

# University of Birmingham

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School of Education  
Edgbaston  
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A secondary initial teacher training  
short inspection report  
2007/08

Managing inspector  
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## Introduction

The University of Birmingham works in partnership with approximately 80 schools to provide secondary initial teacher training (ITT) courses. It offers training in English, mathematics, science (including biology, chemistry and physics), history, geography, modern foreign languages, physical education and religious education. All courses train teachers for the 11-18 age range. At the time of the inspection there were 202 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 Initial Teacher Education Inspection Framework.

## Key strengths

- the concentration on the fundamentals of good teaching from the beginning of the training
- the highly personalised nature of the training
- the high level of professional dialogue and discourse which takes place
- the high calibre of the trainees and their commitment to the training
- the excellent communication and strong professional relationships across the partnership
- the outstanding quality of the training provided for school-based mentors
- the prominence of reflective and evaluative practice in both the training and in the management and quality assurance of the programme
- the cohesiveness of the partnership of the university and the schools.

## Points for consideration

- give increased feedback to mentors and schools on the quality of their training
- make the plan for the improvement of the partnership more explicit.

## The quality of training

1. Since the last inspection the high quality of the training has been maintained and improved. The change from a three to a two placement model works well and the period of university-based training between placements provides valuable reflection time and enables the trainees to focus in greater depth on their progress towards the Standards in the second placement. The content of the courses effectively embraces new developments, including subject initiatives, workforce reform and personalised learning. Trainees seen during the inspection spoke with passion of their ambition to be as good a teacher as it is possible to be and to embrace fully the aspirations of *Every Child Matters*.
2. There is exceptionally strong coherence between the subject and whole school issues training. From the beginning, the training emphasises the breadth of the teacher's role. Sessions at the university are very well designed and structured to provide opportunities for the trainees to analyse how their own subject fits into the bigger picture of a school. This enhances their wider understanding of the role and expectations of a teacher in secondary schools today. Furthermore, the concentration on the fundamentals of good teaching, during the first term of training, enables the trainees to develop a very secure grasp of the Standards and to gather evidence of their achievement of these in a meaningful way.
3. The training is highly personalised. University tutors form excellent relationships with their trainees and communication takes place regularly through weekly emails or the trainees' reflective journals. Personal tutorials and weekly review meetings are central to meeting trainees' individual needs. Issues are resolved quickly and, where necessary, the training adjusted. Weaker trainees are exceptionally well supported. The quality of the individual support provided for average trainees moves them on to become good or even excellent practitioners. In addition, trainees receive a great deal of support and encouragement to extend their interests, for example, in learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
4. The stability of the partnership enables the university tutors to know the schools and mentors very well. When considering placements, tutors take school mentors' individual styles into account alongside, for example, trainees' needs to experience the teaching of minority ethnic groups or work in a different social context. The utmost care and consideration is given to matching trainees to schools and mentors.
5. Unusually, five of the six modules in the programme are accredited at Masters level. This change, introduced since the last inspection, has raised the bar for both trainees and tutors. Assignments set as part of the courses provide excellent academic and professional challenge for the trainees. In addition, the strong focus on research significantly enhances the quality of the training. Tutors share their own school-based research with the trainees and encourage them to experiment in their teaching to avoid any over-reliance on one style. The requirement that trainees undertake research in school helps them to analyse their own practice and supports

the development of their reflective and evaluative skills. The quality of trainees' self-evaluations seen during the inspection was outstanding.

6. The extent to which the university tutors consistently model good teaching practice is impressive and this contributes greatly to trainees' confidence and competence in class management and lesson planning. Trainees have excellent opportunities to observe good teaching practice as part of their training. In addition, a very wide range of events is organised to take trainees' experience beyond the classroom. For example, modern foreign languages trainees accompany staff to the airport for a languages day.

7. A very high level of professional dialogue is central to the training. Seminars at the university promote the questioning of ideas and trainees seen during the inspection demonstrated great confidence when discussing educational concepts. The quality of the school-based mentoring is high and the trainees benefit greatly from the frequent discussion and copious oral feedback they receive following observations of their lessons. However, a minority of written feedback is not as helpful as it might be in providing a clear analysis of the strengths of the lesson and precise targets for improvement.

