

University of Bedfordshire

Initial Teacher Education inspection report

Inspection dates: 4–7 February 2013

This inspection was carried out by four of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one seconded inspector in accordance with the *Handbook for inspecting initial teacher education from September 2012*.

The inspection draws upon evidence from 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

	Primary QTS
Overall effectiveness How well does the partnership secure consistently high quality outcomes for trainees?	2
The outcomes for trainees	2
The quality of training across the partnership	2
The quality of leadership and management across the partnership	2

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The primary phase

Information about the primary partnership

1. There is a long tradition of teacher training in Bedford dating back to the late nineteenth century. Primary training is currently focused in the Polhill campus, just a short distance from the town centre, and in over 300 partnership schools in clusters in and around Bedford, Milton Keynes, Luton, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire. The schools in these areas include primary, lower and middle schools. Pupils in these schools come from a range of ethnic and social backgrounds.
2. The partnership offers both undergraduate and postgraduate routes into teaching. There are currently 395 trainees on the four year undergraduate route leading to the award of bachelor of education (BEd) with qualified teacher status (QTS). On the one year postgraduate certificate in education course there are 119 trainees.
3. The inspection of November 2011 judged the overall effectiveness of the primary provision to be satisfactory and capacity to improve as inadequate. Following that inspection, there have been significant changes in organisation and senior leadership. These included the merging of the primary department with the secondary and post-compulsory education departments to form a new department of initial teacher training and education and the appointment of a new Dean, Associate Dean, head of department and head of primary phase.

Information about the primary ITE inspection

4. This inspection was carried out by four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one seconded inspector. Inspectors observed the teaching of 14 final year or postgraduate trainees and 14 newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in ten schools. Inspectors also visited two further schools to observe training in science and in meeting the needs of gifted and talented pupils. One inspector observed training at the university focused on phonics (letters and the sounds they make) and early reading.
5. Meetings were also held with 29 trainees from the first, second and third years of the BEd programme. Inspectors also held discussions with headteachers, school-based mentors and leaders of the partnership.
6. Discussions were held with partnership colleagues about leadership and management, recruitment and selection, and about the quality of training. Inspectors scrutinised trainees' files and looked at a wide range of documentation including improvement plans and evaluations of work

undertaken. Inspectors also took into account the 148 responses to the trainee online questionnaire.

Inspection team

Mark Williams HMI	Lead inspector
Robert Lovett HMI	Assistant lead inspector
Sheena Macdonald HMI	Team inspector
Christopher Nye HMI	Team inspector
Steven Popper, seconded inspector	Team inspector

Overall Effectiveness

Grade: 2

The key strengths of the primary partnership are:

- The good progress leaders have made since the last inspection in:
 - removing previous weaknesses
 - improving outcomes for trainees so they are now good
 - setting the right priorities to improve training further.
- The good quality mentoring in schools that:
 - identifies well the progress trainees are making
 - sets targets for trainees that is securing better outcomes for both trainees and the pupils they teach.
- The good training in phonics and early reading and mathematics that is:
 - identifying well where gaps or strengths in subject knowledge exist
 - enabling trainees to teach these areas increasingly well.
- The commitment of trainees to their chosen profession as demonstrated by their:
 - high employment rates
 - attention to meeting the different needs of pupils in their classes
 - promotion of good behaviour and positive attitudes with the pupils they teach
 - ability to reflect on their own teaching to being about improvement both to their own teaching and the learning of their pupils.

What does the primary partnership need to do to improve further?

- To further strengthen the partnership and the effectiveness of schools as trainers, leaders should:
 - involve all schools in checking how good the quality of training is
 - ensure existing strengths are made more widely known across the different clusters within the partnership.

