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A primary initial teacher training
short inspection report
2007/08

Managing inspector
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Introduction

St Mary's University College works in partnership with over 1,000 schools to provide primary initial teacher education (ITE) courses. It offers a one-year Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) for the 5 to 11 age ranges, a two-year part-time PGCE for the 5 to 11 age ranges, and undergraduate three-year and four-year BA courses with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) for the 5 to 11 age ranges. At the time of the inspection there were 679 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 2

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

- coherent training, including the focus on developing trainees' subject knowledge and the links between school and centre-based training
- excellent communication with schools over a wide area
- the effective, collegiate leadership and management of the partnership, including at programme and subject level
- the high quality, personal support for trainees within a very caring university college atmosphere.
- the enthusiastic and confident trainees who are committed to becoming good primary teachers.
- the training in inclusion and the *Every Child Matters* agenda.

Points for consideration

- improving consistency in the quality of lesson observation feedback
- ensuring all trainees are set well focused targets on each school placement
- providing opportunities for tutors to gain evidence of trainees' performance in the classroom in order to evaluate further the impact of their training
- ensuring that schools adopt a more rigorous approach to evaluating their own training.

The quality of training

1. The quality of the training has been maintained since the last inspection. The structure and content is well planned. The university has responded effectively to the introduction of the new Standards and recent curricular initiatives. Training ensures that trainees have a good knowledge and understanding of the full range of National Curriculum subjects and the Primary National Strategy. Well designed handbooks provide clear indications as to how the training links to the Standards. The training is balanced carefully to ensure that trainees are prepared suitably for their school placements.

2. Imaginative tasks and assignments support the training well and provide good opportunities for trainees to apply theory to classroom practice. Strengths are training in inclusion and the integration of the *Every Child Matters* agenda throughout all aspects of the training.

3. All elements of the training combine well to secure trainees' progress towards the Standards, and cohesion between subject training and professional studies is a particular strength. There is a strong focus on cross curricular work, for example on global citizenship and the way in which information and communication technology (ICT) can be used to support teaching. Links between central and school-based training are good. Schools are given detailed guidance about the training programmes so they are fully aware of what is expected of school-based training and of support from link tutors.

4. The high quality centre-based training succeeds in training enthusiastic, knowledgeable and confident trainees. Training is delivered by well qualified tutors who are equally enthusiastic, have high expectations and model good primary practice. There is a strong emphasis on personal research and reflection, and trainees come well prepared to lectures. The session notes are detailed, well prepared and indicate that a range of suitable training activities and teaching styles are used. A strength is the degree to which the training is practical, 'hands-on' and rooted in classroom practice. Training is well-resourced and good use is made of ICT: the university's virtual learning environment provides effective support to trainees, particularly in science.

5. Trainees are overwhelmingly positive about the centre-based training. A key to its success is the caring and supportive atmosphere and particularly the tutors' dedication. The training is responsive to the needs of the trainees and emerging issues in each cohort are responded to rapidly. For example, in the postgraduate course, a weakness in trainees' understanding about how to teach phonics was identified, and extra training was timetabled.

6. School-based training is good. Trainees feel well supported by link tutors and school-based trainers, who are made aware of their trainees' targets from previous placements and audits. However, it is not always clear how some targets are followed up in subsequent school placements. Although sound overall, the

quality of lesson observation feedback varies. Targets are sometimes imprecise and comments describe, rather than evaluate, the trainees' teaching.

7. There are well-established and rigorous systems to audit trainees' needs. Weaknesses are identified early and resolved through a wide range of support, including organised peer support, additional workshops and individual tutorials. Further audits ensure that problems are overcome. Trainees' progress towards meeting the Standards is well monitored both in schools and by personal and link tutors. Trainees are confident in how to collect evidence because they have been well-guided. External examiners provide clear and helpful monitoring advice and the university is proactive in addressing any issues that are raised.

8. Clear, systematic and effective procedures exist to ensure that the assessment of trainees' achievements against the Standards is fair. A percentage of assignments are double marked and comments are clear and helpful. Systems to assess and record trainees teaching are rigorous and systematic. End of placement reports are detailed. Final judgements draw upon a good range of evidence to ensure that assessment is consistent and accurate.

Management and quality assurance

9. The overall management and quality assurance are good. Recent changes in leadership and management have strengthened strategic planning and engendered growing confidence among the staff to take further steps to improve the provision.

10. Procedures to attract applications are very good. This is exemplified by the attractive prospectus and web site, which indicate the benefits of a small campus with a Catholic ethos. Open days and evenings are very well attended and many trainees apply as a direct result of attending these events. The number of trainees from under-represented groups and the number of men is increasing, as are the number of trainees from black and minority ethnic groups. The effectiveness of the selection process and the training programmes is reflected in the good completion rates. A very high proportion of trainees gain teaching posts after leaving the university.

11. The programmes are managed well and there is strong teamwork between the university and partnership schools. The management team has a good knowledge of the expertise in partnership schools. Positive working relationships exist between the university and schools; schools are beginning to be organised into 'clusters' to co-ordinate the consistency of training provision.

12. The roles and responsibilities of all trainers are set out clearly in the partnership handbook. Partnership school staff carry out their duties with a high degree of commitment. Most school-based staff take full advantage of the good range of training opportunities on offer and link tutor visits provide helpful training for new class teacher mentors.

13. Communication is excellent. Partnership office staff are efficient and the trainees and schools know whom to contact for information. Systems and procedures for allocating school placements are well established and ensure that this complex task is handled smoothly.

14. There are well established procedures for moderating trainees' written work and practical teaching by university tutors. Regular core and programme meetings and joint lesson observations are strong features of internal moderation. The quality of the external examiners' reports is good and the provider's guidance to examiners is comprehensive.

15. The provider has extensive procedures to evaluate the quality of provision. Systems for monitoring the implementation of the policies on equality of opportunity and the promotion of good race relations are effective. Arrangements for monitoring developments in the training programme are also thorough. For example, school-based staff and trainees evaluate new initiatives in some detail.

16. A wealth of data is generated from trainees', tutors' and school's evaluations of the quality of training. Where there is evidence that quality has not been maintained, prompt and decisive action is taken. There are good opportunities for trainees to feedback on their teaching in lectures but opportunities for tutors to evaluate the impact of training on the trainees' performance in the classroom are as yet underdeveloped. This has, however, been identified as an improvement priority. The schools confirm that they receive additional support promptly when there are concerns. In most cases, link tutors assure the quality of the school-based training. However, the schools' systems to evaluate their training are not as robust as they could be.

17. Self-evaluation is well organised, detailed, accurate and informative. Appropriate targets are set for future action. Further work is being undertaken to plan for future provision in light of all evaluations. The quality of the improvement planning provides a secure basis for ongoing development. Actions within individual subject plans are appropriate but success criteria are not always sufficiently measurable; however, actions are increasingly focused upon outcomes for trainees.

18. The provider is benchmarking its performance against similar providers including other primary, London and faith providers. For example, excellent comparative data have been compiled to demonstrate how the trainees' gradings are improving by the end of the course and how long former trainees remain in teaching. Evidence from the 2007 newly qualified teacher survey put the provider consistently ahead of the sector in each section and in improving their own performance year on year.