



Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

Aberystwyth Partnership of Initial Teacher Education

**School of Education, Institute of Arts and Humanities, P5,
Penglais Campus, Aberystwyth University
Aberystwyth
Ceredigion
SY23 3UX**

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by

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and
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This report is also available in Welsh

About Aberystwyth Partnership of Initial Teacher Education

The Aberystwyth Partnership of Initial Teacher Education consists of Aberystwyth University, working in partnership with six lead schools and 59 partnership schools situated broadly across Wales. At the University, the Aberystwyth Partnership of ITE sits within the School of Education.

The partnership provides one programme of ITE with two pathways, accredited by the Education Workforce Council (EWC) from September 2019:

- PGCE Primary with Secondary Enrichment
- PGCE Secondary with Primary Enrichment

Within the Secondary pathway, student teachers can study the following subjects: biology, chemistry, physics, drama, English, geography, history, mathematics, modern foreign languages and Welsh.

The programme is a full-time, one-year course and is offered bilingually.

There are 30 students following the PGCE Primary pathway, of whom eight are taking the course through the medium of Welsh. There are 21 students on the PGCE Secondary pathway with five studying through the medium of Welsh.

Summary

The Aberystwyth Initial Teacher Education Partnership has established a clear vision for its provision that recognises the importance of developing future teachers who are innovative, creative and evidence-informed practitioners. Leaders and staff have made good progress to become research engaged in ITE and to collaborate in research and enquiry nationally and internationally. This work is making an important contribution to building research capacity and evidence across the education sector in Wales.

Since its inception, the partnership has faced notable challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and lower than anticipated student recruitment rates. However, overall, it has been too slow to prioritise important areas of its work requiring improvement. Too much teaching, mentoring and too many of the learning experiences the partnership provides do not support student teachers to make sufficient progress.

The partnership's leadership structures and processes reflect suitably the joint responsibility of the university and its lead partner schools for the programme. However, in practice, partners are unclear about their roles and responsibilities and play a minimal role in ensuring the quality of provision. Communication across the partnership is poor and the role of lead partner schools, in particular, is significantly underdeveloped. This means that the partnership has struggled to deliver the programme as intended. Overall, there is a lack of coherence between the university-based and school-based aspects of the provision. This, coupled with important shortcomings in mentoring and teaching, makes it difficult for students to develop their ability to link theory with practice, and use this knowledge to reflect critically on, and improve, their teaching.

Most student teachers develop strong professional attitudes and a secure understanding of the responsibilities of being a teacher. Their engagement in university taught sessions is good and they value their school experiences. However, in general, difficulties with the location, timing and requirements of school-based learning and challenges with aspects of their academic work have had a negative impact on students' well-being.

Recently, the partnership has implemented quality assurance processes to monitor the quality and consistency of students' experiences in school. However, the execution of these is weak. The partnership has a limited understanding of self-evaluation for improvement and relies heavily on external feedback to make changes and guide decision-making. These are important weaknesses in leadership and management.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve self-evaluation and improvement planning processes so that they identify precisely the aspects of the partnership's work that are most in need of improvement to ensure students' progress
- R2 Strengthen partnership working, including the role of the lead school, and the effectiveness of joint leadership
- R3 Improve the quality of teaching and mentoring across the partnership
- R4 Ensure that the programme provides students with a suitably coherent, integrated and progressive range of experiences that develop their knowledge and skills in sufficient depth and breadth
- R5 Address issues that impact negatively on students' well-being and strengthen the contribution they make to the evaluation and improvement of the programme

What happens next

The partnership will draw up an action plan showing how it will address the recommendations from the inspection. Estyn will re-inspect the provision in approximately one year's time.

Main findings

Learning:

A majority of student teachers make suitable progress during their initial teacher education programme. Generally, progress in their academic studies is stronger than in their school-based experiences, where it is inconsistent. In around a half of cases, student teachers' progress often slows, plateaus or regresses due to weak mentoring in at least one of their school experiences. Consequently, the achievement of a minority is limited. A few students, whom the partnership has judged to be on track to meet the standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), are not secure across all of the standards and are not ready to assume the duties of newly qualified teachers.

Overall, student teachers' progress in learning is stronger on the primary pathway, than on the secondary pathway. Most who are training to become primary teachers have a good awareness of teaching and learning approaches appropriate to the 3 to 11 age range, including a clear understanding of the features of effective provision for younger pupils. They can explain aspects of pedagogical practice successfully, for instance when describing strategies to teach in different areas of learning and experience. A few primary students show a strong awareness of the limitations of

various teaching approaches, and how these are important considerations when planning for pupils' learning.

