

West Midlands Consortium

Initial Teacher Education inspection report

Provider address	Thomas Telford School Old Park Telford TF3 4NW
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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

Explanation of terms used in this report

Attainment

The standard reached by a trainee at the end of their training.

Progress

A judgement of a trainee's professional development from their starting point.

Achievement

The progress made and standard reached by a trainee at the time of the inspection or at a recent assessment review point.

The provider

3. The West Midlands Consortium works in partnership with schools locally and regionally to offer two one-year routes into secondary teaching, each leading to qualified teacher status (QTS) in the 11 to 16 age range: a professional graduate certificate of education, or postgraduate certificate of education (PGCE) with courses in three subjects, and an employment-based Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) in a wide range of subjects that varies from year to year. Many trainees also benefit from additional opportunities to gain experience in the post-16 age range. Management of both programmes is located within Thomas Telford School in Telford. PGCE and GTP programmes offer placements in a range of different types of school, mainly academies and maintained schools located within eight local authorities in the west midlands region.

4. The awards associated with the provision are validated through a franchise arrangement with Staffordshire University, which runs its own, separately accredited, provision for initial teacher training. Assessment arrangements for West Midlands Consortium trainees and major course developments are managed through a partnership between staff at the consortium and the university. The two providers share the same external examiners.

A commentary on the provision

5. The following are particular features of the provider and its initial teacher training programmes:
 - the management team's oversight of both programmes that helps to promote a consistently strong experience for trainees in their placement schools
 - strong collaboration across the partnership, backed by excellent communication
 - the strong support for trainees' personal and professional needs
 - all placements for both PGCE and GTP trainees take place within a group of 33 partnership schools, a feature which ensures that there is a close shared understanding of the provider's systems.
6. The following recommendations should be considered to improve the quality of the outcomes for trainees:
 - developing further the quality of evaluation and improvement planning, including the detailed analysis of data
 - improving the extent to which trainees are prepared for teaching in a diverse society.

Provision in the secondary phase

Context

7. The West Midlands Consortium provides initial teacher training leading to QTS in the 11 to 16 age range. The partnership comprises 33 secondary schools and at the time of the inspection there were 40 trainees on the programme. All trainees follow a one-year PGCE programme leading to a Professional Certificate of Education, or a Postgraduate Certificate of Education if they complete sufficient work at Masters' level. Training in the 11 to 16 age range is offered in three subjects: design and technology, information and communication technology (ICT) and physical education (PE).

Key strengths

8. The key strengths are:
 - the support and accessibility of staff and their response to trainees' individual needs
 - the high quality of the central training and that provided in schools
 - the high degree of consistency of provision across the partnership
 - the selection process, which recruits trainees with the qualities required to complete the course successfully and to gain employment
 - the excellent communication across the partnership that helps mentors to feel involved in the programme and enables course tutors to respond quickly to problems
 - the excellent match of schools to trainees' needs.

Recommendations

9. In order to build further its capacity to improve, the provider should:
 - ensure that improvement planning focuses more on improving outcomes for trainees.
10. In order to improve trainees' progress and attainment, the provider should:
 - ensure that all trainees fully understand their role in promoting child protection
 - broaden trainees' experience so that all are well prepared for teaching in a diverse society.

