

West Midlands Consortium

Thomas Telford School
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A secondary initial teacher training
short inspection report
2007/08

Managing inspector
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Introduction

The West Midlands Consortium, based at Thomas Telford School, works in partnership with 31 schools to provide secondary initial teacher training (ITT) courses. It offers trainees the Postgraduate Certificate or the Professional Graduate Certificate of Education (both styled PGCE) in design technology (DT), information and communication technology (ICT) and physical education (PE). At the time of the inspection there were 42 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 high quality of the subject training and particularly the support for trainees' individual needs
- the thoroughness of the course content in the three subjects, especially in its anticipation of future curriculum developments
- the suitability of the placement structure which provides trainees with a breadth and depth of experience and weekly opportunities for reflection
- the high level of challenge and support provided by the subject leaders
- the rigour of the selection procedures and their impact on recruitment
- the high quality of the management of the course and the partnership, and the impact on training
- the strong and productive link with Staffordshire University in the review and improvement of the course
- the strong response of the provider to external evaluation and inspection.

Points for consideration

- improving the consistency of the ongoing assessment by mentors in school by reviewing the systems for documenting and grading trainees' performance
- strengthening the focus on diversity and multiculturalism.

The quality of training

1. The structure and content of the programme are very well planned to ensure that trainees meet the Standards. Trainees are provided with placements which provide a good balance of experiences: their length works well and there are timely assessments within them. The block element in the first placement is a good feature. The time allocated for central training and its almost weekly occurrence enable good opportunities for trainees to reflect on their teaching, experience further subject enhancement and receive peer and tutor support. The course content is reviewed and modified to accommodate new developments in the subjects as well as recent changes in 14-19 provision. There is a good enhancement of provision through Key Stage 2 and post-16 experiences.

2. The different elements of the training combine well. There are good links between subject studies and educational and professional issues (EPI), all of which are carefully mapped to the Standards. However, there is some variability in the EPI programme offered in schools and insufficient weighting of diversity and multicultural issues. Nevertheless, at the time of the inspection, trainees were demonstrating a good emerging understanding of the contemporary role of a secondary teacher.

3. The central training is effective and is characterised by a high level of subject leader support. In ICT, for example, training fully reflects future curriculum developments in schools. In PE, school-based mentors and outside experts complement the subject leader's input. Subject knowledge training is a particular strength and the EPI programme is structured well. School-based training supplements the central provision very effectively and the mentors provide good feedback to the trainees on their progress. The new lesson observation form ensures that the mentors' evaluations are highly focused and reflective. Assignments are well designed and extend trainees' understanding of subject issues.

4. The course is very well planned to meet trainees' individual needs. Subject knowledge auditing is initiated at interview and closely monitored and reviewed during the training. Throughout the training, mentors are well informed of the outcomes of these reviews. PE trainees receive good support in order to gain a range of awards and to improve their subject knowledge. ICT trainees, who have gaps in their expertise, are directed to booster classes before starting training. Weekly meetings between mentors and trainees include focused and useful discussions about progress and future targets. Most subject mentors monitor progress well and provide good quality written feedback.

5. Assessment procedures are good. Trainees receive helpful feedback on assignments and benefit from the opportunity to submit written work in draft form, knowing that if it does not reach the required standard it can be resubmitted. Formal lesson observations are carried out three times a week and closely monitored by course leaders. For the Standards, trainees are graded on a four point scale at different points in their training. However, there are inconsistencies in the use of these grades to assess the progress of trainees against the standards. The

partnership recognises this as an area for improvement. Judgements at the formal assessment points are thorough, helpful and inform the transition between the placements.

Management and quality assurance

6. The arrangements for the selection of trainees are very rigorous. They result in very good outcomes in terms of the quality of the trainees recruited. The thoroughness of the administration is supported by the fact that the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) has drawn on the course administrator's expertise in disseminating guidance on selection to other providers. Consistent across all three subjects and fully documented, the interviews provide a wide range of selection evidence.