Many secondary student teachers have secure knowledge of the subjects they are studying to teach. A majority understand the importance of using a blend of teaching approaches and share with their peers useful examples of how they have achieved this when teaching their subject. However, secondary students' learning and progress vary too much between subjects. In general, due to shortcomings in the programme's structure and the content of modules, student teachers do not always develop their knowledge, skills and understanding progressively or systematically.

In taught sessions, most student teachers engage enthusiastically and recall previous learning successfully. A minority ask pertinent questions to further their understanding of subject pedagogy, such as how to make mathematical concepts more accessible to pupils in the secondary age phase. They reflect suitably on their school-based experiences by linking theory with practice, for example when discussing research about different approaches to developing inclusive teaching and learning practices for pupils with additional learning needs.

In general, many student teachers are confident and articulate when sharing their ideas and opinions. A few provide thoughtful responses to topical issues, such as the prominence of religion and faith in the curriculum. They consider how they might manage the different views of parents towards Relationships and Sexuality Education sensitively. A few with advanced critical skills also use their understanding of research to think about how linking learning across subjects can strengthen pupils' understanding of, for example, language and mathematical concepts. However, in a few taught sessions, students receive information passively and do not develop their critical thinking sufficiently.

Students generally develop an appropriate understanding of mandatory curriculum requirements through the taught elements of the programme and their school experiences. By observing and teaching in their non-specialist age phase during their 'enrichment' school experience, many students develop a suitable understanding of the continuum of learning for pupils aged 3 to 16. They become aware of different pedagogical approaches in their non-specialist age phase, such as the importance of play-based learning for younger pupils, or subject-specific pedagogies that enable older pupils to learn successfully.

During these enrichment experiences, a very few primary students develop their knowledge of language progression well, for example through planning sequences of Welsh lessons for pupils in Years 7 and 8. A few secondary students use their knowledge of relevant pedagogies within their subject successfully to develop international languages and humanities' teaching in the primary phase. However, in general, many students do not make sufficient progress during the enrichment experience. This is particularly the case for secondary students, where their teaching tends to be in a narrow aspect of the curriculum, with little opportunity for whole-class teaching.

Many students develop appropriate knowledge of the key features of the Curriculum for Wales, for example planning authentic learning contexts for pupils within and across areas of learning and experience. However, student teachers' understanding

of a purpose-driven curriculum is often not secure and their practice reflects misconceptions, such as the need to plan for one or more of the four purposes in each lesson. These misconceptions are reinforced when school-based mentors and university tutors set them inappropriate developmental targets to do so.

During the programme, a majority of student teachers plan suitably for pupils' progression in a sequence of lessons that draw from schools' medium-term plans or schemes of learning. A very few students use their specialist subject knowledge to suggest curriculum themes. They plan their own innovative units of work that engage and challenge pupils successfully, for example by learning about gothic literature in Year 8 and technical theatre during drama lessons in Year 10. In the very few instances, where students' teaching is particularly effective, they show flexibility when planning in response to pupils' learning needs. However, too often, students do not take good enough account of pupils' prior learning and experiences or consider longer-term learning goals when planning lessons.

Overall, students are conscientious when planning their lessons. When their school mentors give them the autonomy to be creative, many often identify imaginative and interesting contexts for learning and prepare stimulating resources that engage pupils successfully. However, around a half of student teachers do not have a good enough understanding of how to identify clear and relevant objectives and success criteria for pupils' learning. These are often too broad and focus on the activities pupils will complete, rather than what pupils should learn. This limits their ability to assess pupils' progress and means they focus on keeping pupils on task during lessons, rather than monitoring and deepening their learning.

Nearly all student teachers establish positive professional working relationships with pupils and school staff. Many communicate effectively, providing clear instructions and explanations to pupils about their tasks. They manage the learning environment well and set clear expectations for pupils' behaviour. However, a few find it difficult to establish effective classroom routines or manage low-level disruption.

A majority of students develop sound questioning skills, for example to check pupils' understanding, while a very few ask challenging, incisive questions that probe and extend pupils' thinking and use of vocabulary skilfully. However, a minority ask only basic questions that do not encourage pupils to think deeply about their learning or move their learning forward. This is often because they are not clear about the intended learning, or do not think carefully enough about types of questions and questioning techniques, when planning their lessons.

