

Report summary

From training to teaching early language and literacy

The effectiveness of training to teach language and literacy in primary schools

'We need to renew our national drive for higher standards of literacy... I am committed to Ofsted playing its part in that campaign to raise standards.'

Sir Michael Wilshaw, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, March 2012.

All teachers, including new teachers coming into the profession, need to be well trained. New teachers in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2 must know how to teach early language skills, reading and writing effectively.

This survey set out to evaluate how well new teachers are trained to teach language and literacy, including phonics in primary schools. Inspectors followed 50 trainee teachers from their final training placement to the first and second terms of their first teaching posts. Forty-four of these trainees from 10 different initial teacher education providers took part from the start to the end of the survey.

Inspectors found variation in the quality of initial training and induction and considerable differences in the depth of knowledge and level of skills of the new teachers in teaching early language and literacy. Twenty-one of the 44 new teachers had good or better skills. Fourteen of these had received at least good training at every stage of their training and induction with sufficient focus and in-depth learning. However, the survey also found that not enough new teachers had consistent high-quality training during initial teacher education and induction to ensure that they developed good teaching skills, underpinned by a deep understanding of language development and the acquisition of literacy skills.

The following factors were found to be most important in ensuring that trainees and new teachers have the best possible chance of developing the necessary knowledge and expertise for teaching language and literacy well.

- Initial teacher education programmes need to ensure that every trainee has a good understanding of how children develop language and literacy skills

and a good understanding of the prerequisite early developmental experiences children need to ensure later success.

- There must be ongoing rigorous evaluation of the knowledge and skills of trainees and new teachers, specifically with regard to the teaching of language and literacy; training opportunities must be adapted accordingly.
- Trainees and new teachers must receive clear, robust and objective feedback on their performance, specifically about the teaching of language and literacy.
- Trainees and new teachers must be provided with many early opportunities to work alongside skilled colleagues in assessing, planning and evaluating pupils' learning, in order to ensure that from the outset, planning and teaching meet the different needs of all pupils.

Key findings

- Twenty-one of the 44 new teachers were teaching language and literacy well and ensuring that good progress was being made in this area by nearly all of the pupils in their class. Nearly all the 44 new teachers were teaching at a satisfactory or better level by the spring term 2012.¹
- Fourteen of the 44 new teachers did not have sufficiently in-depth training in assessing pupils' skills and knowledge in language and literacy to be able to use their judgements effectively to plan lessons and decide how to give extra help.
- All but three initial teacher education providers gave trainees at least a reasonable start in understanding how to teach phonics effectively, but nearly half the trainees were not sufficiently aware of how learning in one age group related to pupils' previous and subsequent learning in language and literacy.
- In the best initial teacher education programmes, trainees developed a good understanding of how language skills underpin literacy, and how the development of phonic skills relates to reading and writing across the age groups from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Year 6 and beyond. The most successful training and induction occurred in schools where there was a whole-school focus on improving the teaching and learning of language and literacy.
- The survey found that it is possible for a trainee to become a successful new teacher even when aspects of their initial training have been weak, where the gaps in their knowledge and skills are picked up and addressed by the provider, subsequent school placements or the induction school. Similarly it is possible for a new teacher to be effective when induction is weak if they have had good strong training and experience in good or better placements.

¹ The term 'satisfactory' refers to the criteria used in the inspection framework for maintained schools and academies, January 2012;
www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/090019.

- Too often training and induction in the teaching of language and literacy did not take sufficient account of trainees' and newly qualified teachers' different starting points. This survey found that, although not a guarantee of success, an initial degree in English, other language-based subjects or child development usually provided a stronger foundation of understanding for teaching language and literacy.
- On leaving training, newly qualified teachers were not always sufficiently skilled in adapting their teaching to meet the needs of pupils at an early stage of learning English as an additional language, the needs of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.
- Trainees rarely had sufficient training and guidance on how to work with other colleagues to ensure: that they received information about the pupils in their class who were taught in different ability groups by other staff; that they were able to monitor the quality of the input of, and provide feedback to, other staff working with pupils in their class in developing language and literacy skills.

Main report published 16 November 2012
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120031

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No. 120031

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