

Birmingham City University

Academic Registry
Feeney Building
Franchise Street
Perry Barr
Birmingham
B42 2SU

A primary initial teacher training
inspection report
2007/08

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Introduction

Birmingham City University works in partnership with 798 schools to provide primary initial teacher training courses. It offers both undergraduate and postgraduate courses covering early years and general primary age ranges. There is a flexible option on the postgraduate route. At the time of the inspection there were 857 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 revised report combines the judgements from a short inspection of the provision and of the management and quality assurance arrangements in 2006/07, with the judgements from the scrutiny of further evidence submitted to Ofsted in February 2008.

Grades are awarded in accordance with the following scale

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

Main inspection judgements

Quality of training: Grade 1

Management and quality assurance: Grade 1

Key strengths

- the highly effective team of tutors
- the strength of the partnership
- high quality documentation to support school-based training
- tutors' high quality support for trainees, including their feedback, to ensure that individual needs are met well
- the quality and use of subject knowledge audits
- the high quality resources, including information and communication technology and the working environments, to enhance trainees' experiences
- the structure, content and coherence of the courses
- the effective range of marketing strategies leading to a good level of recruitment of good quality applicants

The quality of training

1. The quality of training is outstanding. The structure and the content of all training programmes meet the Requirements well and are designed to ensure trainees are able to develop the subject knowledge and teaching skills to meet the Standards. Improvements since the previous inspection include the structure, content and coherence of courses, the tutor support for trainees and the quality of resources to enhance trainees' experiences.
2. The elements of the courses combine well. They provide very good coverage of how children learn and the relevant issues and current developments in teaching. Trainees accumulate good levels of practical knowledge. Trainees' subject knowledge, particularly in English, mathematics and science is developed particularly well through the very good use of audits. Current issues such as the implications of the Rose Report on phonics, *Every Child Matters* and The Primary National Strategy are given strong emphasis, along with attention, for example, to diversity and urban contexts. Appropriate regard is given to the Key Stage 3 Strategy, particularly in English and mathematics courses, to further develop trainees' subject knowledge. Very good opportunities exist for trainees to experience Foundation Stage settings. As a result, trainees have a very good understanding of teaching and learning from the early years to the beginnings of secondary schooling.
3. The time spent in schools provides at least good opportunities for trainees to develop their skills in planning, teaching and assessing pupils in their preferred and other age ranges. The taught modules inform and build on school experiences very well. Good quality programme handbooks give details of the content of training sessions with clear references to the Standards, highlight the place of individual modules within the overall programme and clarify the links between professional studies and other subjects. Trainees apply what they know by carrying out well-designed school-based tasks. These are used well to structure taught sessions and to encourage trainees to reflect on their experiences and progress; for example, on the postgraduate courses, trainees are required to explore children's ideas and misconceptions in classification and in evaporation. The outcomes of these explorations form the basis of an assignment.
4. University trainers are well qualified. They use their academic research to enhance course content and development; for example in understanding the factors influencing boys' achievement. Very good use is also made of the expertise and specialist knowledge of consultants, advanced skills teachers, headteachers and class teachers to deliver particular sessions, such as those on assessment for learning and diversity. The quality of resources, including information and communication technology, is very good. The quality of the accommodation is good, with each base room set out as a classroom. Of particular note are the drama studio and school hall. Trainees' evaluations of sessions and modules show a high level of satisfaction with the quality of the centre-based training. They value the enthusiasm with which trainers model effective classroom practice though a good range of interactive teaching strategies.

5. Trainees have a good understanding of their progress towards meeting personal targets and the Standards through reports from their tutors as well as their own evaluations. They benefit from detailed, constructive feedback on their teaching.

6. There are very good procedures for supporting individual trainees. Trainees speak highly of the help and encouragement from the committed team of tutors from the university and in schools. The virtual learning environment allows for good levels of communication between trainees and tutors as well as access to regularly updated course materials and trainees' own contributions.

7. Mechanisms to assess trainees' achievement against the Standards and external moderation arrangements are robust and accurate. Tutors regularly work with trainees to discuss the quality and appropriateness of the evidence they collect on their progress. Course assignments and tasks are carefully designed to link theory and practice and to enable trainees to show how they meet specific Standards. Assignments are marked to clear criteria with supporting comments and constructive criticisms. There are very good internal systems in place to ensure that assignments are marked accurately. Both first and second markers write perceptive comments to help trainees improve.

Management and quality assurance

8. Recruitment procedures are robust. Promotional material is used well to attract high quality applicants, including a good proportion of males and those from minority ethnic groups. Representatives from partnership schools value being fully involved in the thorough selection process. Robust procedures for ensuring the suitability of trainees to work with children are applied rigorously. The retention of trainees is very good and employment rates are high at the end of the courses. Effective strategies have been implemented to improve further the retention of male trainees and those from minority ethnic groups.

9. The courses are very well led and managed through a comprehensive committee structure. Each committee has a clear remit and detailed minutes of meetings are kept. There are good opportunities for partnership schools and trainees to contribute to course development through the boards of study. The module assessment and approval committee is used very effectively to manage changes to modules in a swift, yet well-informed way.

10. The courses are delivered by a highly effective team of tutors with a very good range of up-to-date experience and expertise. They work very well together to deliver high quality training and promote improvement. Tutors participate in frank discussions during their regular and clearly recorded meetings which take account of the views of trainees to bring about improvements to the training programmes. Newly appointed tutors undergo a thorough induction programme and continuing professional development is rightly given a high priority. As a result there is a strong culture of self-improvement.

11. The very good relationship between the university and its partnership schools is a strong feature of the courses. School-based tutors and class teachers have clearly defined roles. Documentation, including the partnership agreement, is clearly written and provides very helpful guidance for schools. For example, specific information booklets for each school experience clearly detail what is expected of trainees as well as providing helpful information to enable schools to support trainees' subject knowledge development. Summary booklets are used well by trainees to ensure that they, and the staff supporting them, fulfil the requirements of each school experience. Good communications ensure that any problems are raised quickly and tutors act promptly.

12. All school-based tutors receive high quality training that includes a good balance of reading, practical activities and assessment. The requirement to work with a trainee under the supervision of an experienced faculty-based tutor during this period of training is a strong feature. As a result school-based tutors provide very effective support for their trainees. Support for classroom teachers has been enhanced through the provision of some clearly presented written materials. However, there is no requirement for them to participate in any practical training. As a result, their mentoring skills are not always well developed.

13. The university evaluates every taught module and school experience placement thoroughly by seeking the views of trainees and schools. This detailed information is analysed and used to prepare module reports which include appropriate action points for improvement. The provider makes well judged and successful improvements to training, as evidenced by the upward trend in those trainees graded good and very good by the end of the course. Appropriate action plans are drawn up but these lack precise timings and measurable success criteria.

14. Policies for race equality and equality of opportunity are clear. Their implementation is monitored thoroughly through the boards of study and the university responds well to the views of trainees. For example, an alternative induction' week has been introduced to meet the needs of black female trainees.