

The College of St Mark and St John

The College of St Mark and St John
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A secondary initial teacher training
short inspection report
2006/07

Managing inspector:
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Introduction

The College of St Mark and St John works in partnership with about 90 schools to provide secondary initial teacher training courses. It offers training in art and design, English, geography with information and communication technology (ICT), ICT, mathematics, modern foreign languages, physical education (PE), religious education and science. All these subjects are available as postgraduate certificate in education courses and lead to qualified teacher status (QTS). Mathematics and physical education are also available as undergraduate courses leading to QTS. At the time of the inspection there were 176 trainees on the secondary courses.

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: 1

The overall quality of training is at least good.

The provider will receive a short inspection in three years.

Key strengths

- the collaborative partnership with schools
- very effective management, which maintains high quality training and leads to significant improvement
- very effective support and training for trainers and rigorous quality assurance, which promotes high quality training in partnership schools
- the high level of coherence between the different elements of the training
- the effectiveness of the training in meeting trainees' individual needs
- very effective monitoring of trainees' progress
- the rigorous and consistently applied selection procedures.

Points for consideration

- placing a greater emphasis on subject-specific content and pedagogy in the training programmes.

The quality of training

1. Training programmes are very well designed to provide opportunities for trainees to meet the Standards. Carefully planned college and school based general professional studies programmes include very good coverage of key areas such as lesson planning, assessment and behaviour management. College training sessions are complemented by useful discussion and reflection in cross-subject seminars and the topics covered are systematically followed up by tutors in subject specific training programmes. These arrangements are highly effective in enabling trainees to understand how the different elements of the training combine to help them make good progress towards the Standards.

2. Training programmes reflect contemporary developments in schools; they are relevant and supported well by recent texts, journals and links to suitable web sites. There is good coverage of equal opportunities and race awareness issues and the implications of Every Child Matters feature prominently in all aspects of the training. In PE, the course content has been updated so that there are better links between activities such as gymnastics and dance. The way in which general professional studies shapes the subject programmes adds enormously to the coherence of the training, but occasionally there is insufficient emphasis on subject-specific pedagogy and content.

3. The high quality training that was evident at the time of the last inspection has been maintained and there have been significant improvements in subjects where training was comparatively weaker. In all subjects, college tutors are adept at blending theory and practice. They employ a broad range of suitable strategies including the innovative use of ICT and sessions led by trainees. The expertise of visiting lecturers and school staff is used to good effect to enhance the quality of training. School-based training is carefully planned and makes very effective use of the examples of good practice which are included in the course handbook. Target setting has improved since the last inspection. Trainees are extremely positive about how well professional tutors and mentors make use of grade characteristics to identify areas for improvement.

4. The course is particularly successful in meeting trainees' individual needs. Pre-course guidance and individual tasks ensure that trainees are well prepared for the training. Subject knowledge audits are completed at interview and are regularly reviewed by tutors and mentors. This is done particularly well in PE where training programmes are carefully adapted to meet trainees' emerging needs. In all subjects, trainees receive good support to develop their ICT skills. School placements are very well matched with trainees' needs: for example by placing strong trainees in the most challenging schools to ensure that they are extended or by placing trainees with mentors who suit their preferred learning styles.

5. The monitoring of trainees' progress towards achieving the Standards is a strength of the course. The progress review diary is used very well and helps to ensure that judgements about trainees' strengths and areas for improvement are

consistent and accurate. Tutors and mentors make very good use of the partnership lesson observation template to provide trainees with regular and comprehensive feedback on their teaching. This is usually carefully cross-referenced with the Standards and includes pertinent comments on trainees' progress and weekly targets. Assignments provide further opportunities to monitor trainees' progress and are marked carefully by tutors, although assessment sometimes lacks sharpness because there are no subject-specific assessment criteria. The reports completed at the end of school placements are of high quality. They are very clear about trainees' strengths and areas for development, and are used very well to identify training priorities for the subsequent placement.

6. The very thorough monitoring of trainees' progress underpins effective assessment arrangements. Trainees have a good understanding of what constitutes appropriate evidence and know how to present this to demonstrate that they have achieved the Standards. Arrangements for the final assessment of trainees against the Standards are thorough and understood by all. Internal and external moderation arrangements are rigorous and effective. Particularly good use is made of joint observations for moderation, as well as for mentor training and quality assurance.

