

Plymouth Marjon University

Address: Plymouth Marjon University, Derriford Road, Plymouth, Devon, PL6 8BH

Unique reference number (URN): 70131

Inspection report: 23 March 2026

1. Primary

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	● ● ● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

✓ **Compliance, including safeguarding: standards met**

Expected standard ●

Achievement

Expected standard ●

Across the primary programmes, trainees gain the knowledge and skills they need to teach the national curriculum well. In science, for example, they learn to use models effectively to teach abstract concepts. Trainees understand their role in keeping pupils safe and how to teach pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Regular progress points help leaders monitor trainees' development closely. Professional development tutors act quickly if trainees begin to fall behind. Weekly observations, targets and reflection tasks provide further feedback to help trainees identify their strengths and next steps. However, leaders recognise that the quality of mentor feedback varies. This can affect progress for some trainees.

Trainees receive appropriate support that helps them prepare well for employment. They take part in seminars on application writing, mock interviews and sessions with school leaders. Most trainees, including those with additional needs or those from disadvantaged backgrounds, complete the programme successfully.

Curriculum, teaching and training

Expected standard 

Leaders have designed a carefully structured curriculum that equips primary trainees with the subject-specific and pedagogical knowledge they need to become effective teachers. Important content, such as behaviour management and oracy within intensive training and practice (ITAP), is introduced early to build trainees' confidence before they begin school placements.

Leaders sequence the curriculum into logical steps. In early reading, for example, trainees first learn about early language development before deepening their understanding of phonics. School visits, focused assignments and opportunities to observe expert teachers help trainees apply and refine their knowledge in a range of contexts. School placements give trainees regular chances to apply their centre-based learning, including behaviour management strategies, with growing confidence.

The curriculum is informed by high-quality research. Trainees use this research to shape their practice, such as using oral rehearsal and explicit instruction to support pupils' writing. Staff place a strong emphasis on adapting teaching to meet differing pupil needs. Trainees develop a repertoire of strategies, including scaffolding, to meet the needs of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and pupils facing other barriers to learning.

Specialist pathways broaden and enhance the primary programme. For example, those following the early years route gain valuable experience and understanding through focused placements in early years settings.

Leaders integrate safeguarding training throughout the programme. From open days onwards, trainees receive clear and repeated messages about their duty to keep pupils safe. Quizzes, reflective tasks and placement activities help them develop a secure understanding of statutory requirements and professional expectations.

Leaders provide mentors with a dedicated portal, bespoke training and regular communication. Most trainees benefit from effective mentoring. However, some mentors do not have a sufficiently deep enough understanding of the curriculum, including parts of ITAP. This limits how quickly some trainees can build and apply their knowledge on placement.

Weekly observations play a central role in supporting the quality and accuracy of assessments. Trainees generally receive clear, targeted feedback that identifies what is working well and what needs to improve. Trainees and mentors value university quality assurance tutor visits, which help link academic learning with practice in schools.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders and staff foster a welcoming and inclusive culture. Trainees feel valued and able to share their needs without fear of judgement. This begins before recruitment and continues through their induction and across the programme. Trainees describe feeling well supported and confident that staff will respond promptly when they seek help.

Professional development tutors (PDTs) know trainees well. Regular one-to-one meetings help them identify emerging needs and put tailored support in place. When trainees require specialist assessments, staff work closely with the university's Disability and Inclusion Advice Service to arrange assessments or provide assistive technology. Clear signposting to internal services, such as counselling, helps reduce trainees' barriers to wellbeing.

Staff typically make adaptations promptly. PDTs work with school mentors to plan reasonable adjustments, including movement breaks and accessibility arrangements. They share pastoral needs, such as caring responsibilities, sensitively with placement schools so that flexible arrangements can be made.

Leaders have recently introduced individual learning and medical plans to formalise support for trainees with additional needs. Although early in development, these plans are beginning to strengthen the consistency and clarity of support across the partnership.

Leadership

Expected standard 

Leaders articulate a clear and coherent vision rooted in social equity and a commitment to preparing 'teachers for tomorrow'. This vision is shared across the partnership. Leaders use the local context well to shape a curriculum that equips trainees for long-term success.

