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A secondary initial teacher training
short inspection report
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Introduction

Staffordshire University works in partnership with approximately 30 schools to provide secondary initial teacher training (ITT) courses. It offers training in business education and design and technology. The business education course trains teachers for the 14-19 age range and the design and technology course for the 11-18 age range. At the time of the inspection there were 32 trainees.

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 report draws on evidence from a short inspection of the provision and an inspection of the management and quality assurance arrangements.

Grades are awarded in accordance with the following scale

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Main inspection judgements

Management and quality assurance: Grade 1

The overall quality of training is at least good.

The next inspection of this provider will take place in accordance with the Initial Teacher Education Inspection Framework.

Key strengths

- the exceptionally clear and well-considered underpinning philosophy of how the trainees should be prepared for a career in teaching which promotes critical reflection and a focus on learning
- the high quality of the subject training at the university and in the schools
- the excellent support for and attention to trainees' individual needs throughout the course
- the excellent leadership of the training programme and the subject courses
- the very close partnership between the school-based subject mentors and the university tutors
- the quick response to any issues raised by schools or trainees.

Points for consideration

- increasing the contribution of senior school leaders to the management and future development of the partnership
- improving the effectiveness of self-evaluation by focusing more closely on the operational aspects of the provision and trainee outcomes.

The quality of training

1. Since the last inspection the good quality of the training has been maintained and, in design and technology, further developed and improved. The course structure provides the trainees with a very good balance of practical teaching and regular periods of reflection and training at the university. Regular training at the university builds mutually supportive relationships amongst the trainees.
2. An exceptionally clear and well-considered philosophy on the preparation of trainees for a career in teaching permeates the course and promotes a very strong emphasis on learning and critical reflection. Trainees met during the inspection were impressively articulate and reflective about their practice and were emerging from the course with the determination to promote effective learning through imaginative and inventive teaching approaches.
3. The content of the training is broad and provides a very thorough treatment of contemporary initiatives and developments within education and, more specifically, within the two subjects. This includes, for example, coverage of the new diplomas for the 14-19 age range, a strong focus on *Every Child Matters* and, for design and technology trainees, comprehensive training in electronics and communications technology. Training content is further enhanced by contributions from mentors and former trainees employed in partnership schools, and by research undertaken at the university. For instance, a research project to promote the collaborative planning, teaching and evaluation of lessons has challenged the trainees to reflect more critically, deepened their understanding of learning and extended their skills in team working.
4. The different aspects of the training cohere very well. Subject mentors have a very good understanding of their role in developing the trainees' subject knowledge for teaching and the thorough auditing of trainees' subject knowledge ensures that both school and university trainers are fully aware of the trainees' continuing needs. In addition, the tasks undertaken by the trainees during their school placements give subject mentors a prominent role in linking the subject and general professional training.
5. The modelling of good teaching by the university subject tutors is a major strength of the training. In business education, for instance, sessions are very well planned to ensure that the trainees have the opportunity to consider both the content of a topic and relevant teaching strategies. This approach promotes the high level of critical reflection displayed by the trainees. Trainees spoke in glowing terms of the insights they had gained into the teaching of design and technology as a result of the tutor's skilful modelling of best practice. In a similar vein, the subject mentors in schools provide very good training and support through regular observations of the trainees' teaching, focused evaluative feedback and target setting that effectively promotes trainees' progress towards the Standards. Trainees benefit greatly from the university's careful choice of placement schools, in which

much consideration is given to providing an experience of a contrasting setting and different age range and, in some cases, a different mentoring style.

6. The level of support for trainees and attention to their individual needs throughout the course from both the university and school-based trainers is outstanding. One trainee commented, 'There is still as much support at the end of the course as at the beginning'. In addition, because of the excellent communication between the university tutors and the trainees, any queries or concerns are identified quickly and provoke a quick response. Weekly meetings between the trainees and their subject mentors and, for most of the course, with their university tutors, ensure that trainees' progress is monitored very closely. Personalised programmes are devised by the schools and, at the university. The decision to extend masters level credits to the trainees' teaching practice has significantly raised expectations. Timely and very effective support and guidance is provided for those trainees who are a cause for concern.

