

Birmingham City University

Seacole Building, Westbourne Road, Birmingham, West Midlands B15 3TN

Inspection dates

22 to 25 May 2023

Inspection judgements

	Primary age-phase	Secondary age-phase
Overall effectiveness	Good	Good
The quality of education and training	Good	Good
Leadership and management	Good	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement	Requires improvement

What is it like to be a trainee at this ITE provider?

Leaders have reviewed the ITE programme through the lens of a trainee teacher. They have ensured that the centre- and placement-based training links together cohesively. This carefully designed curriculum helps trainees to develop a reflective approach that stands them in good stead for the rigours of the profession.

In most areas, leaders have designed a coherent curriculum. It sets out the important knowledge trainees need to know, remember and use to support their emerging professional practice. Trainees learn the nuance and detail of successful classroom practice, alongside the subject pedagogical knowledge needed to teach each subject effectively. They learn how to manage pupils' behaviour and their crucial role in safeguarding pupils and promoting pupils' mental and physical health. Primary-phase trainees learn how to teach early reading well, including how to teach phonics. Trainees receive clear guidance that helps them to understand how to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Leaders, tutors and mentors work together effectively and harmoniously across the partnership to support and develop trainees. Steps to enhance the quality of communication, such as introducing electronic systems to share information between stakeholders, have worked well. One mentor summed this up, saying, 'I have found the organisation to be highly organised and fully supportive of me in this role. The documentation is clear and easy to use.'

Leaders are proud that the trainee body reflects the diversity of the region they serve. They have fostered a supportive and inclusive culture across all settings. Most trainees feel well supported, and leaders are alert to any emerging pastoral needs. Leaders are quick to take steps to provide individual trainees with the support they need to give them the best chance of being successful.

Information about this ITE provider

- In the 2022/23 academic year, the partnership had 1,056 trainees over two phases: primary and secondary.
- In 2022/23, the partnership trained a total of 811 trainees in the primary age-phase. This figure included 568 undergraduate trainees on the Bachelor of Arts with qualified teacher status (QTS) route, in primary and early years education, covering either the three to seven or five to 11 age ranges. There were 184 full-time and 13 part-time trainees studying towards a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) on either the core or School Direct routes. PGCE trainees trained in either the three to seven or five to 11 age ranges. There were also 46 trainees on specialist full-time PGCE primary age-phase routes in either mathematics, physical education or SEND.
- In the secondary age-phase, there were 245 trainees in 2022/23. This included 96 undergraduate trainees on the following programmes: Bachelor of Arts with QTS in physical education, Bachelor of Science with QTS in computing and Bachelor of Science with QTS in secondary science (biology). There were also 149 trainees following the core PGCE programmes and the PGCE School Direct routes. The PGCE subjects offered in 2022/23 were: art and design, biology, business studies, chemistry, computing, design and technology, drama, English, geography, health and social care, history, mathematics, modern foreign languages, music, psychology, physical education, physics and religious education and sociology.
- In 2022/23, there were nine primary age-phase and 10 secondary age-phase assessment-only candidates.
- The provider works with a wide range of schools, colleges and other settings. Most of these partners are inspected by Ofsted. In 2022/23, those settings that had been graded by Ofsted spanned the full range of judgements, including outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate.
- Overall, the partnership works with 17 School Direct partners across the primary and secondary age-phases. These partners span eight local authorities.
- In the primary phase, the partnership works with 390 schools, covering 44 local authorities.
- In the secondary phase, the partnership works with 128 schools, spanning 26 local authorities.

Information about this inspection

- When Birmingham City University was last inspected by Ofsted in May 2022, both the primary and secondary phases were judged as requires improvement.

- This inspection was carried out by nine of His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two Ofsted Inspectors (OIs).
- During the inspection, inspectors met with senior leaders, heads of department, course coordinators, course tutors, link tutors, quality assurance leaders, university admissions staff, assessment-only route leaders and members of the strategic partnership committees across both the primary and secondary phases. Inspectors spoke with professional mentors, subject mentors, headteachers and senior leaders in partner schools.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of information, including documentation relating to the ITE curriculum in both phases; documentation in relation to safeguarding arrangements; audits of the provider's compliance with the Department for Education's (DfE) ITT criteria and supporting information; training materials from across all phases; assessment materials; and course handbooks.
- In the primary phase, inspectors spoke with 113 trainees, 10 early career teachers (ECTs) and 52 mentors. Inspectors made 13 on-site visits to schools and spoke face to face or remotely with trainees from a total of 53 schools.
- In the secondary phase, inspectors spoke with 61 trainees, 25 ECTs and 51 mentors. Inspectors made 14 on-site visits to schools and spoke face to face or remotely with trainees from a total of 53 schools.
- In the primary phase, inspectors completed focused reviews in art and design, early reading, English, geography, history, mathematics, modern foreign languages, physical education and science.
- In the secondary phase, inspectors carried out focused reviews in art and design, design and technology, English, geography, history, mathematics, music, physical education and science.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the Ofsted surveys for staff and trainees that were completed during the inspection.

