

Astra SCITT

Initial teacher education inspection report

Inspection dates Stage 1: 30 April 2018 Stage 2: 24 September 2018

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted Inspectors in accordance with the 'Initial teacher education inspection handbook'. This handbook sets out the statutory basis and framework for initial teacher education (ITE) inspections in England from September 2015.

The inspection draws on evidence from each phase and separate route within the ITE partnership to make judgements against all parts of the evaluation schedule. Inspectors focused on the overall effectiveness of the ITE partnership in securing high-quality outcomes for trainees.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding; grade 2 is good; grade 3 is requires improvement; grade 4 is inadequate

	Primary and secondary QTS
Overall effectiveness How well does the partnership secure consistently high-quality outcomes for trainees?	1
The outcomes for trainees	1
The quality of training across the partnership	1
The quality of leadership and management across the partnership	1

Primary and secondary routes

Information about this ITE partnership

- Astra provides primary (five to 11 years) and secondary (11 to 16 years) school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) for graduates. Trainees who successfully complete their training are recommended for qualified teacher status (QTS) and may also gain a postgraduate certificate of education from the Institute of Education or Goldsmiths University.
- The partnership began its own training programme in 2016. It offers School Direct salaried and non-salaried training routes for both primary and secondary trainees. Secondary trainees in 2017/18 specialised in English, mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, drama, geography, history, modern foreign languages or physical education.
- The SCITT is based at Dr Challoner's Grammar School in Amersham in an area where there is selective education. The partnership works in close collaboration with 35 local schools across Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire. At the time of stage 1 of the inspection, there were seven primary trainees and 54 secondary trainees. In September 2018, 13 primary trainees and 47 secondary trainees began their training. A small number of trainees follow the assessment-only (AO) route to QTS.

Information about the primary and secondary ITE inspection

- During stage 1 of the inspection, inspectors observed the teaching of 12 trainees, in seven schools. At stage 2, inspectors observed the teaching of 11 newly qualified teachers (NQTs), in seven schools. They observed four trainees at both stages of the inspection and spoke with one trainee who followed the AO route. Mentors conducted observations jointly with inspectors at both stages of the inspection.
- At stage 1, inspectors met with two groups of trainees, and at stage 2, they met with one group of NQTs and one group of new trainees. Inspectors also met with the SCITT Steering Group, the course director, professional tutors, supervising tutors, subject mentors, mentors and headteachers on both stages of the inspection. Inspectors took account of 49 responses to Ofsted's online trainee questionnaire, which trainees completed in July 2018, as well as the partnership's own surveys.
- At both stages of the inspection, inspectors evaluated a range of evidence, including trainees' files, pupils' work and assessment information about pupils' learning. Inspectors considered an extensive range of documentation provided by the partnership, including information on the attainment and progress of trainees. They considered employment and completion rates since the partnership started.

Inspection team

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Overall effectiveness

Grade: 1

Key strengths of the primary and secondary partnership

- Determined and committed leaders maintain a comprehensive overview of the performance of SCITT trainees and the quality of the training and support they receive.
- Very accurate and extremely thorough self-evaluation, as well as methodical and effective quality assurance, ensures that trainees' attainment across all of the teachers' standards is consistently high.
- Leaders' extensive use of assessment data to monitor the performance of trainees and intervene where necessary means that the proportion of trainees achieving an overall grade of outstanding is consistently high.
- Centre-based training is well planned to enhance trainees' school experiences. The programme is personalised so that most trainees benefit from a wide range of experiences to become effective teachers by the end of the course.
- Schools and mentors ensure that trainees receive expert coaching throughout their training year. Mentors demonstrate an unyielding pursuit of excellence for their trainees.
- Trainees and NQTs are skilled at developing purposeful and productive working relationships in the classroom. Their professional conduct is exemplary. They are highly reflective, resilient, determined to be the best they can and committed to their profession.
- Trainees and NQTs are confident in implementing effective behaviour management strategies and ensuring that the pupils they teach have positive attitudes to their learning.
- The partnership acts with purpose and commitment to attract high-calibre trainees through well-targeted advertising. Selection processes are thorough and demanding.
- The care, concern and support which the SCITT provides for trainees' welfare, health and well-being are exceptional. This enables trainees to complete their training successfully and thrive in the profession.