Relationships across the partnership are consistently positive. Partner schools regard Plymouth Marjon University as their 'provider of choice'. School-based mentors value the training and ongoing support they receive. Bespoke resources, such as structured conversation bookmark prompts, help mentors guide trainees' progress effectively.

Leaders are reflective. Quality assurance processes help them review what the programme does well and what needs to improve. For example, since the previous inspection, leaders have restructured the curriculum so that trainees now receive stronger input across all foundation subjects, including from the early years onwards. However, leaders recognise that oversight of the wide ranging support systems they offer is not yet fully coherent, which limits how precisely they can evaluate impact.

Leaders ensure that teacher educators have the knowledge and skills to teach their subjects and phases. Many undertake masters-level qualifications to enhance their teaching and academic practice. Staff have regular opportunities to share expertise and knowledge of the curriculum. Leaders observe new teacher educators to check the quality of instruction.

Those responsible for oversight ensure that the curriculum meets the Department for Education compliance requirements, including statutory safer recruitment practices. Staff and trainees feel safe and confident to report concerns, contributing to an effective safeguarding culture.

Staff are unanimously proud to work at this provider. They describe a culture of care, high expectations and values driven leadership. Staff feel well supported in their roles and benefit from plentiful opportunities for professional learning and sharing of expertise.

Professional behaviours, personal development and wellbeing Expected standard

Pastoral support is a notable strength. Trainees benefit from readily available guidance and a shared sense of community. Many make regular use of The Chaplaincy Centre to connect with peers and seek support. Trainees value open communication channels that allow them to reflect and seek help when needed. Feedback mechanisms, including the programme voice panel, give leaders a clear understanding of trainees’ experiences. They use it to make timely and ongoing changes to support wellbeing.

Leaders set clear expectations for trainees’ professional behaviours, attendance and engagement. Explicit teaching and a dedicated professional behaviour conference reinforce these expectations. In centre-based training and on school placements, trainees demonstrate the behaviours expected of teachers with maturity. On rare occasions when expectations fall short, leaders intervene promptly through the cause for concern process.

Trainees receive valuable guidance on managing their time and workload. They receive advance notice of upcoming events and recommendations on how to prioritise tasks. This prepares them well for the realities of becoming a teacher. Trainees report no bullying, harassment or discrimination. They trust leaders to respond effectively if concerns of unprofessional behaviour arise.

Next steps

Leaders should develop their oversight of the wide-ranging support systems they offer, systematically evaluating them and using what they learn to drive further improvements.

Leaders should strengthen mentoring further, ensuring that mentors have a deep understanding of the curriculum and their role in supporting trainees to secure and apply their learning.

Leaders should ensure that trainees consistently receive the high-quality feedback they need to quickly make any necessary improvements to their teaching.

2. Secondary

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Compliance, including safeguarding: standards met

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Throughout the course, trainees develop the knowledge and skills they need to be successful classroom practitioners. They learn about the evidence underpinning different approaches to managing behaviour and to teaching their specific subjects.

Trainees understand their responsibility for safeguarding as teachers. They take their professional responsibilities such as being a form tutor and a teacher of personal, social and health education seriously.

Trainees generally reflect on their teaching, drawing on their own knowledge and the expertise of staff who support them. They know what is going well. Sometimes mentors do not enable trainees to identify and act on priorities for improvement promptly. When this is the case, it inhibits trainees from developing as rapidly as leaders intend.

Most trainees complete their programme and feel well prepared for the realities of teaching. School leaders speak highly of the readiness to teach of those who trained at the provider.

Curriculum, teaching and training

Expected standard 

The ITE curriculum is ambitious and coherent. It prepares trainees with the subject knowledge and teaching skills they need to teach effectively. The curriculum enables trainees to build on their emerging knowledge and skills over time, with plentiful opportunities to apply what they are learning in practice.

The curriculum is underpinned by a wide range of high-quality research about teaching generally, specific subject areas and approaches to behaviour management. Trainees know how to make evidence-informed decisions about what approaches to take with pupils.