Management and quality assurance

7. Very effective management and quality assurance have maintained the high quality training which was evident at the time of the last inspection and led to significant improvements in subjects where training was comparatively weaker. There is better integration of ICT within the geography course. Changes to the overall programme have led to greater consistency in training in modern foreign languages. In PE, there is much better coverage of the six National Curriculum areas of activity.

8. Rigorous selection procedures are consistently applied across all subjects and routes. There are very clear selection criteria which are set out clearly in a comprehensive selection handbook. Initial applications are scrutinised carefully and the tasks set for those invited for interview are well designed to assess their suitability for teaching. Interviews involve college tutors and teachers from partnership schools and the recommendations they make are carefully recorded. These procedures are closely monitored and senior managers are involved in selection decisions about borderline candidates.

9. Successful applicants are set pre-course tasks which are well matched to their individual needs, particularly in relation to subject knowledge development. Trainees are required to provide evidence that these tasks are completed by the start of the course. They are also required to undertake some preparatory work related to the implications of Every Child Matters and this is also followed up at the start of the course. These arrangements ensure that trainees are very well prepared for the training programmes.

10. The prospectus and web site highlight the college's strong commitment to equal opportunities and staff work strenuously to attract trainees from ethnic minority backgrounds. However, minority ethnic groups are under-represented in the southwest region and this is reflected in recruitment to the secondary course.

11. The clear sighted and extremely capable management of the secondary provision supports high quality training and good outcomes. Senior managers have been particularly successful in building a vibrant training partnership, founded on openness and trust. Communication within the college and with partner schools is highly effective. Those involved in the training are confident about discussing emerging issues and ways in which the provision could be improved. The contributions of college and school staff are actively sought and equally valued. A tangible sense of collaborative working permeates the partnership.

12. At the time of the last inspection there were limited opportunities for schools to be involved in the strategic development of the partnership. However, a comparatively new secondary partnership advisory group is playing an increasingly prominent role in shaping the future of the partnership. The requirement that the group should be chaired by a partnership headteacher gives a clear indication of the value placed on schools' contributions. The work of this group is sensibly complemented by that of the partnership review development group which deals with the more detailed and operational aspects of training and course design.

13. A committed team of college tutors work together very well with an evident sense of common purpose. Their contribution to the training is complemented by the work of very capable and conscientious professional tutors and subject mentors in partnership schools. High quality documentation, including a comprehensive course handbook and partnership agreement, ensures that all trainers have a very clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Training programmes for mentors and professional tutors are comprehensive, closely linked and well attended. There is prompt and systematic follow up for the very few new mentors who are unable to attend.

14. The partnership employs a wide range of strategies to evaluate the quality of the provision. Trainees evaluate both college and school-based training and schools evaluate the quality of communication, administration and the support provided by the college. Schools also evaluate the progress made by trainees during block placements. When college tutors visit schools they complete a simple but effective monitoring grid to check on the quality of school-based training. Furthermore, trainees email the weekly targets that they agree with their mentors to college tutors: this enables tutors to maintain a clear overview of the work of mentors. A range of qualitative and quantitative benchmarking data also informs judgements about the quality of provision. At present, external examiners report on groups of subjects. The college recognises that this arrangement is not always successful in pinpointing subject-specific areas for development and is currently appointing examiners for each subject.

15. This wealth of information helps to ensure that senior managers have a good intuitive understanding of strengths and weaknesses. These are shared openly with schools in a climate of honesty and trust. There is a shared commitment to continuous improvement and areas where there is scope for improvement are tackled promptly and collaboratively. The monitoring of school-based training is exemplary and its impact on the quality of provision is evident.

16. The various strands of quality assurance lead to specific and distinct action plans: for example, in response to external examiners reports. This approach is largely determined by the requirements of present institutional framework for quality assurance and improvement planning. This is currently under review. Senior managers recognise that there is scope to develop a more systematic and coherent cycle of whole course evaluation and improvement planning, with a sharper focus on impact and outcomes, particularly at a subject level.