7. The consortium has a clear policy for diversity and equal opportunities, appropriately adapted from that of Staffordshire University. This policy effectively promotes a consistent approach across all schools in the consortium and in the arrangements for selection. Over the last few years the consortium has been industrious in promoting recruitment from minority ethnic trainees. An important strength of the consortium's policy on inclusion is its willingness to recruit ICT trainees with minimal qualifications and to support them in their attendance at subject knowledge booster courses.

8. The quality of training is the result of the strong leadership and management of the provision, both as a whole and within the individual subjects. An instance of this is the rapid way the management addressed the weaknesses in ICT identified in the previous inspection. It is also indicated by the way the recent change to Staffordshire University as the validating authority has been used to generate a number of innovations to improve what was already good practice. The quality of the management is also exemplified by the seamless way it was maintained during a period of staff illness.

9. Systems for securing the commitment and participation of all partners in the consortium are very good. These are led by the course director, emulated by the subject leaders, and facilitated by the course administrator. For example, there is a strong management committee attended by headteachers. Schools have a clear understanding of the partnership agreement and immense confidence in the role of the lead school, including its management and distribution of the consortium finances. Minutes of meetings are well written and widely circulated. Documentation is clear and succinct. It enables staff in the partner schools to understand how to act in particular circumstances. There are good systems for communicating issues that need resolution. Issues arising are resolved promptly.

10. The lead school offers trainees access to outstanding resources and up-to-date facilities in the three PGCE subject strands. Library facilities, whether at the centre, in partner schools, or through the link to Staffordshire University are good.

11. Staff training is a strength. There are regular and well attended subject mentor meetings. The three subject leaders are well qualified and experienced trainers. They visit new mentors in schools to deliver helpful on-site training and assure the quality of mentoring through regular monitoring of forms and log books completed by mentors and trainees. Subject tutors, on their twice termly visits, enable mentors to develop their observation and feedback skills, increasingly through the use of joint observation. This well-documented process, together with developmental work on mentors' understanding of the Standards, enables there to be a high degree of consistency in mentor support.

12. The quality assurance of school provision is good. It has been recently strengthened by the visits of the partnership manager of Staffordshire University. For example, two visits are made to each trainee, one in each placement, to thoroughly check key features of the provision. The process is formal, transparent, and enables the consortium to be confident in the consistency of its support. It has illuminated the scope for developing in-school scrutiny of a similar kind by professional tutors. The partnership is usefully taking this forward in a pilot project.

13. The moderation of assessment is good. Subject leaders play a key role and are proactive in their work with mentors to develop a greater familiarity with the Standards. Subject mentors visit each other's schools to undertake joint observation. This is good practice. The procedures for end of course assessment are rigorous and the pass-fail borderline is secure.

14. There are extensive and effective procedures to monitor and evaluate the quality of the provision. Trainees, mentors and headteachers complete questionnaires in which they identify successful aspects of the provision and any areas of dissatisfaction. Formal procedures for ensuring linkage between evaluation and action have been developed through the six-monthly review of the development plan by the management group. The consortium monitors and analyses all areas of assessment and uses internal and external moderation and inspection well to seek continuing improvement. Trainees express a very high level of satisfaction within each subject area as they complete their training. The consortium has rapidly adopted the TDA's self evaluation document for ITT. The document is well written and indicates that the provider has a very good understanding of the quality of its work and a good capacity for improvement.

15. The consortium's formal system of quality assurance features a strong response to external evaluation and inspection, monitored through the twice-yearly production of detailed course reports by the director of teacher training. Its response to the previous Ofsted inspection was very full and prompt. The consortium now benchmarks with Staffordshire University. The university's approach to quality assurance encourages a rapid response. There is a lively system of continual reflection on current practice and a constant quest for improvement formally summed up in a full and clear three-year course development plan.