Intensive training and practice (ITAP) strengthens trainees' ability to link evidence to their classroom practice, taking account of the local context and challenges. However, some mentors do not know enough about their role in ITAP to enable trainees to consolidate this on school placements.

Trainees gain a thorough understanding of the different barriers that pupils may face, such as having a special educational need and/or disability (SEND). They learn how to remove barriers for pupils and how to work with other professionals to secure support when needed. Trainees on the undergraduate route value what they learn from undertaking a SEND specific school placement.

Trainees learn about their wider professional duties. For instance, they know their responsibilities for keeping children safe through effective supervision. Trainees gain a qualification in personal, social and health education which deepens their understanding of the ways in which they can help pupils to stay safe and to thrive.

Teacher educators are experts in their field. They consider how trainee subject-knowledge audits can be used to adapt the curriculum, addressing common gaps or misconceptions. Trainees value how teacher educators deliver the key knowledge and teaching skills in small steps building towards teaching sequences. Trainees say this provides them with the confidence and skills they need to be prepared to teach in their subject.

Mentors typically understand how to enact their roles, including in their subject. They get detailed and timely information about what is taught in the ITE curriculum, followed up by helpful reminders such as mentoring bookmarks and weekly prompts. This enables most mentors to support trainees to apply and deepen their centre-based learning when on placements in school.

Typically, trainees receive developmental feedback which helps them progress by precisely identifying what they are doing well and what could be even better. On occasion, for some trainees, the quality of feedback is not as effective.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Trainees feel welcome and valued, describing “holding hands” together as a team. Leaders ensure that there is unity across different routes into teaching. For instance, they thoughtfully group trainees so that they develop a sense of belonging on the course, and within the wider profession.

Leaders encourage trainees to share any additional needs they have from the outset of the course. Adjustments are put in place with the involvement of trainees. These are particularly helpful to trainees who are balancing commitments, such as parents and carers, with their course. Trainees typically feel that their needs are met. Some of the approaches to reducing barriers for trainees are newly in place. This means that trainees do not consistently benefit from additional support that is timely and bespoke to their needs.

Leaders are aware of potential barriers to learning that some trainees might face. The resources trainees need to use throughout the course are designed to be as accessible as possible for those with additional needs. Extra funding is provided for trainees who need it

so that they can access the same opportunities as their peers such as gaining additional sports coaching qualifications.

Leadership

Expected standard 

Leaders balance what is in the best interests of trainees, what serves the local education sectors needs and the overall vision and values of the university carefully. They know the strengths within their provision, and also what needs to develop further including in support of the core mission of reducing social disadvantage. Trainees who come from areas of deprivation themselves typically achieve highly.

Those responsible for oversight assure themselves over the quality of provision, including that relevant statutory duties are met. The university measures the impact of their work to improve, for instance on areas such as reducing workload and efficiency. However, some changes are in their infancy and there has not been a strategic approach to evaluation across all aspects of the provision.

Extensive on-going professional learning supports most of those who teach, mentor and support trainees to develop their expertise and carry out their roles effectively. However, sometimes mentoring does not seamlessly integrate school and centre-based learning or provide precise developmental feedback to trainees.

The curriculum meets the requirements set out by the Department for Education. Suitable recruitment checks are carried out to ascertain that trainees are suitable to work with children.

Staff who work for, or in partnership with, the university feel that their views are sought and valued. They recognise the way that leaders have sought to reduce workload burden. Clear communication from the provider helps staff to feel well prepared to support trainees. Staff have confidence that bullying or harassment is not tolerated by leaders.

Professional behaviours, personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Trainees typically get the support they need to thrive. Communication between school-based placements and the university ensure that concerns about trainees can be identified and addressed quickly. Trainees feel that staff at Plymouth Marjon University 'place the human at the heart' of what they do.

Leaders support trainees to meet the high expectations of their professional behaviours both in and out of school, including online activities.

Trainees attend well, both for centre-based and school-based elements of the course. They understand the expectations of them as professionals if they are absent.

Where trainees encounter barriers to their learning, leaders are swift, empathetic and resourceful in resolving difficulties. This is life-changing for some trainees. However, this approach is not systematically reviewed to ensure that all trainees can access the support they need, or to identify and proactively minimise the risk of barriers arising.

