

North Bedfordshire Consortium

Initial Teacher Education inspection report

Provider address	Samuel Whitbread Community College Shefford Road Clifton Bedfordshire SG17 5QS
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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 is defined as the standard reached by a trainee at the end of their training.

Progress is judged in terms of how well a trainee has developed professionally from their starting point to the standard reached at the time of the inspection or at a suitable review point.

Achievement is judged in terms of the progress made and the standard reached by a trainee at the time of the inspection or at a recent assessment review point.

The provider

3. North Bedfordshire Consortium is based at Samuel Whitbread School in Shefford. It is accredited to provide training for 24 trainees in 6 secondary subjects: art, English, history, geography, mathematics, and science. The course leads to qualified teacher status (QTS) and the Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), validated by the University of Bedfordshire. The consortium also offers an employment-based route to QTS, which was inspected at the same time and is the subject of a separate report. The two programmes are fully integrated, with a consortium board overseeing the strategic management of both routes.
4. During 2009–10 the consortium was made up of 19 schools (nine upper schools and ten middle), nearly all of which are located in Bedford Borough and

Central Bedfordshire. Trainees are usually initially placed in upper schools and then complete a second placement for the summer term in a middle school in order to gain Key Stage 3 experience. Most of the rural schools in the consortium are mono-cultural (white British), whereas the urban schools have much wider ethnic diversity.

Provision in the secondary phase

Key strengths

5. The key strengths are:
 - the thorough yet flexible procedures to recruit well-qualified applicants with the personal qualities that give them the potential to be good and often outstanding teachers
 - the trainees' enthusiasm, commitment and high expectations that are demonstrated in their very positive relationships with students and staff
 - the high quality pastoral care and close attention paid to meeting individual needs that ensure trainees make consistently good progress
 - the regular and accurate tracking of trainees' progress, supported by good external quality assurance systems, that identifies underperformance promptly and ensures interventions are put into place to support trainees who are at risk of failure
 - the very strong commitment shown by the provider and partnership schools to training high quality teachers who meet the needs of local workforce development, underpinned by their effective collaboration and a shared purpose.

Recommendations

6. In order to improve trainees' progress and attainment, the provider/partnership should:
 - ensure that all trainees are consistently provided with sharper developmental feedback and more challenging targets so that their progress accelerates by:
 - improving the quality of mentoring through refinements to mentor training and the provision of ongoing support
 - refocusing the strong quality assurance systems so that there is a greater emphasis on monitoring the effectiveness of mentoring and target setting
 - maintaining momentum and challenge for trainees during their second placement
 - ensure that the good pedagogical and theoretical background provided in the professional studies programme is translated more consistently into trainees' classroom practice
 - ensure that all trainees have a secure understanding of how to teach in multi-cultural contexts.

7. In order to improve the quality of planning for further improvement the provider should:
 - ensure that improvement planning at all levels has clear milestones and responsibilities identified, with easily measurable success criteria, focused on trainees' outcomes.

Overall effectiveness

Grade: 2

8. Trainees' good attainment has been sustained over the last three years. The provider has not however, increased the proportion of trainees who are judged as outstanding. Recruitment of good quality mathematics, science and English trainees is more challenging than in other subjects, and although most of these trainees have good attainment by the end of the course, few are graded outstanding. Retention rates are high, and exit interviews show most trainees who leave do so for personal reasons. The provider is particularly skilled at supporting weaker trainees and enabling them to qualify successfully. All trainees from the last two years are in employment and of the current cohort, most already have a job for September. Past trainees are largely employed in partnership schools and many are now in promoted posts. The provider is thus meeting local needs for upper schools extremely well. Fewer trainees are employed in middle schools, although they constitute half the schools in the partnership. Although, the provider is slightly over generous in its assessment of trainees, this does not affect the overall attainment judgement. The pass/fail borderline is secure.
9. Trainees show great enthusiasm and commitment to teaching. Most are strongly self-motivated, taking full responsibility for their development, reflecting on their practice and often acting on their own initiative to develop their skills. In the classroom, they show confidence and develop strong professional attributes early in the course. They quickly build good relationships with students and colleagues, and enjoy the opportunity to take a full part in the life of the school, particularly valuing their experience in pastoral roles, or teaching personal, social and health education. By the end of the course, trainees can plan for varied, relevant, engaging activities in lessons, but their planning for students' progression in learning is less well developed. The majority have good questioning skills to support differentiation, but they are less skilled at providing resources to meet the learning needs of individual students. Subject knowledge in geography and English trainees is strong but less so in other subjects, where trainees apply themselves well to developing those areas where they are insecure. Trainees benefit from their training in how to meet the needs of students with English as an additional language, but their understanding of how to teach in a diverse society is more limited. They have good understanding of how to use assessment effectively and have high expectations of students' behaviour.