Overall effectiveness

Grade: 1

11. The overall effectiveness of the provider in securing high quality outcomes is outstanding.
12. The provider judges that trainees' attainment is good and inspectors agree. Trainees have strong organisational skills which help them to structure their lessons and select a range of teaching strategies that maintain students' interest. In each of the three PGCE subjects, trainees are appropriately aware of health and safety issues and plan and organise their lessons so as to minimise risk. Trainees have strong personal qualities that help them to develop professionally. For example, they reflect on their own practice, respond positively to advice from others and form strong relationships with pupils and colleagues. The strongest trainees show excellent subject knowledge and use it to plan lessons that make use of imaginative contexts for teaching the subject; they show a good understanding of National Curriculum levels and make full use of assessment opportunities to monitor pupils' progress and to aid their learning. The small number of weaker trainees are still developing their questioning skills and offer pupils only limited feedback during lessons. When evaluating the effectiveness of a lesson, a few trainees focus on their teaching too much rather than on pupils' learning.
13. Inspectors' view that training is outstanding is supported by current and past trainees. Trainees consistently make good progress in achieving challenging targets and the training fully meets trainees' needs. Appropriate pre-course tasks, such as those that enhance subject knowledge, and an early subject knowledge audit feed effectively into a personalised training plan for each trainee. Trainees develop their subject knowledge considerably during the course, for example through peer teaching a topic to other trainees. Trainees draw great benefit from high-quality training in the centre and in schools, and as a result, they develop a strong understanding of pedagogy generally as well as that relevant to their specialist subject. All the training elements combine extremely well and make an effective contribution to the trainees' overall professional development.
14. In school, trainees benefit from frequent and regular lesson observation feedback from their mentors. Feedback is of a generally high standard and focuses on helping the trainee to meet the QTS Standards; it is helpful, constructive and leads to targets for improvement. The quality of targets arising in mentor meetings varies: much excellent practice exists, but in a few cases, targets are not consistently applied and are not easily measurable. In the best examples, targets for development are suitably challenging and focus sharply on extending pedagogical skills and subject-specific knowledge and understanding. The overall assessment of trainees is accurate and involves mentors at all stages through to the final assessment board. Although all trainees benefit from training in child protection and safeguarding and gain

certification, some trainees are not sufficiently confident in their own role in school in ensuring child protection.

15. Recently enhanced monitoring of school-based training and additional guidance to mentors mean that the consistency of training across the partnership is now excellent, rather than good as judged by the provider six months ago. This high-quality provision is based around excellent communication across the partnership and the fact that course tutors know the schools so well. As a result, mentors are clear about their responsibilities for training and the expectations of the role. The role of the partnership manager is also crucial in monitoring provision, moderating judgements and providing feedback to schools about the training they are providing.
16. Processes for moderating judgements are very effective. For example, in addition to joint lesson observations with the professional tutor and the visiting centre-based tutor, some mentors benefit from additional opportunities to undertake joint lesson observations with mentors in other schools. Professional tutors use guidance from partnership managers to ensure that the material they cover is similar to that covered in other schools. Mentors feel well supported, especially when they need advice or additional support with weaker trainees. Mentor training makes a very effective contribution to promoting consistency but does not always make full use of mentors' expertise to lead elements of the training.
17. The efficient use of resources makes a strong contribution to high quality outcomes. The well-considered allocation of trainees to schools helps to ensure that all have the opportunity to make good progress and to meet the QTS Standards. Many trainees, particularly in PE and design and technology, benefit from placements at specialist colleges. Trainees in all subjects benefit from working in well-equipped schools and the fact that their training sessions in the centre take place in high-quality specialist accommodation. The centre's facilities, including the new computer suite, help trainees to develop effectively their subject knowledge and their understanding of different ways to present subject-specific ideas in the classroom. A number of one-day courses, held at the weekend or in school holidays, provide additional opportunities for trainees to develop particular aspects of their subject knowledge. Visits to the local Ironbridge Gorge Museum make a strong and distinctive contribution to design and technology trainees' understanding of the history of technology. Some trainees are making good use of the opportunity to access electronic copies of journals through Staffordshire University library. The virtual learning environment (VLE) is making a contribution to trainees' progress and well-being, although the provider is aware that there is scope for further development.
18. Recruitment and selection procedures are effective: they ensure that the programme recruits trainees who have the qualities needed to make good progress on the course and develop into successful teachers. The course enjoys a strong reputation locally and employment rates for those who complete are above average. The provider offers taster courses, which successfully help recruitment to the shortage subjects of design and technology