Primary phase report

What works well in the primary phase and what needs to be done better?

Leaders have developed an ambitious curriculum. It is underpinned by the DfE's core content framework (CCF) but extends well beyond this. For example, leaders have considered how the curriculum can help prepare trainees to lead subjects in school. The centre-based training is built around professional studies and subject-specific training. These two elements are intrinsically linked. What trainees learn in professional studies, is then explored further through subject-specific lenses. This deepens trainees' learning effectively.

Subject leaders and tutors are experts in their field and have experience of the primary phase. They have carefully considered curriculum content and sequencing to make sure that trainees learn the right things in the right order. In doing so, they have put relevant educational research at the heart of the curriculum. As a result, trainees develop their knowledge and skills well over time. Trainees are well prepared for their school-based placements.

The subject-specific element of the training is equally strong across all subjects. Leaders have made sure that trainees learn about systematic synthetic phonics early on in the course. This gives trainees a secure grounding in how to teach pupils at the early stages of learning to read prior to their first placement. In addition, trainees benefit from high-quality training linked to meeting the wider needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language. Trainees say this gives them a 'flying start' when they begin their school-based placements.

The provider works closely with the schools in which trainees are placed. Mentors speak positively about the availability and level of support they receive from the university tutors. This is supplemented by the range of training and support materials that are available on the partnership website. Mentors value this, including the quick response they get if they require any help. This reinforces the effective working relationship between the university and the schools.

Mentors have a clear understanding of the centre-based training and are committed to the partnership. In many instances, feedback from mentors to trainees, alongside the setting of related targets, is precise and supports trainees to develop their teaching. However, in some instances, the feedback and the related targets are not sufficiently pertinent to the trainee's needs and do not draw on centre-based learning.

Trainees are continually assessed as they progress through the curriculum. This feeds into timely formal assessments. The assessment process is multi-layered and checks that trainees understand and grasp the specific building blocks of the curriculum. The assessment process is underpinned by the university's assessment systems, which trainees, mentors and university tutors have full access to.

University tutors make regular checks to ensure that trainees benefit from high-quality school-based placements. These quality assurance systems are becoming embedded and are developing well over time. However, some small pockets of inconsistency remain. Leaders know this and are already taking effective action to ensure that quality assurance systems result in tangible improvements.

Trainees are required to complete and update a wide range of course documentation, which reflects their progress through the ITE curriculum. Trainees value this and understand how it supports their development of subject knowledge and pedagogy. However, at times, trainees find this difficult to manage.

What does the ITE provider need to do to improve the primary phase?

(Information for the provider and appropriate authority)

- In some instances, leaders have not ensured that the feedback and related targets that mentors provide to trainees are of consistently high quality. When this is the case, feedback and targets lack precision and specificity, and are not pertinent to the individual needs of the trainee. Leaders should check and make sure that mentors consistently provide purposeful feedback and set precise targets, which align with the ITE curriculum so that all trainees benefit from high-quality guidance.
- Sometimes trainees find the demands of the documentation they need to complete during the course difficult to manage. This can impact negatively their well-being. Leaders should review the clarity and purpose of course documentation so that it supports trainees' progress through the curriculum, without being over burdensome. This in turn will reduce trainees' workload and support their well-being.

Does the ITE provider's primary phase comply with the ITE compliance criteria?

- The provider meets the DfE statutory compliance criteria.

Secondary phase report

What works well in the secondary phase and what needs to be done better?

In many areas, leaders have created an ambitious curriculum. Skilled subject tutors have thought carefully about what trainees will learn, and when they will learn it. This helps trainees to successfully deepen their knowledge of their subject and reflect on how best to teach it. Subject tutors draw on and make links to pertinent research to help inform and shape the design of the curriculum. Alongside this, leaders have put in place an effective professional studies programme that is closely aligned with the CCF. Through subject sessions, trainees learn how to apply this knowledge in a subject-specific context. However, in a few subjects, the sequence of learning and the key knowledge that trainees should acquire has not been set out clearly. This leads to some trainees not having a secure enough and detailed understanding of the subject they are teaching.

Leaders have established strong relationships with schools across the partnership. Through regular channels of communication, mentors know what trainees learn in their centre-based sessions. Mentors and trainees regularly discuss the 'curriculum map' and how they can apply the knowledge they have learned in centre-based training in their school placements. This builds trainees' confidence as they put their learning into practice.

Leaders provide effective ongoing training to mentors. This defines their role, sets out what is expected of them, explains the centre-based curriculum and details how to best support trainees. Mentors use this training to provide useful feedback to trainees. However, leaders recognise that there is more work to do to ensure mentors consistently set trainees high-quality targets that draw on the centre-based sessions and reflect trainees' current knowledge and skills.

