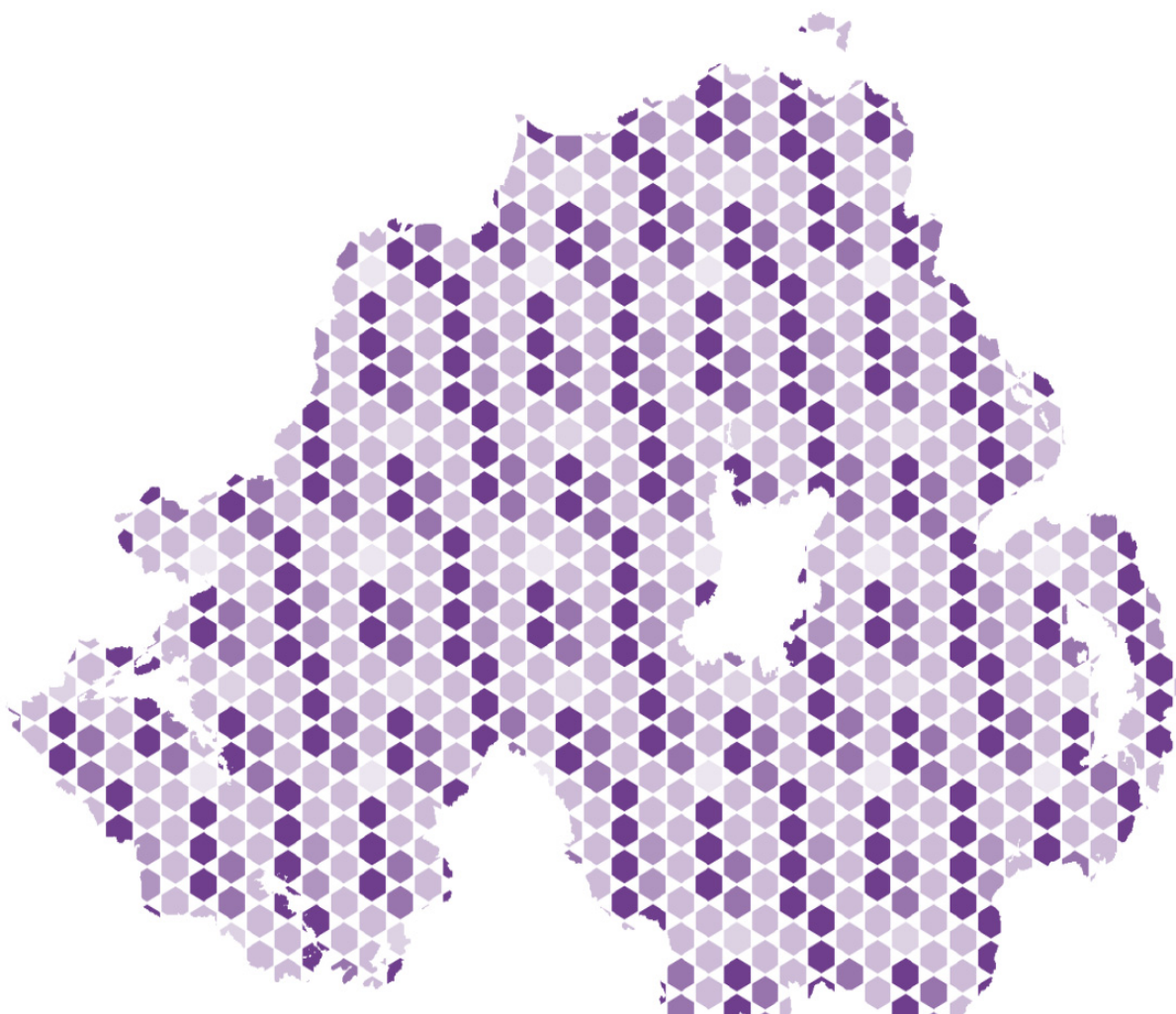


# TEACHER/HIGHER EDUCATION INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

An Inspection Report on the PGCE  
Early Years Programme, with a  
focus on Literacy and Numeracy,  
Stranmillis University College

