

# University College Plymouth St Mark and St John

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Derriford Road  
Plymouth  
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A primary initial teacher training  
Short inspection report  
2007/08

Managing inspector  
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## Introduction

The University College of Saint Mark and Saint John works in partnership with 250 schools to provide primary initial teacher education (ITE) courses. It offers three-year undergraduate Primary and Early Years programmes, leading to a Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree and a one-year post graduate programme, which leads to a post graduate certificate of education (PGCE). Post graduate trainees can specialise in a modern foreign language (MFL). At the time of the inspection there were 491 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: 2

The overall quality of training is at least good.

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

## Key strengths

- the leadership and management of primary ITE which has brought about continued improvement
- the very good collaboration between staff which results in strong cohesion across and within courses
- the high quality of the centre-based training
- the clear focus on the Standards
- the positive responsiveness to feedback and to new developments in primary education
- the selection and recruitment procedures that are beginning to address some identified weaknesses in retention.

## Points for action

- increasing trainees' confidence in teaching pupils with English as an additional language and improve their understanding of cultural diversity.

## Points for consideration

- sharpening the focus of subject action plans so that they identify specific success criteria which link precisely to trainees' subject teaching
- ensuring that the support given to trainees in schools is consistently good.

## The quality of training

1. The strengths of the training have been maintained and added to since the last inspection, and new courses have been developed for both the BEd and PGCE routes. The content and structure of these new courses have been carefully designed in collaboration with partnership schools. The main strengths are the high quality of the centre-based training, the way in which all elements of the training combine together, the clear focus on the Standards, and the responsiveness of the university college to new developments in primary education. Trainees are placed in school environments that enable them to develop their teaching skills and extend their knowledge and understanding of the teaching profession.
2. The quality of the centre-based training remains very good. In English, mathematics and science, the well-planned courses are taught by very well qualified tutors who have a commitment and passion for their subjects. The trainees respond with enthusiasm and find the courses challenging and inspiring. They take responsibility for increasing their subject knowledge, which is carefully audited by the university college, and value the support they are given by tutors and the very good resources that are available. The computer-based systems, to which they have easy access, are particularly helpful in enabling them to pursue personal goals in their learning.
3. All curriculum subjects are covered in the training. As a result, trainees are particularly secure in their knowledge of the National Curriculum and the Curriculum Framework for the Foundation Stage. The tutors work together very effectively to make sure that the training is coherent. Imaginative links are made between subjects encouraging trainees to plan cross-curricular themes in line with Excellence and Enjoyment and the Primary National Strategy.
4. Aspects of inclusion have been carefully mapped out so that they form coherent strands across modules. This has been particularly successful in ensuring that the provision for gifted and talented pupils, and for those with special educational needs, is considered frequently. New opportunities for all trainees to visit special schools and for some to experience a special school placement have increased their understanding of special educational needs. The partnership has worked successfully to weave strands from the Every Child Matters agenda into the training. However, cultural diversity and provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language are strands that are not yet sufficiently clear or included often enough. As a result, trainees are not confident in these areas.
5. The training makes strong connections between theory and practice. School-based tasks and assignments are well linked to centre-based training. However, while the school-based training has many strengths, there is too much variation and some trainees do not get the support they need from every placement. School-based training is particularly well developed in the Early Years BEd course.
6. The Standards are clearly articulated in every aspect of the training. For example, lesson observations and assignments are referenced to the Standards. As a

result, trainees become very familiar with them and are able to evaluate accurately their progress towards achieving them.

7. The training is responsive to new developments in primary education and this is valued by partnership schools. For example, there is an increasing emphasis being placed on the teaching of phonics and early reading skills. The PGCE course with an MFL specialism is making a contribution to this shortage area within primary education, and all postgraduate trainees are receiving some training in MFL before it becomes a compulsory element of the primary curriculum.

## Management and quality assurance

8. Senior management provide very strong leadership. Most aspects identified for improvement in the last inspection have been tackled successfully. The development of new and revised courses has been seized upon as an opportunity to build excellent team working, shared vision, good communication and consistently effective leadership and management at all levels. Roles and responsibilities are very clear and there is an increasingly successful emphasis on collegiate and personal responsibility. This is resulting in very good cohesion across and within courses and increasingly high confidence and satisfaction rates amongst newly qualified teachers.

9. The university college knows its trainee teachers very well and this good relationship begins at the selection and recruitment stages. The courses are increasingly popular and the reputation of the university college has improved in recent years. This has enabled the university college to be more rigorous in the criteria for selection and recruit more academically able trainees. Materials and information provided prior to application are informative, interesting and inviting. School and university college-based colleagues work together to ensure that varied, interesting and well organised interview procedures give candidates good opportunities to demonstrate a range of experience, attitudes and skills. Rigorous systems are in place to ensure that essential identity, qualification and criminal records bureau checks are carried out efficiently.

10. Good use is made of interview tasks to identify areas for development and these inform initial individual target setting early in the course. Pre-course activities and suggestions for reading prepare the trainees well. The university college has experienced high drop-out rates in the past although many of these trainees have been redirected into other higher education routes and some have returned as postgraduates. The university college has analysed common causes and identified vulnerable groups. Strategies to support these groups are in place and are resulting in an increase in retention rates.

11. The university college has a strong commitment to widening participation and works hard to recruit, support and retain candidates with additional needs. Despite continuing efforts to recruit trainees from black and minority ethnic communities, the number remains very low. Through some joint work with

Malaysian students, and through the experience that some students have of teaching in France or Spain, the university college is giving trainees some experience of cultural diversity but it is aware that this is an area for further development. The proportion of male trainees is comparatively high and increasing.

12. Partnership arrangements are good and the partnership advisory group played a particularly important role during the development of the new courses. It meets regularly to enable trainers and trainees to review course development. There are clear systems underpinned by very explicit documentation to ensure that all partners understand their roles and responsibilities. The university college's virtual learning environment is increasingly effective in enabling good communication and quick and easy access to a wide range of resources, tutor and peer support.

13. There are good induction and staff development arrangements. The strong collegiate approach ensures that centre-based staff plan and evaluate in teams, sharing and developing expertise. Good training opportunities are provided for school-based staff but there is some variability in the take up of this support. The university college supplements school-based support when necessary and has improved the consistency and quality of link tutors.

14. Systems to monitor and evaluate provision are very thorough. They enable the partnership to have a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development. Good use is made of a wide range of information including regular feedback from trainees and schools, benchmarking data and rigorous evaluation of modules. Weaker areas are identified in the strategic action plans and improvement is well targeted on raising trainees' professional skills and confidence. Subject plans feed well into the overall plan; however, there is scope for identifying specific success criteria which link precisely to trainees' subject teaching. In spite of this, the success of improvement planning can clearly be measured in the rapidly improving trend in most areas of the newly qualified teacher survey.