Trainees learn how to manage the competing pressures associated with teaching, and of the importance of maintaining a positive work-life balance.

Trainees feel able to raise any concerns they may have with regard to the conduct of their peers and the staff who they work with. Trainees are confident that bullying or harassment would not be tolerated.

Next steps

Leaders should ensure that there is seamless integration between the taught elements of the curriculum and teaching practice, particularly for intensive training and practice, so trainees receive timely opportunities to practise and refine their teaching.

Leaders should ensure that mentors provide trainees with the feedback and guidance they need to quickly bring about improvements in their teaching.

Leaders should further develop their systematic evaluation of all aspects of the provision so that they can identify trends and issues so that they can intervene early and improve provision coherently.

What it's like to be a trainee at this provider

‘A small university with a big heart’ is what trainees experience on their teacher training programmes. They feel welcome and gain a deep sense of belonging from the outset. Trainees develop supportive and long-lasting peer networks. Therefore, they continue to contribute to a professional teaching community as they progress through their careers. Current, and previous trainees, are extremely positive about their experiences of Plymouth Marjon University.

Trainees describe a positive culture of openness where they can raise questions and share any worries they may have. Trainees build trusting relationships with the teacher educators that support them. This helps them to feel safe, both on their training programme and when on school placements.

Leaders have a secure understanding of trainees' barriers to learning, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They take effective steps to reduce these at the beginning of the training programme, and then respond quickly to any changing or emerging needs. Therefore, trainees are well supported to flourish and be successful.

Trainees typically learn what they need to become successful early career teachers across the programme. Dedicated teacher educators use their expertise to prepare trainees well to practise, with confidence, what they learn in the classroom. For example, trainees are well equipped to use their knowledge of adaptive teaching, and evidence based approaches to managing behaviour, to support pupils well in the classroom. The curriculum also ensures trainees develop a secure understanding of their responsibilities for safeguarding children and how to maintain high levels of professionalism.

Trainees benefit from the provider's collaborative partnerships with educational organisations. They receive broad and helpful experiences throughout their programmes. For example, how to support the needs of pupils in areas of social disadvantage, coastal deprivation or isolation. As a result, trainees are well prepared to teach in their local area and beyond.

About this inspection

Trainees in the primary and secondary phases are either undertaking an undergraduate or postgraduate route. The postgraduate route is offered in partnership with 4 training partners.

There are 2 pathways on the undergraduate primary route: undergraduate primary general and undergraduate primary early years foundation stage (EYFS).

There are 4 pathways on the PGCE postgraduate primary route: primary general, primary special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), primary early years foundation stage (EYFS) and primary part-time pathway.

In the secondary phase, postgraduate trainees choose a subject area, with 10 currently running. There is the option of a part-time pathway. Undergraduate trainees study a Bachelor of Education in science, maths or physical education.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMI.

Inspectors spoke with leaders of the 4 training partners, the academic director of education, the dean of faculty, and the programme leads for primary and secondary. They also met with those responsible for compliance and members of the executive leadership board.

Inspectors visited 18 schools: 11 primary and 7 secondary (including one remote visit).

During the inspection, inspectors also spoke with numerous staff, trainees, professional tutors and school mentors.

Inspectors spoke to primary- and secondary-trained early career teachers (ECT) who had completed a course at this provider over the past 2 years.

Overall lead inspector:
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Primary phase lead inspector:
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Secondary phase lead inspector:
Sarah Favager-Dalton, His Majesty's Inspector

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Lydia Pride, His Majesty's Inspector
Donna Briggs, His Majesty's Inspector
Ben Jordan, His Majesty's Inspector
Jason Edge, His Majesty's Inspector
Emily Henry, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 23 March 2026

Number of partners and trainees

Education phase	Number of training partners / partner colleges	Number of trainees
Primary	3	223
Secondary	2	145

Our grades explained

Exceptional 

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other providers can learn from it.

Strong standard 

The provider reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard ●

The provider is fulfilling the expected standard of training. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention ●

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement ●

The provider needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of training.

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