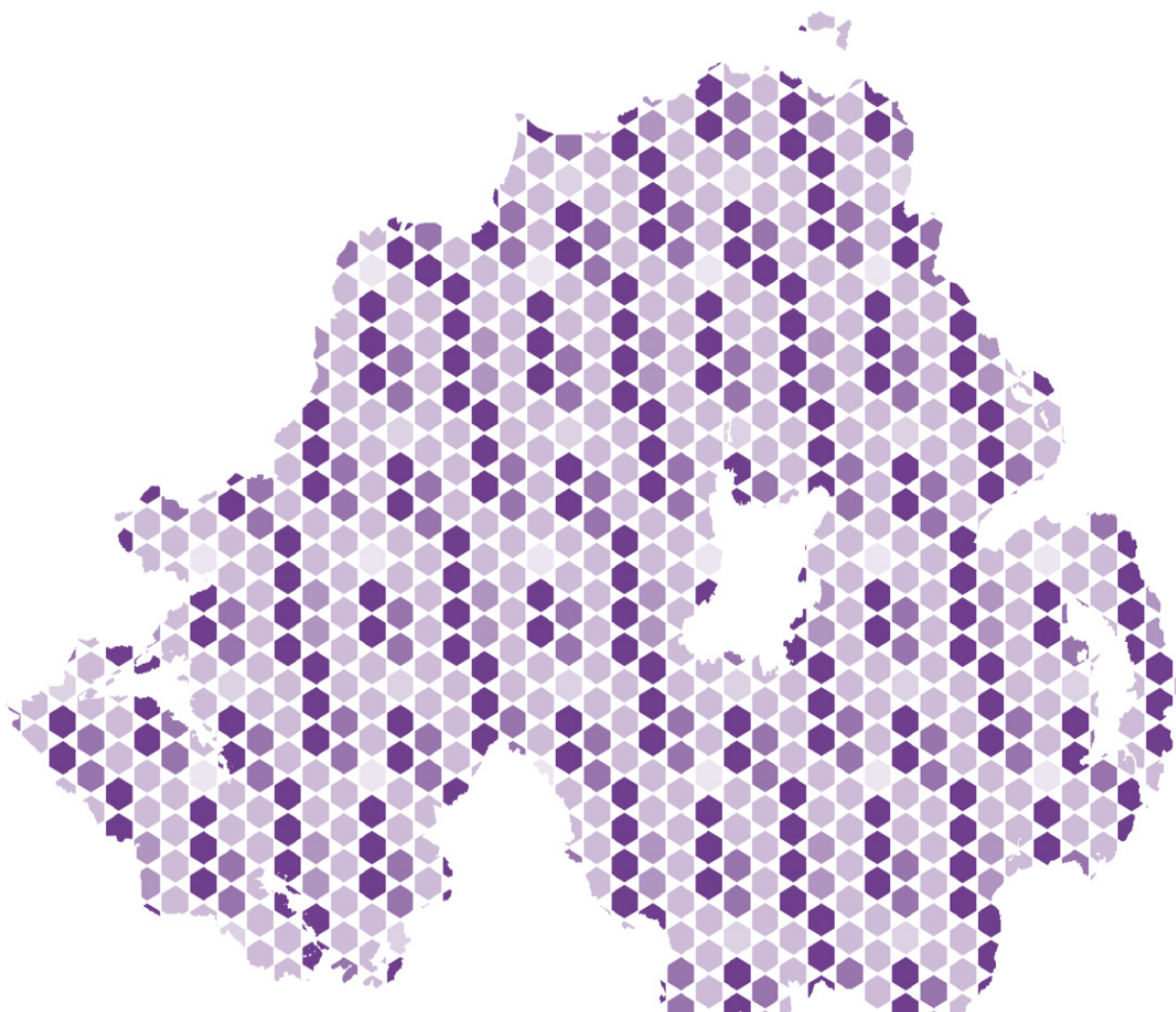


TEACHER/HIGHER EDUCATION INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

An Inspection Report on the
Irish-medium Primary PGCE
Programme, with a focus on
Literacy and Numeracy,
St Mary's University College

