

15 February 2016

Mr Keith Atkins  
The Taunton Academy  
Cheddon Road  
Taunton  
Somerset  
TA2 7QP

Dear Mr Atkins

**Evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of phonics training in the Somerset SCITT Consortium primary ITE partnership**

Thank you for the help which you and your colleagues, trainees, newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and schools and settings gave when I conducted a monitoring inspection of your primary ITE partnership on 28 January 2016. 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**

Somerset School Centre Initial Teacher Training Consortium (SCITT) works in partnership with 80 schools and five local authorities. The partnership comprises infant, first, junior, middle and special schools. The SCITT works with academies, independent providers and children's centres. There are currently 52 primary trainees, 14 of whom are following an Early Years and Key Stage 1 programme and six of whom are pursuing a specialism in special educational needs. On successful completion of the one-year course, trainees are awarded a postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) and qualified teacher status (QTS). Somerset SCITT also has five trainees who are following the School Direct route into the teaching profession.

During the focused monitoring inspection I visited a primary school to observe two NQTs teaching. The views of a further two NQTs were gathered through a telephone conversation and a discussion was held with eight current trainees. Meetings were held with three senior leaders and the English tutor who is responsible for phonics training. A range of documentation was reviewed, including a self-evaluation document, improvement plans and responses to the findings of external surveys. I also observed a centre-based training session on phonics.

## **Outcomes for trainees**

Trainees and NQTs are well prepared to become effective teachers of phonics. They possess a secure knowledge and understanding of how the systematic teaching of phonics aids the development of pupils' reading and writing skills. From the outset, trainees are expected to reflect on their own learning and the progress they make. Trainees make good use of their subject knowledge to become confident and accurate in using the technical vocabulary associated with teaching phonics. Most make good use of this knowledge to set themselves challenging targets.

The NQTs observed said that they were confident and were becoming increasingly effective teachers of phonics. Their secure subject knowledge and good depth of understanding of how to teach and assess phonics gives them the confidence to develop pupils' reading skills through both discrete phonics lessons and by using phonics strategies across the curriculum. However, trainees and NQTs said they would like to know more at the start of their training about the range of phonics teaching programmes available. They would also welcome more opportunities to teach phonics to younger children.

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

The SCITT leadership has taken decisive action to improve the teaching of English. As a result, the quality and rigour of the centre-based training has been reviewed and significantly strengthened. Changes in leadership that came into effect at the start of this academic year have had an immediate positive impact and improved the quality of the phonics training offered to trainees across the partnership. In addition to the updated early reading documentation, trainees are now provided with a wider range of practical resources and useful ideas.

The new English leader is very experienced and knowledgeable and has a clear understanding of what effective phonics training should look like. She has designed training materials, tasks and assignments to ensure a greater emphasis on trainees developing a secure and practical knowledge of how to teach phonics. These strategies, linked to the regular and detailed checks on trainees' learning and progress, give leaders a 'real-time' understanding of how trainees develop. It allows them to identify any potential weakness in provision and take early and effective action. As a result, leaders can point to a steady improvement in the quality of trainees' teaching of reading, and of phonics in particular.

Trainees who met with me spoke very positively about the quality of their phonics training. They say that they are acquiring a secure knowledge of the appropriate terminology. This exposure to the correct metalanguage ensures trainees are well equipped to teach phonics with increasing confidence. This contrasts markedly with the National College for Teaching and Leadership's NQT survey, where responses were below the sector average in respect of NQTs feeling prepared to teach reading, including phonics and comprehension.

Trainees and NQTs speak enthusiastically about the highly practical activities incorporated into their training. While the broad range of school placements on offer provide good opportunities for trainees to practise their newly acquired skills, they would welcome more opportunities to observe outstanding practice.

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

I found a clear commitment by SCITT leaders to introduce innovative models of teaching and further improve the quality of phonics training. Self-evaluation is honest, accurate and firmly focused on current SCITT and sector priorities. For example, leaders have responded quickly to national survey findings and improved the quality of English teaching. A new leader for English has been appointed. The taught sessions of the centre-based training now have a more coherent structure where phonics is an integral part of each session. Rigorous procedures are now in place to check on trainees' progress in phonics. The careful tracking of trainees over the past three years has ensured that their learning and progress are monitored and used diagnostically to further improve provision. As a result of improved centre-based training, current data indicate the growing confidence of trainees in their phonics knowledge since they started the course.

Improved performance management systems enable module leaders to be held fully accountable for trainees' progress and outcomes. Senior leaders use appraisal activities, including lesson observations, as an opportunity to enhance the work of all leaders by sharing best practice. Leaders also draw effectively on external expertise to enhance the centre-based phonics provision and this is helping to provide trainees with greater opportunities to observe outstanding practice.

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

David Edwards  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**