and ICT. Course tutors are willing to take risks where they see candidates with potential from non-standard backgrounds, while retaining high standards. Tutors set appropriate conditions for acceptance on the course, such as sending the candidate on a subject knowledge enhancement course. While target numbers in PE and design and technology are usually met, recruitment in ICT has been around 80% of target in recent years. The interview process, which makes full use of mentors' expertise, is strong. All safer recruitment processes are in place. Interviewers make appropriate assessments of candidates' presentation skills, their ability to communicate effectively, their subject knowledge and personal skills. For example, selection in PE includes an appropriate practical test of the candidates' physical skills. While the provider has undertaken several measures to promote recruitment from under-represented groups, the recruitment of trainees from minority ethnic backgrounds remains consistently below target.

19. The provider promotes equality well. As a result, there is no evidence of differences in the rate of progress of different groups or evidence of harassment or discrimination. Completion rates for those who start the programme are above the sector average. A clear strength of the provision is the support that staff in schools and the centre, including the course administrator, provide for trainees. For example, one course leader quickly dealt with a trainee's timetable difficulties and intervened sensitively to give the trainee a more realistic workload.
20. Trainees benefit from contrasting experiences in their two placement schools, gaining broad experience of pupils with different abilities, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Because of the strength of their training, trainees plan well to accommodate pupils requiring additional support. Managers have recently developed the central training part of the programme to put more emphasis on diversity issues, and consequently trainees show a good understanding of the need to promote equal opportunities in their teaching. However, although they have a clear understanding of issues surrounding equality and diversity, some trainees have only limited experience of classes containing ethnic and cultural diversity. As a result their preparation for teaching in a diverse society is less strong than other aspects of their work.

The capacity for further improvement and/or sustaining high quality

Grade: 2

21. Leaders and managers successfully sustain high quality outcomes across the breadth of provision. The small team of managers, one focusing on each of the three subjects, work together closely, share ideas effectively, and meet the high expectations of trainees and mentors.
22. Managers show a good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of performance across the partnership and the majority of self-evaluation grades are accurate. Evaluations are based on information about all aspects of the provision and take appropriate account of input from mentors and trainees.

Regular meetings of mentors, together with more formal management committees, ensure that course developments take full account of views from across the partnership. These meetings, together with excellent communication, ensure that changes to procedures are understood by all. The effective evaluation procedures include the consideration of commentaries from external examiners in each subject. The provider responds well to comments from external review. For example, external consultants identified trainees' limited understanding of the curriculum at Key Stage 2 as a relative weakness. In consequence, managers now give a higher profile to ensuring that all trainees gain experience in a primary school, and trainees' understanding of progression in their subject area has developed as a result. Even though small cohort numbers make some analyses difficult, current evaluations pay too little attention to monitoring the performance of groups over time. In addition, managers' current methods of recording the views of mentors make it difficult for them to analyse the responses or monitor changes over time.

23. In this well-managed provision, managers have secured contributions from a range of high-quality staff. In addition, a managed induction programme is in place this year in anticipation of a change of programme director so that the newly-appointed director can take over with the minimum of disruption. The allocation of resources has had a clear impact on provision: for example, the provider has allocated additional funds to run taster courses and has set up the possibility of running a subject knowledge enhancement short course within the centre. In addition, the use of the centre's facilities on Saturdays and during half-terms is an efficient use of resources. Leaders and managers have successfully improved provision and maintained high quality outcomes, including good attainment in all subjects, above-average retention and high employment rates. However, in recent years, attainment levels have fluctuated rather than risen and information from the newly-qualified teacher survey demonstrates increasing satisfaction with some aspects of the course but no consistent picture.
24. Managers anticipate and respond to change well. For example, in collaboration with other regional providers, the partnership has bid for and obtained funding for 'with experience' diploma training. This has been used to set up experience for design and technology and ICT trainees in a school where diplomas are being taught. As a result of this and other training, these trainees show a very good understanding of 14 to 19 issues. Trainees are well informed about curricular developments in their subject area and beyond. For example, they are able to explain how they have planned lessons that aim to develop pupils' personal learning and thinking skills. Through course tutors keeping up to date with changes in education, training in e-safety has been strengthened; as a result, trainees show a good understanding of their role in safeguarding vulnerable pupils from potential dangers on the internet. For instance, in one case, a trainee dealt very well with an example of cyber-bullying that he encountered in school.
25. Improvement planning is well organised and focuses on key issues. Success criteria are generally clear, and managers review regularly the progress that has been made towards achieving objectives. The views of mentors, trainees

