

University of Sussex

School of Education and Social Work, University of Sussex, Brighton, Brighton & Hove,
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Inspection dates

23 January to 26 January 2023

Inspection judgements

	Early years ITT	Primary age-phase	Secondary age-phase
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	Good	Good
The quality of education and training	Outstanding	Good	Good
Leadership and management	Outstanding	Good	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	N/A	Outstanding	Good

What is it like to be a trainee at this ITE provider?

Trainees are immersed in strongly research-based and ambitious programmes. A close partnership exists between provider, schools and settings. This means that a combination of theory and its practical application prepares trainees well for their chosen vocation. A deep-rooted determination that trainees become 'reflective, responsive and research-driven' firmly underpins the approach.

Trainees' experience is personalised and tailored, especially if facing adversity. They are well supported to manage their workload. Trainees are confident in raising any qualms about their training because leaders actively encourage them to do so, responding promptly where they can.

Promoting and striving for inclusion is a golden thread that runs through both the management of the courses and the curriculum itself. While doubtlessly equipped with helpful classroom tactics, trainees are furnished with a deeper, more mature understanding of relationships, behaviour and communication.

The training prioritises the importance of subject knowledge. It succeeds in fostering trainees' confidence in what they are teaching, including literacy and reading. The programmes are designed to give trainees the appetite to explore research-based

strategies while safely supported by their mentors and tutors. Through this nurture and encouragement, trainees take strides towards finding their own professional identities upon which to build their early careers.

Information about this ITE provider

- The University of Sussex provides early years, primary and secondary initial teacher education. The provider offers postgraduate routes into teaching across these phases. There is also an undergraduate route in primary leading to a Bachelor of Arts with qualified teacher status (QTS). Postgraduate primary and secondary trainees have the option of taking School Direct (fee paying) or School Direct (salaried) routes which are included alongside, and also lead to, the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).
- The primary phase currently has the largest number of trainees, with 214 at the time of the inspection. The large majority of these were undergraduate trainees. Just under a third of primary trainees were working towards a PGCE, including those on one of the School Direct routes. The secondary phase had 190 trainees engaged in the PGCE programme, with just over one third of these on one of the School Direct routes.
- The early years training programme offers graduates the opportunity to gain QTS alongside studying for a Master's degree. There were 15 early years trainees at the time of the inspection.
- The provider works with approximately 50 early years settings, over 240 primary schools and 198 secondary schools across more than six different local authorities.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was conducted by seven His Majesty's Inspectors and three Ofsted inspectors.
- Inspectors had discussions with the heads of each phase, course leaders, subject leaders, professional tutors and a range of other leaders and staff connected with different aspects of the programme. Meetings were held with current or former trainees individually and in small groups. Inspectors also spoke with school-based mentors, headteachers and senior leaders. The overall lead inspector met remotely with four members of the strategic committee.
- Collectively, the inspection team spoke with 112 trainees or former trainees. Inspectors visited 17 settings or schools in person and conducted a wide range of other discussions remotely. They also took account of the views expressed in 241 inspection surveys completed by trainees and 296 returned by staff, including setting- or school-based staff who are involved in the programme.
- To understand fully how well trainees are prepared to teach, inspectors in each phase focused on certain subjects or areas of learning in more detail. In early years, these areas of learning were personal, social and emotional development, literacy and mathematics. The primary phase focused in particular on early reading, mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, geography and music. The focus subjects in the secondary phase were English, science, modern foreign languages, drama, history and music.

Early years phase report

What works well in the early years phase and what needs to be done better?

The sum is far greater than the parts on this demanding and distinctive route to early years teacher status. Leaders successfully 'push the boundaries' so that trainees flourish and become much more than high-quality early years teachers. The professional practice and academic elements of the course are meticulously interwoven. Expert trainers and high-calibre mentors complement each other in a symbiotic partnership.

Trainees quickly take on the mantle of critical thinkers who understand the 'why' as well as the 'what' of early years teaching. Along the way, through cascading their learning, they have a tangible, positive influence on the professionalism and practice of staff in their settings. By the end of the course, trainees develop a sophisticated understanding of their elected specialism. Many move quickly into manager roles after graduation, extending their influence on the lives of young children.

