PROGRESS WITH STUDENT TEACHER PLACEMENTS

A report by HM Inspectorate of Education

September 2006

HMIe
improving Scottish education

KEY TO COVER MAP

⭐ Teacher Education Institute (TEI)

🔵 School located within 30 miles of a TEI

🔴 School located between 30-50 miles from a TEI

⚫ School located further than 50 miles from a TEI

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FOREWORD

This is a report on the progress that has been made since HMIE published *Student Teacher Placements within Initial Teacher Education* in October 2005 in response to a request by the Minister for Education and Young People. Our report was based on extensive fieldwork and consultation over session 2004/2005, activity which itself contributed to awareness raising, and developmental thinking and action, in advance of its publication.

This progress report fulfils a commitment to Ministers to provide an update on developments and practice nationally. It also reflects the intention on the part of HMIE in future to track more systematically the impact on the education system of our publications and their recommendations.

We found that education authorities had made significant progress in devising and implementing policies and systems for placing of student teachers in a wider range of their schools. Schools have responded positively. Overall, there was encouraging evidence that the agencies involved had all continued to make progress in providing good placements for students. Teacher education institutions have also developed the effectiveness of their approaches to improving communication with schools. Across all partners, roles and responsibilities are more clearly defined and the planning of placements has improved. Nevertheless, there is still more to be done on improving the number and organisation of suitable placements, in areas such as assessment, and in assuring the quality of placements, particularly where schools and teachers are becoming involved for the first time.

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HM Inspectorate of Education

1. Introduction

At the request of the Minister for Education and Young People, HMIE carried out a review of student teacher placements in 2004/2005. This resulted in the report, *Student Teacher Placements within Initial Teacher Education*, which was published in October 2005. It described good practice and made recommendations for improvement.

This progress report describes and evaluates the steps which the key stakeholders have taken to address the recommendations in the October 2005 report. Its structure follows the organisation of recommendations in the original report.

2. Development of partnership working

Recommendations
In partnership, Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs), Education Authorities (EAs), schools, Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) and the General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTCS) should:
- *clarify their roles and responsibilities in relation to all aspects of student teacher placements;*
- *plan student teacher placements with a longer time horizon;*
- *build on the successes and lessons learned from the probationer teacher induction scheme and exploit synergies between continuing professional development (CPD) for probationers and student teachers on placements; and*
- *work to implement improved and more consistent travelling and subsistence expenses arrangements for students to widen the range of schools which can take student placements.*

Partnerships amongst TEIs, EAs, schools, SEED and the GTCS have continued to strengthen. There is a greater understanding among the key stakeholders of their respective roles and responsibilities. For example, the consortium of western education authorities and TEIs has developed a detailed partnership agreement which sets out roles, responsibilities and deadlines for the principal stages of the placement process. Communication between TEIs, education authority student placement coordinators and schools has improved. There has been a significant increase in the provision of placements including those in remote and rural areas. Schools have a clearer understanding of the expectations of their receiving student teachers. Together, schools and education authorities have made a promising start to developing well-defined frameworks for student teachers. In particular, students have become increasingly involved in the wider aspects of school life by participating in continuing professional development programmes designed for newly qualified teachers.

3. Teacher education institutions' response

Recommendations
TEIs should:
- *engage more with education authorities on the planning, management and evaluation of student placements;*
- *through improved collaboration, achieve greater consistency across TEIs on the timing, purpose and procedures for secondary student teacher placements. In primary schools, organise placements on a stage basis so that the TEIs are not all seeking the same stage placement at the same time;*
- *improve the standardisation of placement documentation and communication with schools and students;*
- *review and standardise the nature of written reports required from teachers on student progress and performance;*
- *take steps to improve the consistency between tutor evaluations and class teacher evaluations on student progress and performance;*
- *provide timely feedback to education authorities and schools on the quality of student teacher placements within schools;*
- *work with schools and education authorities to overcome some of the difficulties which teachers have attending pre-placement meetings; and*
- *provide more mentoring courses and introduce mentoring modules for teachers.*

Working in partnership with education authorities, TEIs have made significant operational and structural changes in their approaches to planning and organising student teacher placements. Some TEIs have established new administrative units to deal with the increased number of student placements. These changes have brought about a more standardised approach to organising placements. However, there have been difficulties with some of these new approaches as a result of underestimating the amount of work required to place students from a number of teacher education programmes. This has resulted in delays and in providing both students and schools with sufficient notice of their placement.