and external reviewers feed into the plan and help to move the provision forward. Partnerships with other local providers, particularly Staffordshire University, together with the programme director's role as an external examiner, have helped managers to benchmark provision against some other providers. However, current plans focus too much on improving provision rather than outcomes for trainees, and managers make insufficient use of comparisons with national benchmarks to identify areas for improvement.

Employment-based routes to qualified teacher status

Context

26. The West Midlands Consortium provides employment-based initial teacher training in a wide range of secondary subjects, based in 31 schools in eight local authorities across the west midlands. Places are available for suitable candidates on the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) route only. Only consortium schools offering PGCE placements can bid for GTP places. The partnership has provided for a small number of GTP places since accreditation in 2004 and the programme runs in parallel with the PGCE provision. GTP trainees train to teach a range of subjects, including shortage subjects and those not represented in the National Curriculum. Thomas Telford School is the lead partner in managing the provision; the other partners are schools and Staffordshire University. At the time of the inspection, there were 28 trainees on the programme, with subject specialisms in English, mathematics, science, art and design, dance, design and technology, health and social care, history and physical education. All were training for the 11 to 16 age range. Nine trainees were training as specialists in English; numbers in all other subjects were small.

Key strengths

27. The key strengths are:
- the selection process which recruits well-qualified and enthusiastic trainees, matched well to local needs
 - placements in schools which are very supportive and offer trainees distinctive and challenging opportunities
 - mentors' strong support for trainees' individual needs so that trainees make good progress towards the QTS Standards
 - the close and effective collaboration within the partnership, well supported by excellent communications, which contributes to consistently strong training across the partnership.

Recommendations

28. In order to improve trainees' progress and attainment, the provider should:
- improve the quality and range of subject-specific training
 - broaden trainees' experience to enhance their preparation for teaching in a diverse society.
29. In order to strengthen capacity to improve, the provider should:
- ensure that improvement planning focuses more closely on outcomes for trainees

Overall effectiveness

Grade: 2

30. The overall effectiveness of the employment-based programme in securing high quality outcomes for trainees is consistently good. Recruitment and selection arrangements and the use of resources make an outstanding contribution to the effectiveness of training, confirming the partnership's own evaluation. The quality of training in subject pedagogy is less strong than the training in general professional issues. This is the main reason why training and overall effectiveness are good rather than outstanding.
31. The overall attainment of trainees is good. The very large majority make good progress and attain high outcomes. Virtually all trainees gain employment and a high proportion are employed in partnership schools. Trainees are for the great part well qualified and many have significant relevant prior experience of working with young people. Trainees show strong personal qualities: for example, they take advice well and develop as reflective practitioners who evaluate their lessons critically. Their striking enthusiasm and enjoyment of teaching builds a good rapport with students. Trainees demonstrate positive attitudes in the classroom, and as a result, pupils enjoy learning. Most engage and motivate students well yet demonstrate good strategies for managing behaviour when necessary.
32. Trainees show strengths in planning, resulting in them being able to teach well-focused lessons, which are structured to support learning during lessons of different lengths. They understand where pupils find tasks difficult and that they need to adapt plans to suit the range of needs in the class. The strongest trainees employ a range of strategies to motivate pupils and support their progress: for example, they use stimulating activities and resources which give learning a realistic context or an appealingly contemporary slant, and they incorporate well-judged applications of modern technology. A few weaker trainees are still developing their skills in assessing and monitoring pupils' progress during lessons and over time; others are still learning to adapt their behaviour management strategies to suit different age groups.
33. High-quality training and assessment enables trainees to make consistently good progress towards challenging targets. Trainees' strengths are linked to the good qualities evident in training. Very strong central training enables trainees to understand educational issues well, and consequently, they can contribute to the all-round development of pupils in schools. Committed mentors provide greatly-valued individual support for trainees' professional development. Training in subject-specific pedagogy is not as strong as training in general teaching issues and this means that some trainees have only a limited understanding of current developments in the teaching of their subject.
34. Trainees benefit from making an early start on auditing their knowledge and skills. However, they assess their levels of confidence with little guidance, and as a result, initial audits do not always identify the most appropriate strengths and weaknesses. Trainees work hard and successfully fill gaps in knowledge, skills and experience. In most cases, training plans are well tailored and have

