

13 March 2015

Mr Peter Mellor  
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Dear Peter

**Evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of phonics training in the Leeds Beckett University primary ITE partnership**

Thank you for the help which you and your colleagues, trainees, newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and schools gave when Karen Ling, Eithne Proffitt and Rajinder Harrison (Additional Inspectors) and I conducted a monitoring inspection of your primary ITE partnership on 12<sup>th</sup> March 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**

Leeds Beckett University works in partnership with around 350 schools and a number of teaching school alliances to provide initial teacher education (ITE) in two primary age ranges, 3-7 and 5-11. At the time of the monitoring inspection 280 primary trainees were following a three-year programme and 84 trainees a four-year programme. 72 early childhood education trainees were following a three-year programme and 71 a four-year programme. 38 trainees were on a primary postgraduate certificate in education programme and 18 on an early childhood education postgraduate certificate in education programme. 18 trainees were following a primary School Direct training route. In addition, 36 trainees were following a two-year undergraduate early childhood education programme with QTS.

Inspectors visited three partnership schools. They observed six lessons taught by year 2 undergraduate trainees and three by newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Inspectors also held discussions with School Direct, PGCE and year 4 trainees in schools; observed a year 3 early childhood education, school-based training session in a local primary school and a Year 1 centre-based English training session at the

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university. They also held discussions with groups of trainees from the different training programmes, trainees and NQTs working in partnership schools, English and phonics trainers, leaders and managers and mentors, induction coordinators and head teachers. Inspectors reviewed a range of documentary evidence including phonics training materials, assessments, portfolios, evaluations and improvement plans.

## **Outcomes for trainees**

Perceptive and reflective trainees demonstrate a good understanding of the systematic approach required to teach phonics and how this can be used to develop pupils' reading, writing and spelling skills. Trainees take responsibility for their own professional development in phonics and most are proactive in seeking out opportunities to gain further observation experiences with experienced teachers and identify what they need to do to improve. They make good use of their subject knowledge and use technical vocabulary with accuracy and confidence in their teaching. Trainees plan phonics lessons carefully to ensure they build on prior knowledge and extend pupil's understanding.

Early childhood education trainees and NQTs observed were confident and competent teachers of phonics. Their high levels of subject knowledge and depth of understanding of how to teach and assess phonics enables them to promote rapid learning when listening to children read, teaching discrete phonics lessons or using phonic strategies within the wider curriculum. Although primary trainees working in Key Stage 2 made valid attempts to include phonics in their English teaching, this lacked the same precision and focus. Trainees missed valuable opportunities to use their phonics training to promote pupils' learning in spelling and guided reading.

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

The university takes a strategic approach to planning a common and coherent training programme for phonics, within its English and professional studies modules, across its different primary and early childhood education training routes. This begins at the interview stage when applicants receive helpful phonics targets to work on before they start their training and ends with professional development and booster activities in preparation for employment. Phonics training is of good quality and enables trainees to become familiar with a range of commercial schemes and systematic approaches. Centre-based training is provided by two hardworking and responsive tutors, leading literacy practitioners from local schools and expert external speakers. Trainees complete three stepped audits, linked to the stage of their training, enabling them to self-assess their growing knowledge and understanding of phonics. These audits are compiled, along with well-designed directed tasks, assignments, practical resources, relevant research and Ofsted reports, into a comprehensive phonics portfolio. Trainees indicate this portfolio

provides an essential, practical toolkit to aid their teaching of phonics. Trainees' skills in critical reflection are developed through tutorials, which take place after each period of teaching practice, and are used effectively to set targets for the teaching of phonics in their next placement. Trainees particularly value the university's holistic approach to developing both their theoretical knowledge and their confidence and competence in the teaching of phonics and early reading. They can also opt into specialist training and support through the British Dyslexia Association's 'Sound Check' programme and receive input on the Every Child a Reader (ECaR) initiative. Some trainees also chose to complete their major independent study on phonics.

