

# Saffron Walden and Comberton Training Schools

Initial Teacher Education inspection report

---

Provider address

Comberton Village College  
West Street  
Comberton  
Cambridgeshire  
CB23 7DU

---

Inspection dates

8-12 June 2009

Lead inspector

Christine Dick HMI

---

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this report in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404040, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings  
St Ann's Square  
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

## Introduction

1. This inspection was carried out by one 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 Saffron Walden and Comberton employment-based initial teacher training partnership was established in June 2003 across eight schools within the Cambridgeshire, Essex and Hertfordshire region. The partnership aims to address the need for high quality recruits to schools in the locality, with a particular focus on shortage subjects. The provider currently offers 13 places on employment-based routes to qualified teacher status for the 11-16 and 11-18 age ranges. School settings include urban and rural locations, comprehensive schools and a single sex faith school. At the time of the inspection there were 12 trainees.
4. Comberton Village College is the lead school in the partnership, having taken on this role from Saffron Walden County High School in September 2008. A small steering group, chaired by the principal of the lead school, oversees the strategic direction of the provision. A full-time member of the teaching team from the school manages the training programme on a part-time basis.

## Employment-based routes to qualified teacher status

### Key strengths

5. The key strengths are:
  - the well-managed provision and productive focus on local needs that adds value to partnership schools
  - the good personal and professional support from tutors and mentors which helps trainees to make good and sometimes outstanding progress
  - the enthusiasm and strong commitment of the trainees to the teaching profession and to furthering their wider experience of the teacher's role beyond lessons
  - the very effective combination of academic study and practical skills development which enables trainees to reflect on and improve their teaching practice
  - the rigorous recruitment, selection and induction which ensures trainees are well-matched to placement schools and that they make early progress.

### Required actions

6. In order to improve trainees' progress and attainment, the partnership must:
  - strengthen the links between the auditing of subject knowledge for teaching, individual training plans, and the routine monitoring and review of trainee performance
  - ensure all mentors set improvement targets that are sharply focused on the trainees' learning and development.

### Recommendations

7. In order to further improve the quality of training across the partnership the provider should:
  - secure self-evaluation and improvement planning with more sharply focused and quantifiable statements related to outcomes for trainees, against which progress can be measured.
8. In order to strengthen strategic leadership the partnership should:
  - further develop the role of the steering group in driving the strategic direction of the partnership.

## Overall effectiveness

Grade: 2

9. The overall effectiveness of the provider in securing high quality outcomes for trainees is good.

10. Trainees' attainments by the end of the programme are good. Inspectors support the provider's evaluation that most trainees attain to a good or better standard and few are judged satisfactory. Trainees are highly committed to their own professional development and have similarly high expectations of their own students' learning. They are engaged fully in the life of their employing school and take every opportunity to widen their experience; for example, in acting as form tutors, taking assemblies, managing after school clubs and participating in the professional development available to school staff. As a consequence, trainees have an in-depth understanding of the broad range of responsibilities inherent in the role of the teacher, far beyond their day-to-day classroom experience. A well-planned programme of assignments includes a focus on school-based action research and this promotes trainees' good reflection on the impact of their teaching on learning.

11. Rigorous recruitment procedures result in the selection of trainees who have the potential to make good progress. Offers are conditional to the successful completion of a two week placement, in the prospective school, in the summer term prior to the start of the training. As a result, trainees are well-matched to their employing institutions, settle in very quickly and make early progress. Typically, the training attracts candidates who live close to partnership centres. Applications reflect the social, ethnic and cultural make up of the locality. Consequently, recruitment from minority ethnic groups is very low and this remains a focus for improvement. The demand for places is high and very few trainees fail to achieve qualified teacher status. Progression to full teaching posts after the training is very good, with the majority of successful trainees retained in local schools.

12. Trainees, many of whom have excellent potential, are enthusiastic and fully committed to meeting the Standards. The broad and balanced programme of professional studies, academic reflection and focused attention on the craft of teaching combines well so that the majority of trainees make at least good progress. In reviewing their lessons, the most successful trainees undertake careful analysis of the impact of their teaching on students' learning and use this to improve their practice. Typically, trainees are proficient in the use of information and communication technology to enhance their teaching. Class management skills are good, although a few trainees struggle to deal with aspects of poor behaviour. Not all of them make best use of assessment to inform planning for learning. Nevertheless, headteachers speak highly of the significant contribution the trainees make to the life of the main placement school and the value they add to workforce development there.

13. Trainees are clear about how *Every Child Matters* relates to their teaching. A well-considered action research assignment helps trainees to develop a good understanding of other key issues for secondary teaching. For example, one trainee described eloquently how a visit to a local primary school, to observe the teaching of French at Key Stage 2, would influence future planning for modern foreign

languages work with Year 7; another spoke with enthusiasm about the exploration of strategies to bridge the gender gap and to encourage boys into dance.

14. Trainees receive regular and very helpful support from mentors, professional tutors and the training manager. Evaluations of trainees' teaching practice are accurate and appropriately related to the Standards for newly qualified teachers. Effective strategies are in place to ensure those trainees identified as at risk of not meeting the Standards are promptly supported through to successful completion. The best feedback to trainees is analytical, constructive, related to previous outcomes and records clear and specific guidance on what they need to do to improve further. Although all mentors are highly supportive and responsive to trainees, not all of them set improvement targets that are sharply focused on the trainees' learning and development. 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.