Inspected: June 2010

CONTENTS

Section	Page
1. SELF-EVALUATION AND INSPECTION	1
2. THE EVIDENCE BASE	1
3. THE POST GRADUATE CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION (PGCE) PROGRAMME	2
4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	2
5. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS	3
6. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING	4
7. CONCLUSION	6

1. SELF-EVALUATION AND INSPECTION

1.1 The inspection of the Irish Medium (IM) primary Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) programme provided by St Mary's University College (College) was conducted within the terms of the Department of Education (DE) Circular 2010/03 *Initial Teacher Education: Approval of Programmes* which sets out the requirements which programmes must meet to be approved by DE. The provision is required by the Circular to be of a quality which is judged by Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) to be at least satisfactory. The inspection adopted a focus on literacy and numeracy across the curriculum of the programme. The choice of a curriculum focus was influenced by the draft strategy *Every School a Good School: a strategy for raising achievement in literacy and numeracy* (DE, Bangor, 2008). The document *Self-evaluation and inspection of initial teacher education provision, 2009-2010* (Inspectorate, July 2009) contains the framework of quality indicators employed for the inspection.

1.2 In advance of the visit, the College produced a self-evaluation (SE) report (Annex 1 provides a short summary). In arriving at an evaluation of the levels of competence of student teachers, the School and the Inspectorate independently evaluated and reported on how well the student teachers are achieving and on the quality of provision for learning which, together, comprise a single summary performance level for the overall effectiveness of the provision (quality and outcomes). They also both evaluated and reported on the effectiveness of leadership and management, including the effectiveness of self-evaluation in securing improvement by raising achievement and enhancing quality. Lecturers were also invited to identify and describe briefly instances of effective practice which illustrate aspects of the self-evaluation and inspection framework. A small selection of these is included in this report.

1.3 Finally, the College and the Inspectorate independently reported an overall level for the programme areas being assessed. In all cases, the evaluations relate to six performance levels which may be interpreted as follows:

PERFORMANCE LEVEL
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

2. THE EVIDENCE BASE

2.1 During the academic year 2009-2010, a team of three inspectors visited the College and a sample of PGCE students during their school-based work experience. In advance of the visit, the College produced a short self-evaluation report (Annex 1). The inspectors observed eight sessions taught by six academic staff, including lectures, seminars and practical workshops including sessions on literacy and numeracy. A very small number of the sessions involved collaborative teaching between members of the College's IM team and College staff with specialisms in other areas. The Inspectorate observed instances of learning and teaching; talked, formally and informally, to a selection of students and lecturers; discussed samples of the students' work with the students concerned; attended meetings; read policy, planning and evaluation documents; and reviewed the resources.

2.2 The inspectors and College staff conducted six significant discussions which focused partly on their roles and responsibilities and partly on self-evaluation evidence produced for other purposes such as External Examiners, the Annual Module Review Reports, the Annual Report on Admissions and PGCE Student Profile report from September 2009, minutes of PGCE course team meetings, minutes of the IM School Partnership Group meetings, and results of the 2009 Student Survey. A formal discussion was held with a group of students in the College as well as with five students during visits to school-based work placements in three schools. The visits to schools also allowed for a range of informal talks with classroom teachers and principals and gave inspectors access to current student school experience files to examine planning and reflection.

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

3. THE IM PRIMARY POST GRADUATE CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION (PGCE) PROGRAMME AT ST MARY'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

3.1 The IM PGCE primary programme consists of three modules, two delivered in College at Masters-level addressing educational, IM, curricular and professional issues; the third module at H-level comprises two blocks of school-based work, one in an IM primary school or unit and one in an English-medium primary school.

