

Titan Partnership Birmingham

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A secondary initial teacher training
full inspection report
2007/08

Managing inspector
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Introduction

The Titan Partnership, Birmingham, works in partnership with eight schools to provide secondary initial teacher training (ITT) courses. It offers the Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) accredited by the Open University in English, mathematics, science, French, design technology (DT), physical education (PE), religious education (RE) and information and communications technology (ICT). At the time of the Standards visits of the inspection there were 20 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 full 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

Standards achieved by trainees: Grade 2

Quality of training: Grade 2

Management and quality assurance: Grade 2

The next inspection of this provider will take place in accordance with the Initial Teacher Training Inspection Framework.

Key strengths

- the professional attributes of the trainees
- the high expectations and guidance for structuring the training
- the meeting of trainees' individual needs throughout the course
- the quality of the support provided by mentors
- the thorough and constructive marking of assignments
- the partnership's rapid improvement and prompt response to internal and external feedback.

Points for consideration

- increasing trainees' opportunities for taking practical account of diversity, and in particular the support of pupils for whom English is an additional language, in their teaching
- extending opportunities for trainees to acquire a deeper understanding and experience of assessment, monitoring and reporting
- ensuring that all subject leaders keep abreast of relevant research.

Standards achieved by trainees

1. Trainees establish very positive and productive relationships with their pupils. They are keen for them to succeed and they set high expectations. They are firm but approachable in manner. Trainees are good team players, are well regarded by colleagues, and are well-integrated into their subject departments. They take a full part in meetings with parents and acquire a good knowledge of teachers' responsibilities for pupils' welfare. They are distinguished by their professional approach to their work.

2. Overall, trainees' evaluative skills are good. As a result of training they make effective use of Titan's documentary prompts to evaluate, assess and monitor pupils' learning. They are very receptive to critical comments and use them to reflect on and to improve their teaching. In consequence, the progress that many have made over the year of training has been considerable.

3. Trainees' subject knowledge and their skills in applying this are good; they ensure that any gaps in their knowledge are remedied. They are able to challenge pupils in subject teaching in both the selective and non-selective school settings of the partnership. They have a good understanding of how pupils develop and learn, and a secure working knowledge of frameworks and statutory requirements.

4. Trainees' understanding of achievement and diversity, their awareness of guidance on safeguarding and of the importance of promoting pupils' health and well-being, are good. They show sensitivity to those with a variety of learning difficulties and disabilities.

5. Trainees' planning has improved during the year. Lesson plans are detailed and take account of pupils' learning to ensure progression and coherence. The best trainees are flexible and can modify their plans at short notice according to changed circumstances. However, some trainees have limited experience of teaching pupils for whom English is an additional language and therefore they are not so confident in planning suitable tasks to meet their specific needs.

6. Trainees have acquired a wide range of teaching strategies and are skilful in selecting the right one to promote effective learning. For example, ICT trainees are adept at making optimal use of classroom areas, with and without computers, in order to ensure that they achieve a good balance between discussion and practice. The trainees' class management skills have improved steadily during the year. Discipline and control are good. They ensure that pupils learn in a safe environment and encourage them to work collaboratively.

7. All trainees mark work at least soundly and maintain records in line with school policies. The best trainees are good at formative assessment. They have a good knowledge of the pupils' National Curriculum levels and track pupils' progress well. Trainees' assignments on assessment demonstrate a good breadth of awareness of authoritative writing. However, most trainees need more opportunities

to develop their understanding and experience of assessment, monitoring and reporting.

The quality of training

8. The structure and content of the training programmes are well planned to ensure that trainees meet the Standards. There is a strong level of coherence between generic and subject training. All the training is supported by clear and thorough documentation. Trainees are allocated to placements which provide them with a wide breadth and balance of experience. Although the course is designated as covering the 11-16 age range, it continues to offer all trainees who want post-16 experience good classroom opportunities for that age range. In addition, the two separate experiences in primary schools enable trainees to gain a firm understanding of transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. Subject programmes are planned with careful reference to national developments and there is good coverage of the national strategies. This represents an improvement since the previous inspection. Effective use is made of expertise within partnership schools to develop trainees' skills in teaching the National Curriculum Programmes of Study.

9. The different elements of training combine well. Tasks and assignments add to the coherence and relevance of the training. This is particularly the case, for example, with some of the termly tasks on assessment and personalised learning. Central training within subjects and the general professional studies programme are followed up effectively in schools. For example, sessions on pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities occur in different elements of the course at the same time and are linked. Whilst the schools of the partnership provide rich settings for learning about diversity, opportunities for trainees to take practical account of diversity in their teaching are underdeveloped.

