

The Alban Federation

Initial Teacher Education inspection report

Provider address	The Alban Federation Sandringham School The Ridgeway St Albans Hertfordshire AL4 9NX
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Inspection dates	2 - 3 June 2009
Lead inspector	Christine Dick HMI

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Introduction

1. This inspection was carried out by two of 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. The Alban Federation employment-based initial teacher training partnership was established in 2004 and accredited in 2007. The Federation is a partnership of six 11-18 schools, each with up to two specialist subjects. The schools, many of which are high performing, are located within the Hertfordshire region. The Federation has moved progressively from 3 trainee cohorts each year to 1 starting in September 2008. At the time of the inspection there were 14 trainees. A further 7 trainees gained qualified teacher status at Easter of the same year. The partnership aims to address the need for high quality recruits to schools in the locality, with a particular focus on shortage subjects. Places are currently offered on employment-based routes to qualified teacher status for the 11-18 age ranges. School settings include mixed and single sex comprehensive schools.
4. Sandringham School is the lead school and the headteacher is the chair of the Federation board. A full-time member of the management team from the school coordinates the training programme on a part-time basis. An experienced member of the training team from a different partner school will take on this role in September 2009.

Employment-based routes to qualified teacher status

Key strengths

5. The key strengths are:
 - the highly effective leadership at all levels with a clear sense of purpose, a strong and collegiate bond and resolute focus on quality assurance
 - the highly professional and enthusiastic trainees who make a very good contribution to the work and life in their employing schools
 - the rigorous recruitment and selection procedures that ensure trainees are well-matched to placement schools and get off to a good start
 - the very-well conceived deployment of available resources which contributes to trainees' good and increasingly outstanding progress.

Recommendations

6. In order to further improve trainees progress the provider should:
 - establish a shared understanding, across all those involved in the training, of the expectations of trainees at the higher levels against the Standards
 - strengthen further the dialogue and reflection about subject knowledge for teaching so that all trainees develop an in-depth understanding of how best to promote students' learning in the specialist subject.
7. In order to further improve the quality of training the provider should:
 - define improvement plans so that they are more highly focused on improving outcomes for trainees.

Overall effectiveness

Grade: 2

8. The overall effectiveness of the provider in securing high quality outcomes for trainees is good. Trainees' overall attainments by the end of the programme are good. The proportion of trainees to achieve the Standards at the highest level has increased over the last two years. Trainees are acutely professional and enthusiastic. Most have high expectations of their own students' achievement. They make a very good contribution to work and life in their employing schools; for example, acting as tutors and in supporting curriculum enrichment activities. As a result they are very well-prepared to meet the challenges inherent in the teacher's wider role.

9. The very rigorous recruitment and selection procedures are characterised by trainees' high completion rates and very few withdrawals. Applicants to the training spend time at their proposed employing school and a day at the federation. Interviews involve a range of stakeholders including headteachers, professional and subject mentors, and students. Consequently, trainees are well-matched to schools and are quick to make good progress against the Standards for qualified teacher status. Progression to employment, often in local schools, and rapid promotion beyond the newly qualified phase is good. Recruitment from minority ethnic groups is very low. Although a number of trainees from this category apply for places, they are rarely successful. The federation recognises the need to follow up on unsuccessful applicants to guide them in accessing relevant support to develop the necessary skills to gain places.

10. A thorough analysis of individual learning needs, including subject knowledge for teaching, leads to detailed and personalised training plans. Trainees' progress is regularly monitored in weekly meetings with mentors and they feel well-supported. Nevertheless, the provider recognises the need to strengthen the links between the auditing of subject knowledge for teaching, individual training plans, and the monitoring and review of trainee performance to establish a more detailed overview of the progress trainees make given their different starting points

11. The different elements of the training combine well to ensure that the vast majority of trainees make at least good progress. Trainees plan their lessons carefully and take account of the learning needs of students with different abilities working in the same group. The most competent trainees manage to secure an appropriate level of challenge for higher attaining students. They are encouraged to be innovative in their teaching methods and many are successful in doing so. The very good skills they have in reflecting on their generic teaching practice help them to bring about improvements. Conversely, trainees' evaluation of the impact of their teaching on students' learning, particularly in the context of strategies deployed in teaching their specialist subject, is less well-developed. Headteachers speak highly of the value-added by the trainees' contribution to their school and are active participants in the federation. Participation in which one head described as 'investing in the workforce and middle managers of the future'.

