

Mid Somerset Consortium

Initial Teacher Education inspection report

Provider address	Crispin School Church Road Street Somerset BA16 0AD
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Inspection dates	27 April - 1 May 2009
Lead inspector	Peter Gale HMI

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Introduction

1. This inspection was carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectors supported by a team of specialist inspectors in accordance with the *Framework for the Inspection of Initial Teacher Education (2008-11)*.

2. The inspection draws upon evidence from all aspects of the provision to make judgements against all parts of the inspection evaluation schedule in the framework. Inspectors focused on the overall effectiveness of the training in supporting high quality outcomes for trainees and the capacity of the partnership to bring about further improvements. A summary of the grades awarded is included at the end of this report.

Key to inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

The provider

3. Mid Somerset Consortium is a partnership of a group of schools and a college in the mid Somerset area. It is located at a lead school in Street. The provider offers routes to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) through employment-based initial teacher education. There are places for 20 secondary trainees (priority and non-priority subjects) and the provider recruits to this number. There is an increasing number, currently 14, of self-funded trainees in schools in both the maintained and independent sector.

4. The partnership comprises a lead school, a core partnership containing three schools and a college, two associate partner schools and a varying number of schools with self-funded trainees; the exact number depends on each year's need for placements for trainees.

Employment-based routes to qualified teacher status

Key strengths:

5. The key strengths are:
 - the effective and efficient use of resources to bring about improvements to the course
 - the excellent central training covering a wide range of relevant, contemporary topics
 - the retention of trainees on the course and the resulting, excellent local employment rates
 - the enthusiasm and quality of the central management
 - the personalisation of the course to meet individual need.

Recommendations

6. In order to improve trainees' progress and attainment the provider should:
 - develop the link between subject knowledge coordinators and subject mentors so that trainees gain the maximum benefit from subject training
 - support the transition between the two school placements for trainees who find this difficult by quality assuring the coherence of second school experiences.
7. In order to improve the capacity to secure further improvement the provider should:
 - consider ways to develop perceptive self-evaluation for all aspects of the provision, particularly at a subject level, so all involved in training are clear about the priorities for improvement and their role in planning for and securing these
 - put in place succession planning that would allow the partnership to function effectively should any of the staff in key roles be indisposed or leave.

Overall effectiveness

Grade: 2

8. The overall effectiveness of the provider in securing high quality outcomes for trainees is good.

9. Trainees' attainment is good overall. Trainees in all subjects are enthusiastic and communicate their enthusiasm to learners. Good examples of this were seen in observed lessons in English, science, modern foreign languages and information and communication technology. However, trainees' progress is not consistently strong across all subjects and placements. Trainees are able to reflect critically on their own practice and to use this to improve. The high quality of reflection was particularly clear in assignments and the contribution these make to trainees' progress.

10. Trainees' practice has earned the respect of the schools in which they are working. This is clear from the appropriate but demanding responsibilities they have been given. It is further evidenced by the fact that some trainees move immediately to promoted posts in their school or elsewhere at the end of the course. Trainees demonstrate leadership and management skills well.

11. The large majority of trainees consistently teach lessons that are at least good and have outstanding characteristics. Trainees are acutely aware of key aspects of good teaching and learning. They have a good understanding of *Every Child Matters* and how this relates to their teaching and other roles. They use assessment to inform teaching and learning; differentiate teaching to meet the needs of different learners; and help pupils to become more independent learners. Trainees' understanding is very well supported by the excellent central general professional studies course which covers a wide and appropriate range of contemporary topics that make a good contribution to trainees' progress.

12. Generally, trainees have a good knowledge and understanding of the secondary curriculum, including developments and issues in their subjects. However, there is variation between subjects. For example, in physical education, trainees' knowledge, understanding and experience are too focused on outwitting opponents and replication of actions, phrases and sequences with games taking a central role to the detriment of other aspects of the physical education curriculum. This variation in quality is, in part, due to the fact that subject mentors and recently appointed subject knowledge co-ordinators currently operate in isolation.