Good links are made between centre- and school-based training and trainee placements. These provide structured opportunities for trainees to put their developing knowledge, skills and understanding about phonics into practice in their teaching. Helpful prompts for planning discrete phonics lessons and teaching guided reading support trainees well and help them focus on the important areas of assessment and evaluating the impact their teaching has on pupils' learning. Recent training for link tutors and mentors and partnership documentation emphasises the partnership's clear expectations for phonics training. Every trainee is entitled to observe and teach phonics and to be observed and receive feedback on their teaching of phonics on each placement. However, a few year 2 trainees reported that they had not as yet been able to observe or teach phonics during their school placements. The partnership's own quality assurance systems have identified some variation in the quality of target setting and feedback trainees receive from mentors and class teachers. Inspection evidence confirms that some feedback and targets lack the necessary subject specific focus on phonics and early reading.

Greater emphasis is appropriately placed on the teaching of early reading and the use of systematic synthetic phonics in the training provided for those on the 3-7 rather than 5-11 training routes. Trainees and NQTs from the early childhood education routes are competent teachers of phonics and early reading. This is because their training places phonics and early reading at its heart and ensures trainees have sufficient opportunities to plan, teach, evaluate and assess their teaching of phonics in a variety of contexts. For example, groups of 10-12 trainees work with a tutor as part of a school-led initiative with a local primary school to support Reception and Year 1 children to make progress with their reading. Trainees receive detailed verbal and written feedback on their teaching from their tutor. This gives the tutor a very accurate picture of how well trainees use phonic and language comprehension strategies in their teaching of reading. A rigorous, formal, assessed interview is also used to test early childhood education trainees' understanding of underlying theory and its practical application in both discrete phonics sessions and across the wider early years curriculum, their accurate use of enunciation and their knowledge of graphemes from memory.

The proportion of NQTs who indicate they feel well prepared by their training to teach phonics in the National College for Teaching and Leadership's (NCTL's) NQT survey has steadily improved year-on-year, but remains below the sector average. Similarly undergraduate and postgraduate trainees, who responded to Ofsted's trainee online questionnaire in 2013-14, indicated they lacked confidence in the use of phonics in early reading and how to promote pupils' literacy skills. The two School Direct trainees, who responded, were more positive. The partnership's own internal evaluations indicate trainees on all programmes feel well prepared to teach reading, including phonics and comprehension. Most of the trainees who inspectors met during the inspection were fulsome in their praise for the quality of phonics training and support they receive. They indicated that they had been well prepared to teach phonics and were confident they would be able to demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge in the teaching of early reading and a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics by the end of their training. Although primary trainees receive phonics training in years 1, 3 and 4 of the undergraduate training programme, a number indicated the need for more structured phonics training in year 2. Inspectors agreed with the trainees' views. The length of time between the phonics training in year 1 and their second year placement makes it difficult for trainees based in Key Stage 2 classes to translate their earlier training into effective phonic strategies to support older pupils' learning.

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

There is a clear commitment to continually improving the quality of phonics training. The university has audited and reviewed the content and structure of its training and tutors have utilised their own research to analyse and improve its quality and effectiveness. Improvements have been sensibly piloted in the early childhood education programmes before being developed and embedded in the primary programmes. New procedures are in place to check on trainees' progress in phonics but these are not yet used to identify and tailor additional support or experience for those who need it. Improvement plans for the last three academic years clearly identify the correct priorities for improvement and which actions have been achieved to date. Success criteria are not yet linked to improvements in trainees' outcomes or expressed in a measurable way to enable leaders and managers to assess the impact of actions taken.

Schools are fully involved in the delivery of the phonics training and the university has responded very positively to a number of school-led initiatives, including PGCE focus days and School Direct, where schools are also involved in designing the training. Evaluation processes collect the views of trainees during and at the end of their training. Regular informal dialogue with schools is used to seek the views of headteachers, but the partnership is not yet formally collecting the views of school-based colleagues and employers as part of its evaluation procedures. Employing headteachers, who spoke to inspectors, indicated trainees were well prepared by their training to teach phonics during their induction year.

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

**Angela Milner**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**