good impact. In the best examples, they are shaped by the most relevant and best informed practice. For example, design and technology trainees benefit from the comprehensive and accredited health and safety training that is provided centrally. Trainees appreciate the value of very well-planned training events for coaching sports. The impact of this training is exemplified by a physical education trainee who overcame initially-low confidence in organising outdoor and adventurous activities to develop the skills required to support a group of pupils on a camp-craft expedition.

35. Provision across the partnership is of a consistently high standard. The provider ensures that training takes place in schools and departments where there is a high level of commitment to training, and where trainers have an excellent understanding of their role in securing high quality outcomes for trainees. Trainees value the wholehearted help they receive from their mentors. They benefit from regular observations of lessons made by both subject specialists and also by others such as the school's coordinator for special educational needs. The quality of feedback is generally high, but a small number of observation reports give rather superficial comments which are of limited use in helping trainees to develop further. Mentors' use of targets for development also varies, but in examples of excellent practice, targets are suitably challenging, well focused on the QTS Standards, and systematically followed up. Assessment is accurate and rigorous. Good moderation procedures include joint observations by the link tutor once per term and sometimes by the school's professional tutor. Visits by an independent consultant further ensure that formative assessments and support for trainees are consistent. Where trainees' progress falters, excellent communication across the partnership helps all concerned to identify needs quickly and provide effective support that leads to improvement. Both school placements are very well matched to trainees' needs.
36. Recruitment and selection arrangements make an outstanding contribution to the high quality outcomes. The provider meets targets for recruitment in priority subjects. Managers have responded to local needs through recruiting trainees in subjects such as psychology or health and social care that do not feature in the National Curriculum. Virtually all who complete are appointed to teaching posts, a high proportion of them in consortium schools. Selection complies with all requirements, and exemplifies good practice by involving mentors and central staff, testing written and oral communication skills, and assessing trainees' ability to interact with young people. Pre-acceptance conditions applied to some candidates have provided trainees from non-standard backgrounds with opportunities to benefit from the training.
37. The excellent use made of resources has a significant impact on trainees' progress. For example, trainees experience a variety of types of school, including several with appropriate specialisms, giving them a broader view of education than is typical. The allocation of resources is highly responsive to need: where the need arises, the centre loans trainees laptops and key texts for the year, and additional staffing arrangements are made to support particular trainees. The content of the VLE provides easy access to forms and

useful resources linked to professional issues sessions, but the provider is aware of the need to offer more links to support subject pedagogy in the full range of subjects.

38. The provider promotes equality and diversity well. Targets for the recruitment of minority ethnic trainees have been met in two out of the last three years. The balance of females to males on the programme is similar to the national picture. There are no indications that trainees from identified groups achieve differently from their peers: all groups make good progress relative to their starting points. Excellent personal support for trainees does much to secure equality of opportunity. Trainees from all groups feel extremely well looked after, and continue to feel well supported by the consortium during their early years in teaching. Although contrasting school placements make highly successful contributions to trainees' professional development, not all trainees benefit from opportunities to visit or work in a school with a high mix of different social and ethnic groups. This restricts trainees' practical understanding of how they can support good achievement in their subjects by, for example, those at an early stage of learning English.

