

Tribal
Kings Orchard
1 Queen Street
St Philips
Bristol BS2 0HQ

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk
Direct T 0845 123 6001
Direct email:
inspection queries@tribalgroupp.co.uk



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Dr Maureen Glackin
Head of School
St Mary's University
Twickenham
Waldegrave Road
Twickenham
TW1 4SX

Dear Dr Glackin,

Evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of phonics training in the St Mary's University primary ITE partnership

Thank you for the help which you and your colleagues, trainees, newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and schools gave when Amanda Gard, Her Majesty's Inspector, Andy Maher and Helen Wiseman, Additional Inspectors, and I conducted a monitoring inspection of your primary ITE partnership on 12 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

St Mary's University works in partnership with up to 1,200 schools, mainly in London but as far afield as Milton Keynes and Torquay. Of these, around 450, many of which are in the immediate area, regularly have trainees on placements. The partnership offers three routes to qualified teacher status. Trainees can follow an undergraduate course leading to a Bachelor of Arts (BA Honours) in primary education.

Alternatively, there is a two-year, work-based BA Honours course for trainees who already have a foundation degree in education. St Mary's also offers full- and part-time Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) courses in primary education. At the time of the inspection there were 449 undergraduates in training. Forty nine trainees were following the work-based learning option. There were 205 postgraduate trainees, including 21 who were taking the two-year part-time route. There were also 22 trainees following a one year 'School Direct' programme which is based in schools.

FMI monitoring inspection letter



Inspectors visited four partnership schools. They observed four lessons taught by second year BA Honours trainees during the second week of their second school experience, three by NQTs and one by a recently qualified teacher. Inspectors held discussions with groups of undergraduate and postgraduate trainees and with trainees and NQTs from all routes working in partnership schools. They met with senior leaders, course leaders and link tutors at St Mary's, and senior leaders and mentors in the schools visited. Inspectors observed two training sessions, one delivered to first year BA trainees and one to postgraduate trainees. They also reviewed a range of documentary evidence including training materials, evaluations and action plans.

Outcomes for trainees

Trainees have a good understanding of the importance of phonics in helping pupils to develop early reading and writing skills. Trainees' subject knowledge is secure. Their command of the correct technical vocabulary and awareness of how phonics skills should be taught systematically are good. Trainees' planning for the phonics sessions observed was detailed. Trainees used the partnership proforma well to structure lessons which followed a common format of reviewing previous learning, teaching new skills and giving pupils opportunities to apply what they have learnt. At this relatively early point in their training, trainees generally use assessment information appropriately to differentiate activities for pupils of different abilities. They are less skilled, however, at assessing pupils' understanding or picking up misconceptions during lessons and adapting their teaching accordingly.

The NQTs observed were confident and competent teachers of phonics. They planned lessons carefully, based on regular assessments of what pupils already knew. NQTs' teaching was precise and enunciation of sounds clear. The NQTs planned interesting activities and made good use of resources to motivate pupils. NQTs are more skilled at assessing pupils' learning during lessons. They checked pupils' skills and understanding, corrected or explained, and checked again. The pace of learning in the lessons observed was good. Pupils were developing the early reading and writing skills that will stand them in good stead for the future.

The quality of training across the partnership

The views of trainees and NQTs who spoke to inspectors about their training in phonics are in marked contrast to the NQT survey data published by the National College of Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) in recent years. Current trainees and NQTs could not imagine why the data suggest satisfaction rates below sector norms. They were very positive about their training in phonics, which matches the responses to the partnership's recent evaluations. Most trainees completing their training in 2014 felt they had good or better training opportunities and made good or better progress in their phonics teaching during their time at St Mary's.

Inspectors agree that the phonics training is of a high quality. Whichever route trainees follow, there is a clear focus on phonics from the start and throughout the course. Centre- and school-based training fit together well so that trainees are continuously building their knowledge and developing their experience. Expectations are high. Trainees are required to teach phonics regularly on each school experience. They are also formally observed teaching phonics at least once on each placement. Feedback from school staff is accurate and helpful. It is at its best when it is very specific about the teaching of phonics, rather than general classroom practice. All trainees are expected to exceed the minimum expectations set out in the Teachers' Standards, including in relation to phonics, by the end of their training. There are procedures for checking on trainees' progress and identifying and tailoring additional support or experience for those who need it. Leaders acknowledge, however, that systems to draw together information on trainees' subject knowledge, competency and confidence in phonics and set targets could be more coherent.

The English team has been strengthened by the appointment of staff with recent, relevant experience and expertise. Centre-based training gives trainees a good grounding in phonics, including familiarity with the range of commercial schemes they may come across in schools. Trainees respond well to practical sessions and those where tutors model different teaching strategies. They value opportunities to practise by teaching each other phonics. Some trainees are less enthusiastic about theoretical sessions. They do, however, generally agree that academic assignments which, for example, require them to critically debate the role of phonics are an important, if challenging, part of their professional development.

The quality of leadership and management of the ITE partnership

St Mary's is an ambitious ITE partnership. Leaders have high expectations of the partnership and of trainees, as do trainees of themselves and the partnership. The key areas for improvement in phonics training identified at the last inspection have been tackled effectively. The expectations relating to teaching phonics on school placements have not only been formalised but have been raised. Better use is made of best practice in partnership schools, although establishing systems to triangulate evidence for a database of excellent practice and the use of interactive technology are still work in progress. Success criteria in action plans are more closely linked to improvements in trainees' outcomes, but are not always expressed in a measurable way.

The commitment to continuous improvement remains strong. For example, the early literacy placement (ELP) has been introduced in Year 1 of the BA course, giving trainees an additional two weeks in school, immersed in training about the teaching and learning of early reading and writing. Regular training for link tutors to keep them up to date and abreast of current thinking includes phonics sessions. Action plans take account of national changes to the English curriculum and assessment, as

well the partnership's priorities for phonics. Leaders take responsibility for NQTs beyond the end of their training. Currently, the partnership offers ongoing support through after-school meetings, although uptake of phonics events has been limited. An online forum is under development. Leaders are sensibly keeping the training they offer in the immediate area and beyond under review, taking account of other provision. Although they feel confident they know the views of schools employing former trainees through existing communication channels, leaders are not formally collecting the views of employers as part of their self-evaluation.

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

Alison Bradley
Her Majesty's Inspector