Inspection Judgements

The outcomes for trainees are good

7. Trainees, overall, attain well and become good teachers in schools. Previous weaknesses in assessing how well trainees were doing have been addressed so that the assessment of trainees is now wholly accurate. The wide range of information held by the partnership, coupled with good quality mentoring that now exists in schools, means all involved in helping trainees become good teachers know where individual strengths and areas to improve lie. Whereas in the last inspection different groups of trainees did not achieve as well as each other, there is no evidence that this is the case now.
8. Employment rates are high. This is because schools recognise that University of Bedfordshire trainees are committed to their chosen profession. Trainees have the stamina to complete what all describe as challenging courses. Completion rates are above average on the undergraduate course and while below average on the postgraduate course, they are improving strongly.
9. Trainees from the partnership display a number of key strengths. They reflect well on their own teaching and this, with the consistently good support they are now given, helps them to improve their own practice and, importantly, the learning of their pupils. Even the small and decreasing number of trainees judged to be requiring improvement at this point in their training show elements of good practice that suggests they will exceed the Teachers' Standards by the time they qualify. Strong features of trainees include their attention to meeting the different needs of pupils in their classes. This means that pupils they teach, regardless of ability or background, make at least expected and often good progress in their lessons. As a result, trainees promote equality well. Trainees have also benefitted from good training from serving teachers in how to promote good behaviour so that learning does not get interrupted. Trainees and pupils respect each other in equal measure. As a result, pupils in trainees' classes are nearly always keen to learn.
10. Trainees teach lessons that are predominantly good by the time they reach the end of their training. In one lesson, for example, Year 1 pupils successfully extended their knowledge and understanding of number bonds beyond ten to 100 and to 1000. The trainee involved pupils well in the lesson and made clear to them what they were to learn. Good questioning challenged pupils, including the more able, to think about what they needed to do to make larger numbers. Pupils behaved well throughout the lesson.

11. Overall, former trainees teach well. Some, just five months in their new schools, are already outstanding in quality. One NQT, for example, ensured all her Nursery and Reception-aged children made at least good progress in saying the sounds that come at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of words and then put these sounds together. As a result of using activities such as colourful images on large computer screens, the interest of her children was secured and all could confidently say words such as 'win' and 'will'. Another NQT used a video clip excellently to ensure her Year 4 pupils could solve real life problems using number lines and more formal ways of adding and subtracting combinations of smaller and larger numbers.

The quality of training across the partnership is good

12. Both trainees and school partners expressed confidence in the improvements that have been made to the quality of training. Whereas, in the past surveys of former trainees have raised concerns about the quality of training, NQTs spoken with during this inspection reported confidently that, overall, it had prepared them well to teach. NQTs from the undergraduate programme reported, for example, much better training in phonics in their final year of training than had been received earlier in their course. Current trainees also recognise there has been improvement in the provision. Of the trainees who responded to the online questionnaire, nearly 88 per cent were confident their training would make them a good or better teacher with less than five per cent disagreeing.
13. The quality of mentoring in schools is much improved and is of good quality. Past inconsistencies reported by trainees and NQTs are no longer evident. As a result, the assessments of what trainees can and cannot do is much sharper and, importantly, more accurate. Whereas a few mentors and headteachers have in the past doubted the accuracy of assessment from one placement to another, this is no longer the case. School-based mentors are clear about their roles and their work is quality assured by the link tutor. Mentors' feedback to trainees is of good quality. They ensure that targets set for trainees to build on strengths or remedy weaknesses are focused on outcomes for pupils and are followed through. Any concerns are identified quickly and followed up with equal speed by the link tutor.
14. The training in phonics and early reading is good. Whereas only just over half of the former trainees who responded to the last NQT survey were confident they were prepared well to teach phonics and early reading, current NQTs and trainees spoken with during this inspection were much more so. Less than ten per cent of respondents to the online questionnaire disagreed they were confident and able to teach these

important areas. Confidence and competence in teaching phonics and early reading has improved because training strikes a good balance between theory and practice. Good use is made of a range of resources and expertise. It has also improved because those assessing how well trainees are teaching are increasingly focused on what they should look for in trainees' teaching and pupils' learning. This means that feedback given to trainees is more sharply focused than that provided in the past and where improvement is needed targets to bring this about are equally precise. Where weaknesses do exist, in subject knowledge for example, these are picked up quickly and interventions put into place to secure more rapid improvement than had previously been the case. Trainees and mentors point to additional workshops, support from individual schools, and extra time in school which ensures, by the end of training, trainees enable their pupils to make at least expected progress.

