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Mr A Hudson  
Head of School of Education  
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Dear Mr Hudson

**Evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of phonics training in the Kingston University Primary (ITE) Partnership**

Thank you for the help which you and your colleagues, trainees, former trainees and schools gave when Ian Hancock, Her Majesty's Inspector, Kiran Campbell-Platt, Additional Inspector, and I conducted a monitoring inspection of your primary ITE partnership on 5 February 2014. The focus of the inspection was to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of phonics training.

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

**Context**

The provider works in partnership with approximately 200 primary schools. This includes infant, junior, primary and special schools. These are state schools, academies or independent providers. Depending on their individual circumstances, schools choose one of three partnership models. They can select to make maximum use of tutor involvement from the university, take ownership of their school-based trainee mentoring or opt for a mixture of the two. Within the partnership, there are three teaching schools and three lead School Direct training partners. There are also close links with three local authorities who provide school-centred teacher training.

There are two primary programmes which offer Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). There is a primary three-year undergraduate route for teaching 5 to 11year olds. Specialisms include English, mathematics, geography/history and science. There are approximately 85 trainees in each undergraduate year group. The one-year postgraduate (PGCE) route provides the opportunity to specialise in either Early Years and Key Stage 1, or Key Stages 1 and 2. Specialisms in this route include general primary, Early Years, and primary French, Spanish and German, which are available for 150 PGCE trainees.

In 2012/13, both the Bachelor of Arts (BA) primary QTS and the PGCE primary programmes were subject to an extensive review, which was part of a wider revision of the academic framework of the university. This resulted in a revalidation of both teacher training routes and the re-alignment of its content from eight to four modules. The teaching of early reading and systematic synthetic phonics was made a key focus.

Inspectors visited three partnership schools. They observed parts of lessons taught by three trainees and three newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Inspectors also held discussions with five trainees from the PGCE course and second year students from the three-year BA course. Meetings were held with senior leaders and mentors in the three partnership schools visited. Discussions were also held at the university with senior leaders and those responsible for delivering the training in phonics and early reading skills. Inspectors reviewed a range of documents including training materials and handbooks. No centre-based training took place during the monitoring visit, but one inspector considered a range of lecture notes, slide presentations and task-based assignments which related to the teaching of phonics.

## **Outcomes for trainees**

Trainees and NQTs have a good understanding of the subject knowledge required to teach phonics and most share the relevant technical vocabulary with their pupils. They carefully check that the pupils understand the correct way of sounding out letters or groups of letters and give them opportunities to apply their knowledge in reading and writing activities. All lessons observed followed a similar plan which involved a recap on previous learning, followed by teacher input and then an opportunity to practise a new skill. It was then applied to a speaking, reading or writing activity. Good use was made of electronic whiteboards to demonstrate new concepts and skills, and mini whiteboards were used well by the pupils to practise them. In an effective lesson, the teacher explained with clarity the differences between the graphemes 'c', 'ch' and 'k'. As the pupils practised writing these graphemes, the teacher moved around them checking that they were recording accurately words that began with these graphemes. Inspectors generally found that there was a lack of interesting and stimulating resources available in schools for pupils to consolidate their learning.

## **The quality of training across the partnership**

Trainees and NQTs are very positive about their training experience in phonics and this reflects the university's own surveys. Out of the 127 trainees who completed an independent survey organised by the university at the end of the academic year 2012/13, 88% considered that they were either well or very well prepared to teach reading, including phonics and comprehension. This is in marked contrast to the most recent NQT survey data published by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) in November 2013 where only 30 responses were returned, the results of which indicated a dip below the sector norm for this aspect of the training. This was despite the improving trend over the past three years in the percentage of trainees who rated their preparation to teach reading, including phonics and comprehension, as very good or good.

Trainees' subject knowledge is regularly audited and tested, and additional training is compulsory for those who fail to reach the expected level. This is consolidated through the completion of practical tasks and written assignments relating to the teaching of early reading and the use of phonics. Outcomes of observations by tutors and school-based mentors are recorded on a detailed sheet which has clear references to the Teachers' Standards. This is used effectively to check that they have met the requirements of the programme.

An impressive feature of the centre-based training is the way in which trainees are introduced to a wide range of commercial phonic schemes, which enables them to adapt their subject knowledge confidently when teaching in different schools. The use of story-telling to reinforce the teaching of phonics is a particularly successful feature of the training programme because it brings phonic skills into real-life situations. Trainees speak very highly of a visiting speaker who demonstrates the powerful influence stories have on the development of early phonic skills. For example, they confidently use repetition and rhyming phrases in stories when teaching phonics and note that it is especially effective when pupils join in with the story or act out certain words. Most trainees expressed confidence about the theory of teaching phonics but felt less secure about linking these with their school placements. Although they appreciated watching video clips from lessons, they considered that they learnt more from the high-quality phonics lessons modelled in school. Inspectors also spoke to some trainees and NQTs who considered that their practical placements had lacked the opportunity for breadth of experience across the 4 to 11 age span. The university is fully aware of this concern and has already taken steps to ensure that additional placements are made available to them for this purpose.

### **The quality of leadership and management of the ITE partnership**

Although leaders and managers recognised that the external NQT survey was not representative of the views of the majority of its trainees, they wasted no time in taking action to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of phonics training. A plan to improve the quality of training further in phonics identifies appropriate steps

which will be taken within a measured timescale. Already, an external consultant has been brought in to review provision and make recommendations for improvements. Module leaders have adapted the contents of the phonics training and trainee focus groups have been involved in evaluating the provision. Systems to check the progress made by trainees have been reviewed to ensure that there is a greater engagement from trainees in tracking their understanding and confidence in teaching phonics. By improving the links between the centre-based training and school experience, leaders have greater confidence in the opportunities trainees now have to teach phonics. There has been an improved focus on the depth of the subject knowledge of both university tutors and mentors based in schools. The expansion of a database which records those schools, such as those with specialist literacy status, and where good practice has been identified, is strengthening the expertise to which trainees have access. Working within a Literacy Steering Group in partnership with Brunel and Durham universities, initiatives and resources are being shared to provide mutual support and challenge.

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

Lorna Brackstone  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**