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20 March 2014

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Dear Dr Wild

Evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of phonics training in the Oxford Brookes University primary ITE partnership

Thank you for the help which you and your colleagues, trainees, former trainees and schools and settings gave when additional inspectors Malcolm Hunt, Andy Maher, John Menendez and I conducted a monitoring inspection of your primary ITE partnership on 19 March 2014. 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

Oxford Brookes University works in partnership with around 500 schools to provide initial teacher education (ITE) in the 5–11 age range for a Bachelor of Arts (BA) course, and in the 5–11 and 3–7 age ranges for postgraduate trainees. At the time of the monitoring visit there were 279 trainees following the three-year BA course (across all three years) and 195 on the one-year postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) course, of whom 27 are training to teach children aged 3–7 and 168 to teach pupils aged 5–11. There are currently 92 trainees on the four-year, work-based BA course. The PGCE course includes the option of taking up to two modules at level 7 (Masters level).

Within the partnership there are two School Direct training partners. One is a school for pupils with special educational needs, where nine trainees are following a specific pathway to gain a PGCE and qualified teacher status (QTS). The other school works with the partnership to provide training for seven trainees to gain QTS. The

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partnership also provides the PGCE component for 32 School Direct trainees based at a Teaching School that is also a school centred initial teacher training (SCITT) provider within the region.

Inspectors visited four partnership schools. They observed lessons taught by four trainees and two newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Inspectors also held discussions with trainees from the PGCE course, third year students from the three-year BA course and several NQTs from both routes. Meetings were held with senior leaders and mentors in the four partnership schools visited. Discussions were also held at the university with senior leaders and those responsible for training in the teaching of phonics and early reading. Inspectors reviewed a range of documents including training materials and handbooks. No centre-based training related to the teaching of phonics took place during the monitoring visit.

Outcomes for trainees

Trainees and NQTs know how to teach systematic synthetic phonics to pupils in schools. All trainees and NQTs observed can talk about and use a wide range of strategies to engage pupils in phonics and early reading. Trainees on all routes and pathways are very enthusiastic and reflective about their own practice in teaching phonics. They respond well to opportunities for self-study and develop their subject knowledge by using the provider's well-designed work book for teaching systematic synthetic phonics. This depth of knowledge and understanding is evident in trainees' well organised files and their ability to talk about how they encouraged pupils to be enthusiastic and competent readers.

Trainees and NQTs use this secure subject knowledge effectively to plan and teach good phonics sessions which meet the different abilities and needs of pupils in their classes. Their clear enunciation of phonemes models the sounds pupils need to know in order to read simple words. Trainees and NQTs use a variety of resources, such as flash cards, interactive whiteboards and pictures to support their good teaching of phonics. Teaching assistants are well briefed and used effectively to support the teaching of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Pupils who speak English as an additional language receive similar levels of effective support to develop their phonic knowledge and early reading skills. NQTs continue to build on the skills learnt during their training to teach good phonics sessions in their schools. Discussions with them confirmed that they feel well-prepared overall by the university but that they would have appreciated receiving the more structured approach now in place for the current BA and PGCE trainees.

The quality of training across the partnership

Analysis of the results from the latest online questionnaire for current trainees confirms that the vast majority of the 172 who responded feel very well prepared to teach phonics in schools. This is in stark contrast to the results of the NQT survey in November 2013 where, out of the 88 responses returned, the proportion unhappy with their level of preparedness was significantly above the sector norm. A wide

ranging review of documentation and discussions with programme leaders and trainees confirm that these poor perceptions have been reversed.

The modification and further implementation of well-designed programmes across all pathways and routes ensure that trainees fully develop the skills necessary to teach phonics effectively to young learners. The coherence between training at the university, self-study and practical teaching in schools is good. Subject audits and systematic synthetic phonics work books are used well by trainees and tutors to ensure good levels of subject knowledge by the end of each route and pathway. This completion of practical tasks and written assignments relating to the teaching of early reading and the use of systematic synthetic phonics consolidates the development of trainees' expertise. School placements provide good opportunities for trainees to practise their skills further. Peer teaching sessions at the university provide challenging activity for BA trainees in their first year with opportunities to build their confidence and measure their progress in their second year. Discussions with trainees following this route confirmed that they find this activity challenging, but very useful as it progressively develops their levels of confidence in the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics.

The requirements and procedures to support the development of trainees' skills in teaching phonics while on placement are more explicit as a result of a thorough programme review. For instance, mentors are now expected to observe trainees teaching phonics in every placement using a specially designed phonics teaching observation form. Scrutiny of trainees' files confirmed that these observations are undertaken, trainees' strengths and areas of development are assessed and individual targets are set to develop their skills further. Those trainees making insufficient progress are given extra support and encouraged to attend extra training at the university.

The university makes appropriate use of expert practitioners and high quality placements within the partnership to provide trainees with the opportunity to observe the best practice in the teaching of phonics. For instance, all trainees following the BA route are given opportunities to observe exemplary teaching in their first serial placements in their first year. Experienced practitioners in the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics from partnership schools participate in the centre-based training. However, discussions with senior leaders and mentors in schools indicate that there are missed opportunities for the partnership to work even more closely with schools to improve outcomes for trainees further.

The quality of leadership and management of the ITE partnership

The response of managers and programme leaders to the negative feedback in the 2013 NQT survey results has been rapid. Programme and subject leaders modified and readjusted the timings of existing training modules and introduced further modules across each route and pathway to improve the development of trainees' subject knowledge and skills in teaching systematic synthetic phonics. As a result, there is now better coherence between the centre-based training and the training

completed in schools. These improvements are reflected in the greater confidence of the vast majority of trainees in the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics to pupils.

Action planning is thorough and linked closely to improving trainees' teaching of systematic synthetic phonics. The tracking of trainees' individual progress in teaching systematic synthetic phonics is comprehensive and monitored carefully at the end of each school placement to identify those trainees achieving well and those who are a cause for concern. Furthermore, these tracking data are used to review the impact of the course and support self-evaluation and further improvement.

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

Philip Mann
Her Majesty's Inspector