8. There are rigorous procedures to monitor, assess and moderate trainees' progress towards the Standards. Since the last inspection the documentation used for recording trainees' achievements has been modified and mentors and trainees are very positive about the impact of the new approach on trainee development and progression. The transition meeting between mentors, tutors and trainees, which takes place just before the second placement, is a highly effective means of supporting trainees' progression.

## Management and quality assurance

9. The selection procedures are highly effective and promote fairness, consistency and thoroughness in the selection of suitable applicants. Consequently, the courses recruit high quality trainees, with a higher than average proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds. Trainees seen during the inspection were articulate, intellectually curious and highly committed to all aspects of their training. Through a varied range of pre-course tasks, successful applicants are prepared well for the training. Information gained during selection, together with audits of subject knowledge, influences the content of the training and the support provided for the trainees from the outset.

10. The partnership of mainly urban schools is diverse and exceptionally well managed. Schools effectively contribute to the selection process and are actively involved in the planning and development of the programme through the partnership steering committee, subject working groups, conferences, briefings, and tutors' visits to schools. There are very clear criteria for the selection of partnership schools and those visited during the inspection provide excellent training venues.

11. Schools' understanding of their responsibilities is outstanding. All mentors are required to complete the university's training before working with a trainee and are carefully monitored by the university during their first year. Attendance at training for both new and experienced mentors is exceptionally good, in part because of its high quality but also because of mentors' strong commitment. Training sessions are thoughtfully structured to equip the school-based trainers with the knowledge and skills they need to carry out their role to the high standard expected by the university. Course handbooks provide very clear guidance. As a result, mentors feel they have a very good understanding of the training they are expected to provide.

12. The university tutors are of high calibre, many with a national reputation for the quality of their research and writing about their subject. All are full-time and most have been in post for some years. Those who are new, including the tutors for English, physics and physical education, are well supported and are fulfilling their roles and responsibilities very effectively. The group of tutors operates as a very strong and cohesive team.

13. Communication is exemplary at all levels and a significant strength of the partnership. The frequency of the university tutors' communication with the school-based trainers and trainees enables them to gain an accurate picture of the strengths of individual schools. Tutors use this knowledge well by drawing on mentors' expertise, and the diversity within the partnership, to enhance the quality of the central subject and whole school issues training. Extensive mentor involvement in university training, conferences and briefings ensures that good practice is effectively shared to promote ever higher standards of training.

14. The excellent communication and strong professional relationships in the partnership provide a secure foundation for the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the quality of the training. For instance, during school placements, tutors receive regular feedback from trainees and school-based trainers and, where there are concerns, take prompt and effective action. A comprehensive range of quality assurance procedures and improvement mechanisms is used very well to develop courses further. As a result, aspects of subject training, including that provided in physical education and modern foreign languages, have improved since the last inspection. The sharing of good practice and the procedures for the internal moderation of the assessment of the trainees against the Standards, both of which were indicated as points for consideration in the last inspection, are now strong features of the provision.

15. The university's action planning identifies the need to continue to reduce inconsistencies and raise the quality of mentoring in schools. Although tutors' visits, trainees' evaluations and the high quality of the mentor training contribute significantly to achieving this, the schools visited during the inspection indicated they would welcome even more feedback from the university to aid their self-evaluation and improvement.

16. The university is fully aware of its responsibilities for promoting equality of opportunity and good race relations and ensures that schools have the necessary policies and appropriate practice in place. A wide range of data is used well by the university to monitor the impact of these policies and also to inform its self evaluation and improvement. The annual programme review conference is a significant aspect of the partnership's self-evaluation and improvement planning. Attended by members of the steering group, some senior mentors, subject mentors and university tutors, the event provides an excellent opportunity to evaluate the programme and identify priorities for its future development. Any planned changes which ensue from the conference are communicated promptly to schools through subsequent meetings and briefings. Although the university's requirement for annual programme and subject reviews and action plans is met, targets for the improvement of the partnership are not formalised into an explicit action plan which is then communicated to the schools.