The development of an ICT system, VALED, to communicate placement data to schools, education authorities and TEIs is a promising innovation which has potential as a national system for organising student placements. This system is being piloted and is at too early a stage of development for evaluation in this review.

TEIs have adjusted the timing of placements in secondary schools to make it easier for schools to organise common induction programmes. They have also adjusted primary programmes to ensure that they are not all seeking placements at the same stage throughout the year. This approach has helped to alleviate the particular difficulties in obtaining pre-school placements.

TEIs have adopted a number of effective approaches to improving communication with schools.

- Pre-placement meetings between university staff, teachers and primary student teachers have continued. These meetings have been successful in communicating the TEIs' expectations on the purpose of the placement. TEIs have sent helpful

summaries of these meetings to schools, and this has been particularly useful for those teachers who were unable to attend such meetings.

- TEIs have used ICT to provide a further communication channel. They have sent links to relevant documents on their websites to schools, which have found them helpful. However, in a small number of cases the e-mails sent to headteachers have not reached the class teacher. There have also been some difficulties with firewalls preventing schools from downloading documents from university websites.

- Most TEIs have reviewed their placement documentation. In some cases the school, tutor and student receive the same document and in others the handbooks are customised for each audience. One university also produced helpful 'thumbnail sketches' to summarise the key messages from its student placement handbooks.

- TEI staff recognise the difficulties which school staff have in coming to terms with different styles of placement documents, especially when schools frequently have students from a number of TEIs on placement at the same time. Some steps have been taken by the Scottish Teacher Education Committee (STEC) to harmonise TEI documentation but little progress has been made to date.

- TEIs have continued to organise meetings for secondary school student regents. These meetings have been successful in communicating the procedures and purposes of placements. A promising innovation has been the collaboration between the TEIs to provide joint inputs for regents' meetings in specific education authorities.

TEI staff recognise that school teachers find it burdensome to have to manage a number of different student teacher assessment and reporting arrangements, especially when they have students on placements from different TEIs at the same time. Schools find it especially difficult to use a number of different assessment scales. For example, one university uses a six-point scale whereas others use a pass/fail or a pass/fail/merit system. STEC has taken some initial steps to promote greater harmonisation in assessment and reporting, but there has been little progress to date.

TEIs vary considerably in the way they take account of school evaluations of students' performance. In some cases, there is considerable discussion between the class teacher and tutor before an evaluation is made. In other cases, the tutors spend little time sharing views on the student's performance, and miss opportunities to strengthen evaluations by building in both perspectives on it.

TEIs ask students to reflect upon and evaluate their school placement experience. However, the information thus gathered is not shared formally with schools or education authorities. This information would provide valuable feedback to enable schools and authorities to make improvements to their arrangements.

A number of TEIs already provide mentoring courses for school staff and many more were planned for the next academic session. These courses range from one-day events to whole modules from Charter Teacher programmes. No evidence was yet available on the effectiveness of these programmes.