3.2 The students on the programme are generally graduates in Irish or have a strong language background. The number of applications for places on the programme has fallen slightly over the last three years while the number of places available has increased significantly.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 Under the strong, visionary leadership of the Principal and senior managers, all College staff have a clear understanding of the College's structures for self-evaluation and their role in promoting continued improvement. The Inspectorate endorses the strengths and areas for development identified by the College in its self-evaluation (SE) report (Annex 1). There is a clear commitment by the entire College community to the promotion of Irish-medium education (IME), demonstrated by staff development for all staff on the values and aims of IME. The College works hard to develop strategic links with key IM and wider educational partners and uses these to inform and enrich the PGCE Programme and ensure that current priorities are addressed appropriately.

A workshop for teachers hosting PGCE students was held to enhance understanding between IM schools and College and to strengthen the partnership. The teachers came with a range of experience; some with many years experience hosting students and one hosting a student for the first time. The teachers were shown the range of teaching resources, including electronic resources, available to students and a discussion forum on LearningNI where students evaluate the new electronic IM resources on *BBC Fios*. Through the workshop information and understanding was shared, roles and responsibilities clarified and case studies explored. The importance of effective communication between all partners was highlighted and the nature of developmental competence clarified. Intervention and mentoring systems were tested and the dilemma of achieving a balance between supporting students and fostering independence was explored. Teachers suggested ways to enhance provision; there are plans for a workshop and a role-play exercise on effective communication with parents during the coming academic year.

4.2 The strengths with regard to leadership and management include:

- the high quality of the College's structures for self-evaluation ensuring timely modifications where necessary;
- the effective strategy of distributed leadership and its explicit link to the strategy for staff development;
- the shared vision for the role of the College in the provision for IME;
- the commitment of the College as a whole to the promotion of IME; and
- the development of the College's research capacity in relation to IME.

4.3 An area for development is:

- to monitor, review and develop the effectiveness of the arrangements for collaborative teaching.

Overall, the effectiveness of leadership and management in securing improvement by raising achievement and enhancing quality is very good.

5. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

5.1 The students on the PGCE programme generally have an honours degree in Irish, or in another subject, and also a high level of competence in Irish. They understand the need to continue to develop their language competence to work competently in an IM environment.

5.2 The strengths include:

- the commitment of the students to IME;
- the commitment of the students to the pastoral care of the children;

- the professional attitudes demonstrated by the students both during College activities and during school-based work;
- the very good understanding by the students of the teacher competences and the application of the competences in helping students to reflect on their own professional development;
- the capacity of the students for critical self-reflection focused on learning intentions; and
- the readiness of students for progression to employment.

The quality of standards and achievements is very good.

6. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION

6.1 A representative of the College's Governing Body met with the inspection team to learn of the purpose and focus of the inspection. He spoke of his pride in the work and achievements of the College and talked about his hopes and vision for the future, in particular the important role the College plays in the IM sector and the important place the Irish-medium education (IME) has in the work and life of the College.

6.2 The students talked of their appreciation of the caring, supportive ethos of the College and the commitment of the whole College community to meeting their needs. They spoke of their loyalty to IME and are very aware of their need to continue to develop their Irish language skills in the context of teaching competence 3 (ii).

6.3 Inspectorate observation included sessions on key curricular areas such as literacy and bi-literacy, numeracy, special educational needs and The World Around Us taught by the College's IM and non-IM staff. The quality of the teaching by academic staff observed during the inspection was very good or outstanding in one-half of the sessions observed. A notable feature of the provision is the reintroduction of an element of collaborative teaching involving the College's IM staff and College staff with other specialisms. This aspect of the provision should be monitored, reviewed and developed to ensure that it is as effective as possible.

6.4 The College's IM staff have made major contributions to Irish-medium education in terms of research, resources and approaches to IME and these are used to very good effect to inform the programme. The College's non-IM staff make a very positive contribution to the provision. Students are given weekly seminars on aspects of the Irish language by the College's specialist language staff and a field trip to the Gaeltacht has recently been introduced.

