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Mr Andrew Read
The University of East London
Cass School of Education and Communities
Water Lane
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Dear Mr Read,

Evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of phonics training in the University of East London primary ITE partnership

Thank you for the help which you and your colleagues, trainees, newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and schools gave when Chris Campbell, Her Majesty's Inspector, Kiran Campbell-Platt, Additional Inspector, and I conducted a monitoring inspection of your primary ITE partnership on 5 February 2015. 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 University of East London, Cass School of Education and Communities works in partnership with 99 primary schools in 18 local authority areas. There are currently 306 core primary trainees following a one-year post graduate course of initial teacher education leading to qualified teacher status (QTS). Of these trainees, 60 follow the primary with early years 3–7 course and 246 follow the primary 5–11 course. All primary 5-11 trainees select an enhanced subject or area focus. Subjects include modern languages, English and mathematics; areas include special educational needs and English as an additional language. The provider also works with seven schools to provide places for 27 School Direct trainees and with 10 schools to provide places for 60 School Direct (salaried) trainees.

Inspectors visited three partnership schools. They observed six lessons taught by trainees and two by newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Inspectors met with a further 13 trainees and three NQTs to discuss the quality of phonics training provided. Meetings were held with school-based mentors and NQT induction tutors and senior leaders at the three schools visited. Discussions were also held at the university with



senior leaders and the lead phonics trainer. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including training materials, handbooks, and the phonics action plan.

Outcomes for trainees

Trainees and NQTs are well prepared to become confident and effective teachers of phonics (letters and the sounds they make). They have a good grasp of the subject knowledge required to teach effectively and to understand the link between the systematic teaching of phonics and the development of pupils' reading and writing. Trainees recognise that, as well qualified professionals, they have a responsibility for ensuring their own professional development and are skilled at identifying where they are doing well and what they need to improve. They are proactive in seeking opportunities to observe good practice and address any deficiencies. Because trainees work with good trainers and very effective school-based colleagues, there are ample opportunities for them to improve their confidence and ability to teach phonics. As a result, trainees are doing a good job in developing pupils' phonic skills.

Both of the NQTs observed taught very effective English lessons which ensured that pupils made good progress in developing their understanding of writing and the essential link between letters and the sounds they make. Although right at the start of their second school placement, trainees carefully planned lessons which improved pupils' understanding of phonics. In two successful group teaching sessions for Reception children, trainees used a good range of resources, such as pictures, flash cards and sand trays, to reinforce the links between phonics and writing. Trainees stressed the importance of initial letter sounds and helped children blend letters to read, and then spell, unfamiliar words. Trainees do not always remember to reinforce the appropriate subject specific vocabulary, such as digraph and phoneme, when talking to pupils. This hampers the ability of pupils to critically analyse and discuss text.

The quality of training across the partnership

NQTs and trainees speak very positively about the quality of their phonics training. They say that it gives them the skills and knowledge required to become confident teachers of phonics and early reading. This contrasts with the National College for Teaching and Leadership's NQT survey, where responses were below the sector average in each of the last two years, in respect of NQTs' confidence to teach phonics. Both trainees and NQTs spoke enthusiastically about the effective dovetailing of university-based training with high quality school-based observations and training. Trainees gain a great deal from the early observations of phonics teaching in a school where this is a particular strength. They also speak highly of the focused phonics-specific training they receive. University-based training makes frequent links between phonics and teaching in English and other subjects. However, trainees would welcome more modelling and practical demonstrations of how to successfully integrate phonics into a range of lessons.

Central training provides trainees with the subject knowledge and vocabulary to enable them to benefit from their school-based experience and training and become effective teachers of phonics. At the time of the last inspection, the quality of subject-specific feedback in phonics through the consistently good use of detailed lesson observation documentation was identified as a strength of the training. This continues to be the case. Trainees receive good feedback on how well lessons have gone and what they can do to improve their teaching. The university recognises that this information could be better used to monitor both the quality of central training overall, and the progress of individual trainees.

In addition to the universal phonics training, there are additional drop-in sessions for trainees who are feeling less confident, or who have been identified as requiring extra support. The university has significantly strengthened the role of personal tutors to enhance the level of academic and pastoral support they can provide. One trainee described the excellent support she had received in order to improve her understanding of phonics. After expressing a concern, she was contacted quickly, given good advice and appropriate additional resources were suggested. Another said that even when personal tutors do not themselves have the required expertise, they ensure a colleague provides this and monitor its impact on trainees' progress.

The quality of leadership and management of the ITE partnership

The most recent phonics action plan identifies a range of appropriate priorities drawn both from the university's own self-evaluation and an analysis of the 2014 NQT survey. The university has revised the structure and timing of taught elements of the course in order to establish an understanding of how to teach speaking and listening skills before teaching phonics. There is a clear rationale underpinning this change. It is intended to ensure greater continuity in trainees' understanding of how pupils learn to communicate, and to place phonics more securely within this. In response to the NQT survey, the university employed a senior lecturer with substantial experience in delivering phonics training, including work as a phonics consultant, to act as 'phonics champion'. While this was not a title trainees were familiar with, they knew exactly who to turn to if they had any concerns or questions about phonics. There is additional support on offer for trainees who lack confidence and greater involvement of NQTs to support current trainees.

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

Robert Lovett
Her Majesty's Inspector