12. Trainees are clear about their roles and responsibilities as teachers, the implications of *Every Child Matters* and those associated with the teacher and the law. They receive good personal and professional support from mentors and central trainers. The quality of school-based training, mentor support and the development of subject knowledge, using departmental expertise and external courses, are both structured and responsive to individual needs. The input and monitoring from professional mentors provide both impetus and quality assurance for the whole training process. As a result, the trainees make continuous progress and reach attainment levels at least as good as initial predictions for the end of the programme.

13. Evaluations of trainees' teaching practice are accurate and appropriately related to the Standards for newly qualified teachers. Final assessment of trainees' performance is detailed and thorough. Strategies are in place to ensure those

trainees identified as at risk of not meeting the Standards are supported through to successful completion. The best feedback to trainees on their practice relates previous outcomes to current performance and records clear and specific guidance on what they need to do to improve further. Mentors are invariably supportive but some targets they set with trainees are task related and insufficiently focused on their learning and development. Support for the enhancement of trainees' subject knowledge from mentors and lead subject specialists is typically good but there is scope to improve this aspect of the feedback on the lessons trainees teach. At times, feedback lacks detailed comment on the appropriateness of the strategies trainees select to support students' learning in the context of the specialist area. As a result, opportunities for reflection and further development are missed.

14. The training is well led and managed. Programmes are tailored appropriately to meet trainees' individual needs. Revised arrangements for continuous assessment, including weekly observations of trainees' teaching have resulted in both trainees' and trainers' improved understanding of what trainees have achieved and how they are making progress against the Standards. Appropriate autonomy is given to trainees in selecting the second school placement to provide a contrasting experience. Where relevant, they are supported in accessing schools outside of the federation. Professional tutors undertake school visits and typically monitor the process well.

15. Trainees value the opportunity to meet as a group for the well-developed central programme of professional studies. The pattern of generic input, followed by a subject perspective, helps them to link theory effectively to their teaching practice. For example, in discussion with inspectors, trainees were able to articulate how their subject links to whole school curriculum and to students' overall development. The central training is supported well by the federation coordinator through sessions led by external specialists and experienced practitioners, including headteachers, from federation schools.

16. The deployment of available resources to ensure trainees achieve their potential is outstanding. Resource allocation is open and transparent in the partnership agreement. Financial reports are reviewed at every board meeting. A key priority in the strategic management of the provision is to secure accountability and best value for money. As a consequence, there is very good deployment of human resources and this contributes well to the good and improving outcomes for trainees. Good use is made of internal and external expertise and school premises to support the delivery of the professional studies programme. Furthermore, the allocation of sessions to schools is under review to inform improvements for September 2009. Schools are consulted appropriately on the purchase of resources to support the training. Trainees appreciate the loan of laptops which help them in their teaching practice and in producing work for assessment. Central and school-based resources are enhanced by access to library facilities at a local university.

17. The overall consistency and quality of provision across the partnership is good. The good communication and support engendered by the federation coordinator has helped to secure a cohesive training programme which results in confident trainees who make good progress. Professional mentors conduct a rigorous programme of cross-moderation and issues arising from visits are

addressed promptly. Regular meetings are scheduled to enable the sharing of good practice; although not all trainers attend these on a regular basis. Nevertheless, the professional loyalty within this small and collegiate partnership ensures effective responses to the needs of both trainees and their trainers. Joint observations and shared monitoring of trainee progress between subject and professional mentors provide a training and quality assurance function that is improving consistency and is valued. There is further work to do in developing a consistent understanding of what constitutes good and outstanding attainment against the Standards, especially in borderline cases.

