

An outstanding partnership's approach: University of Birmingham

URN: 70001

Region: West Midlands

Remit: Schools

Provider background

The [University of Birmingham](#) is a long-established provider of ITE. It offers primary and secondary teacher education courses. Successful trainees gain qualified teacher status (QTS) and are awarded a masters' level Postgraduate Diploma in Education with 120 credits. There are two courses within the primary programme: early years (3–7) and general primary (5–11). At the time of the inspection there were 29 trainees following the early years course and 95 following the general primary course. Both courses are based at the Edgbaston campus.

Brief description

The University of Birmingham was one of only two higher education institutions judged to be outstanding in its primary inspection in 2012/13. The [inspection of May 2013](#) judged leadership and management to be outstanding. Outcomes for trainees are excellent and continue to improve. Partnership schools are fully committed to ensuring that trainees become at least good and often outstanding teachers. Employment rates exceed national averages by some margin and trainees display excellent professional qualities; they are clear that good teaching leads to pupils who are interested in their work, enjoy learning and behave well.

This is one of two examples for the University of Birmingham's ITE provision.

The good practice in detail

Two aspects of the partnership's work stand out when looking at both the outcomes for trainees and the pupils they teach.

- The partnership's clear systems of accurately assessing the strengths of individual trainees and measuring how well they exceed the [Teachers' Standards](#).

- Trainees' clear view that children, regardless of their ability, should learn well, achieve their potential and enjoy school.

Trainees' promotion of good behaviour is a particularly strong feature; their pupils want to learn and enjoy school. This is because the professional studies element of the training strengthens both trainees' confidence and competence in supporting disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEND) and focuses on promoting good behaviour.

Meeting and exceeding the Teachers' Standards

The partnership is crystal clear about the strengths of each individual trainee from the beginning to the end of their training.

Information gained at the interview stage feeds directly into the training and ensures that trainees get off to a flying start. Trainees' development is then further enhanced through a series of very well-organised audits which help trainees and trainers, including school-based mentors and, in mathematics, peer buddies, see each trainee as an individual. This in turn provides the basis for the highly personalised support trainees receive.



This can be seen in the following example.

- Two trainees struggled initially with mathematical subject knowledge and pedagogy.
- As a result of the highly personalised support, they became clear in their understanding of mathematical concepts and their teaching and the learning of their pupils improved markedly.
- They provided greater levels of challenge to their pupils, ensuring the use of correct vocabulary and terminology in their discussions and responses.
- Both trainees were on target to exceed the Teachers' Standards at an outstanding level.

The success of this support is evident in the good or outstanding progress trainees make, including those who for whatever reason experience difficulties.

This high-quality personalised support also enables all trainees to become at least good teachers with the majority exceeding the Teachers' Standards at an outstanding level by the end of their training.

Professional studies

Trainees understand the 'how and why' of teaching and learning, and how to promote good behaviour. This is because assignments and directed tasks make excellent links between educational theory and classroom practice.

Begun in university-based sessions, followed through in schools and checked regularly, they introduce trainees very effectively to the principles of formative assessment and enhance their understanding of different pupil groups, including those who are disabled or have special educational needs and those who are more able.

The result is that trainees and newly qualified teachers (NQTs) quickly develop a good understanding of what their pupils can and cannot do, and design effective lessons which meet the differing needs well. The way this training combines ensures that trainees progress from being managers of behaviour into increasingly confident teachers who successfully promote good behaviour for learning in their pupils.

Training for teaching disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs



The primary partnership has SEND as an integral part of both school- and university-based provision with opportunities for trainees to spend their second placement in a special setting. The majority of these opportunities are in mainstream schools with, for example, a speech and language unit or a resource base.

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Specialist tutors are allocated to support both trainees and schools through weekly visits to closely monitor trainees' progress against the Teachers' Standards.

All trainees completed the assessed placement with at least a good grade awarded. Evaluations by both trainees and schools showed trainees' knowledge and understanding of SEND had been extended well. Two trainees undertaking the placements went on to gain employment in special schools.

Classroom management

From the onset, the training focuses on promoting 'behaviour for learning' and encourages trainees to critique theory and policy linked to classroom management.

