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A secondary initial teacher training
inspection report
2007/08

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Introduction

Birmingham City University is working in partnership with 128 schools to provide secondary initial teacher training (ITT) courses in art and design, design and technology, drama, mathematics and music. In music, both full-time and part-time routes are available. All courses train teachers for the 11-16 age range. At the time of the inspection there were 173 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 combines the judgements from a short inspection of the provision and of the management and quality assurance arrangements in 2007/08, 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 selection and sequencing of training topics and activities
- the excellent integration of professional studies and subject training
- the strong focus on peer coaching
- the very strong focus on identifying and meeting the individual needs of all trainees
- the excellent selection process that results in committed trainees whose expectations about teaching are well informed
- the very strong and committed leadership in all subject areas and in the provision overall
- the very strong partnership between the university and its placement schools
- extensive and secure systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of training and the impact of this in terms of continuously improving provision.

Points for consideration

- clarify the balance between support and quality assurance activities in the professional mentors' role
- ensure that all subjects provide prompt pre-placement support for those subject mentors who are unable to attend training sessions.

The quality of training

1. The quality of training is excellent and provides every opportunity for all trainees to meet the Standards. Courses are carefully planned and structured. Topics are chosen discerningly to reflect current issues and developments. Activities and tasks are sequenced very well to provide trainees with the appropriate tools and experiences at just the right moment to aid their understanding of the role, requirements and responsibilities of being a teacher first and being a teacher of a specialist subject next. Serial placements are well planned, providing a gradual and effective introduction to the school and to teaching and ensure that trainees are more confident and familiar with the classes they will teach during their block placement.
2. Course documentation is of excellent quality. The structure and content of the university's virtual learning environment (VLE) is excellent and is a very well used resource that trainees find invaluable in supporting their training needs.
3. Excellent coherence is evident between the professional studies and subject studies elements of the course. Themes in professional studies, which form the backbone of the course, are well developed and contextualised through subjects. As a consequence the significance and relevance of different aspects of the teacher's role become evident to trainees, as they develop the core teaching skills and competences within their own subject. The highly effective school-based programme is informed and guided by the central programme, ensuring that both school and central professional training is cohesive and very well planned. The use of paired placements in the first school placement offers peer support to trainees and encourages confidence, gained through sharing planning, team teaching and peer review. This reinforces well the very strong focus on peer coaching developed in the centrally-based course.
4. Trainees are required to reflect critically, share professional practice and apply their learning in their own teaching practices. Centre-based training consistently models good practice for trainees and relationships between trainees and course tutors are strong. Visiting tutors from among partnership schools make a valuable contribution to central training and in addition very good use is made of other external expertise to enhance the training provision across all subjects.
5. The initial subject audit, completed at the selection stage, is used very effectively by trainees and trainers to begin the process of identifying individual needs. This is followed by highly personalised pre-course developmental tasks and very well focused school visits that ensure each trainee is fully prepared, in terms of their awareness of teaching issues and their subject knowledge. The latter is supplemented by the individual subject action plan that is then pursued both centrally and in schools to ensure that trainees' subject knowledge is of a high standard. The very good, and clearly documented, tracking of individual progress throughout the course ensures that both the individual trainee and their tutors and mentors are very aware of their strengths and areas for development at all stages during the course.

6. The monitoring of trainees' progress against the Standards is excellent. Trainees are supported in quickly familiarising themselves with the Standards, how different parts of the course can contribute evidence, and how to evaluate the quality of their evidence. The work of trainees in schools is monitored very closely via detailed, thoughtful and constructive feedback provided on lessons and comprehensive weekly progress reviews. This weekly review process between trainee and mentor is a powerful training mechanism involving trainees in evaluating their own progress and in negotiating future targets. This highly effective monitoring process, which includes regular university tutor visits to schools, the weekly review meetings and the formal university tutorials ensure that trainees' progress in relation to the Standards is formally and rigorously reviewed at every stage of the course.

7. Assessment is thorough, accurate and consistent throughout the training. A very good range of different assessment techniques is employed which models good practice in assessment in schools. Feedback on assignments is evaluative, constructive and accurately matched to grades. Explicit graded criteria are used to assess trainees' progress in relation to the Standards, which, for assessment purposes, are helpfully grouped together in clusters. Trainees and mentors find this extremely useful and it results in clear referencing to, and checking of, the Standards in lesson feedback and in the weekly reviews held with trainees. Final assessment of trainees' achievement against the Standards is accurate and confirmed by external examiners.