- Employment rates are consistently high. Local schools are very keen to employ trainees from the partnership. The partnership's ongoing support for NQTs in their teaching careers is much appreciated.

What does the primary and secondary partnership need to do to improve further?

The partnership should:

- hone the expertise of mentors in assessing and supporting the development of trainees' subject knowledge
- strengthen trainees' understanding of how best to use a range of assessment information in order to maximise learning for all groups of pupils.

Inspection judgements

1. The quality of provision is outstanding. Over the short time that the SCITT has been operating, leaders, managers, tutors and mentors have worked purposefully and persistently to develop, establish and advance the partnership's core principles of excellence, collaboration, innovation and support.
2. Course leaders are highly committed and dedicated to maintaining high standards of training, support and outcomes for trainees. The course director capably manages a highly effective team that works very well together to ensure the success of the SCITT and its trainees.
3. Primary and secondary trainees awarded QTS at the end of their training exceed the minimum level of practice expected of teachers at that point in their career. They demonstrate excellence in the majority of the teachers' standards, and consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct.
4. There is no significant variation in attainment across different subjects, routes, phases or groups of trainees. The small number of individuals following the AO route all successfully gain QTS. Their recruitment and assessment are of the same high quality as those of other trainees, as is their attainment against the teachers' standards.
5. The effectiveness of the partnership is demonstrated through consistently high completion rates in comparison with national figures. For the very small number of trainees who defer, there are entirely plausible reasons.
6. Trainees and NQTs are highly valued by their placement and employing schools. Employment rates are extremely high, with most trainees being employed in partnership schools. Many mentors in schools are former trainees from the partnership.

7. Trainees and NQTs have strong subject knowledge, as well as high expectations of pupils, positive relationships and consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct. The partnership is working to further strengthen trainees' understanding of the use of available assessment information to support the learning of all groups. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who speak English as an additional language and those of high ability.
8. The partnership offers a coherent programme of training that takes into account trainees' starting points and develops their knowledge and skills purposefully and systematically. Centre- and school-based training align very well to ensure that trainees quickly develop an extensive range of teaching skills across the age and ability range.
9. Trainees' understanding of curriculum and assessment requirements is well developed using the expertise of staff from partnership schools. The development of trainees' subject knowledge has been a particular focus for the partnership, with subject handbooks and central training individually designed to meet the requirements of each subject. In physical education, for example, additional training has been provided after school to meet the breadth of content required by the subject. In mathematics, there has been a much greater focus on reasoning mathematically and problem-solving.
10. In the primary phase, training is suitably focused on phonics, early reading and mathematics, and physical education. The new specialist primary lead has revised training to ensure trainees have the experiences and opportunities they need to teach confidently and competently across the wider curriculum and full primary age range.
11. In an area of selective education, leaders take great care to organise contrasting placements which ensure that trainees gain experience of working with pupils from a wide range of backgrounds. Partner schools include those with a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils and those judged to require improvement.
12. Trainees rapidly develop into reflective practitioners and carry these skills through to their NQT year. Their willingness to seek and act upon advice enables them to continue to develop their practice. As a result, NQTs quickly establish effective classroom management, high expectations of pupils, positive relationships and mutual respect in their classes. NQTs typically demonstrate detailed subject knowledge and confident exposition.
13. Trainees' and NQTs' appreciation of managing classrooms is a particular strength. Responses to the trainee online questionnaire confirm that trainees feel they know how to promote good behaviour and implement a range of behaviour management strategies. The overwhelming majority of NQTs seen

and spoken to confirmed that they knew how to promote good behaviour and implement a range of behaviour management strategies.

