

EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSPECTORATE

Report of a Survey of

The Early Years Enriched Curriculum Pilot

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*

Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



The Early Years Enriched Curriculum Pilot

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report “Survey of The Early Years Enriched Curriculum Pilot,” presents the findings of an evaluation by the Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) of the quality of the provision in a sample of 29 schools in year 1 and year 2 classes participating in the Early Years Enriched Curriculum (EYEC) Pilot throughout Northern Ireland.

The pilot was devised jointly by the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and The Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) to address perceived weaknesses in the formal traditional curriculum currently on offer. The pilot was originally offered in six schools within the Greater Shankill area of Belfast, and was based both on the findings of international research and what was considered to be good early years practice both in Northern Ireland and across Europe. The emphasis was to be on learning rather than teaching and would encourage the teachers to be flexible in their approach and to adopt strategies to meet more fully the needs of individuals and groups.

The evidence base for the report consisted of visits by the Inspectorate to a sample of primary schools participating in the pilot in each Education and Library Board (ELB), as well as feedback from parental questionnaires sent to a small sample of the schools. School visits involved discussions with the Principal, members of the senior management team, the class teachers and classroom assistants. In addition, inspectors observed lessons, evaluated relevant school documentation, spoke with the children as they worked in class, and examined samples of their work.

The findings indicate that the quality of the provision in the schools surveyed was almost always of a high standard.

The summary of the main strengths and areas for improvement are outlined below.

Where the practice was found to be good or very good, the following strengths were identified by the Inspectorate:

- ◆ a majority of the children have a positive attitude to learning; they appear settled, confident, independent, well motivated, interested and happy;
- ◆ there is a sense of fun and enjoyment in learning;
- ◆ a majority of the teachers are well-organised, enthusiastic, hard-working, and committed to promoting the children's learning;
- ◆ there is a sense of teamwork among the teachers and the classroom assistants;
- ◆ a wide range of appropriate teaching strategies is used to promote learning;
- ◆ in a majority of classes, differentiated learning experiences are provided and the children's differing needs are met effectively;
- ◆ there is an emphasis on promoting the children's personal, social and emotional development;
- ◆ there is effective involvement of the classroom assistants in promoting the children's language and learning;
- ◆ there is effective liaison with parents, and good parental support for the pilot;
- ◆ there is a whole-school approach to, and support for, an enriched curriculum;
- ◆ there is evidence of progress made in the children's learning.

Where the practice was found to be less effective, the following areas for improvement have been identified:

there is a need

- ◆ to develop more appropriate methods of planning an enriched programme, and of assessing and recording the children's responses and achievements over time;
- ◆ for some of the staff to develop a better understanding of the principles of learning through play;
- ◆ for more thorough monitoring and evaluation of the enriched curriculum by the senior management team of the school;
- ◆ to develop, and extend further, the programme for creative and expressive development;
- ◆ to develop a more progressively broad and challenging physical play programme, especially for outdoor play;
- ◆ to identify and meet effectively the training needs of all the staff.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Much work has been carried out at an inter-board level to ensure consistency of approach in each of the ELBs and to support the teachers and classroom assistants in their day-to-day work with the children. The vast majority of principals and teachers were generally satisfied with the advice, training and support offered by the Curriculum and Advisory Support Service of the ELBs. In most of the EYEC classes, the role of the classroom assistant has developed beyond that of providing classroom support; it now involves participating actively in lessons, and promoting and supporting language development and learning. While some training has been made available to classroom assistants, the level and amount provided are insufficient to support them in this enhanced role. Discussions with teachers highlighted the need for support and training to be tailored, where possible, to reflect their individual needs. For example, beginning teachers, returning teachers and substitute teachers would not necessarily require the same support at a given time.

While, initially, many of the principals and teachers had approached the pilot programme with caution, and had concerns regarding the children's progress, particularly with regard to reading and writing, the staff report these fears were unfounded. Several teachers reported that many of the changes implemented were not radical, but rather were based on the good practice that had been established, or had evolved in many schools over the years. In the best practice, the teachers had evidence to support and illustrate the children's progress and development in literacy and numeracy.

The majority of the principals now view involvement in the pilot programme as a whole-school initiative and are aware that there are implications for the key stage (KS) 2 curriculum. The findings from the survey indicate that there is currently uncertainty about the continued development of the children's learning experiences and the long-term implications for their learning in KS2. There is a need for school development plans to reflect and address this issue. Further consideration needs to be given to the transition between year groups,

including the pre-school year, and between KS1 and 2, in order to ensure that the positive attitudes to learning and the wide range of experiences gained by the children are built upon and continue to flourish and develop.

The EYEC provided in the schools surveyed is a worthwhile, interesting and enjoyable experience for a majority of the teachers, staff, children, principals and parents involved. The survey found that there is great commitment and enthusiasm for the EYEC within schools and that most of the participants support the continuation of the initiative. Almost all of the responses highlighted the very significant benefits to the children in terms of their cognitive, physical and social development and of the promotion of positive attitudes to learning.

Copies of the full report can be obtained from

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