An unwavering commitment to ensuring that children get the absolute best start in life permeates all aspects of the course. Recruitment processes are thorough, testing out trainees' potential and dedication to what will be an exacting course. Leaders have diligently selected what trainees need to know and understand about the early years curriculum and pedagogy, grounding it in an impressive range of contemporary thinking and research. They skilfully design activities to put trainees in children's shoes to understand how they learn and capitalise on specific expertise in local settings to further enrich training.

Leaders are uncompromising in their insistence that mentors are well-qualified early years practitioners who will ensure that trainees get excellent practical teaching experiences. So, for example, trainees acquire a mature understanding of their role in developing children's fluency and security in early reading and mathematics. There is no doubt in their minds that the use of systematic synthetic phonics is not up for negotiation. Trainees become proficient in adapting teaching to take account of children's developmental stages and understanding their behaviour as a form of communication.

Leaders keep their finger firmly on the pulse of this exceptional training programme. They work closely with partner settings in a constant quest to further enhance quality and ensure its currency. So, for example, trainees' thinking about how children learn best is influenced by research on cognitive load theory as well as the more traditional early years thinking about, for example, enabling environments. Training closely mirrors this in the way that it is methodically designed. Leaders scaffold and carefully assess trainees' learning over time to ensure that they succeed on what they variously call this 'life-changing', 'fascinating' and 'fulfilling' course.

Does the ITE provider's early years phase comply with the ITE compliance criteria?

- The provider meets the DfE statutory compliance criteria.

Primary phase report

What works well in the primary phase and what needs to be done better?

Leaders successfully realise their ambition to develop trainees who are reflective, responsive to pupils and informed by research. They have designed a coherent and carefully sequenced curriculum which is underpinned by the core content framework (CCF). The curriculum gives trainees the essential knowledge, skills and understanding to be well prepared for the start of their teaching career. Leaders, including new course and subject leaders, have a clear view of the strengths and areas to be developed. They make strong use of trainees' views to improve the programme.

Leaders help trainees to understand the distinctiveness of individual subjects. Trainees are equipped with sufficient understanding of the most important foundational knowledge to teach pupils across national curriculum subjects. They know the importance of building on what pupils have previously learned. However, trainees' knowledge of how this links with what children learn in Reception Year is less well developed.

Trainees develop a clear knowledge of how to teach early reading and the importance of phonics. They gradually build their expertise in how to identify and support weaker readers, including by observing expert teachers. Trainees understand the significance of ensuring pupils learn to read fluently so they can access the rest of the curriculum.

Leaders use effective systems to check that trainees are learning the intended curriculum. They are swift to adapt the training in light of trainees' development. For example, leaders recently provided additional sessions to strengthen trainees' knowledge of assessing pupils' learning during lessons. Leaders prioritise and check that trainees understand how to identify and support pupils with special education needs and/or disabilities. The 'Turtledove classroom' contains profiles of fictitious pupils which helps trainees to be inclusive by understanding pupils' varied needs, including those who speak English as an additional language.

Leaders work positively with partnership schools. School leaders appreciate their swift and effective communication. Leaders make sure that mentors have a detailed understanding of what trainees learn at the university so they can reinforce this while trainees are on placement. Trainees reflect thoughtfully on their learning, discuss their progress through the programme with mentors and identify next steps together. Leaders have developed strong systems for the induction and training of mentors to help them to understand their roles and responsibilities. However, their oversight of the impact of mentors' work and the subsequent feedback is at an earlier stage of development. They have already introduced an online system to begin to strengthen this aspect of their work.

What does the ITE provider need to do to improve the primary phase?



(Information for the provider and appropriate authority)

- The focus on the place of the early years within the subject-specific elements of the training is underdeveloped. This means that trainees do not have a secure understanding of how what children learn in the early years links with subject-specific learning for older pupils. Leaders should ensure that training, including subject-specific sessions, builds trainees' knowledge of what and how pupils learn in the early years and how to build on this in subsequent year groups.
- Leaders' oversight of the impact of mentors' work is at an early stage of development. As a result, there is some variability in how well mentors support trainees' ongoing development. Leaders should ensure that as well as the necessary induction and training, all mentors receive feedback on the quality of their work so they are able to provide consistently effective guidance and support.

Does the ITE provider's primary phase comply with the ITE compliance criteria?

- The provider meets the DfE statutory compliance criteria.

Secondary phase report

What works well in the secondary phase and what needs to be done better?