The first assignment requires trainees to utilise observations of current classroom practice noting how those being observed use their voice in a variety of ways – for example:

- raising or lowering the tone
- using particular phrases or words
- naming pupils
- making use of gestures
- adding actions such as moving towards a particular child.

The assignment also requires them to consider the main issues influencing the way teachers promote good behaviour. This enables trainees to improve their own practice by thorough reflection and subsequent analysis of whole-school policy and classroom management.

The extract below, taken from a former trainee’s work, exemplifies the programme’s successful blend of appropriate research-based literature linked to relevant classroom practice:

‘The classroom teacher adopts an extremely positive teaching approach, by focusing on the desired behaviour and effectively using corrective language. When teachers changed their directional language, their corrective language became more positive. For example, ‘Can everybody sit as nicely as this table?’ instead of ‘You are not sitting as nicely as this table’ works better.’

This approach has resulted in 70% of trainees being awarded an outstanding grade at the end of their programme because their skills in promoting good behaviour were enhanced.

Subject knowledge

Trainees’ subject knowledge is strengthened so that different areas of the curriculum can be linked in meaningful ways.

Thematic weeks involve trainees finding significant links across all



subjects, including information and communication technology (ICT).

These prepare trainees well to teach, depending on their chosen age phase, the National Curriculum or the Early Years Foundation Stage.

This example illustrates this approach.

- One NQT provided her Year 3 pupils with information from a chocolate manufacturer and challenged her class to create a new item of confectionary.
- Following the teacher's input, the pupils from a wide-range of abilities, successfully found different combinations of ingredients adding up to 1000g.
- The teacher was able to use her incisive knowledge of her pupils to re-shape questions to ensure that those who had struggled achieved success.

Clear guidance for schools

Guidance is given to schools about what is expected of trainees and school-based mentors.

- An easy-to-use website provides tutors, school-based mentors and trainees with good access to a range of handbooks, forms and guidance.
- These are updated regularly based on feedback from stakeholders regarding their usability.
- School-based mentors appreciate opportunities such as these. As one reported, 'I always feel valued as a mentor by your team.'

A good example of the guidance given, and how school-based mentors contribute, is shown in part of the Early Reading Audit.

- Trainees are observed teaching phonics each term, after which they receive formal feedback, including subject-specific guidance.
- However, the standard lesson observation comment sheet was not a suitable vehicle for recording phonics owing to differences in the way the teaching of this aspect is organised in different schools.
- For example, sessions may be taught to a smaller group of children rather than the whole class.
- As a result of feedback, a form specifically for phonics was designed by the English tutor and further revised in the light of comments from school-based mentors.

A sample of this is shown below.

When observing the teaching of phonics, strengths and areas for development in trainees' subject and pedagogic knowledge should be noted and discussed with the trainee. Trainees should:

- know appropriate use of letter names and letter sounds
- pronounce phonemes correctly ('pure' sound without schwa/'er')
- be able to identify the phonemes in a word and the graphemes which represent them
- know that one phoneme can be represented by a number of graphemes (for example, ee / ea / e / e_e / y / ie)
- know that a grapheme can represent more than one phoneme (for example, a in ant / was / father / water / any)
- know the difference in a digraph (one phoneme, for example, sh / ch / th) and a blend (more than one phoneme, for example, br / st / nd)
- know the high frequency words, including those which are decodable and those which are 'tricky words' (phonically irregular)
- use appropriate terminology with confidence (for example, digraph, long vowel phoneme).

Following further feedback, a new lesson observation comment sheet was designed specifically for use in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Both observation sheets have been well received with some schools using them for their own internal observations and continuing professional development. In addition, trainees found regular phonics subject-specific observations and feedback very helpful. Trainees report high levels of confidence and competence in the teaching of early reading in the end-of-year English training evaluations.

If you would like to discuss the good practice highlighted in this example, please contact Dr Christine Szwed at the School of Education at c.a.szwed@bham.ac.uk.

The good practice case studies that Ofsted publishes highlight specific examples of practice that providers of education, learning and children's services have used to achieve successful outcomes.

For education, the case studies do not recommend a single particular approach to teaching and learning. Ofsted has no preferred lesson structure or teaching style. We showcase and share a wide range of approaches that providers have found work well for them in achieving good outcomes for children, young people and learners.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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