4. Education authorities' response

Recommendations
EAs should:
- *develop and implement a clear policy on student teacher placements;*
- *set clear expectations that all schools and subject departments should be prepared to accept students on placement, unless there are exceptional circumstances;*
- *monitor rigorously the number of schools and secondary departments receiving students;*
- *evaluate the quality and effectiveness of placements and share good practice in student teacher placements;*
- *encourage schools to deploy a range of staff, including principal teachers and chartered teachers as mentors and regents; and*
- *encourage and support the flexible deployment and secondment of teaching staff to work with TEIs as tutors and teacher fellows.*

EAs have made significant progress in devising and implementing policies for placing student teachers in their schools. As a result, schools have a growing awareness of the important role they play in teacher education and the development of the teaching profession. In most cases, education authorities state clearly that schools will host student teachers, taking account of their particular circumstances. Schools have shown a high level of commitment to student teacher placements and have in almost all instances provided students with appropriate and fulfilling experiences.

EAs have successfully appointed student placement coordinators and encouraged effective links with the TEIs and schools. The coordinators have collected data on student teacher placements, and EAs now have much better information on the number of students taken by each school each term. Schools with an established track record of taking substantial numbers of students have continued to do so while others have become more actively involved. Overall, the student placement coordinators have established very good relationships with schools and TEIs and they have been generally successful in increasing the number of student teacher placements. However, the capacity of some coordinators to fulfil their student coordinator work effectively has been limited when it has been an addition to an already busy remit. In some cases, coordinators were appointed for just one or two days each week.

While improvements have been made in the management and planning of placements, the placing of large numbers of students remains a challenge for education authorities. The increase in the number of newly qualified teachers in schools continues to require some primary schools and secondary departments to support student teachers and probationer teachers simultaneously. TEIs and EAs have worked hard to overcome the shortage of nursery class placements. This continues to be a concern for the longer term.

EAs have focused upon increasing the number of student teacher placements and to date have given little attention to systematically monitoring the quality of these placements. Some steps already taken to evaluate the quality of placements include recall meetings of student teachers with education authority staff to evaluate the success of placements and the use of questionnaires to establish the views of students and school staff. This is an important area

for future development to ensure consistently high quality experiences for students on placement.

EAs have encouraged schools to deploy principal teachers and student regents to provide appropriate support to students while on placement. In many cases a systematic approach to mentoring students was still at an early stage of development. However, some EAs had already successfully held well-attended in-service training in mentoring for teachers. This is an aspect worthy of continuing development by all authorities. EAs have supported TEIs' efforts to recruit appropriately skilled teachers to fulfil the roles of tutors and teacher fellows. However, for some TEIs, recruitment of suitable staff to meet the demands of growing numbers of students has been an ongoing challenge.

5. Schools' response

Recommendations
Schools should:
- *implement the education authority policy on student teacher placements;*
- *offer student placements on regular basis across all terms and across all secondary departments;*
- *ensure that all students receive a warm welcome and are treated professionally by all school staff, and where possible assist student teachers with travel arrangements;*
- *value all students equally, irrespective of their course of study, and be prepared to accept students in their first year of BEd course as readily as those in their final year;*
- *exploit opportunities to use the up-to-date knowledge and experiences of students on placement to enhance school staff development;*
- *apply the guidance provided by TEIs and improve their understanding of how to apply the SITE benchmark statements;*
- *ensure that key staff involved with student teachers attend pre-placement meetings;*
- *provide opportunities for students on placement in the school to discuss common issues;*
- *give accurate feedback to students and TEIs on students' performance, especially when there are weaknesses; and*
- *ask students to evaluate their placement and respond to these evaluations to improve future placements.*

Schools had become more aware of their role in taking increased numbers of student teachers but they were not always aware of their EA policies in this area.

Many primary and secondary schools have provided increased numbers of student teacher placements. However, a few departments in secondary schools continue not to take students and there continues to be a shortage of placements in English and mathematics. Headteachers of small primary schools preferred to have only one student at any given time.

In both primary and secondary schools, headteachers have taken students with very little notice. However, in a few cases schools have had to place students in less suitable classes due to the increased numbers of students and newly qualified teachers.

