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University of Birmingham

**Better
education
and care**

Edgbaston
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A primary initial teacher training
short inspection report
2006/07

Managing inspector
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Introduction

The University of Birmingham works in partnership with 87 schools to provide primary initial teacher training courses. It offers an early years course and a general primary course leading to the award of a postgraduate certificate in education. At the time of the inspection there were 97 trainees.

Context

The inspection was carried out by a team of inspectors in accordance with the *Ofsted Handbook for the Inspection of Initial Teacher Training (2005-2011)*.

This report draws on evidence from a short inspection of the provision and an inspection of the management and quality assurance arrangements.

Grades are awarded in accordance with the following scale

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

Main inspection judgements

Management and quality assurance: Grade 2

The overall quality of training is at least good.
The provider will receive a short inspection in three years.

Key strengths

- the strong team of well qualified and committed tutors who deliver good quality university-based training
- the strong coherence between the core subjects and professional studies
- the good modelling of the use of information and communication technology within training sessions
- the exemplary provision and organisation of resources for mathematics
- the recruitment of trainees from minority ethnic groups.

Points for action

- ensuring that arrangements for briefing and developing school-based trainers are effective
- ensuring that all trainees receive regular, good quality support in schools.

Points for consideration

- improving the monitoring and recording of trainees' progress towards the Standards
- clarifying how subject improvement plans link to the overall strategic plan
- following up rigorously any weaknesses identified through the written English selection task.

The quality of training

1. The course is structured well and designed to enable trainees to meet the Standards. There is a good balance between time spent in schools and in the university. The course gives appropriate attention to the key stages for which trainees are prepared and trainees get suitable teaching experiences.
2. The course content is relevant, up-to-date and sensibly sequenced across the year. The National Curriculum, Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage and the Primary National Strategy are thoroughly covered; for example, trainees have already been introduced to the new literacy framework. The principles of *Every Child Matters* permeate the course and due attention is given to diversity and inclusion. The course strikes a good balance between improving trainees' own subject knowledge and developing their pedagogical skills to prepare them to teach primary school pupils. The course handbooks are of good quality and show clearly which Standards are being addressed in each training session.
3. Assignments cover relevant topics and require trainees to read extensively and to draw on their own experiences in schools. School-based tasks involve interesting activities, many of which feed directly into the formal assignments. Trainees are also expected to undertake reading tasks both before and after training sessions.
4. The level of course coherence between the elements of central training is very high. This coherence is achieved because the small close-knit team of tutors plan the programme together and have a thorough knowledge of all elements of the course. They are able to refer, in their own training sessions, to other sessions where trainees will encounter relevant material. For example, core subject tutors covering assessment in their own subject refer to the generic coverage of this in the professional studies course. University sessions draw well on trainees' experiences and materials gathered in school, particularly those arising from the school-based tasks.
5. The quality of training in the university is good. Tutors are well qualified, have relevant research interests and most have appropriate primary school experience. Training sessions are planned well and course materials are good. A strong feature of the training is the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in a way which models good classroom practice. Well-chosen outside speakers add a further dimension to many course elements, particularly professional studies. School-based training is at least satisfactory, although the support provided for trainees by mentors and class teachers varies significantly between schools. The feedback trainees receive on their teaching is detailed and includes reference to the Standards. However, trainees receive limited subject-specific feedback, particularly in science.

6. Arrangements to meet individual needs are at least satisfactory. Trainees undertake audits of subject knowledge early in the course. These are appropriate in content and format; tutors analyse the results and additional workshops are provided to support trainees when needed. Trainees are also expected to identify their areas of weakness and to undertake self-study to help remedy them. However, the audits are not always used effectively by trainers to monitor trainees' progress to enable training to be focused on their needs. Their progress is checked at the end-of-term personal tutorial, although this means that there is a significant period of time in the autumn term when no formal check is made on their subject knowledge development.

7. Trainees are required to keep a professional development profile which contains a variety of relevant documents. These include weekly evaluations against the Standards during school experience and feedback sheets on lessons and assignments. At the end-of-term tutorial, the trainees and their personal tutors agree and sign off those Standards which have been achieved. However, current procedures and documentation do not enable trainees to get a clear view of their on-going progress.

Management and quality assurance

8. The university recruits well-qualified trainees. Detailed information for prospective candidates is provided through the easily accessible web site. The recruitment of trainees from minority ethnic groups is an outstanding feature of the course. The university has implemented successful strategies to improve its recruitment of males. The thorough selection process includes representatives from partnership schools. A good feature is the successful completion of a school placement for each candidate before they are accepted. Trainees are fully informed at interview of the structure and timescales of the course. The retention rate is high; almost all trainees completed the course and gained employment last year. The written English task is carefully assessed, but when weaknesses are identified they are not followed up rigorously.

9. The programme committee, partnership committee and board of studies all have clear remits and ensure that the PGCE programme is managed well. Representatives from partnership schools contribute to programme development through membership of the partnership committee. Lines of accountability are clearly defined and understood. Minutes are clearly recorded and retained. An efficient administrative officer provides good support through the PGCE office. Good access to course documentation is easily available through the secure web site.

10. The small team of well-qualified tutors all have well-defined job descriptions. They work together effectively to provide strong leadership of the central training programme. They make good use of expertise from partnership schools and outside speakers to contribute to the central training. As link tutors they provide a good

communication system between the partnership schools and the university. As personal tutors they are highly valued by the trainees for the support they provide.

11. The partnership agreement is reviewed annually and is signed by all schools in the partnership. This document outlines the responsibilities of the various personnel involved in the school-based training. However, some of the responsibilities are not sufficiently clearly defined and, as a result, not all schools fulfil their obligations. For example, a significant minority of school-based trainers have not attended briefing meetings in the past three years and a significant number of trainees do not receive their entitlement of a weekly meeting with their mentor when on school experience. Consequently, the support trainees receive in schools is inconsistent. The university is aware of this lack of attendance and link tutors, when they visit schools, update mentors who do not attend briefings. However, this does not provide the same opportunities for sharing good practice between schools that are available at the central meetings.

12. Although all schools in the partnership have a trained mentor, the university has identified the need to provide them with further subject-specific training. Joint lesson observations between link tutors and mentors have been introduced to address this priority. However, planning is as yet insufficiently developed to ensure that all schools benefit from this training. For example, only a small minority of mentors will benefit from the joint observation of a mathematics lesson this term.

13. Trainees have access to a good range of resources in dedicated rooms for the core subjects in the university. Resources for mathematics are excellent and the training room reflects a good primary learning environment. Printed resources are available in the well-stocked learning resources centre where trainees can also gain internet access. The secure web site is very informative and is regularly updated.

14. Internal and external moderation arrangements are satisfactory. An appropriate sample of assignments is second marked. The external examiners' reports, which were an issue at the last inspection, are detailed and helpful. The university responds promptly and effectively to issues raised in these. For example, the mathematics assignment has been improved and a new tutor has been appointed for mathematics and ICT.

15. Trainees evaluate school and university-based training and mentors evaluate the support provided by the university. This information, along with that in the external examiners' reports, is used to develop the training in the short term. For example, more phonics sessions have been included in the English programme in response to trainees' evaluations. The partnership coordinator collates the good range of evaluation and statistical evidence systematically to inform the annual programme audit. This audit also incorporates a summary of the individual subject action plans which are effective tools for improvement in the short term. Success criteria in the plans for mathematics and ICT are specific and measurable. However, the individual subject plans do not make it clear how actions will lead to the longer-term improvements in quality identified in the university strategic plan.