Many student teachers use a suitable range of teaching and learning strategies, appropriate to the lesson content, subject or age phase. However, a few student teachers struggle to maintain a suitable pace to their teaching or structure the learning well enough. As a result, pupils lose interest in their tasks. In addition, a few secondary students do not have sufficiently strong subject knowledge or understanding of effective teaching in their subject. Their repertoire of teaching approaches is too narrow and, consequently, they are not always able to support pupils' learning successfully.

A majority of student teachers do not challenge pupils appropriately in their learning. Commonly, they do not provide sufficient scaffolding for less able pupils or pitch the

learning high enough for those who are more able. This is because they do not use formative assessment strategies sufficiently well. Too often, student teachers' evaluations on their teaching are descriptive and superficial. They rarely consider how well pupils are progressing with their learning or the impact their teaching has on pupils' progress. This makes it difficult for them to plan effectively for pupils' next steps and their own development.

Most students have suitable numeracy and digital skills. Many are good language role models for pupils and use subject terminology appropriately in their teaching. However, a few student teachers' own literacy skills are not strong enough. They make frequent errors in sentence construction and punctuation in their written assignments, and spelling errors when providing written feedback on pupils' work. Overall, student teachers' ability to plan for and support pupils to apply their literacy, numeracy and digital skills across the curriculum is at an early stage of development.

Most students make strong progress in developing their Welsh language skills from their starting points. Students who are new to learning the language participate enthusiastically in taught sessions and are eager to improve their pronunciation and verbal communication skills. Those whose first language is Welsh use a more formal style when appropriate, for example when planning a presentation to school governors on a specific aspect of their work. However, a minority of students, including those with advanced Welsh language capabilities placed in English-medium schools, miss opportunities to develop pupils' Welsh and make limited use of the language when teaching.

In their academic assignments, many students make effective use of a range of appropriate educational texts to support them to consider different pedagogical approaches. They make relevant connections between educational theories and their early experiences in the classroom, for example when providing a critique of constructivist learning theory in a video presentation. A minority of students produce assignments of high quality, where they critique sources robustly, drawing on the wide reading of educational journals, seminal texts and current educational policy. They provide convincing arguments, identifying limitations in others' research and reflect successfully on their own emerging teaching practices and theories of learning. However, a few students have difficulty organising their written responses and communicating their ideas clearly. In addition, they tend to rely too heavily on a few well-known, or dated texts that focus generic approaches to pedagogy, and rarely explore a broad range of publications or relevant contemporary journal articles to deepen their understanding of subject teaching.

Overall, student teachers' critical skills in their assignments and during university taught sessions are stronger than in their school-based evaluations. Only a few student teachers use what they have learned from reading and research to inform and shape their day-to-day classroom practice. Most hardly ever make links between theory and practice to help them reflect on, and develop, their teaching during their school experiences, unless explicitly required to do as part of an assignment.

Well-being and attitudes to learning:

Most student teachers value the helpful professional relationships they have with their tutors and mentors. Many are aware of, and appreciate, the pastoral support

that is available through university and school systems. They feel well supported during their school experience and at university, appreciating the regular contact they have with their tutors and mentors.

A majority of students are developing a suitable understanding of how to manage a healthy work-life balance. They are adapting appropriately to the requirements of the programme and the teaching profession, and building their resilience, including managing workload pressures. Tutors, along with staff in lead schools, provide beneficial opportunities for student teachers to access weekly virtual well-being drop-in sessions or cluster catch-up meetings. However, a minority of students find balancing the demands of preparing to teach and meeting assignment deadlines too challenging. These students often do not feel well supported and this is having a negative impact on their well-being.

At university and in school, many student teachers feel safe and free from verbal and physical abuse. Many feel they are treated fairly and are respected by university and school staff. They understand the impact their own conduct has on pupils' behaviour and are developing an appropriate understanding of the professional responsibilities of being a teacher. Many of them recognise the impact pupils' own well-being has on their ability to learn and are becoming increasingly aware of the range of strategies and approaches schools use to support pupils' emotional, social and behavioural needs.

Overall, most students have a secure understanding of the relevant procedures and requirements for safeguarding children and young people. They apply school policies on health and safety well. After attending relevant professional learning, for example on how to keep pupils safe from the dangers of radicalisation, they understand school safeguarding procedures appropriately.