Leaders in the secondary phase have created a highly ambitious curriculum that motivates trainees to shape their identities as confident and aspirational teachers. Trainees actively draw upon well-founded and relevant education research. The ITE programme is carefully sequenced and provides trainees with a rich store of knowledge and skills. Trainees complete the programme with high expectations of themselves and their pupils. They are completely ready to teach their subjects, manage their classrooms with kindness, meet the needs of all pupils and be role models for the profession.

The provider's work with its partner schools is exceptional. Relationships with school leaders are mutually beneficial and contribute in a major way to recruitment and retention of teachers in the area. Programmes of training in the university and schools are closely aligned and interwoven. All aspects of the CCF are fully absorbed into the training programme.

Programme leaders' quality assurance of the programme is characterised by impressive attention to detail at every level. Trainees' and other stakeholders' views are sought, valued and acted upon to drive leaders' truly relentless pursuit of excellence.

Programme leaders have made huge strides in setting high standards for mentors and tutors, beyond the requirements of the CCF. Training for mentors, systems for recording feedback and leaders' checks on quality are meticulous and highly effective. Most mentors provide trainees with meaningful feedback and set precise targets. Nevertheless, some mentors are still developing the necessary skills to implement the provider's demanding curriculum. Sometimes comments from mentors are not sufficiently specific to help trainees with their reflections.

Trainees' critical habits of review and reflection are a fundamental part of the programme. Assessment points in the programme are carefully planned to avoid any unnecessary workload and increased stress. Trainees' written assignments are deliberately designed to focus on subject-specific research that will enhance trainees' practice in the classroom. A flexible and personalised approach to the final assessment assures the required rigour and challenge while enabling trainees to succeed and celebrate their progression through the course.

Expert subject leaders and tutors ensure that trainees have the knowledge they need to teach their subjects well. Tutors ensure that trainees start the course with sufficient subject knowledge. Over the programme, tutors have a pivotal role in ensuring that trainees continue to develop their knowledge and skills through trying out approaches, reflecting and practising.

What does the ITE provider need to do to improve the secondary phase?

[Information for the provider and appropriate authority]

- Mentors' feedback, including target-setting, is not consistently incisive or mature enough to fulfil the programme's exacting expectations. This leads to some variability for trainees in the quality of feedback they receive. Programme leaders should ensure that mentors fully and precisely implement the intent of the ITE curriculum to the highest standard.

Does the ITE provider's secondary phase comply with the ITE compliance criteria?

- The provider meets the DfE statutory compliance criteria.

ITE provider details

Unique reference number	70071
Inspection number	10258637

This inspection was carried out in accordance with the 'Initial teacher education inspection framework and handbook'.

This framework and handbook sets out the statutory basis and framework for initial teacher education (ITE) inspections in England from September 2020.

Type of ITE provider	Higher education institution
Phases provided	Early years Primary Secondary
Date of previous inspection	10 to 13 March 2014

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, Overall lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Bradley, Phase lead inspector (early years)	His Majesty's Inspector
Laurie Anderson, Phase lead inspector (primary)	His Majesty's Inspector
Janet Pearce, Phase lead inspector (secondary)	Ofsted Inspector
James Broadbridge	His Majesty's Inspector
Linda Culling	His Majesty's Inspector
Alan Derry	His Majesty's Inspector
Shaun Jarvis	His Majesty's Inspector
Julie Sackett	His Majesty's Inspector
Paul James	Ofsted Inspector

Annex: Placement settings and schools

Inspectors visited the following settings and schools as part of this inspection:

Name	URN	ITE phases
St Martin's Church of England Primary School	114539	Early years
Wise Owls Nursery School	EY491000	Early years
Woodingdean Primary School	114480	Primary
St Nicolas Church of England Primary School	114560	Primary
Benfield Primary School	114412	Primary
Westdene Primary School	114380	Primary
Downs Junior School	114366	Primary
St Margaret's Church of England Primary School, Rottingdean	114537	Primary
Moulsecoomb Primary School	147680	Primary
Dorothy Stringer School	114580	Secondary
Hove Park School and Sixth Form Centre	114607	Secondary
Downlands Community School	126087	Secondary
Blatchington Mill School	114606	Secondary
Priory School	114598	Secondary
Cardinal Newman Catholic School	114611	Secondary
Longhill High School	114581	Secondary
Chailey School	114594	Secondary

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