

University of Reading

University of Reading
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A primary initial teacher training
inspection report

2007/08

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Introduction

The University of Reading works in partnership with around 300 schools to provide primary initial teacher training (ITT) courses. It offers a four year undergraduate course with specialisms in English, art and music and a one-year postgraduate course. Both of these courses are in the 3-7 and 5-11 age ranges. At the time of the inspection, there were 205 trainees on the undergraduate course and 53 on the post graduate course.

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 revised report combines the judgements from a short inspection of the provision and quality assurance arrangements in 2006/07, 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

Standards: Grade 1

Quality of training: Grade 1

Management and quality assurance: Grade 1

Key strengths

- excellent planning for course improvement based on a thorough analysis of trainees' standards
- very good monitoring systems that give the partnership a clear view of its strengths and areas for development
- high quality training programmes
- the very well-defined structure and content of both courses which ensure that all elements of the training combine well
- excellent attention to meeting trainees' individual needs
- the very well managed partnership
- very thorough monitoring and assessment of trainees' progress towards meeting the Standards
- rigorous selection procedures that result in the recruitment of high calibre trainees.

The quality of training

1. The quality of training overall is outstanding. The content, structure and coherence of both the undergraduate and postgraduate courses are highly effective and prepare trainees very well to teach across two key stages with a good understanding of the key stages either side of these. The coherence between the central and school-based training is a major strength because trainees build their knowledge and skills exceptionally well across both settings. Well designed assignments and tasks focus trainees' observations and link theory and practice very clearly. The use of information and communications technology (ICT) has improved since the last inspection and is an important element of provision. Both courses successfully blend professional studies and cross-curricular dimensions, such as the teaching of mathematics to pupils with English as an additional language. In addition, there is a strong focus on creativity, building very well on national guidance. Strong features are the opportunities to follow a subject specialism or undertake a special educational needs (SEN) placement in the undergraduate course.

2. The quality of university-based training is outstanding. Tutors imbue trainees with a passion for the subjects they teach, have high expectations and provide them with intellectual challenge. This enthusiasm builds trainees' confidence and they thoroughly enjoy their training. Tutors successfully model good primary practice and involve trainees in lively, interactive sessions, promoting self-assessment and reflection. An impressive feature is the flexibility with which tutors adapt the detail and manner of their delivery as a result of feedback from assignments and school experience.

3. Science provision has been strengthened since the last inspection. Trainees especially enjoy the practical sessions that make science relevant to everyday life and the links that are made to citizenship and assessment. Both courses take very good account of recent national initiatives, such as how to teach phonics, while retaining a broad interest in promoting children's joy in literature. Trainees are taught effectively how to develop children's skills in writing poetry throughout the primary years. Trainees are alerted to children's common misconceptions in, for example, mathematics and science, and are prepared effectively to address them. Support staff at the university make a major contribution to the quality of provision, as do the good quality resources available.

4. The trainees' individual needs are met exceptionally well. This is because tutors know trainees very well indeed. Very good adjustments are made to enable those with learning difficulties or disabilities to access the courses and make good progress. The close matching of trainees to school placements adds another strong dimension to meeting individual needs. Trainees are able to undertake a special study or an advanced teaching project, which allows them to follow particular interests or skills. These provide a rigorous intellectual challenge. Trainees' subject knowledge is audited, tracked and developed very effectively. The university's

virtual learning environment also helps trainees to follow special interests and adds to their learning.

5. The progress trainees make towards meeting the Standards is monitored and assessed very well. Weekly tutorials with mentors are effective in tracking trainees' progress towards the Standards and in setting short-term targets for them. Trainees receive good quality, generic feedback on their teaching, although mentors' feedback is not always subject-specific enough or sufficiently focused on pupils' learning. Trainees provide good quality evidence of their achievements of the Standards, and their progress is recorded well in the professional development profile. The meeting between trainee, tutor and mentor, at the end of each school practice, is very effective in moderating outcomes and ensuring trainees know exactly how well they are doing.

Management and quality assurance

6. The partnership is extremely well led and managed. As a result, the training programme has improved since the previous inspection and is now of high quality.

7. The partnership is highly successful in its recruitment and retention of trainees. Through very well-targeted advertising with high quality materials, it attracts a wide range of applicants. Selection criteria are carefully applied to determine which applicants will be interviewed. The interview process is very well organised and well-briefed staff from partnership schools are involved in interviews. Rigorous procedures lead to the selection of high calibre trainees. Identity and criminal records bureau checks are carried out thoroughly and followed up promptly in case of delay. The university is very active in seeking applicants from under-represented groups, such as males or those from minority ethnic groups.

8. Staff from partnership schools are very well represented on the primary steering group. This forum enables university tutors and school-based staff to work very effectively together in managing and improving the partnership. This group works alongside other management groups to ensure that there is excellent coherence between different aspects of provision, such as the comprehensive range of school-based tasks that help trainees make very good links between theory and practice.

9. A particularly strong feature is the knowledge that the partnership has of specific skills and specialisms in its schools. Excellent use is made of this information to place trainees, matching their needs with what schools can offer. This attention to detail is at the heart of meeting trainees' needs.

10. Well produced documentation supporting school placements, including the partnership agreement, defines trainers' roles and responsibilities very well. As a result, school-based mentors and supervising tutors have a clear understanding of how best to support trainees. Communications across the partnership are very

effective and tutors are prompt in responding to trainees' queries. As a result, trainees feel very well supported. The university's virtual learning environment also makes a major contribution to effective communications.

11. Mentors value the training and briefing they receive before each school placement. The opportunity for mentors and trainees to meet ensures that each placement is closely tailored to trainees' individual needs.

12. Improvement planning, complemented by very good use of a wide range of benchmarking data, is excellent. The partnership has very good monitoring strategies that enable it to have excellent understanding of its strengths and areas for development. It takes very good account of what trainees, mentors and external sources have to say about provision to bring about improvements. Thorough moderation of assessments of trainees' teaching and written assignments ensures that these are accurate and consistent. An excellent feature of self-evaluation is the analysis of how well trainees meet each of the Standards by the end of their course. This is used to identify what is working well and the aspects of the training that need to be improved. The success of this approach is the improving level at which trainees are meeting the Standards from year to year. Changes to courses have included a greater focus on assessing pupils' learning earlier in the postgraduate course and an earlier focus on reporting to parents in the undergraduate course.