Management and quality assurance

8. The selection process is excellent and ensures that highly committed and appropriately qualified trainees are recruited to the programme. School-based mentors are involved in the selection process and, where possible, selection activities and interviews occur in placement schools. The outcomes of the selection and interview process are well documented. As a consequence, very good advice can be given to unsuccessful applicants on what they might do to improve and, indeed, there is evidence of such applicants successfully gaining a place on the course at a later date. Guidance on selection and interview procedures for applicants is very clear. The interview guidance notes produced to ensure that university tutors and school-based mentors adopt a consistent approach both within and between subjects are equally clear. The strenuous efforts made to recruit suitable trainees from less represented or less advantaged groups ensure that the provider exceeds its targets.

9. There is very strong and committed leadership in all subject areas and in the provision overall. The Board of Studies and the highly effective Secondary Partnership Committee ensure that school-based mentors have good opportunities to contribute to course planning and decision-making. Excellent communication ensures that all partners involved in training have a clear view of their role and expectations and of trainees' needs and subsequent progress. The provider's documentation is exemplary in this respect and provides much useful, clear guidance for partnership schools. Subject and professional mentors demonstrate strong commitment to the

role and provide very good quality support for trainees. Very good relationships are apparent between university tutors and school-based mentors. On an operational level however, the balance between support and quality assurance activities in the professional mentors' role is not always clear and leads to some variability in how well this role is carried out in a small minority of schools.

10. Highly effective mentor training is provided for both new and established mentors and attendance at mentor training sessions is good. The very good guidance given by university tutors on their visits to schools supplements this training. However, not all subjects ensure that mentors who are unable to attend the training events prior to the start of a placement are visited before or at the beginning of the placement. As a result, there is some variability in the quality of mentor support received by trainees at the start of their placements in a minority of schools.

11. Highly effective monitoring of policies on equal opportunities and the promotion of good race relations are in place. The Diversity Discussion meetings are an effective forum for trainees to raise issues and review action. In addition, The Secondary Partnership Committee considers how to promote equal opportunities and good race relations and effectively monitors the implementation of policies in schools.

12. Robust monitoring procedures are in place to ensure that high quality training is maintained. Tutor visits very effectively monitor the quality of provision in placement schools and the very helpful tutor visit checklist provides an agenda for the visit that ensures a consistent approach. Within the university, peer observation and trainee evaluation of modules ensures effective monitoring of the central training programmes. Monitoring and moderation of trainees' teaching is continuous. Both professional mentors and university tutors jointly observe lessons with subject mentors. Weekly review sheets and placement assessment and evaluation forms are monitored by professional mentors and university tutors. The monitoring of assessment processes is both comprehensive and effective and internal and external moderation procedures ensure that the assessment of trainees against the Standards is rigorous, consistent and accurate.

13. In its pursuit of excellence, the provider has in place extensive and highly effective systems to evaluate the quality of the provision - indeed every aspect of the provision is evaluated, starting with applicants' evaluation of the selection and interview process. The data resulting from this extensive process of evaluation of provision is subject to a timely and detailed level of analysis and consideration and results in very effective action planning that leads to continuous improvement. The two placement evaluation reports, based on trainee and mentor responses to each placement, are examples of the excellent use of evaluation data. These reports provide placement schools and the partnership in general with a timely analysis of strengths and areas for development that can be acted upon immediately as well as being taken into account in planning the following year's provision.

14. The very comprehensive evaluation of the course, including its extensive benchmarking activities, enables the provider to identify any weaknesses, to decide on actions and to continuously improve the provision. This is clear in relation to many areas including: the continuous revision of modules, the development of assessment and moderation procedures in the second placement, the development of peer teaching and coaching, the change from three to two placements, the piloting of mentor use of the virtual learning environment, and the actions taken to encourage all professional mentors to assume greater responsibility for the quality assurance aspect of their role.

15. The university's major strength in the arts, its local connections, excellent partnership relations, very effective management and tight and secure quality assurance systems suggest that it has very good capacity to develop its already excellent training programme into national 'cutting edge' provision in some areas.