6.5 The strengths of the quality of provision for learning include:

- the Irish language and Irish-medium education environment provided by the College and the commitment of the College to IME;
- the excellent working relationships between staff and students;
- the outstanding quality of support for students;

- the effective manner in which the experience and expertise of the College's IM staff are used to inform the Programme;
- the positive contribution of non-IM staff to the programme, particularly the contribution of the specialist literacy and numeracy lecturers;
- the extent to which the Programme structure and content address current IM and wider educational priorities;
- the very good quality of much of the teaching observed and the effective promotion of literacy, bi-literacy and numeracy in an IM context; and
- the excellent relationships the College has fostered with the IM sector and with key educational partners generally.

Communication between students during school-based work was supported through the Discussion Forum on LearningNI (LNI), which productively encourages students to make effective use of ICT in the IM setting and make meaningful connections between different learning experiences. Students participated in ICT workshops, facilitated by C2K and BBC staff. They explored LNI and participated in a course learning how to use the Irish language programmes within the BBC Fios portal. Students incorporated some of the Fios programmes into their teaching and shared their observations and lesson evaluations online with one another and with guests from the BBC Irish Department. Host teachers appreciated the students' creative use of these resources in the classroom.

6.6 An area for development is the need:

- to monitor and support the students' continuing language development.

School-based work

6.7 The strengths evident in school-based work include:

- the clear guidance given to students on Child Protection before they undertake any school-based work;
- the quality of the teaching by students observed which was always good or better;
- the thorough preparation by students for their teaching particularly in relation to literacy, bi-literacy and numeracy;
- the students' reflection and evaluation of their practice which had a clear focus on learning;
- the consistent manner in which staff discuss previous feedback given and link this to progress made with students;
- the emphasis the College places on preparation for induction and early professional development during school-based work;

- the effective support given by schools to students during school-based work, and
- the commitment of schools to the partnership with the College.

A PGCE student, on his third school-based work block, instigated excellent work in an IM primary unit. Before the placement began, the student teacher was briefed on the teacher's plans to embark on an ICT based project with P6/7 pupils. The PGCE student, who had participated in a movie-making workshop facilitated by Northern Ireland Screen as part of the PGCE literacy course, offered his expertise in the area of movie-making to the class teacher. The pupils made a movie on the theme of The Egyptians, animated with clay characters, which attracted accreditation from CCEA. The project proved a huge success with the pupils and the teacher, who also developed skills and will include this innovative approach to learning and teaching with other classes in future years.

The quality of provision is very good.

Overall, the quality of provision for learning and the standards achieved by the students is very good.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of the provision of teacher education (and self-evaluation) by this provider is judged by the Inspectorate to be very good. The provider is meeting very effectively the needs of the student teachers and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

The overall quality of teacher education (and self-evaluation) across the Irish-medium PGCE Primary Programme is very good.

AREA A - SELF-EVALUATION OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE PGCE PRIMARY (IME) PROGRAMME

It was concluded that, in St Mary's, leadership and management are very effective in raising achievement, supporting the student teachers and enhancing quality on the PGCE (IME) Programme. This is helped by the small size of the institution and the collegiate nature of leadership and management whereby staff at all levels interact and exchange views on a regular basis. There is a strong sense of community and mutual respect arising from the College ethos which means that leaders and managers are very focused on ensuring that students receive the highest quality of learning experiences and are enabled to reach their full potential.

A wide range of evidence was considered in the evaluation of the effectiveness of leadership and management and the following strengths were identified:

Strengths:

- the strong and effective team approach to implementing and developing the PGCE Primary (IME) programme;
- the high-quality relationships with schools in all aspects of the ITE partnerships;
- the strong links with the Irish-medium community;
- the dedicated, effective teaching staff with a range of experience well suited to delivery of the programme;
- the major contribution made by staff to Irish-medium educational developments;
- the sharing of expertise and good practice through staff development and other methods;
- the close interconnectivity with other high-quality College programmes;
- the highly effective communication between all involved in the programme;
- the high level of involvement of staff in educational research and scholarly activity;
- the very effective quality assurance and review procedures, demonstrating the embedding of a strong self-evaluation culture in the College; and
- the very high quality of accommodation and resources to facilitate student learning.