Many student teachers feel that the partnership is beginning to listen to their views and they believe that they are having an influence on a few important decisions. For example, as a result of feedback, the partnership has recently introduced a beneficial alternative lesson planning template. However, the effects of late notification of school experience placements and long travel times in the first term, coupled with accommodation difficulties and balancing the demands of the programme, have had a negative impact on the resilience and well-being of a minority of students.

Student teacher representatives have recently been appointed as part of the staff-student council. However, most are generally unclear of their role and how to undertake it effectively. Lately, they have discussed the partnership's action plan that addresses aspects of the programme that are affecting student teacher well-being. This has led to a positive change in the school experience placements policy resulting in more timely notification for final school experiences. For many student teachers, this has had a short-term positive impact on their well-being.

In general, student teachers value the opportunities to gain school experience beyond their areas of expertise in a different age phase through the enrichment placement. However, due to the length and timing of this experience mid-way through the programme, a few become unduly anxious and many lack confidence in their teaching skills. As a result, they do not feel adequately prepared to balance

teaching for a higher proportion of the week in their specialist age phase on their final placement, with assignment deadlines.

Most students develop positive professional attitudes in university and in school. In general, their attendance and punctuality are good. They engage well in lectures, sustain concentration, and share their thinking and experiences thoughtfully with their tutors and peers. For example, during 'reflection weeks', student teachers value opportunities to discuss their progress and they talk openly about the aspects of their classroom practice and academic studies that they need to work on. Many engage well with feedback from their tutors and use written feedback suitably to improve on aspects of their academic writing or presentational skills for subsequent assignments. However, a few do not make the improvements necessary, for example to the accuracy of their writing.

During their school experiences, many students develop strong working relationships with their mentors and pupils. They have positive attitudes towards improving their own practice and a professional commitment to seeking out feedback and acting upon advice. Many students reflect appropriately on their own teaching experiences, and work alongside their mentors to set targets for improvement. However, overall, the quality of students' critical reflections is too variable and in the majority of cases they do not consider suitably the impact of their teaching on pupils' progress. In a few instances, improvement targets are repeated several times over the course of a school experience and students do not use them well enough to make enough progress in their teaching.

Many students understand the importance of research and enquiry in developing their teaching. They engage thoughtfully with action research tasks carried out in school and, in the best cases, link these tasks to an aspect of their own teaching that needs strengthening. For example, they investigate whether teaching strategies that capture younger pupils' attention at the start of a lesson help to develop their listening and speaking skills. However, in general, students do not have a secure understanding of how their academic work can support their teaching and as a result miss opportunities to make meaningful improvements to the quality of their practice.

The majority of students take an active part in school life, for example through attending staff meetings or contributing to extra-curricular clubs. On a few occasions, they grasp opportunities to develop their leadership skills, for instance by sharing their expertise willingly with other teachers in curriculum areas. However, a minority miss valuable chances to share their professional learning and engage in school improvement activities alongside colleagues. This is often because students are travelling long distances to and from their school placements.

Teaching and learning experiences:

The partnership has developed a programme that aims to provide students with teaching experiences across primary and secondary phases. However, overall, it does not support student teachers well enough to deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills coherently or progressively. For example, the structure of modules and their content is not planned carefully enough, resulting in too much repetition and discrete inputs. In addition, students in the secondary phase do not

always benefit from well-planned opportunities to develop their subject-specific pedagogy and skills.

The university worked suitably with its partner schools in the original design of the programme. However, lead schools make very few contributions to the delivery and continuing co-construction of the taught course. Generally, partnership schools do not have a good enough understanding of the programme to support students to progress in their learning.

There is a suitable balance between taught content and school experience. Many students feel that the latter provides helpful opportunities to develop their teaching approaches. Early in the programme, in the university taught sessions, the majority of tutors provide students with appropriate input and feedback about lesson planning skills. This enables student teachers to develop their knowledge about planning processes for teaching and learning suitably during this early stage of their development. With tutors' support, the majority consider how to improve their plans, by reflecting on whether the lesson content they have planned is relevant to pupils' learning.

The opportunities for students to experience both primary and secondary age phases help them to develop a strong understanding of effective transition between those phases. However, this 'enrichment' experience is not planned carefully enough to help students develop their critical skills, or benefit from structured mentoring. Furthermore, while a majority of students feel that the enrichment experience in a phase other than their specialism is helpful, a minority do not feel that it is provided at the most beneficial time. The delay between their first and second teaching experiences in their main area of study is often detrimental to the progressive development of students' knowledge, understanding and skills.