Leaders have strengthened their approach to quality assurance. They undertake regular visits to schools to check on the work of mentors and how they are supporting trainees. Leaders also routinely sample the work of trainees and mentors through the provider's online system to ensure this is up-to-date and follows the course requirements. Placement link tutors work closely with lead mentors in schools. They check the curriculum is being delivered and that all processes are being followed correctly. Leaders share information with the strategic partnership committee which supports and challenges leaders on how the provision could improve. While significant improvements have been made, there remain some inconsistencies in the way quality assurance documentation is completed. This leads to a variable experience for some trainees.

Leaders have ensured that there are effective processes and systems in place to assess trainees. Mentors understand how the provider's assessment tracker should be used and how this aligns with the curriculum key themes and the 'curriculum map'. Where necessary, university staff act quickly to put in place support for those who are not on track. This all helps to make sure that most trainees go on to complete the course and successfully start their first year in teaching.

University tutors and mentors provide trainees with high-quality pastoral support. Trainees value this. Leaders ensure that trainees, regardless of background or disability, can access the curriculum. Leaders are mindful of trainees' workload and do not put unnecessary demands on them. They have considered the purpose and scope of paperwork that trainees are required to complete. Most trainees speak positively about the relationships they have with staff and how they are considerate of their well-being.

What does the ITE provider need to do to improve the secondary phase?

[Information for the provider and appropriate authority]

- In a few subjects, leaders have not set out in sufficient detail the precise subject knowledge that trainees need to know, understand and remember. This means that in these subjects, trainees do not develop a sufficiently detailed understanding of the debates, practices and traditions of the subject they are learning to teach. Leaders should ensure that the ITE curriculum in all subjects sets out the smaller detail of what trainees need to learn so that trainees can draw on this in conjunction with their mentors in their placement settings.
- Leaders have not ensured that the targets mentors and trainees produce collaboratively are of consistently high quality. In some instances, they lack specificity and precision and do not draw on the programme content. Leaders should ensure that all mentors are equipped with the knowledge of the centre- and subject-based training, aligned with a clear understanding of what effective targets look like, so that all trainees benefit from the precise guidance they need to improve.
- Leaders have not fully reviewed the effectiveness of quality assurance systems and processes that they have introduced to monitor the quality of the curriculum. As a result, they do not have a clear enough understanding of the full impact of their work to improve provision for trainees. Leaders should check and refine their quality assurance processes so that they provide a more accurate picture of the quality of provision for trainees, which will in turn support further improvements across the partnership.

Does the ITE provider's secondary phase comply with the ITE compliance criteria?

- The provider meets the DfE statutory compliance criteria.

ITE provider details

Unique reference number	70075
Inspection number	10247725

This inspection was carried out in accordance with the 'Initial teacher education inspection framework and handbook'.

This framework and handbook sets out the statutory basis and framework for initial teacher education (ITE) inspections in England from September 2020.

Type of ITE provider	Higher education institution
Phases provided	Primary Secondary
Date of previous inspection	16 to 19 May 2022

Inspection team

Ian Tustian, Overall lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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Heather Simpson	His Majesty's Inspector
Jane Spilsbury	Ofsted Inspector
Jo Evans	His Majesty's Inspector
Nicola Harwood	Ofsted Inspector
Tim Hill	His Majesty's Inspector

Annex: Placement schools

Inspectors visited the following schools as part of this inspection:

Name	URN	ITE phases
Acocks Green Primary School	139443	Primary
Lea Forest Primary Academy	139003	Primary
Whitehall Nursery & Infant School	104163	Primary
Pheasey Park Farm Primary School and Early Years Centre	147480	Primary
City Road Primary School	146385	Primary
Lozells Junior and Infant School and Nursery	103227	Primary
Nechells Primary E-ACT Academy	138396	Primary
Ward End Primary School	103217	Primary
Paget Primary School	103240	Primary
King David Junior and Infant School	103444	Primary
Hodge Hill Primary School	143869	Primary
Grace Mary Primary	103945	Primary
Sladefield Infant School	103255	Primary
Caludon Castle School	139292	Secondary
Bordesley Green Girls' School & Sixth Form	103493	Secondary
Harborne Academy	136213	Secondary
Erdington Academy	143413	Secondary
Bristnall Hall Academy	139043	Secondary
Holte School	103509	Secondary
Holyhead School	137034	Secondary
Heartlands Academy	135907	Secondary
Plantsbrook School	137053	Secondary
Shenley Academy	135911	Secondary
Joseph Leckie Academy	137830	Secondary
Shireland Collegiate Academy	135170	Secondary
Hodge Hill College	103503	Secondary
Beacon Hill Academy	137705	Secondary

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