence and competence
- the effective blend of trainers' expertise, excellent quality mentoring and coaching, high-quality feedback and outstanding developmental targets

which nurtures trainees' rapid development and enables them to become excellent teachers

- the highly effective quality assurance systems and processes which lead to very rigorous self-evaluation and detailed improvement planning to support enhancement, sustain high quality outcomes and secure continuous self-improvement
- the extensive involvement of leaders and managers from all partner schools in shaping the vision and culture of excellence, and in steering the strategic direction of the Federation.

What does the employment-based partnership need to do to improve further?

The partnership should:

- ensure that trainees always focus on how well students learn and make progress when reflecting on the success of their teaching.

Inspection Judgements

The outcomes for trainees are outstanding

10. Trainees have an excellent understanding of the Teachers' Standards and aspire to become good and outstanding teachers. Over the last three years, the partnership has significantly improved the proportion of trainees demonstrating outstanding attainment by the end of their training. There are no differences in the performance of groups of trainees across the partnership. Trainees achieve such high levels of attainment because of the excellent model of personalised training and the very high levels of support and challenge they receive from the Federation. They make rapid progress, from the start of the programme, to become confident and highly competent teachers. The success of this approach is underpinned by consistently high completion and employment rates.
11. Although the inspection took place relatively early in their training, trainees were already demonstrating notable strengths in terms of their teaching and their standards for professional and personal conduct. This results from the rigorous selection process and the exceptionally high expectations of the Federation, which trainees consistently meet. Trainees have a highly developed ability to reflect critically on their own practice and to take effective action to improve. They are committed to learning, excited by the responsibility they are given to secure their own

professional development and inspired to strive continually for excellence.

12. Trainees draw extensively on their experience and skills developed from previous careers in business, sport or the performing arts, and their recent experience as unqualified teachers, coaches, cover supervisors or teaching assistants. This means that they are well organised and able to establish positive relationships with their students quickly. Trainees have high expectations for behaviour and feel confident in their use of a range of behaviour management strategies. They understand the importance of consistently promoting positive attitudes to learning and are passionate about teaching their subject.
13. Trainees' lessons are well planned with a clear recognition of the need to differentiate challenge for different ability groups. Trainees draw on their well-developed subject and curriculum knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning to plan a range of interesting activities, and ensure students make good progress. Trainees show a high level of awareness of how to promote the literacy and mathematical skills of the students they teach. They quickly establish themselves as valuable members of their departments and are willingly involved in all aspects of school life. For example, one trainee has initiated a creative writing club for students.
14. In a few cases, at this early stage of their development, their written reflective observations sometimes focus more on what the trainee did rather than on students' progress. Trainees are not always effective in maintaining the pace and challenge of learning throughout their lessons but observations of newly qualified teachers indicate that such issues are eliminated by the end of the training. For example, in one Year 10 mathematics lesson, excellent pace and challenge inspired confidence in higher attaining students to articulate clearly their methods for solving difficult problems. All NQTs observed during the inspection were teaching at least consistently good and often outstanding lessons, contributing significantly to the progress pupils make in their learning and making an extremely positive contribution to the schools in which they were employed.
15. The positive impact of training on trainees' future progression in teaching can be seen in the significant numbers of NQTs gaining responsibility and leadership posts early in their careers. Employers indicate high levels of satisfaction with newly qualified teachers who they say are retained in schools. High employability rates in schools outside the partnership attest to the Federation's reputation for training effective teachers and future school leaders.

The quality of training across the partnership is outstanding

16. The outstanding training reflects the strengths of this small partnership of high performing schools and demonstrates how relevant expertise is skilfully deployed. Mentors are experienced experts who demonstrate an outstanding commitment to developing the next generation of teachers. The Federation coordinator and the six professional mentors are the lynchpins of the Federation's excellent coordination of provision within and between schools. They provide first class support to trainees and subject mentors and excellent cross-moderation which ensures consistency of assessment across the partnership. They also contribute actively to the recruitment and selection process, the design and delivery of the centre and school-based professional studies programmes and the strategic direction of the partnership.
17. Trainees and NQTs express very high levels of satisfaction with their training experience and indicate how well prepared they are with the evaluative and practical skills and knowledge they need to teach effectively. The training is very carefully planned and structured. It provides excellent continuity and cohesion in a seamless approach to centre and school-based training. This ensures that trainees can exceed the minimum level of practice expected of teachers, as defined in the Teachers' Standards, by the end of their training. A particular strength is the imaginative and continually updated centre-based training, which incorporates a highly-relevant, weekly professional studies programme and associated timely assignments. These assignments enable trainees to draw on research, reflections and their observations and to apply what they have learned immediately to their teaching.
18. Partnership schools provide highly appropriate venues for training. Second school placements are chosen carefully to provide a complementary training experience. Trainees are mentored effectively in schools by knowledgeable and supportive subject mentors who are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Increasing numbers of subject mentors are ex-trainees. High-quality mentoring and coaching nurtures trainees' professional development and ensures that they make rapid progress in becoming effective teachers.
19. Feedback to trainees is highly specific about what they need to focus on next to improve their teaching and thus it supports their development extremely effectively. Weekly meetings with subject mentors are rigorously managed to secure progression in trainees' skills. They include a stringent review of progress against short-term targets and offer effective challenge and support. For example, the subject knowledge tracking system, developed since the last inspection, is an excellent means of setting goals for trainees' development and for assessing progress against them. Trainees identify gaps in their subject knowledge

through a subject audit during their induction. They then apply this to the curriculum by planning schemes of work, which address weaknesses. Trainees are subsequently tested in the development of the subject knowledge needed to deliver these schemes by subject mentors during their weekly meetings.