10. The quality of central training is good. In a session on child development, trainees were introduced to a range of learning and developmental theories and were then challenged to discuss their own preferences. English and science sessions observed were characterised by very good pedagogy and pace. In these, and other training sessions, trainees are expected to carry out a series of brief but effective practical tasks which enable them to extend their understanding of how to teach different subjects. Appropriate steps are taken to ensure that reading lists are relevant, although in some cases subject leaders lack awareness of current research.

11. Mentors and professional tutors are very well informed of course requirements and offer good support and guidance to trainees. As a result many have travelled a considerable distance in reflecting on, adapting and modifying their teaching. Mentors know trainees very well and the quality of their written feedback and the targets they set for trainees' improvement is good.

12. The course is well planned to meet the individual needs of trainees. The auditing of subject knowledge and ICT skills at the outset of the course provides a useful starting point. These audits are then reviewed termly. The process is

thorough and usefully distinguishes between subject knowledge and subject application. Each trainee has an individual training plan which is monitored closely and incorporates targets which are reviewed and updated regularly. Staff respond rapidly and are successful in supporting trainees who are at risk of failing. The high level of individualised support results in well motivated and enthusiastic trainees who make good progress.

13. Procedures for monitoring and assessing the trainees against the Standards are wide ranging and are based upon a wealth of evidence. The termly summative reports are written well and provide comprehensive statements of what has been achieved. In the best cases it is very clear to trainees what they need to do in order to improve. The marking of assignments is thorough and accurate. Scripts are extensively annotated with constructive comments.

14. The trainees' professional development portfolio provides good evidence of meeting the Standards. Mentors and professional tutors check this carefully. The final assessment of trainees is thorough and the pass/fail borderline is secure.

Management and quality assurance

15. The arrangements for the selection of trainees are rigorous and result in the recruitment of good quality trainees. Interview procedures are well documented and candidates are selected against clear criteria. Interview records are thorough and provide good evidence of how well each candidate meets the criteria. Notes of strengths and areas for development are passed to mentors and inform individual training plans from the outset of the training.

16. The partnership demonstrates a strong commitment to recruiting and supporting trainees from minority ethnic groups. An important strength is the flexible approach to trainees who may have to defer in a particular academic year and re-enter in a following year. The management committee receives annual reports on the monitoring of equal opportunities and steps continue to be taken to raise trainees' awareness of equal opportunities and the promotion of good race relations.

17. Since the last inspection, a new management structure, with a programme manager and an ITT co-ordinator, has become fully embedded. This has had a strong effect on improving provision and establishing a common sense of purpose. There is a very clear committee structure separating strategic and operational matters. A quality assurance group carries out the important role of checking the quality of provision and of challenging managers on the impact of policies. Members of groups at all levels demonstrate a clear vision, a commitment to improvement and good knowledge of the training programme and of the trainees. The small size of the partnership, both in terms of the small geographical area it covers and its small number of partner schools, facilitates good communication and a high level of mutual understanding. Day-to-day communications between the central office and the partner schools are very good.

18. An innovation which illustrates the constant drive to improve practice is the development of documentation which sets out high expectations and guidance for structuring the training. It highlights accepted good practice in ITT, identifies areas for development for the partnership as a whole, as well as setting out the termly expectations of trainers and trainees. The documents have been shared widely and successfully at all levels.

19. Responsibility for the management of subject training resides with subject leaders who teach in partnership schools. Their roles have been strengthened recently to include monitoring the quality of training in schools. They play an important part in spreading good practice, managing subject training, training mentors and carrying out moderation visits to other schools. All this work is done well and has significantly increased the quality of training. Careful induction and support is provided for new subject leaders.

20. Mentors are well trained for their roles and responsibilities and consequently they carry out their duties well. Their training is supplemented by support from professional tutors, who observe them, give feedback and monitor their records regularly. This is an important factor in the improvement of support for trainees.

21. The quality assurance of provision is good. Not only is the partnership committee good at challenging the management but the partnership as a whole has responded well to quality assurance issues raised during the first inspection visit. The actions it has taken have significantly increased the quality of trainee support.

22. The moderation of assessment is very thorough. Mentors and professional tutors closely scrutinise trainees' portfolio evidence which is then cross-moderated by subject leaders and central staff. External examiners' commentaries are thorough.

23. There are extensive and effective procedures to monitor and evaluate the quality of the provision. Trainees complete questionnaires in which they identify successful aspects of the provision and any areas of dissatisfaction. These are extensively analysed. Conferences are used to elicit trainers' views. The annual monitoring report, which is submitted to the Open University, as the validating authority, is a thorough document and sets out clearly the links between evaluation and action. The consortium monitors and analyses all areas of assessment and uses internal moderation, external moderation and inspection very well to seek improvement. Trainees rightly express a very high level of satisfaction with their subject training. The partnership is committed to continuous improvement and this is summed up formally in the well written action plan which is reviewed annually.