



Department
for Education

Initial Teacher Training: special schools and alternative provision

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Summary

This publication provides non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education. It has been produced to help accredited Initial Teacher Training (ITT) providers to involve special schools in their ITT partnerships. **Where we refer to special schools in this document, the guidance also applies to alternative provision, pupil referral units, and mainstream schools with SEN resource units.**

Who is this publication for?

This guidance is for accredited ITT providers and their partners.

Introduction

The Department for Education (DfE) is creating a world-class teacher development system, starting with [Initial Teacher Training](#) (ITT), through to [early career support](#), specialisation, and onto [school leadership](#). This is creating a ‘golden thread’ of professional development that teachers can draw on at every stage of their careers. The overall aim of this golden thread is to support teachers with high-quality training and development and improve outcomes for all children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in special and mainstream schools.

Strong ITT partnerships are critical to high-quality ITT. We recognise the important contribution that special schools can and do make to ITT, and the valuable expertise they bring to ITT partnerships. We therefore want to ensure that accredited ITT providers and their lead partners have the confidence and capability necessary to involve special schools in their partnerships appropriately, and that special schools that want to be involved in ITT can do so.

The focus on quality-first teaching that underpins our [ITT reforms](#) should prepare Early Career Teachers (ECT) to work in a range of settings, including special schools. Like all teachers, teachers working in a special school must demonstrate all of the [Teachers’ Standards](#). We know that teachers in special schools provide an ambitious and stretching education for their pupils, and they can therefore provide great value in embedding teaching expertise into ITT and the ongoing professional development of ECTs. We encourage accredited ITT providers to consider how they involve special schools in their strategic partnerships, whether that be in the form of ITT placements or through a shorter experience. As set out in the [ITT criteria](#), trainee teachers need a variety of experience in schools to enable them to meet all of the Teachers’ Standards. They need to teach children and young people in their specified age range, from different backgrounds, as well as gaining experience of different approaches to teaching and to school organisation and management.

This guidance was developed in consultation with a group of ITT advisors who are experienced in delivering ITT in special schools.

This document provides guidance on the involvement of special schools in ITT. It does not set mandatory requirements. This guidance should be read in conjunction with the mandatory [ITT criteria](#).

Core Content Framework and SEND

In November 2019 we published the ITT [Core Content Framework](#) (CCF), which sets out the knowledge, skills and experiences that trainees need to enter the profession. This document, as well as the SEND Code of Practice, highlights the importance of high-quality teaching as the key to unlocking the potential of all pupils, including those with SEND.

All ITT courses must be designed to incorporate the knowledge, skills and experiences detailed in the CCF into a coherent sequence to support trainees to develop their expertise. The teaching of SEND pupils was a key consideration during development of the framework, and high-quality teaching is the best way to ensure that children with SEND are well educated and supported. Courses must also be designed so that trainee teachers can demonstrate that they meet all of the interlinked Teachers' Standards at the appropriate level. Addressing the Teachers' Standards should be an integrated experience across the trainee's ITT and can be demonstrated in both special and mainstream schools.

School Placements

Allocating school placements

ITT school placements must give the trainee the range of experience and skills necessary to achieve Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) at the relevant phase for which they are training. The ITT criteria are clear that no training programme should cover fewer than 4 consecutive school years. For example, in the primary phase, ITT covering only Years 1 - 3 would be outside the criterion. In the secondary phase, ITT covering only Years 7 - 9 would be outside the criterion. While we expect the two placements to offer a breadth of experience to trainees, there is no specific requirement in the criteria relating to school placements and the need to cover two school Key Stages.

Similarly, while the [ITT Criteria](#) are clear that the ITT course curricula as a whole must be appropriate for the subject, phase and age range that the trainees will be teaching, this should not preclude experience in special schools where the curriculum being delivered may be aligned to the capabilities and needs of pupils rather than to their age.

Accredited ITT providers should carefully consider how school placements in both special and mainstream schools contribute towards the overall programme experience as they develop their curricula. They should take into account additional factors such as any previous classroom experience that a trainee may have, the level of need within the special school and the trainee's career ambitions once they have qualified.

Trainee teachers need a variety of experience in schools to enable them to meet all of the Teachers' Standards. Accredited ITT providers are responsible for ensuring that each

trainee teacher has taught in at least two schools. Taken together, the placements should provide the trainee with an appropriate breadth of experience. Where one placement is going to be in a special school, the other teaching placement(s) should be in a mainstream school which will support the trainee's experience and compliment the trainee's overall ITT. A placement in a special school can reinforce the trainee's understanding of how to plan and teach more effectively for all children.

ITT partnerships should always consider the wellbeing of trainees and ensure trainees are well prepared for all of their school placements. This includes an understanding of the training outcomes, curriculum, and practical experience that they should gain from their placement, as well as knowledge of school policies and routines. They should consider how the placement will support further development.

Balance of placements in special and mainstream schools

All ITT courses leading to QTS must be designed to ensure that trainees have sufficient classroom experience in line with the ITT criteria. For every trainee, consideration should be given to ensure they gain a breadth of classroom experience. If a trainee's programme includes placement(s) in a special school, then contrasting mainstream placement(s) should also be included in the programme design, unless there is a clear rationale for this not to be the case. It is possible to facilitate longer special school placements for trainees who wish to teach in a special school once they have qualified.

It is possible for a trainee to spend the majority of their training programme in a special school, for example, where the special school is the employing school for a trainee on an employment-based route. In these circumstances, we would expect that in most cases, the minimum duration that the trainee should spend in mainstream school(s) would be between half a term to a term to provide the trainee with the breadth of experience they need to achieve QTS.

For most trainees, significant classroom experience in a mainstream school will be important for ensuring that they gain the breadth of necessary experience teaching across the subject and phase. Accredited ITT providers and their lead partners should use their judgement to maximise the impact of the training experience for the trainee by considering other factors, such as any prior mainstream classroom experience that the trainee has, or the level of need in the special school.

For all ITT, accredited ITT providers and their partners, including special schools, should work together to contextualise the trainee's teaching experience within their ITT programme. Where there is a placement in a special school, partnerships should think about the stage of the trainee's development, and how to contextualise what the trainee has learned – particularly in terms of SEND, adaptive teaching, differences within behaviour management, and how this relates to their overall development across their ITT programme.

ITT course phase for teachers in special schools

We recognise that there are circumstances where a trainee undertakes ITT in order to take up a particular teaching role in a specific school and that this is sometimes a role in a special school. Accredited ITT providers and their lead partners should use their expertise and judgement to decide whether a primary or secondary ITT course would be most appropriate for the context in which the trainee will be working as an ECT. For example, we accept that there may be particular circumstances where primary ITT is more appropriate for a trainee who is preparing for a particular role in a secondary special school. Consideration should also be given to the trainee's long term career ambitions in the teaching profession.

Mentoring

High-quality mentoring is instrumental to the effectiveness of a placement. It is imperative that trainees receive high-quality mentoring in their special school placements as set out in the recommendations of the [ITT market review](#).

Each ITT accredited provider must design detailed, high-quality mentor and lead mentor training curricula in line with the new [Quality Requirements](#) for all courses leading to QTS starting from September 2024. It is for each accredited ITT provider to determine what should be included in this.

Mentors with special school experience can and do add value to the overall training experience. Accredited ITT providers should work with special school partners to ensure that mentors have the capacity to support trainees effectively and understand the broader context of the trainee's ITT course. Close alignment of mentor training to the ITT curriculum is critical to high-quality ITT.

The collaboration of mentors across special and mainstream schools to embed school expertise and insight into partnerships is encouraged.



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