20. Subject and professional mentors assess trainees' progress towards meeting the Teachers' Standards frequently and in a wide variety of ways. Their assessment judgements are assured effectively through rigorous internal and external moderation processes. Inspectors judged the assessment of trainees by the partnership for the award of qualified teacher status (QTS) to be extremely accurate.
21. Exceptional communication, comprehensive documentation and trusting relationships facilitate a shared understanding of training approaches and procedures. This enables the partnership to act cohesively and respond rapidly to emerging needs and national priorities. For example, trainees receive thorough preparation for managing students' behaviour through a comprehensive central training programme. Schools have high expectations for the development of their practice. Training sessions led by members of the partnership and experts in behaviour management are delivered early in the training so that trainees quickly develop the skills they need. As a result, trainees feel confident that they can promote good behaviour through their teaching and when necessary use appropriate strategies to manage the classes they teach. Feedback from subject mentors following lesson observations offers trainees helpful practical guidance on managing behaviour, including the importance of sustaining the pace of learning for individuals and groups. Trainees have a sound general awareness of different types of bullying and of how to guard against it.
22. A comprehensive programme of central training, supported by high expectations in schools for differentiated and personalised approaches to learning, enables trainees to make rapid progress in planning lessons to meet the varying needs of students. For example, trainees use school data well to systematically plan work that is appropriately challenging. Visits to other schools, including specialist providers, enable trainees to draw on a range of practical ideas and resources, and to critically evaluate aspects of provision. Trainees have good opportunities to work with students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as with those who are disabled and those who have special educational needs. The importance of working effectively with other professionals and support staff was a strong theme in the special educational needs centre-based training which was observed by inspectors.
23. Evidence from trainees' files and their classroom practice show that trainees systematically plan opportunities to develop students' literacy and mathematical skills in line with well-designed school policies.

Schools within the Federation have focused hard on strategies to improve students' literacy and mathematical skills to support the quality and accuracy of their work across all subjects. Trainees have benefited markedly by learning from these approaches. As a result, they use these approaches in their teaching; for example, in the reinforcement of key vocabulary in a Year 11 physics lesson or the ordering of numbers in a Year 7 French lesson. In addition, trainees have developed a good understanding of phonics (the sounds letters make) to enable them to support students with weaker reading skills effectively. They apply the knowledge gained from completing a useful assignment on phonics to design and use teaching resources to good effect in their subject teaching.

The quality of leadership and management across the partnership is outstanding

24. The strength and maturity of the partnership are considerable. The partnership has outstanding capacity to sustain high quality outcomes for trainees. There is no sense of complacency. A tireless drive toward self-improvement enhances continually the quality of training, and sustains and improves outcomes for trainees. Areas recommended for improvement, at the last inspection, have been tackled effectively and are now strengths. For example, the partnership now makes more comprehensive use of data and measures the impact of improvement planning in terms of outcomes for trainees. In addition, strengths that were identified have been sustained and enhanced.
25. The Federation board plays a key role in managing and monitoring the quality of provision and in shaping the continuing development of the partnership. It ensures that an external moderator is used effectively to support developments and to measure their impact and that all of the statutory requirements for initial teacher training are fully met.
26. Rigorous and deeply embedded quality assurance systems and procedures, including detailed evaluations from a range of stakeholders and internal and external moderation, supported by excellent coordination and communications, ensure the accountability and responsibility of everyone involved in the partnership. For example, professional mentors take responsibility for the induction of new subject mentors. They continue to monitor subject mentors' work through regular meetings, joint observations of trainees' lessons and observations of the weekly trainee-mentor meetings. Similarly, partnership head teachers are held to account, as part of the annual review of the partnership, in challenging meetings led by the Federation coordinator and Federation board chair.

27. Strong leaders and managers have high expectations, sustain high-quality outcomes, secure further improvements and respond well to new opportunities within and beyond the partnership. This is always done intelligently, combining an in-depth understanding of the partnership with the active involvement of key leaders and managers. All partners honour their commitment to the Federation and understand the key priorities for improvement and their role in securing them.
28. The recruitment and selection process is extremely rigorous because the partnership recognises that the quality of education in their schools depends upon it. Recruiting high-calibre trainees is central to the Federation's success. The process balances equality of opportunity with the selection of the most suitable trainees. For example, it offers a part-time variant of the programme to meet the specific needs of a few of the trainees. Different types of assessments are used extremely effectively to test applicants' subject knowledge as well as their aptitude for teaching. They include opportunities to visit the department trainees will be working in, attend a school selection day, complete literacy and numeracy tests and opportunities to be interviewed by different panels, including one made up of students. The partnership easily meets its recruitment targets and attracts a high volume of applications. Trainees indicated they were attracted by the Federation's reputation and its personalised and welcoming approach to recruitment and selection.
29. There is clear evidence that the partnership has a proven track record and an effective strategy for attracting and training teachers to meet the needs of local and regional employers and that it is actively building capacity within the partnership. It has responded very positively to current government policy and is now working within a Teaching School Alliance, led by two of the partner schools, to increase its size and involve new schools, including a special school and a pupil referral unit. The Federation has been awarded an allocation of school direct places for 2013-14 and is seeking accreditation as a provider of school-centred initial teacher training.

Annex: Partnership schools

The following schools were visited to observe teaching:

Roundwood Park School, Harpenden
Sandringham School, St Albans
Sir John Lawes School, Harpenden
Verulam School, St Albans

ITE partnership details

Unique reference number	70182
Inspection number	398727
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Type of ITE partnership	EBITT
Phases provided	Secondary
Date of previous inspection	02 – 03 June 2009
Previous inspection report	http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/70182
Provider address	The Alban Federation Sandringham School The Ridgeway St Albans AL4 9NX