

# Thames Primary Consortium

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A primary initial teacher training  
Short inspection report  
2007/08

Managing inspector  
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## Introduction

The Thames Primary Consortium works in partnership with 20 schools to provide primary initial teacher training (ITT) courses. It offers a postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) for the 5 to 11 year age group. At the time of the inspection, there were 25 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 next inspection of this provider will take place in accordance with the ITE Inspection Framework.

## Key strengths

- the excellent levels of communication, organisation and administration
- the recruitment and retention of high calibre trainees who, once qualified, remain in the profession
- the very strong collegiate partnership across the consortium and high level of commitment to the trainees' progress
- the excellent and highly focused individualised support for the trainees
- the quality of school-based mentoring
- the professional approach of the enthusiastic and highly committed trainees.

## Points for consideration

- ensuring that strategic action planning is sufficiently detailed to be effectively used by all partners, including those new to the partnership
- strengthening further the consistency of agreed quality assurance procedures by involving all partners in moderating trainees' lesson observation forms and files
- developing the role of the school-based mentors as trainers for school staff new to the partnership.

## The quality of training

1. The content and structure of the training course are good with some very effective features. The content of the training, the assignments and the school-based tasks are very well planned and meet the Requirements in full. The timing and structure of the programme enable trainees to acquire a firm foundation of subject knowledge and understanding throughout the course. There is a very good balance between central and school-based training. The course handbooks are well written and provide a good overview of the training. However, the subject training outlines are not sufficiently detailed. There are clear links in subject documentation to information and communication technology (ICT) but links with other subjects are not explicit enough.
2. The training provides good coverage of the National Curriculum and national strategies and of the Every Child Matters agenda. A significant strength is the emphasis placed upon progression in learning and the opportunities that trainees have to observe and practise teaching throughout the primary age range. Very good attention is paid also to increasing trainees' awareness and understanding of the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 3. The trainees are able to take advantage of specialist subject training which provides a good starting point for curriculum leadership.
3. A further strength is the cohesion between all aspects of training. This helps to ensure that trainees have the opportunity to apply what they have learnt during centre-based training sessions to their own practice in school and then to reflect upon this in subsequent centre-based sessions. For example, in mathematics, centre-based training on algebra is linked to a school-based task on teaching and evaluating a lesson on problem solving; this is then followed up in the trainees' mathematics assignment. Cohesion is further enhanced by mentors observing centre-based training sessions, thus improving their own understanding of how centre-based and school-based training complement each other.
4. The quality of training was judged as good at the last inspection and this has been maintained. Centre-based training is delivered by well-qualified tutors who model good primary practice. The training provides comprehensive coverage of relevant issues. For example, in English, additional training on synthetic phonics was provided following the Rose Review. Trainees express considerable enthusiasm for all aspects of the course. The consortium has a small but adequate stock of training materials for centre-based sessions and the provision of ICT resources has improved considerably since the last inspection. A well-organised library contains relevant texts and is well used by trainees. Training in professional studies is comprehensive and effective. For example, trainees are well prepared to teach pupils with English as an additional language and those with additional learning needs and disabilities.
5. School-based training is thorough and organised well. The class teacher and school mentor meet regularly with their trainees to set well focused targets which are related closely to the trainees' practice. These are then followed up in subsequent meetings. Trainees are given plenty of opportunities to observe good

practice throughout their placement schools, and their own lesson observations show a developing understanding of the need to be reflective teachers.

6. Support for individual trainees is excellent. Subject audits are used very well to identify weaknesses in subject knowledge and understanding throughout the training. This then leads to highly focused support at both the centre and in partnership schools.

7. Assessment procedures, including those for the final assessment of trainees' progress against the Standards, are thorough, fair and transparent. They are explained clearly in the handbooks. Tutors, mentors and trainees have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities with regard to assessment. Feedback to trainees on their teaching is usually detailed and identifies suitable targets for improvement although in some observation forms the comments are more descriptive than evaluative. Systems to ensure that written assignments are accurately marked and provide clear evidence of the trainees' progress against the Standards are robust. Marking criteria are clear, detailed and helpful. For example, grade descriptions for each section of the assignment are summarised in a useful chart so that trainees can identify in detail where their strengths and weaknesses lie. Comments on assignments are helpful because they contain evaluative and constructive guidance.