The taught aspects of the primary course provide students with generally suitable opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of teaching, especially of younger pupils. However, overall, the quality of the taught programme is too variable. It does not always support students' progress and does not build well enough on their learning or deepen their understanding of effective teaching practices. In addition, primary students are expected to teach concurrently in the three to seven and seven to eleven ages ranges throughout their first school experience. This limits their ability to establish effective teaching practices in one age phase during this early stage of the programme.

There is an appropriate focus on research and enquiry in the majority of the taught programme. However, students do not have sufficient structured opportunities to link their reading and research to their experiences in school. Assignments provide helpful opportunities for students to reflect on research and practice, but most schools are not aware of the content of the taught course. Consequently, during their school placements, students rarely have worthwhile opportunities to blend theory and practice.

'Reflection weeks' are included throughout the year to allow students opportunities to gain new knowledge and consider practice in different settings. However, these weeks are not planned strategically or coordinated sufficiently well, and the quality of delivery is too variable. As a result, they do not always improve students' teaching,

knowledge or skills. A majority of students feel that they are held too early during the school experience, so they have limited experiences to reflect on. Furthermore, lead schools make little contribution to the planning and delivery of reflection weeks.

Students benefit from a few suitable opportunities to understand the mandatory requirements of the Curriculum for Wales and the published guidance, but do not have sufficient opportunity to explore and learn about curriculum design. As a result, a majority have a limited understanding of the theory behind Curriculum for Wales. In addition, students do not have enough opportunities to develop their understanding of planning for the progressive development of pupils' skills and their misconceptions, such as planning for the four purposes in individual lessons, are often reinforced during taught sessions and school experiences.

The partnership supports appropriate development of students' own literacy, numeracy and digital skills through university sessions that cover relevant topics and optional 'drop in' sessions, where students can seek more individualised guidance. Most students who are learning Welsh have valuable opportunities to develop their spoken and written communication skills. This includes working with students who are fluent in the language. The immersion and enrichment sessions help Welsh learners to develop and improve their language skills well. For students whose first language is Welsh, 'Gloywi iaith' sessions provide beneficial support to refine their oracy and written skills.

Overall, the partnership does not review the quality or impact of the programme's curriculum well enough. It is beginning to consider feedback from students about aspects of the programme, but this information is not evaluated in the light of other first-hand evidence about teaching and learning. The partnership does not have a strategic enough approach to curriculum planning and development. It has not identified or responded effectively enough to important shortcomings, particularly in the taught aspect of the programme.

Across the partnership, the quality of university-based teaching and school-based mentoring is too variable. Generally, tutors use their subject and phase knowledge to develop students' confidence and competence appropriately. In the few most effective sessions, this includes linking theory and practice well, for example when developing students' understanding of foundation learning and its associated pedagogies.

Nearly all tutors have good professional working relationships with student teachers. Many create nurturing learning environments that encourage students to be inquisitive and to embrace mistakes as learning opportunities. In the few best cases, this promotes strong engagement and professional debate, including identifying aspects of student teachers' lessons to make relevant learning points.

The majority of tutors challenge students to reflect critically on aspects of their teaching which helps to strengthen their knowledge and understanding of effective classroom practice. They use a range of successful approaches, such as student-led discussions and group work, to develop students' subject and pedagogical knowledge, and model strategies that students might use in their own teaching. However, too often, tutors do not promote student discussion or engagement well enough. In these sessions, tutors simply present information to students and pose

mainly rhetorical questions. This limits opportunities for students to develop their critical skills. On a few occasions, particularly on the secondary pathway, the low numbers of students in sessions impact on tutors' approaches to teaching and make it difficult for students to reflect critically on their experiences and learn from one another.

In a minority of sessions, tutors use research well to inform their planning, making helpful links between pedagogical principles, such as planning authentic contexts for learning, and what this might look like for different age groups in a primary school. However, in general, this practice is too variable. A few tutors make only cursory references to research or relevant literature. In addition, a majority of tutors do not provide enough purposeful opportunities for students to consider different approaches to teaching and learning or to deepen their understanding of subject-specific pedagogies.

The partnership provides suitable opportunities for students to make links between theory and their school experiences in their academic work. Most tutors' feedback on assignments relates appropriately to the assessment criteria and, in the best cases, identifies students' strengths but also challenges students' thinking and prompts them to consider connections to research. However, this practice is too variable. In a few instances, comments either focus exclusively on positive aspects of the work or are not precise enough to help students to understand how they might improve.