18. The provider's response to ensuring equality of opportunity is good. Related policies are regularly reviewed through the Federation board. A commitment to meeting trainees' individual needs is embedded in the culture of the partnership and they feel well-supported. The federation has made a determined effort to raise awareness and understanding of cultural diversity amongst trainees. Despite the lack of extensive exposure of trainees and experience of students, for example with English as an additional language, trainees are suitably informed about potential barriers to learning. The partnership is seeking creative solutions to ensure all trainees have the opportunity to practise these skills in their lessons.

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

19. The partnership has the capacity to secure good and improving outcomes for trainees.

20. The Alban Federation has good capacity to improve further to achieve very high quality outcomes for trainees. Leadership at all levels provides a clear sense of purpose and is fundamental to the fostering of a strong collegiate bond across the schools in the federation. Roles and responsibilities are understood well, and all are very willing to accept accountability for their part in delivering training, monitoring, supporting and assessing trainees. The compact nature of the partnership and the strength of relationships support effective formal and informal communication, which in turn enables the partnership to be highly responsive to trainees and to the development needs of school-based trainers. The well-established and resolute quality assurance arrangements have been pivotal to the good progress made by trainees.

21. The partnership has a broad range of well conceived strategies and methods for analysing needs and determining priorities for improvement. The thorough procedures are enabling clear and accurate priority areas to emerge. These are all reflected well in the provider's self-evaluation.

22. Internal moderators are clear about their role. They execute their responsibilities well, although there is some variability across schools in the extent to which there is a shared understanding of expectations at the higher levels against the Standards. The external moderator is deployed appropriately but again there is

scope to harness this support for providing more confidence to school-based trainers and assessors in making judgements at these levels.

23. A productive start has been made to tracking trainees' progress and to grading attainment against the Standards beyond a pass/fail threshold. It is, however, early days in the extent to which this provides incisive and sufficiently focused information on aspects of the Standards which need closer attention if more trainees are to attain at the highest level of performance. For example; subject knowledge for teaching has been on the improvement plan for the last three years, and for next year action points indicate a need to maintain the focus on this. There is, however, insufficient clarity about which aspects need developing. Evidence from inspection and the provider's own evaluation suggests that it is the ability to make a subject accessible to students at different stages of development, to understand further the links within and across subjects and to establish a more in-depth understanding of how children and young people are best supported to learn the subject.

24. Leadership at all levels is good at anticipating change and responding appropriately. For example, steps have been taken to make changes to the training programme in light of the Rose review into the teaching of reading, the Williams review into the teaching of mathematics, and the changes to the secondary curriculum, including those for the 14-19 age ranges. While trainees show an awareness of the issues, understanding is not always embedded, and there is sometimes insufficient follow-through to make sure that all trainees have opportunity to apply this learning to their practical teaching.

25. There is a good feed and flow of information between the various management and leadership groups, and consequently senior leaders are highly proficient in identifying workforce needs and areas for partnership development.

26. Improvement planning is increasingly strategic and the over-emphasis on administrative issues and very short-term actions has reduced significantly. There are now clear links with the key issues arising from self-evaluation, especially those that have the potential to make a difference to the outcomes for trainees. Success criteria have been strengthened but there are still many that relate to task completion rather than the intended outcomes for trainee. The plan is monitored thoroughly to ensure that work is on track, but there is scope to include more interim milestones for evaluating the impact of actions and upon which the board can more readily judge success and value for money within, as well as at the end of, a reporting year. The introduction of more efficient and effective tracking of trainees' progress has already led to some improvement. There has been a step change in the numbers of trainees attaining the higher levels against the standards by the end of the most recent training programmes. It is, however, too early to determine if this is the start of an upwards and sustained trend of improvement.

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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