10. Rigorous systems for selection, involving school staff, ensure that good quality trainees, with appropriate qualifications and previous experience, are recruited to the course. Successful applicants have a strong commitment to succeed, as demonstrated by the high retention and employment rates. All trainees have spent some time in a secondary school prior to the course and for some; pre-course tasks are given to make up gaps in knowledge or experience. Tasks set during interview enable applicants to demonstrate their broad skills and allow interviewers to assess suitability. The proportion of minority ethnic trainees recruited is in line with the provider's target, but is not exceptional. The retention of this group is high and the provider is actively researching strategies to attract larger numbers from under-represented groups.
11. Scores from the selection process and end of first term grades are used to estimate potential and forecast a final grade for each trainee. Progress is then tracked systematically throughout the course, using criteria well understood by trainees and mentors, supported by good quality assurance systems. A half-termly mentors' meeting, is used to discuss trainees' progress, identify appropriate interventions for those who are underachieving, moderate judgements and ensure an effective transition between one placement and the next. However, because of the way these are organised, the same mentors do not attend all meetings and some, particularly those from middle schools, miss out on key training.
12. The training enables most trainees to make good progress from their starting points, with rapid initial development of essential skills. Very good personalised support is provided and the training is adapted to meet individual needs. Trainees particularly value the high quality formative assessment they receive from professional tutors and quality assurance verifiers. However, the quality of mentoring is variable, with the focus frequently operational and summative rather than formative; for example, there is often a strong focus on behaviour management separated from planning and students' learning needs. This variation has a particular impact on more able trainees towards the end of the course when they sometimes lose momentum, because they are not given sufficiently challenging targets. The area lacking is frequently the development of planning skills for students' learning and progression. Some able trainees thus fail to make outstanding progress and this is exacerbated by a lack of timely training for some mentors.
13. Effective use is made of outside speakers and other expert professionals for subject knowledge for teaching and professional studies sessions. The teaching mostly, but not always, models good practice. The provider ensures that the links between theory and practice are made explicit; both through taught sessions and assignments, but these are not reliably developed further by mentors. Upper schools provide high quality school-based training but it not always well aligned with the centre-based programme. Trainees say that although ideas are sometimes revisited they can often see the rationale in retrospect. They particularly value the opportunity for peer coaching through the use of video.

14. A subject knowledge audit is carried out at the beginning of the course and revisited regularly, although there is inconsistency between subjects, and less thorough coverage in some. In the majority of cases mentors plan timetables carefully so trainees teach unfamiliar topics, and specific subject knowledge sessions and immersion days help to fill the gaps. Because trainees are strongly motivated, they frequently take responsibility for developing subject knowledge themselves.
15. Resources are allocated equably. Personnel are used very effectively, with good use made of high quality external assessors and quality assurance visitors who support trainees. Extra visits are carried out where necessary. Trainees have access to a useful range of resources which support their progress and development well. They are encouraged to use information and communication technology (ICT) both as a tool for learning and in classrooms. The use of an e-portfolio to collect evidence against the Standards is developing but has some operational shortcomings. Action planning documentation is also kept electronically but is not consistently revisited by mentors and trainees, and so has a limited impact on progress.
16. There is strong support for the partnership from headteachers who feel the value of 'growing their own' teachers. Effective links with the two local authorities and the university ensure a coordinated offer within the region and less competition between providers. Headteachers are able to make a contribution to developments and some deliver professional studies sessions. However, the involvement of upper school headteachers is greater than those from middle schools who are not able to employ as many trainees because the placement is in the last term. Key stakeholders describe the partnership as open and transparent, with good and immediate communication.
17. The majority of mentors attending training are from upper schools. The training is offered annually at the end of the summer term and the middle school placement is not until the following April, so attendance from these schools is low. Training is very effective in ensuring accuracy of assessment, and developing understanding of the professional studies programme and current educational issues. Mentors' understanding of how to help trainees progress to outstanding is sometimes more limited. Other school staff are very supportive of trainees, although there are some shortcomings in the quality of lesson feedback given by teachers who are not mentors. Support for new schools and mentors joining the partnership, is good at the beginning of the year, but less reliable later.
18. Trainees say they are all treated equally and minority ethnic trainees say they are very well supported. There are no significant differences in the achievement of minority ethnic trainees. Trainees' understanding of how to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs is secure but they are less confident for those with English as an additional language. Although the two placements give trainees experience of both key stages, there are

