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A secondary initial teacher training
short inspection report
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Introduction

The University of Sheffield works in partnership with 36 schools to provide secondary initial teacher training (ITT) courses. It offers courses in English, mathematics, science, geography, history and modern languages; including community languages and oriental languages. At the time of the inspection there were 150 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: 1

The overall quality of training is at least good.

The provider will receive a short inspection in three years.

Key strengths

- the excellent procedures for recruitment and selection, resulting in the enrolment of high calibre trainees
- the well established and stable partnership, characterised by successful working relationships between university staff and school-based trainers
- the outstanding provision for meeting trainees' individual needs
- the level of intellectual challenge within the training, which develops trainees as fully rounded professionals
- the very good use of a wide range of evaluative information in ensuring continuous improvement of the provision
- the highly effective systems for communication between all of those involved in the partnership.

Points for consideration

- clarifying the criteria for the interim assessment categories used by school-based trainers
- ensuring greater consistency between subjects in joint observations of trainees' teaching.

The quality of training

1. The course has many distinctive strengths. By providing a high level of intellectual challenge for its trainees, it prepares them to become not just effective subject teachers, but reflective professionals with a secure understanding of wider educational issues.
2. The content of the course is relevant and up to date. It covers the national strategies very effectively. Trainees quickly develop a very good understanding, for example, of the principles of assessment for learning. The programme provides them with a good understanding of the implications of *Every Child Matters*. The training in educational and professional studies is a strength. Taught exclusively in small, cross-disciplinary seminar groups, this popular part of the course equips trainees with the necessary professional knowledge and also develops important skills such as teamwork. It contributes significantly to the trainees' high level of readiness for life in school.
3. The course is well designed. All its components combine very well to support trainees' progress towards meeting the Standards. The course structure is logical and has many advantages. The trainees' early experience of Key Stage 2, for example, provides them with a basic understanding of transition before this topic is developed at the university. During the first block teaching experience trainees spend one day a week at the university and this is used extremely well to enable trainees to reflect on their experiences.
4. The high quality of the central training is due to the tutors' enthusiasm for, and authoritative knowledge of, their subjects, as well as to the high level of care and support they give their trainees. They use a rich variety of teaching styles and model good practice in their sessions. For example, the problem based learning approach in educational and professional studies not only helps trainees learn effectively, but demonstrates how their own teaching might develop. The training also shows trainees how to make imaginative use of available resources.
5. The quality of training is enhanced by the documentation; for example, science trainees usefully record the main points from each central training session in a simple booklet, which helps them to reflect upon their own learning. In some subjects trainees benefit from the well planned use of a virtual learning environment. They use it to pool resources and for teaching ideas, and in the best cases share responses to their professional reading.
6. School-based training is also effective. Staff have a very good understanding of their responsibilities. Tutors provide mentors with very useful guidelines on what they should cover in their weekly sessions with trainees. Trainees enjoy an extensive range of opportunities to observe good practice and to teach the full age and ability range. University staff intervene quickly and efficiently in the few instances when this does not occur. Mentors and other teachers regularly observe trainees' teaching and provide pertinent commentaries on how it might be improved.

7. The provision for meeting trainees' individual needs is outstanding. Subject knowledge is audited and enhanced very effectively in a variety of ways. In science, for example, the tutor modifies the course in the light of a diagnostic assessment of trainees' knowledge, thus meeting their needs and modelling differentiation. Trainees whose degree is in a different subject from the one they hope to teach receive additional, well focused support. Individuals' programmes are refined according to needs and interests. For example, some assignments and tasks permit trainees to choose a personally relevant focus.

8. Tutors take great care to match trainees to schools that can provide experiences related to their needs and interests. An English trainee with a passion for drama, for example, was placed in a performing arts school. Schools make very effective use of the detailed information they receive on trainees.

9. Assessment is used well to support trainees' progress. Trainees receive good quality developmental feedback on their assignments. Although there is a lack of clarity in the criteria for the interim categorisation of trainees' progress, reports after the first placement are detailed and supportive, and provide a strong basis for future priorities.

Management and quality assurance

10. Well documented procedures and systems result in the recruitment of high-calibre trainees. The prospectus includes much detail about entry requirements and course structure. Trainees praise the efficiency of the selection procedures, saying that tutors are very quick to respond to emails and phone calls, and all feel that they are very well informed about every step in the process. In virtually every case, school-based trainers are involved in interviews. Low withdrawal rates, coupled with very high success rates at the end of the course show the effectiveness of the partnership's procedures.

11. Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes to the structure of the course management, including the increased involvement of school-based trainers. Whilst the committee structure is still evolving, evidence at this stage shows that management of the partnership and training programmes is very effective and has led to improvements in the provision as a whole. The monitoring of race relations and equal opportunities policies is now thorough and well established. Appropriate attention is also paid to legislation such as the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

12. The partnership agreement clearly details expectations and responsibilities of all those involved in the programme. Schools are encouraged to enter into a three-year agreement, which is then reviewed. These arrangements have resulted in a stable and well established partnership with strong working relationships between all staff. Communication between the university and schools is a significant strength. Schools

also have established good working relationships with each other, which enhance aspects of the training programme.

13. Meetings and training sessions for school-based trainers are very well attended and received. There is thorough coverage of procedural matters, with an appropriate focus on both generic and subject specific issues. Mentors particularly appreciate the opportunity to engage in detailed dialogue on the strengths and weaknesses of trainees. This information is used very well in planning personalised training programmes.

14. The provider is strongly committed to ensuring continuous improvement of the provision, and uses effectively a wide range of evaluative information in doing so. Staff respond quickly and efficiently to issues raised by inspectors and external examiners; for example, the lesson plan form used by mathematics trainees was recently modified in response to suggestions made by the subject specialist external examiner. Trainees' and trainers' views are considered and positive changes are made as a result. Trainees are also asked regularly to evaluate every aspect of the training. This information is carefully analysed and taken very seriously by the university, who use the resulting data well in order to plan improvements.

15. There are rigorous systems for monitoring the assessment of trainees throughout the course. Although the recently introduced criteria for the interim grading of trainees are not clearly and commonly understood by trainers or trainees, action plans and profile reports do contain sufficient detail on what trainees need to do. The provider is aware of these issues and there is no evidence that these arrangements have a negative impact on the overall procedures for ensuring that trainees make the necessary progress. However, the current system of categorisation is not always helpful and there is scope for the partnership to improve this aspect of the assessment procedures.

16. Since the last inspection, there have been positive developments in establishing robust quality assurance systems within schools, with the school-based associate university tutors taking increasing responsibility for this. There are examples of some excellent practice within schools; for example, one school-based associate university tutor holds regular meetings with mentors, delivers detailed training on effective lesson observation, and provides high quality exemplars of lesson observation forms and assessment reports. The university link tutors provide valuable feedback to schools based on trainees' evaluations. There has been an increase in the regularity of joint observations between university and school-based trainers but there is still variability between subjects.

17. There is an effective cycle of planning, monitoring and evaluation, and whole course improvement planning is of good quality. There is variability in the quality of documented action plans within subject areas; whilst all accurately identify issues to be addressed, only a minority include sharply focused and quantifiable success criteria. Nevertheless, all university tutors demonstrate a clear understanding of priorities for development within their own areas, and procedures for feeding issues into whole-course planning are effective.