Aspects for further development in Leadership and Management are:

- an investigation of ways in which the PGCE programme could benefit from closer links with An tÁisaonad; and
- further College-wide staff development pertaining to Irish-medium education issues across the curriculum.

<p>The College believes that the performance level in the area of Leadership and Management in the PGCE Primary (IME) Programme is outstanding.</p>
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AREA B - SELF-EVALUATION OF ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS IN THE PGCE (IME) PRIMARY PROGRAMME

It was concluded that, in St Mary's, student teachers on the PGCE (IME) programme achieve at a very high level across the full range of professional and educational areas that might be expected in a high quality initial teacher education programme. It was felt that this is in no small measure due to the dedication and commitment of the students and the excellent working relationships between students and staff. This conviction was based on a wide range of evidence including the very positive reports made by the External Examiner.

A wide range of evidence was considered in the evaluation of how well the students achieve and the following strengths were identified:

Strengths:

- the dedication and commitment of students to the promotion of Irish-medium education;
- the excellent relationships between staff and students ensuring a positive and stimulating learning environment;
- the high standards of work including preparation shown by students on School Experience;
- the high regard expressed by schools for the enthusiasm shown by students and their demonstration of appropriate professional values;
- the highly professional attitude exhibited by students, increasingly demonstrating the ability to critically self-reflect;
- the high levels of student Literacy and Numeracy competence across the Irish-medium Primary Curriculum;
- the thorough preparation of student teachers for progression to employment as Irish-medium teachers; and
- the strong College commitment to retention of students.

Aspects for further development in Achievements and Standards are:

- consideration of how PGCE students could be given opportunities, similar to those available to IME undergraduates, to train and act as peer tutors in the Writing Centre;
- continued exploration of the use of electronic portfolios for student self-evaluation and reflection; and
- exploration of ways to encourage students to make greater use of ICT in their teaching across the curriculum.

AREA C - SELF-EVALUATION OF QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING IN THE PGCE PRIMARY (IME) PROGRAMME

It was concluded that the quality of provision for learning on the PGCE (IME) programme is very high. It was felt that this is due to the high level of expertise of the staff and their commitment to teaching and student learning in an Irish-medium context. There is ample evidence that, arising from the College ethos, there is a very strong commitment to the care and support of students. It was considered that the very positive feedback from students, taken alongside the wide range of other evidence, supports that belief.

A wide range of evidence was considered in the evaluation of the quality of provision for learning and the following strengths were identified:

Strengths:

- the development of an innovative and very relevant programme which promotes Literacy and Numeracy in an Irish-medium context;
- the commitment of staff to the promotion of Irish-medium education;
- the expertise of staff in areas across the curriculum and their ability to develop student competence in Literacy and Numeracy in different educational ways;
- the expertise of core staff in the field of Irish-medium education;
- the excellent quality of student support, guidance and pastoral care provided;
- the high quality of the induction and orientation programme;
- the high quality of preparation, support and guidance for student learning on school experience;
- the good practice in immersion education demonstrated by tutors; and
- the dedicated Irish language provision.

Aspects for further development in Quality of Provision for Learning are:

- developing the use of the Gaeltacht to enhanced students' language skills;
- consideration of ways to develop the International dimension in the PGCE programme;
- exploration, building on existing practice, of ways to further assist students to identify their particular learning needs in the areas of Literacy and Numeracy; and
- further development of good practice in tutors' use of ICT to support the Irish-medium curriculum.

The College believes that the performance level in the areas of Achievements and Standards and Quality of Provision for Learning in the PGCE (IME) Primary Programme is very good.

CONCLUSION

Based on this self-evaluation and taking into consideration all the self-evaluation quality indicators, the overall conclusion reached was that the quality of the provision of teacher education (and self-evaluation) in the PGCE (IME) Primary Programme is very good. The College considers that the programme is meeting very effectively the needs of the student teachers and that the capacity for sustained self-improvement has been demonstrated.

The College believes that the performance level with regard to the overall quality of teacher education (and self-evaluation) in the PGCE (IME) Primary Programme is very good.
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