15. The training in mathematics is good. Most trainees and NQTs speak positively about the good central training and observations of their teaching show it provides them with the skills and confidence required to become successful teachers. Sessions taught at the university focus on the use of practical equipment in reinforcing mathematical concepts. This approach gives trainees experience in addressing misconceptions in a way they can apply to their own teaching. Trainees value the range of mathematical resources to support teaching in areas such as weight and capacity and use these to augment the school's own resources. Assignments and tasks completed while working in schools help make the link between theory and practice. Subject leaders have recently introduced an effective tracking system to record the progress of individual trainees. Where patterns of underperformance in specific areas of mathematics knowledge are identified, training, as is the case with phonics and early reading, is modified in order to address this. This strategy is proving effective in increasing trainees' mathematical competence and subject knowledge for teaching.
16. Other aspects of training to provide trainees with the wider skills to become good teachers are also strong. Trainees have, for example, benefitted from good training in managing pupils' behaviour. In addition, trainees felt the way their training promoted equality of opportunity was a strength. This most positive response is the result of university and school-based training which prepares trainees well to teach pupils with a range of needs including the more able and those with disabilities or special educational needs. Trainees' lessons increasingly meet the needs of the different groups of pupils they teach. Trainees are also prepared well to teach in a range of culturally diverse communities and to understand issues which may arise when pupils have English as an additional language. As a result of this good training one NQT was able to support a pupil so that within six months the child was speaking and writing in English.

17. The confidence and ability of trainees to teach the wider curriculum is enhanced by good quality training sessions in, for example, science and meeting the needs of gifted and talented pupils. Such sessions develop trainees' subject knowledge and offer useful strategies in supporting varying pupil needs. Not all trainees, though, are confident that they have been able to put into practice learning in the foundation subjects in a timely fashion. Nevertheless, the partnership has plans to address this, including the shortening of the undergraduate programme from four to three years from 2013.
18. The most negative response from the online questionnaire related to the timeliness of arrangements for placements in schools. While in a very few cases arrangements are late, discussions with trainees indicates many of these concerns are historical.

The quality of leadership and management across the partnership is good

19. Good leadership has brought about important and necessary changes that have improved both the quality of training and outcomes for trainees. Previous weaknesses have been removed. All six required actions identified at the last inspection have been addressed or are well on the way to being so. The appointment of new leaders and a reorganisation of structures within the partnership have established an organisation more sharply focused on identifying strengths and weaknesses. The partnership now has, for example, effective systems in place to check on the quality of the training, ensure national priorities are addressed and to establish targets for future improvement. However, not all schools have been involved in this work as much as they should have been. While this has not had a negative impact on the quality of training or outcomes for trainees, had such wider involvement been in place the improvements made since the previous inspection may well have been greater.
20. The partnership benefits from schools that are at least good training schools. The commitment to training high quality teachers is shared by headteachers and school-based mentors. All mentoring observed during this inspection was at least good with some which was outstanding. Where it is outstanding trainees, including those who for one reason or another are struggling, are making rapid progress.
21. Even through what has been a difficult time for the university, schools have remained loyal to the partnership. The role of the link tutor in helping individual schools check the quality of their training has been appreciated. It is clear though that while some schools know very well

the quality of training within their clusters and the wider partnership, others do not. This is a missed opportunity to share existing expertise that would lead to even better training and outcomes for trainees.

22. The partnership now has a wealth of data at its disposal to ensure that trainees are equipped with the knowledge and skills required to realise their potential to become good or better teachers. Because of the relatively short time since the previous inspection and time some leaders have been in post, the impact of the use of this data is, in some instances, not yet maximised. In other cases though, in mathematics and phonics for example, it has brought about good improvement in the way trainees teach. This bodes well for the future and coupled with the now good mentoring and training in phonics, demonstrates continuing good capacity for further improvement. Priorities for improvement are appropriate and good use has been made of external expertise such as that from external examiners and the Teaching Agency.
23. The rigour of procedures for recruitment and selection has improved and are now more robust. They identify well the potential of candidates to be good or better trainees and teachers. A range of tasks test out subject knowledge in English, phonics and mathematics well. The information gained is being used increasingly well to support trainees from the beginning of their training and particularly those who are relatively less strong. All criteria relating to recruitment and selection are met. The success of these more robust arrangements is seen in the improved completion rates on the post graduate course.

Annex: Partnership schools

The following schools were visited to observe teaching:

Broughton Fields Primary School, Milton Keynes
Bushfield School, Milton Keynes
Clipstone Brook Lower School, Leighton Buzzard
Elstow Lower School, Bedford
Goldington Green Lower School, Bedford
Newnham Middle School, Bedford
Renhold VC Lower School, Bedford
Robert Bloomfield Academy, Bedford
Shortstown Lower School, Bedford
Springfield Lower School, Bedford

ITE partnership details

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Previous inspection report	http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/70160
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