13. There are rigorous selection procedures which trainees, with justification, describe as 'tough'. Criteria are consistently applied and those trainees who are accepted are suitable for the course. Self-funded trainees from independent schools are selected by a modified procedure. While this process has been no less effective in providing high quality applicants than the procedures for funded trainees, the provider realises it is not as rigorous and has plans in place to use the same procedures for all applicants from next year. The care the provider takes to ensure applicants' suitability results in high success rates and outstanding retention and

employment records. This employment success is entirely due to the high regard in which the provider and its trainees are held by local schools.

14. Most trainees make good progress with some making outstanding progress. The best training is based on a close relationship between subject and professional mentors, other teachers in a department and the trainee. Where this is the case, objectives and targets for trainees are clearly focused and a trainee's response is carefully monitored. One trainee when interviewed said that the training was 'personalised' and well-tuned to her needs, drawing on both theory and practice and that this had greatly contributed to her success. Another example of personalisation is the use of subject enhancement courses with good effect for those mathematics and science trainees that require them. When on occasion problems arise with trainees' progress, the provider is usually quick to identify and address them. For self-funded trainees, the visiting tutor, who works with schools beyond the core partnership, is crucial to this process. They help to maintain a good link between central and school-based training and resolve any problems that arise. In the instances where trainees make less progress, this is largely due to weaknesses in the formative use of targets by school-based trainers. Occasionally trainees' placements mean opportunities to acquire and apply the full breadth of subject knowledge necessary to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum are too limited.

15. The quality of training across the partnership schools is generally strong with core partners demonstrating a very high level of commitment. Training for mentors is regular and constructive, providing a clear understanding of their role and the high expectations of the partnership. However, the focus of training has been more on 'what to do' than 'how best to do it'. The provider is aware of this and is considering mentor training strategies to facilitate even faster progress amongst trainees particularly by making targets sharper. A notable characteristic of the programme in building trainee self-reliance is the organisation of the second placement by the trainee. Usually this works well, providing a high quality experience that contrasts strongly with the trainee's 'home' school. For example, one trainee from an independent school had a very useful experience at a successful maintained school which, nevertheless, faced many challenges. In a few instances, however, placements have been less successful due either to less accurate self-selection or limited interaction between the placement schools; in these cases, a smooth and rapid transition from one school to another was not possible. When the second school placement is geographically some distance from Street, quality assurance has proved difficult for the provider.

16. The time and resource devoted to the final moderation of trainees' attainment of the QTS Standards are impressive. The work of all trainees is assessed throughout as well as at the end of the course. Assessment procedures at all stages, including very thorough external moderation, ensure that the assessment of trainees' achievement of the QTS Standards is accurate.

17. The use of resources is outstanding. The provider's budget is relatively small. Expenditure is very carefully targeted to ensure maximum impact on the outcomes for trainees and the remaining balance is suitably small confirming careful budgeting. An important feature is the work that has gone into developing the self-

funded programme. This has provided additional resources for use in the programme as a whole.

18. The provision supports well the promotion of equality of opportunity and the elimination of harassment and unlawful discrimination. The personalisation of programmes ensures equality of opportunity and there have been no reports of discrimination. The fact that the central programme runs from September to May means that the sequence of sessions is not always as well-matched as it could be to the needs of the very small number of January starters. The programme manager is aware of this and ameliorates any ill effects with individual support.

19. The provider is aware of the need to promote trainees' understanding of Britain's culturally diverse society and, as a result, arranges specific events to address this. A two-day placement for all trainees at an inner-city school in Bristol is successful in raising trainees' awareness. However, the focus of this is observation rather than active teaching and it is too short to develop real understanding of teaching in these contexts. The provider knows this and is considering several strategies. A difficulty is the cost implication of extended placements in multi-cultural schools at some distance from mid Somerset.

The capacity for further improvement and/or sustaining high quality Grade: 2

20. The provider has good capacity to sustain high quality outcomes for trainees and to secure improvements where required. During the past three years, there has been a trend of improvement in the outcomes for trainees. Last year, almost all trainees were good or better in their achievement of the QTS Standards and one third were judged to be outstanding. Predictions for this year indicate that this will be sustained or improved.