14. Trainees and NQTs make a valuable contribution to the life of their schools through organising visits, coaching, extra-curricular activities and, in the case of NQTs, supporting professional development for new trainees. One primary school leader said that trainees were 'involved and influential', especially in bringing new ideas and perspectives to the school. Overall, NQTs are well prepared to take on the breadth of their new roles as a result of their high-quality training.
15. Trainees' health, welfare and well-being are supported particularly well by the partnership. A welfare adviser offers ongoing support to trainees who are experiencing difficulties. Care, guidance and support are key reasons for the high completion rates. National priorities, including managing workloads and developing resilience, are successfully woven into the course.
16. Leaders effectively and regularly track trainees' attainment across all the teachers' standards. They identify when there is any underachievement and offer remedial support accordingly. Communication across the SCITT is swift and efficient. Very robust and effective quality assurance procedures ensure the accuracy of trainees' grading.
17. Mentors are ambitious for their trainees. They evaluate trainees' performance accurately and set precise and appropriate targets to support their progress. Mentors play an increasingly valuable role in supporting taught sessions focused on developing trainees' subject knowledge. In a small number of instances, their written evaluations and targets to develop trainees' subject knowledge further are not as helpful as they could be.
18. In the main, mentors are clear what is expected of them because of the comprehensive SCITT documentation, regular communications and training events. The mentor training programme certificated by the Buckinghamshire New University is well established, highly regarded and contributes substantially to mentors' own professional training and development.
19. Well-focused training sessions have enabled all primary trainees to be confident and competent in the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics, early mathematics and physical education, as confirmed through observation, conversation and the trainee online questionnaire. NQTs think carefully about making effective links across the curriculum, as seen in a Year 2 history lesson on the 'Great Fire of London', where the teacher focused on words ending in 'ed' to show the past tense of regular verbs.
20. The SCITT steering group and SCITT leaders have a well-honed and accurate view of the strengths and areas for improvement for the SCITT. Leaders are

responsive to external advice as well as feedback from trainees. Visiting tutors and supervising tutors play an important role in quality assurance of the provision. They check the quality of mentoring and use this knowledge to drive improvements.

21. The partnership's improvement plan addresses the areas of improvement well to anticipate growth and development, especially in the primary phase. The partnership demonstrates outstanding capacity to make further improvement. Emerging areas for improvement from stage 1 have been quickly and robustly addressed, such as the introduction of detailed subject knowledge audits for all subjects to support and track trainees' subject knowledge development. In the primary phase, the partnership has taken appropriate steps to strengthen the experience of teaching phonics for those trainees whose main placement is in key stage 2.
22. Leaders' rigorous recruitment and selection procedures ensure that trainees are well prepared for the demands of the course. Trainees confirm that the selection process was rigorous but supportive. Well-considered recruitment strategies have ensured that trainees are drawn from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences so that local employment needs are well met. Trainees are matched carefully to their base school. Where, on occasion, a trainee has not been considered a good fit with one partnership school, they have been invited to another.
23. Where trainees have been unsuccessful at interview and clearly have potential, the partnership has offered additional support to help them reapply at a later stage. This support has included further experiences in school and subject knowledge development. The partnership's flexibility has resulted in trainees successfully returning to the course and proceeding to employment.
24. Headteachers, mentors and trainees rate the leadership of the SCITT highly and appreciate the approachability of the team. Many commented on the excellent communication and the additional support offered for trainees and NQTs, whether employed in a partnership school or beyond. School leaders were also keen to describe how working with Astra had benefited their schools in terms of professional development for staff.
25. School leaders find the NQTs' transition documentation to be informative and accurate, especially in highlighting areas in which NQTs need ongoing support. The document is especially appreciated by those schools where the NQT has not worked previously. In a small number of cases, transition documents lack clarity in terms of strengths and targets for the NQT year.
26. The SCITT is fully compliant with the criteria for initial teacher training. The partnership meets all its statutory requirements in relation to safeguarding pupils, the promotion of equality and diversity, and the elimination of

discrimination. Trainees have a secure awareness of cyber-bullying and prejudice-based bullying as well as fundamental British values and child sexual exploitation.

Annex: Partnership schools

The following schools were visited to observe trainees' and NQTs' teaching:

Aylesbury Grammar School, Aylesbury

Chesham Bois Church of England School, Amersham

Dr Challoner's Grammar School, Amersham

Dr Challoner's High School, Amersham

Elmtree Infant and Nursery School, Chesham

Holmer Green Senior School, Holmer Green

John Colet School, Wendover

Seer Green Church of England School, Seer Green

St Mary and All Saints CofE Primary School, Beaconsfield

The Misbourne School, Great Missenden

The Stoke Poges School, Stoke Poges

The Wren School, Reading

Thomas Harding Junior School, Chesham

ITE partnership details

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Previous inspection report	N/A
Provider address	Dr Challoner's Grammar School Chesham Road Amersham Buckinghamshire HP6 5HA



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