The capacity for further improvement and/or sustaining high quality

Grade: 2

39. The provider grades its capacity to improve as outstanding but inspectors judge it to be good. High-quality outcomes have been sustained and the provider's evaluation, anticipation and planning are all good, but have not combined to have an outstanding effect on improving outcomes. This is linked to the fact that improvement planning does not always clearly specify the measurable impact on outcomes for trainees.
40. Working in thorough and effective ways, leaders at all levels have maintained good performance and adapted well to changes. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate. A good range of mechanisms for both internal and external evaluation of the programme contributes usefully to a clear, shared understanding of the partnership's many strengths and also where there is scope to improve, although managers currently make only limited use of comparisons with national benchmarks. Short and efficient lines of communication in this small partnership help school staff and trainees to feed directly into evaluation and improvement planning. Mentors and trainees confirm that programme managers are very responsive to any feedback and that action to follow up highlighted issues has been swift and effective. Such action has secured better experiences for trainees: for example, primary school visits and bespoke second or third school experiences have become more effectively planned. Managers collect data on trainees' progress, though they do not use the information fully to investigate the performance of groups.
41. Schools share a powerful sense of purpose and commitment with the programme's managers. They have formed a strongly collaborative partnership where high expectations are the norm. Very effective leadership and

management, together with thorough moderation and quality assurance, have improved the consistency of training across the partnership so that it is now at an excellent level. Good communications underpin the effective collaborative work well. Handbooks are clear and programmes and materials are in place well before they are needed. School-based trainers feel well supported by programme managers and praise for the swift response to calls is universal. Any inconsistency in schools' practice in meeting requirements is quickly and effectively picked up.

42. Managers have introduced several measures that have led to improved provision and more effective monitoring. For example, they have acted to improve the rigour of the evaluation process. The team of external assessors and evaluators now gathers evidence across a wider range of subjects than before. In addition, the visits to training schools made by link tutors each term are now supplemented by visits from an independent consultant to review the programme. Reports from external assessors are usefully detailed and managers share the reports' contents with partner schools. As a result of previous evaluations, the provider has improved resources for trainees who may be based at some distance from the centre. The provision of core texts on professional issues and the improved accessibility of the VLE are appreciated by both trainees and school-based trainers. In order to improve further the support provided, school-based mentors have recently met in subject teams to compile a list of resources which could be signposted through subject areas in the VLE.
43. Leaders have a good record of anticipating and responding to change. They anticipate the implications of workforce change well: for example the needs of new mentors are quickly identified. Many mentors are new to the role, but quickly show appropriate expertise due to effective central training and induction to the role by experienced school staff. Trainees show a good understanding of recent curricular developments in schools, such as the Assessing Pupils' Progress initiative. They also show a good awareness of how to support students with weak literacy or numeracy skills. However, trainees' awareness of developments in their subject area is uneven.
44. Improvement planning is informed by feedback from stakeholders, users and external evaluators. Plans have clear sight of changes locally and nationally and are adapted accordingly. The improvement plan is organised well, identifies suitable priorities and is systematically reviewed. Partners are aware of priorities and generally play their part conscientiously. The impact of improvement planning is evident in trainees' personal training plans which have improved as a result of clearer guidelines and additional training for mentors. Additional guidance for trainees on how to compile QTS Standards evidence logs more efficiently and effectively, with less bulk and better evidence of understanding, has shown some positive, but uneven, impact. However, a weakness in planning is that objectives and success criteria are not specified in terms of outcomes for trainees.

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

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

Capacity to improve further and/or sustain high quality

	Secondary	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	2
How effectively does the management at all levels assess performance in order to improve or sustain high quality?	2	2
How well does the leadership at all levels anticipate change, and prepare for and respond to national and local initiatives?	2	2
How effectively does the provider plan and take action for improvement?	2	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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