21. The quality of self-evaluation is high; the provider's judgements are generally accurate. Evaluation of the provision is good and includes the use of questionnaires given to trainees, teachers and other staff employed by the provider. The provider's response to the results of these evaluations is prompt and generally effective. Interviewing past trainees has proved particularly useful in reviewing aspects of the course that could be improved. The outcomes of quality assurance and innovations are carefully monitored and where they are not as successful as intended, sensible revision is made. A good example is the careful way in which the provider is going about creating a more accurate trainee entry profile. This initiative is providing trainees with target grades for end-of-course performance against which mentors and course managers can track progress. An analysis is also undertaken of trainees' progress at a series of staged review points. This has proved useful in targeting intervention and support where necessary.

22. The provider anticipates national change well. The best example of this is the content of the central programme which not only changes every year but within a year to ensure its responsiveness. Coverage of topics such as the 14-19 agenda

loom large as does the Rose Review and developments in child protection. This has provided trainees with a good understanding of the wider educational context of their training. The provider is well aware of the need to further develop trainees' experience of Britain's diverse society and is active in seeking to address this within the constraints of accessibility and a very limited budget.

23. The partnership has responded well to the national priority of improving subject knowledge for teaching. It is aware of the inconsistencies across the subjects it delivers and is addressing this with the introduction of subject knowledge coordinators in the last year. Their brief to ensure greater consistency has been partially successful with trainees praising the effectiveness of subject sessions. However, the link between coordinators and subject mentors is not established and so the full benefit is yet to be realised. A thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of this initiative is planned for the end of the year.

24. Another significant illustration of the anticipation of change is the management's recognition of the need to prepare for succession. Core management is in the hands of two people who very successfully inspire, sustain and develop all aspects of the consortium and have an immense amount of relevant knowledge and understanding of how things operate. The provider fully acknowledges that ensuring succession and suitable cover for lengthy absence is therefore essential. Some aspects of work shadowing are in place.

25. The provider is clear about what is working well, those aspects that require further development and those that require improvement. This has allowed the development of a strategic plan that is clearly focused on securing better outcomes for trainees. With the senior team being so receptive to new ideas and best practice, plans are constantly evolving with the inclusion of milestones and measurable success criteria.

26. The planning and drive for improvement is in the hands of the strategic management group. Improvement planning at a subject level is not yet in place though the provider is aiming to develop this as part of the review of subject knowledge coordinators as a means of dealing with the variations in quality between subjects. However, the fact that the partnership has expanded this year, with a third more trainees, and that outcomes have been maintained or improved demonstrates the partnership's capacity to plan for and implement change effectively.

Summary of inspection grades¹

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding; grade 2 is good; grade 3 is satisfactory; grade 4 is inadequate.

Overall effectiveness

		Employment-based routes
How effective is the provision in securing high quality outcomes for trainees?		2
Trainees' attainment	How well do trainees attain?	2
Factors contributing to trainees' attainment	To what extent do recruitment / selection arrangements support high quality outcomes?	2
	To what extent does the training and assessment ensure that all trainees progress to fulfil their potential given their ability and starting points?	2
	To what extent are available resources used effectively and efficiently?	1
The quality of the provision	To what extent is the provision across the partnership of consistently high quality?	2
Promoting equalities and diversity	To what extent does the provision promote equality of opportunity, value diversity and eliminate harassment and unlawful discrimination?	2

Capacity to improve further and/or sustain high quality

	Employment-based routes
To what extent do the leadership and management at all levels have the capacity to secure further improvements and/or to sustain high quality outcomes?	2
How effectively does the management at all levels assess performance in order to improve or sustain high quality?	2
How well does the leadership at all levels anticipate change, and prepare for and respond to national and local initiatives?	2
How effectively does the provider plan and take action for improvement?	2

¹ The criteria for making these graded judgements are in the *Grade criteria for the inspection of ITE 2008-11*; Ofsted July 2008; Reference no: 080128.

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