opportunities missed to use the contrasting range of schools within the partnership to help increase trainees' understanding of how to teach in a diverse society.

The capacity for further improvement and/or sustaining high quality

Grade: 2

19. Good relationships between schools, the local authorities and the local university, which have been built up over a number of years, help to foster cooperation. The course leaders have been in post for a number of years and know schools and school-based trainers well. Stakeholders at all levels describe a great deal of informal dialogue, with prompt action to make changes wherever necessary. A management board meets regularly to deal with day-to-day operational issues. Minutes show prompt action to deal with issues as they arise, although even some substantial priorities do not always appear on the formal improvement plan. For example, recent changes to recruitment procedures have helped make more accurate judgements about applicants' communication skills. The provider carries out regular and thorough analyses of attainment, progress, retention and employment data, and considers trends over time for individuals and all groups. It takes into account the views of users, particularly trainees and key staff from upper schools. External examiner reports are detailed, highly evaluative and give very clear recommendations for improvement, which are actively followed through by the provider. Independent external quality assurance is highly valued within the partnership but is focused on supporting trainees and mentors rather than on assessing the quality of mentoring and increasing accountability. Although there is a clear partnership agreement, roles and responsibilities and thus lines of accountability are not always clear; for example, responsibility for developing trainees' specific subject knowledge, or the precise role of quality assurance assessors in monitoring the quality of mentoring.
20. The course is managed on a day-to-day basis by two joint programme coordinators. They have a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership and a commitment to improve outcomes for trainees. The respond quickly to both local and national change, and review their provision regularly to ensure that it remains relevant and focused on trainees' needs. Re-organisation of the local authority boundaries and possible changes to the current three-tier school system, which may result in middle school closures, are both critical issues, which will affect the way the training is organised. Subject leaders have responded well to current curriculum changes, for example the introduction of BTec courses and diplomas, and have introduced these to trainees. Specific whole day events have been introduced to cover effectively, national issues such as cultural diversity, literacy and numeracy, and the 14 to 19 curriculum. As a result trainees have good up-to-date knowledge of current educational issues, although follow through in subject sessions and by mentors is inconsistent.

21. The consortium board has responsibility for strategic development and meets twice a year and includes headteachers from partnership schools. The board is very focused on trainees' progress and employability as well as strategic development of the course. Evaluation data, and the current local and national priorities, contribute to the identification of key priorities and an improvement plan. Priorities are shared across the partnership and most are clear about their role in improving outcomes for trainees. Although the plan accurately identifies targets that will have an impact on trainees' outcomes, broad success criteria and how and when evaluation will take place, there are relatively few measurable targets and no milestones or clear lines of responsibility. Review takes place at the end of the year. Subject plans mirror the overall plan.
22. The recruitment of well-qualified and motivated trainees, high retention and employment rates, good outcomes and equality of opportunity for trainees, all indicate that evaluation and resulting improvement planning are effective in maintaining good quality provision. Recent improvements to provision and the maintenance of good quality outcomes for trainees demonstrate the provider's good capacity to improve further.

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
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?	2
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

		Secondary
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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