Many mentors and senior mentors have established good working relationships with student teachers and have a genuine desire to see them succeed in their school experiences. The most effective feedback from mentors to students facilitates constructive and supportive professional dialogue that encourages them to reflect on their teaching. It provides a good focus on students' progress over time, references previous developmental goals and identifies improvements in students' practice. This diagnostic and constructive feedback encourages students and helps them to focus on important aspects, such as pedagogy, progression in learning and curriculum.

A minority of mentors encourage students to self-evaluate prior to receiving feedback. However, there is significant variability in the quality of verbal and written feedback to student teachers. Too often, mentors' comments lack detail and fail to provide appropriate direction for students to improve their practice. In a minority of cases, professional dialogue is too mentor led. It does not challenge students to reflect critically or deepen their learning to help them link theory with practice or focus on identifying the impact of student teachers' practice on pupils' learning. Overall, mentors do not focus well enough on student teachers' planning and evaluation skills. Too much of the feedback focuses exclusively on aspects, such as classroom management and compliance with school or departmental strategies, and not on how to plan for learning and outcomes for pupils.

A majority of mentors provide useful next steps and areas for development for student teachers. A minority use verbal feedback to prompt students to consider the sequence of learning and support them to develop their understanding of progression, for example in pupils' literacy skills. However, a minority of targets set for student teachers are superficial or lack precision, so they often find it hard to apply them in future lessons.

Generally, mentors identify students' strengths and areas for development suitably when observing lessons though, on a few occasions, they do not identify key shortcomings in students' teaching and progress, and a few are overgenerous in their assessments. A minority do not have a good enough understanding of how to provide feedback over time against the range of standards because they are unclear about how to evaluate students' progress.

Care, support and guidance:

The attitudes and behaviours that embody the core values of what it means to be a teaching professional are promoted well in many aspects of the programme. There are purposeful opportunities for students to collaborate with their peers to share their experiences, knowledge and understanding, while also developing strong working relationships with other practitioners in schools.

The programme provides a wide range of opportunities for students to become thoughtful and reflective practitioners. For example, students participate in team teaching exercises as part of the university-led sessions where they can test out and discuss different approaches. The 'enrichment' experience provides students with helpful opportunities to develop a good understanding of their professional responsibilities as teachers. However, overall, the programme design does not pay sufficient attention to ensuring that students meet the professional standards of leadership, collaboration, innovation and professional learning securely.

The programme supports student teachers successfully to engage in wider reading and develop an understanding of theories and research that relate to their teaching. This includes understanding the ethics of doing research in schools. The programme offers a variety of meaningful opportunities for students to engage in research enquiry projects to support their understanding of different teaching and learning approaches. However, many student teachers do not make strong enough connections between theory and practice in their day-to-day teaching.

The partnership has developed a suitable tracking system that enables it to monitor individual student teachers' progress and that of groups, as they move through the programme. This includes information about students whose attendance is a cause for concern. The programme promotes opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning and professional development suitably. This includes developing their personal literacy, numeracy and Welsh language skills. There is a clear process for identifying those students in need of this additional support, and students are provided with helpful, targeted provision.

Across the partnership, link tutors work well with schools to support students who are causing concern on their school experience. In the most effective cases, they help mentors and senior mentors to implement support plans that address issues of concern in students' progress. There are appropriate arrangements for ensuring student teachers' fitness to practise, such as managing student teachers' conduct.

The programme offers a range of beneficial resources to support students' well-being and their lifestyle choices, including online resources and university-based services. Recently, the partnership has developed a series of well-being 'check ins' for students during their final school experience. This provides a valuable avenue of

additional support for those who need it. Where practice is at its best, personal tutors provide a good level of individual support while students are on the programme. However, a minority of students share ongoing concerns that their well-being needs are not addressed sufficiently. These concerns include workload, placement allocation and travel distances to schools.

The university offers well-signposted support systems to student teachers who declare a disability or additional need. There are clear processes to make reasonable adjustments and, where appropriate, to support student to access the disabled students' allowance. This enables students to gain appropriate additional academic support. However, the university's processes for agreeing what reasonable adjustments should be made by schools are underdeveloped, leading to inconsistencies in the provision for those students with additional needs. While personal tutors address many of the concerns students raise regarding issues relating to bullying, harassment, or discrimination, a few students do not feel that their well-being concerns are addressed.