## Management and quality assurance

8. The procedures for the selection of trainees meet the Requirements very well. The prospectus and the web site provide potential applicants with detailed information. Selection days are held in consortium schools and involve all school staff. This is a significant strength and highly regarded by candidates and schools. Applicants work with pupils in classes, complete written tasks and make a presentation. These tasks are challenging and focus on assessing a wide range of academic and interpersonal skills. The outcomes of each interview are comprehensively recorded and decisions are made in line with the agreed criteria. The detailed and individualised nature of the feedback to trainees, and pre-course provision is a real strength.

9. The provider has recruited good quality candidates, including males and those from minority ethnic groups, over the past five years. The retention rate on the course over several years has been high. The consortium has excellent data on past trainees in teaching posts since 2001 which shows high retention in the profession.

10. The management of the training programme, led by the course director, is very good and fully meets requirements. The partnership is well managed and the trainees are very well prepared to teach. Partnership schools are fully involved in training, for example, in ICT, design and technology and physical education. Centre-based tutors have relevant, up-to-date experience of primary education. All partners

play a major role in planning and delivering the training programme. There is a good team approach which is evident in how the programmes are planned, delivered and reviewed in the light of evaluations.

11. Roles and responsibilities of the various institutions and personnel within the consortium are clear. Committees have reviewed procedures and made amendments where deemed appropriate; for example, in combining two committees to form a quality improvement committee to oversee programme development and improvement. Trainees, school mentors and headteachers are members of this committee. This ensures that all partners are involved and kept informed of developments. There is open management throughout the partnership. Lines of accountability are clear. The administration of the consortium is excellent; all minutes of meetings are well documented, with action points agreed, resolved, and with dates for completion.

12. The detailed partnership agreement is reviewed regularly. The very high level of commitment by all partners is reflected in regular attendance and participation by their representatives at all meetings and in their active involvement in the school-based training. The provider has well organised training sessions for school and class mentors, including school-based and central training. Additional training is provided to update mentors of new initiatives, for example, the introduction of the new Standards. These sessions include how to moderate judgements through jointly observing lessons and how to plan training timetables for individual trainees. However, there is scope for involving experienced school mentors more in developing the skills of mentors in schools that are new to the consortium.

13. Communications throughout the partnership are excellent and a real strength. Regular use is made of the web site by trainees to aid communication. This enables them to support each other well and particularly with their school-based tasks and assignments.

14. The moderation processes are effective; school-based mentors jointly observe trainees' teaching at each placement, and very often these observations include headteachers, subject leaders and class teachers. Cross moderation meetings with school-based staff visiting other schools are well organised, robust, and ensure consistency in judgements on trainees' teaching. However, this moderation does not include all consortium mentors meeting to moderate trainees' files and lesson observation records.

15. Quality assurance procedures are good and meet requirements in full. The provider monitors all applications from minority ethnic backgrounds and other categories such as gender. Good systems ensure that the provider's race equality and equal opportunity policies are monitored well. The provider has several formal and informal systems to evaluate the quality of the provision, including evaluations from trainees and school staff at regular intervals; it is always an agenda item at the committee meetings. All aspects of training for mentors and tutors are monitored, checked and evaluated regularly. The varied strategies for evaluating provision give the managers a wealth of information about how well the trainees are supported

and guided. Trainees' views are sought at several points and prompt action is taken to deal with concerns.

16. A range of improvement plans are in place. However, they do not always focus on past, present and future developments and the impact these have on the standards the trainees attain at the end of the course. The lack of an over-arching strategic plan makes it difficult for anyone new to the consortium to build on improvements already made.

17. The data clearly show that the trainees make good progress and the consortium's training is such that trainees become good and very good teachers who remain in the profession and continue to make progress.