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26 April 2013

Mr A Jones
Dean/Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Faculty of Education
Manchester Metropolitan University
799 Wilmslow Road
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Dear Mr Jones

Evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) training in the Manchester Metropolitan University primary initial teacher education (ITE) partnership

Thank you for the help which you and your colleagues, trainees, former trainees and schools gave when Eileen Mulgrew HMI, Sonja Oyen HMI, Adrian Guy HMI and I conducted a monitoring inspection of your primary ITE partnership on Wednesday 24 and Thursday 25 April 2013. The focus of the inspection was to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of phonics training.

Having considered all of the evidence I am of the opinion that, at this time, the quality and effectiveness of phonics training are good.

Context

The primary partnership comprises over 1000 schools and settings. It trains teachers to work in the Early Years Foundation Stage and primary age phases. Trainees achieve qualified teacher status on successful completion of a three or four year course leading to the award of a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree, or a one year course leading to the award of the post-graduate certificate in education (PGCE). There are approximately 1000 trainees following a BA course. Two hundred and sixty four trainees are on the PGCE course. In addition, eight trainees are following an assessment only route. The university is based in two campuses: one in Didsbury and the other in Crewe.

Inspectors visited four partnership schools. They observed parts of lessons taught by nine third year BA trainees and four newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Inspectors also held discussions with 11 trainees from the PGCE course and first, second and fourth years of the BA course. Meetings were held with the headteachers and school-based mentors in the four partnership schools and, at the university with senior leaders



and those responsible for delivering the training in phonics. One inspector also observed a training session delivered to second year BA trainees. Inspectors reviewed a range of documents including training materials, handbooks and trainees' files.

Outcomes for trainees

As a result of improvements in training, trainees are able to teach phonics in ways by which their pupils make at least expected progress. This is because trainees use a range of activities which interest their pupils. For example, in a short session with three and four year olds, a trainee used colourful picture cards which grabbed the attention of the children. The trainee demanded the children said the sounds correctly and then challenged them to find other words that began with the same letter. Not only did the children enjoy this activity, they were then able to form the letters correctly in sand. In another lesson, this time in Year 2, a trainee challenged her pupils to identify the sounds made in words in sentences such as, *'No, you know you can't borrow my telephone.'* As the pupils identified the sounds, the trainee also checked her pupils' use of punctuation and whether or not they had seen the need for an apostrophe in the word 'can't'. These examples illustrate well that trainees understand phonics contribute to pupils' ability to improve spelling, punctuation and grammar. This understanding and resulting confidence and competence is highest when trainees talk about their experiences with children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils in Key Stage 1.

NQTs observed demonstrated at least good teaching of phonics. They successfully helped their pupils pick up any errors, in blending sounds for example, and turned these into teaching points from which other pupils could benefit. Trainees are increasingly evaluative of their teaching of phonics. As we agreed, though, the partnership needs to provide greater challenge to trainees to demonstrate more clearly how much progress pupils have made as result of this teaching. For example, where some trainee evaluations offer comments such as 'Pupils made good progress', what is needed is the evidence to back up such statements, for example, 'More able pupils made good progress as demonstrated by all accurately saying and identifying the 'ch' sound in words and writing those words correctly in short sentences.'

Trainees have to go through a verification process which checks they have met the requirements of the Teachers' Standards in relation to phonics at the end of their training. While no trainee on the assessment only route was met or observed, information provided by the partnership suggests their progress is equivalent to those on the BA or PGCE courses.

The quality of training across the partnership

Training in phonics is relevant, includes sessions led by school-based colleagues, and provides more timely opportunities for trainees to put into practice in schools the



learning undertaken at the university. Taken as a whole it contributes well to trainees' understanding of the strong links between reading, speaking, listening and writing.

Key improvements in the training have included the introduction of new phonics focused handbooks and records of lesson observations. These, like the taught sessions, provide a clear structure for trainees to check and develop their subject knowledge and plan the learning of their pupils. Some of the feedback given to trainees by school-based mentors is high quality because it identifies very clearly what trainees need to do to improve their teaching of phonics. Some feedback, though, is less clear. As leaders are aware, in a very few cases, feedback to trainees about their teaching of phonics has not been as regular as the partnership has required.

Trainees who need additional support in their understanding of phonics or their ability to teach reading skills are identified well and provided with additional sessions or extra time in schools depending on need.

The quality of leadership and management of the ITE partnership

The quality of training in phonics, as confirmed by trainees, mentors and headteachers in this inspection, has improved and is of at least good quality. Internal surveys and inspectors do not share the concerns raised by previous NQT surveys. This is because leaders have raised the profile of phonics, in mentor training for example, and have ensured trainees are both increasingly confident and competent in their teaching. Honest and robust evaluation has resulted in clear targets for improvement with high, measurable expectations. The success of the focused handbooks and the work with NQTs to continually keep knowledge, skills and understanding up-to-date is testament to the fact that appropriate actions have been taken. Strengths identified at the May 2011 inspection have been built on and effective use has been made of external support.

Leaders are well placed to achieve more and know what to do next. For example, as part of increasing trainees' ability to teach phonics and reading beyond Key Stage 1, all placements next year will include secondary schools so trainees may better understand how reading progresses from one key stage to the next. In addition, leaders are already considering how they might collect evidence that highlights more clearly the impact of trainees' teaching of phonics on pupils' learning.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your ITE partnership. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Williams



Her Majesty's Inspector