Almost all teachers viewed having a student as a positive experience. They welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the development of the teaching profession. They also recognised the benefits brought to the school by students' up-to-date knowledge, enthusiasm and experiences. Many staff were very willing to spend additional time supporting the work of students.

Most schools found the guidance provided by TEIs for placements increasingly clear and helpful. In particular, the illustrations of benchmarks were found to be most useful. However, schools receiving students from several TEIs found the variability in styles and formats challenging and at times confusing. This was particularly so in the varied expectations of assessments. TEIs and schools need to work together to improve consistency and reduce the burden on teachers supporting students.

The level of knowledge and understanding of the Standard for Initial Teacher Education (SITE) remained variable amongst school staff supporting students. Many found the framework helpful as an organiser for identifying individual targets. However, in a small number of cases, school staff lacked confidence in assessing students. In the best situations, weekly profiles were kept up to date and followed the headings of the standard. Tutors made very good use of the SITE framework to identify development needs and to structure discussions with students and teachers.

School staff welcomed opportunities to participate in pre-placement meetings. They felt it was useful to have students visit the school prior to placements to introduce them to classes and teachers. However, the number of school staff involved with student teachers who attended pre-placement meetings was still too variable. Schools worked hard to involve students in a range of activities to broaden their experiences. Attendance at staff meetings, curriculum development meetings and student group meetings had become more commonplace. In many cases, placements were well managed by the regents, and student teachers valued the regular meetings to discuss progress. Students also valued the opportunity to work alongside newly qualified teachers in professional development activities.

Experienced staff provided helpful feedback to students and felt confident to do so. Regents provided helpful support to staff who had responsibility for writing final assessment reports. School staff felt there was a need for more training in making focused classroom observations of students' teaching. In particular, staff working with students for the first time in the context of expanding student teacher numbers found this to be a challenging aspect. Students perceived that there was a variation in the quality of feedback provided by teachers. In the main, students found feedback was informative and helped identify individual learning targets. However, in a small number of instances students considered feedback to them unhelpful. Overall, there was as yet insufficient development of mentoring skills in the increasing number of teachers involved with placements.

There remained inconsistencies in teachers' application of competencies in assessing students. Tutor judgements and those of the schools still conflicted in a number of cases. The organisation and management of placements for students who fail early placements was particularly challenging for education authorities and schools. TEIs and school managers encouraged school staff to raise concerns quickly should any cause for concern arise in relation to a student on placement. Line managers provided support for teachers with weak

students and made direct links to TEIs in exceptional circumstances. Overall, this remained a challenging area for some staff.

6. SEED's response

Recommendations
SEED should:
- *facilitate planning by providing earlier notice to SFC and TEIs of the number of students required in following years;*
- *consider further whether there is a case for additional funding for education authorities to support the management and support of student teacher placements; and*
- *collect and publish detailed statistics on student placements to help inform future policy.*

SEED has continued to involve the key stakeholders in the planning of future teacher numbers, which in turn determines the number of student placements required the following year. This information is provided at a national level.

SEED has provided increased funding for education authorities for 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 and this has enabled education authorities to appoint student-placement coordinators. In addition, some education authorities have been able to transfer a small amount of this finance to schools to support them taking student teachers.

SEED has hosted a national strategy group for student teacher placements to enable TEI and key education authority staff to share good practice and address common problems. This group also oversees the development of VALED. It also sponsored, with HMIE, a national conference on good practice with placements.

7. Conclusion

The original review carried out in 2004/2005 reported on student teacher placements at a time when there was considerable change. This follow-up review has confirmed that the provision, organisation and quality of student teacher placements have continued to improve. Nevertheless, there is still more to be done on improving the number and organisation of suitable placements. TEIs should simplify the demands upon schools especially of differing assessment and reporting arrangements. Schools should continue to improve the quality of placements and the mentoring of students. All stakeholders should develop effective approaches to quality assurance which provide a basis for continuous improvement of student teacher placements.

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