7. Assessment against the Standards is comprehensive and rigorous. The frequency of contact between the university staff and school mentors promotes consistency in the judgements. Arrangements for both the internal and external moderation of the assessment ensure that the judgements at the pass/fail boundary are accurate.

Management and quality assurance

8. The excellent management of the partnership, strong culture of critical reflection and effective quality assurance procedures ensure that the course is subject to continuous scrutiny and is modified in response to both local and national needs and priorities. Consequently, the training in both subjects is of a high standard.

9. The selection process, previously judged to be extremely thorough and rigorous, remains so and, as a result, both subjects recruit high calibre trainees. The selection day involves a range of tasks which together provide a demanding and fair test of applicants' suitability for teaching. Applicants are usually interviewed by at least one university subject tutor and a subject mentor, the latter having the final decision on whether to accept or reject the candidate. Unsuccessful applicants are offered very helpful feedback and relevant pre-course tasks and, in some cases, conditions such as attendance at subject booster training, are set for those who are offered a training place. The university analyses its recruitment data carefully and, since the last inspection, the recruitment of trainees from minority ethnic groups has doubled and is now very good.

10. The training programme is very well led by the head of education and the university subject tutors. Whilst being passionate about the distinctiveness of the provision, the course team is very receptive to challenge and change. The new tutor for business education has been well supported to make a successful transition from

school to university teaching and has forged a very productive relationship with the tutor for design and technology. The very high level of collaboration between the two tutors and their administrative teams, across two different faculties and sites, supports the strong coherence and consistency of the provision.

11. Since the last inspection the number of design and technology trainees has doubled and new schools have joined the partnership. Against this background, close links between school-based subject mentors and the university tutors remain an exceptionally strong feature of the provision. Excellent communication, good professional relationships and mutual respect form the basis of these links. Subject mentors contribute actively to the operational management of the course and attendance at course committee meetings is generally very good. Schools visited during the inspection were very committed to initial teacher education and their partnership with the university. All provide very suitable venues for training and have high regard for the very good trainees consistently placed with them.

12. The underpinning philosophy of high quality, subject focused training gives the school-based subject mentors a wider role than is commonly found elsewhere. As a result of the good support and guidance they receive, the subject mentors discharge their roles effectively. The university is well aware that the professional mentors, who oversee the training in educational and professional issues in each school, interpret their roles in slightly different ways, often reflecting their need to balance the requirements of a range of providers. Whilst there is no evidence of these differences impeding trainees' progress, the university knows it needs to define the professional tutor role more clearly within its forthcoming revision of the partnership agreement.

13. Regular visits to the schools by the university subject tutors, together with almost weekly feedback from the trainees, ensures that the university has an accurate picture of the training provided by individual schools. In addition, the partnership manager role, which is relatively new, ensures a very thorough evaluation of the quality of each trainee's school experience and a rigorous assessment of how well the university's systems and procedures are working. Partnership managers' feedback to the university informs tutors' support for individual trainees and results in very prompt action in response to any problems or weaknesses in provision. Partnership managers provide oral feedback to subject mentors but their very detailed written reports are not shared with schools. Schools visited during the inspection indicated that they would welcome these to strengthen their own self-evaluation and improvement.

14. The university continuously evaluates training quality and displays an appetite for improvement. Self-evaluation has successfully informed the strategic development of the provision, including an expansion in the number and range of courses and the decision to accredit the course run by the West Midlands Consortium. However, attention has not always focused sharply enough on the evaluation of some of the more detailed operational aspects of the provision including, for example, trainees' achievement of individual Standards and the operation of the equal opportunities and race equality policy.

15. As most of the schools in the partnership also work closely with other providers, the university is sensitive to the need not to place too many demands on their time. Nonetheless, subject mentors contribute very effectively to the improvement of the programme and the actions included in the annual course review are pertinent. However, with the continued growth of the university's initial teacher education programmes and plans for the radical restructuring of educational provision in the locality, there is a need to involve senior school leaders more widely in the management and strategic development of the partnership.