The programme includes appropriate sessions where regional partners provide student teachers with guidance and support for their induction year as newly qualified teachers. However, in general, there is not enough help available to support them as they make their career choices, for instance when applying for jobs and preparing for interviews.

Overall, safeguarding meets requirements and gives no cause for significant concern. The partnership promotes safe practices and a culture of safeguarding linked to child protection. The university has robust procedures for checking the suitability of staff and students, as well as maintaining a thorough record of these checks. It offers students comprehensive training about child protection prior to school experience. There is clear guidance to ensure that schools provide appropriate briefings on policies and procedures to students at the beginning of each school-based experience. However, a few schools do not always provide sufficient information to students about their safeguarding processes.

The programme provides beneficial opportunities for students to reflect critically on wider professional issues. These include issues that affect pupils' learning, for example equity, diversity and social justice. Although the programme covers these areas during taught sessions and during reflection weeks, the partnership's anti-racism framework for ITE is at an early stage of development.

Leadership and management:

The partnership was designed with a clear vision to deliver an integrated model of ITE with experiences in primary and secondary phases, to support students' research and enquiry skills, and to promote the Welsh language in education. This vision permeates much of the partnership's provision. However, since its formation in 2018-2019, the partnership has faced considerable uncertainty. The restrictions of the pandemic, low recruitment rates, and changes to the stewardship of the programme have presented challenges that the partnership has found difficult to manage, particularly around the participation of lead schools. As a result, partnership working is weak, and this has had a negative impact on the quality of learning experiences and student outcomes.

The partnership was established with clear and reasonable leadership structures, processes and systems. University staff and representatives from the lead partner schools share responsibilities appropriately across the leadership groups, and these include representation from senior university staff. There is a well-considered memorandum of understanding that outlines the roles and responsibilities of the constituent members of the partnership. There are appropriate procedures for the selection and de-selection of lead schools. Nearly all partners are committed to the smooth running of the partnership, and they are positive about their involvement and collaboration. The strategic accountability board is starting to establish processes to measure progress against appropriate key performance indicators. It is beginning to undertake monitoring activities that are focused on quality. The operational management group supports the smooth running of the programme. It is beginning to implement actions, as needed to address performance issues before they escalate. However, the leadership groups do not currently fulfil their objectives as set out in the original plans for the partnership. The strategic accountability board does not consider well enough the key strengths and weaknesses in outcomes and provision to drive improvement or set the strategic direction of the partnership effectively. At present, there is insufficient flow of information between the leadership groups to ensure that the overall leadership of the partnership is focused on key issues.

Overall, although the roles, responsibilities and accountability structures are outlined appropriately in the partnership agreement, in practice these processes do not take place as planned, particularly around the accountability for standards, quality assurance and mentor development. In addition, communication across the partnership is not effective enough. This means that cluster schools and a few lead schools are not certain about the roles and responsibilities of school staff involved in ITE.

The partnership responds positively to the feedback from external evaluation. This is beginning to galvanise leaders across the partnership but has not had a significant impact on the effectiveness of joint leadership. For example, the partnership is beginning to develop cluster working across groups of schools to strengthen its work. However, this is at an early stage of development. The role of the lead school and its cluster in key areas, such as quality assurance of student experiences and outcomes, is not effective enough to support the development of the partnership.

Senior university leaders show great commitment to the partnership, despite the current low recruitment rates. Governance structures are sound and helpful. There is valuable communication between the partnership and the university council, so that the council is aware of key issues pertaining to the partnership. Council members are willing to challenge the partnership and to be a critical friend, for example in questioning the effectiveness of roles that schools take in the joint leadership of the programme. However, the information that the council receives does not always reflect shortcomings in important areas of the partnership's work.

The university gathers a suitable range of helpful evidence, information and feedback about its work on behalf of the partnership. This includes feedback from students and external examiners, and reviews such as the departmental quality review. The overview of student outcomes as part of the partnership's annual reporting process is clear and concise. However, the lead schools' contribution to this reporting process is limited.

The partnership's self-evaluation commentary summarises suitably the issues raised in the annual report. Leaders note practical and immediate next steps or suggest further monitoring and consideration of issues. Throughout the annual report, actions are noted and these are summarised in a useful matrix with allocated owners and broad timescales for completion. Although many areas for development are identified, a few important and pressing issues are not acted upon with sufficient urgency, including concerns that students raise. In particular, the partnership has not acted swiftly enough to address aspects of the programme that impact on students' well-being, or the need to revisit the responsibilities of the lead schools as set out in the memorandum of understanding. This is a significant weakness.