15. Overall, the training is well-organised and managed. The good coherence between the different elements of the provision contributes to the trainees' high level of motivation and the good progress they make. In the main, programmes are tailored effectively to meet trainees' individual needs and they are given appropriate autonomy in planning the focus of the second school placement. For a minority of trainees, there is insufficient monitoring and quality assurance of the second school experience and this constrains their progress in this setting.

16. Trainees value the opportunity to meet as a group for the well-developed central programme of professional studies which models best practice in teaching and learning. The generic training is enhanced by sessions led by external specialists and experienced practitioners from partnership schools. In addition, subject training has been enriched this year by five days entitlement to support, from a partnership lead specialist, for every trainee. This complements and builds on the subject support already provided by school-based mentors.

17. The deployment of available resources to ensure trainees achieve their potential is good. A key priority in the transfer of the lead school was to secure the financial viability of the partnership and this has been successful. A high proportion of funding is devolved to support school-based training. Central training is operated cost-effectively using partner schools as a venue. Shared expertise is deployed from across the range of schools to support the effective delivery of professional studies. Trainees are loaned laptops and provided with relevant texts which help them to improve their teaching practice. Additional funding is available to all trainees as personal bursaries for subject specific literature, or for activities to improve their subject knowledge for teaching. Trainees are accountable for reflecting on the impact of this resource through an assignment which forms part of the final assessment. The provider has rightly identified the need to develop further trainees' access to on-line learning materials.

18. The overall quality of provision across the partnership is good. The training manager, mentors and professional tutors meet regularly to share good practice. There is confidence in the training and a shared sense of purpose. The good

communications between the centre and the partnership schools are valued. The good working relationships established support effective responses to the needs of both trainees and their trainers. Joint observations between the teacher trainers across the partnership are improving the consistency of practice and the quality of feedback to trainees. Inspectors' judgements are in line with overall evaluations of trainee performance. The providers' judgements at the grade boundaries are secure.

19. The partnerships' response to ensuring equality of opportunity is good. Trainees feel well-supported and confident that, if concerns are raised, the action taken will be rapid and effective. Personalisation is a key feature of the training. The programme of professional studies pays due regard to the promotion of equality and diversity. External specialists lead sessions on inclusion. Assignments are designed to develop trainees' awareness of the skills needed; for example, in working with students with English as an additional language. As a result, trainees have a good understanding of related issues but not all of them have the opportunity to practise these skills in their lessons.

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

20. The partnership has the capacity to secure good and improving outcomes for trainees. During a period of change, involving the transfer of lead school responsibilities, access to good quality training has been sustained and this has enabled the majority of trainees to meet the Standards to at least a good level by the end of their programme.

21. The success of the training is underpinned by a strong and collegiate approach, in a partnership that is valued by headteachers for the good contribution it makes to recruitment and workforce development in local schools. Course leadership is effective and responsive. The recently formed steering group is taking an increasingly strategic overview to secure the long term future of the provision. There is scope to develop this function further; for example, in the longer term planning to meet proposals for partnership expansion and the consideration of management arrangements to meet the needs of any planned change.

22. All stakeholders are involved in the evaluation of provision. Contributions are gathered in a variety of ways which include regular meetings with provider representatives. Feedback from trainees and their mentors is used to shape improvements; for example, in the design of course documentation, improved access for trainees to subject specialist support and proposals to develop the contact between school-based mentors and subject tutors. The small scale of the partnership, the detailed knowledge of partnership schools, and the good communication facilitated by the training manager ensures that feedback is sought and action taken. Further plans aim to develop the approaches to gathering mentors and employers' views and to improve the range of quantitative data available to support self-evaluation and planning for improvement. Nevertheless, self-evaluation is open and honest. Improvement plans set realistic and achievable targets but these

are yet to be linked sufficiently to measurable success criteria and outcomes for trainees.

23. Provision takes good account of national issues. As a result, trainees are well-informed for example, about 14-19 developments and the implications of the Rose review of early reading in the context of secondary education. At local level, the training is effective in meeting the needs of key partners. The majority of trainees are successful in gaining employment in local schools. Many former trainees enhance the training, and the workforce development in their employing schools, by acting as mentors. A number of them gain rapid promotion beyond the newly qualified phase.

24. Prompt action is taken to address weaknesses identified; for example, by extending trainees' entitlement to subject specific guidance through the appointment of lead subject tutors to work with trainees across the partnership. Furthermore, joint observations of trainees' teaching practice have helped trainers to improve the consistency of feedback to trainees and to moderate judgements made on trainee progress. Changes to arrangements for external assessment and moderation for this year are giving greater accountability to professional tutors. Schools are increasingly required to participate in assessment, cross-marking and quality assurance of outcomes for trainees. An external partner provides interim feedback on internal assessment and actions points are used appropriately to improve assessor competence and confidence in the role. Steps are being taken to ensure new arrangements to secure the requirement for external moderation and external reporting on the quality of final assessments are in place.

25. Overall, the training manager is very effective in taking action in response to feedback to ensure the trainees have access to good quality training that is well-organised and managed. As a result, the partnership agreement has been revised to set out the trainees' entitlement, track accountability and clarify key roles and responsibilities. Sustaining and improving the good quality outcomes are central to the ethos of the provision. Action plans identify key priorities and tasks which are successful in bringing about improvement. In order to bring about a faster rate of improvement, the links between self-evaluation and improvement plans need to be secured in more sharply focused and quantifiable statements, related to outcomes for trainees and against which progress can be measured. Nevertheless, the provider has demonstrated good capacity to improve.

## Summary of inspection grades<sup>1</sup>

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?	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

		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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

Any complaints about the inspection or the reports should be made following the procedure set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)