Overall, evaluation of the partnership's work both within the university and across the lead and cluster schools lacks sufficient rigour. It does not focus adequately on impact and findings are too often presented as an account of actions that have taken place. In particular, despite the clearly set out remit, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group does not fulfil this role well enough. Quality assurance of provision, particularly teaching, mentoring and leadership across the partnership, is currently not suitably robust. As a result, the partnership's evaluation of these areas is often too positive. Furthermore, leaders do not evaluate the impact of provision or leadership on students' progress and outcomes sufficiently well.

The link between self-evaluation and planning for improvement is not sufficiently strong. Leaders do not consider the findings of self-evaluation well enough to draw them into overarching strategic priorities. In the main, planning for improvement does not include targets or milestones against which to monitor progress. Crucially, it lacks suitable performance measures to enable leaders to track progress over time or to evaluate the impact of any work carried out. Objectives do not have sufficient clarity or focus, and there is a lack of success criteria to enable leaders to evaluate progress accurately. The poor quality of planning hinders leaders' ability to drive improvement in many important areas.

The School of Education provides ITE tutors with a comprehensive range of relevant professional learning opportunities, including those identified through their annual appraisal. They receive protected time for their research activities, and there is a planned progression route to work towards a Doctor of Professional Studies. However, there is little opportunity for them to develop their leadership skills to support them in their ITE roles.

The partnership supports collaborative research networks with partners in schools and universities across Wales effectively. This includes staff engagement in projects about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, aspects of the Curriculum for Wales and the professional standards for teachers. This helps staff to stay abreast of and contribute to current research nationally and internationally. A few mentors and other staff in partnership schools are involved in national research projects collaborating with partnership staff. This helps them to support student teachers with their enquiry-based assignments appropriately. However, the partnership does not ensure that school-based staff have a good enough understanding of the taught programme, including approaches to research and enquiry.

University staff have produced a set of useful online resources to help teachers build their research and enquiry skills. Staff in partnership schools have access to a

dedicated programme of professional learning on research leadership, and also to seminars on research activity provided by collaborative evidence networks. The few staff in schools who engage with these seminars keep up to date with national research activity and are better able to support their student teachers with, for example, findings on the Curriculum for Wales.

Recently, the partnership has introduced a new research-based approach to mentor development. It is designed to help mentors support student teachers to reflect critically on the impact of their teaching on pupils' learning. However, many mentors have only received training that focuses on operational arrangements that does not develop their mentoring skills well enough. Furthermore, the training does not cater for mentors with different levels of experience. Attendance at face-to-face professional learning sessions and online mentor forums is poor and processes for securing attendance or catch-up support are not robust. Only a few mentors have accessed the mentor professional learning materials available online.

The partnership's arrangements for quality assuring and providing feedback to mentors on their practice through link tutor contact are too variable. Lead schools and many senior mentors are not routinely involved in quality assuring or developing the practice of mentors. Many mentors receive too little feedback from senior mentors or from others in the partnership to help them develop their practice. The role of the lead schools in designing and contributing to the professional learning for school-based mentors is underdeveloped.

Recent work to develop mentoring practice across clusters of schools in the partnership is beginning to provide leaders with a better understanding of practice across partner schools. However, overall, the partnership's processes for evaluating its professional learning offer for university staff and school-based mentors, and its impact on the quality of support for student teachers, are underdeveloped.

Evidence base of the report

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet the partnership leaders and individual teacher educators to evaluate the impact of the partnership's work
- meet with senior university leaders and governors to discuss the university's support for initial teacher education
- meet with senior mentors and mentors about the school-based elements of the programme and their assessment of student teachers
- meet student teachers to discuss their progress and to gain their views about various aspects of the partnership
- meet student teachers in leadership roles, such as student representatives visit a broad sample of learning sessions and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe students learning and to see staff teaching in school and in university
- observe a sample of students teaching during their final school experience when they are close to achieving Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)
- observe a sample of mentors feeding back to students about their teaching
- scrutinise students' assignments, reflections and lesson planning
- look closely at the partnership's self-evaluation processes
- consider the partnership's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the partnership has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of partnership documents, including information on student assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and leadership groups, information on students' well-being, including the safeguarding of students and pupils, and records of staff training and professional development
- analyse the outcomes from the student and staff questionnaires and consider their views through their questionnaire responses

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

This report was produced in accordance with section 18c of the Education Act 1994, which was inserted by paragraph 13 of Schedule 14 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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