Inspected: June 2010

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## 1. SELF-EVALUATION AND INSPECTION

1.1 The inspection of the Early Years Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) programme provided by Stranmillis 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 short self-evaluation (SE) report (Annex 1). 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 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 In Stranmillis University College (College), over the course academic year 2009-10, the Inspectorate inspected eight sessions taught by seven academic staff, ranging from lectures, seminars and practical workshops to presentations by students, including their use of information and communication technology to support their teaching. Several of the sessions included a specific focus on the cross-curricular nature of literacy and numeracy. Effective professional development opportunities for college staff were also included, for example a lecture from a visiting professor and lunch-time 'good practice' seminars.

2.2 The inspectors and the College staff conducted over 15 significant discussions which focused partly on their roles and responsibilities and partly on self-evaluation evidence produced for internal committees, including The Learning and Teaching Committee. A formal discussion was held with a group of students in the College as well as with five students during visits to six work placements in four schools. The visits to schools also allowed for a range of informal talks with, for example, teacher-tutors, classroom teachers and principals.

2.3 The inspectors reviewed work written by the students including their school experience files. They examined a wide range of planning documentation including minutes of meetings, internal and external audit documents, programme outlines, module and programme reviews and various teaching resources, including on-line materials to support the students. The students' portfolios, including their developing use of an e-portfolio, their assessments, their evaluations and evidence of the tracking of individual student's progress were also sampled and examined.

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 EARLY YEARS POST-GRADUATE CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION (PGCE) PROGRAMME AT STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

3.1 Stranmillis University College has been a provider of Initial Teacher Education since 1922. The current PGCE Early Years programme has been offered to students since 1995, when the University College began to diversify into Early Childhood Studies, Health and Leisure Studies.

3.2 The PGCE Early Years programme consists of four modules: Implementing the Play-based Curriculum; Teaching the Key Stage One Curriculum; Professional Development 1 and Professional Development 2. The academic year is divided into four parts.

- pre-school, including a five-week school placement;
- Foundation Stage, including a five-week school placement;
- Key Stage One, including a six-week school placement; and
- one-week Special Educational Needs focus in a special school.

3.3 In the inspection year, 15 student places were available as determined by DE and the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL). Prior to their recruitment to the programme, all of the students demonstrate a high standard of academic achievement together with a high level of professional commitment, communication skills and personal potential.

#### 4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT AND SELF-EVALUATION

4.1 Following the Inspection Report on Literacy and Numeracy across the BEd Programmes in 2009<sup>1</sup>, the College's Governing Body appointed an assistant vice-principal for teacher education in order to provide a stronger coherence for the teacher education programmes across the College. The recently reconstituted senior management team within the College has streamlined course procedures and functions, improved facilities and provided staff development to support and further enhance the staff/student interface. During the inspection, the programme co-ordinator was absent on a period of extended leave and during the course of the year a number of lecturers took responsibility for modules under the direction of the assistant vice-principal. Although the PGCE Early Years programme is still addressing the challenges of significant transition and transformation, there is evidence of very good progress through enhanced channels of communication between senior management and programme teams, of a renewed sense of ownership of the course and of an improving collaborative and collegiate approach to evaluating and developing aspects of the course.

4.2 In September 2009, the new assistant vice-principal provided an opportunity for all those staff involved in the delivery of the PGCE Early Years programme to undertake self-evaluation and agree the strengths and areas of improvement of the course. The College's self-evaluation report is summarised in Annex 1.

4.3 There is evidence of an improved collaborative approach to evaluating the course and to reviewing and developing the programme in order that it promotes the most effective and current practice. It is evident from the findings of the self-evaluation that the staff and programme leaders have a much clearer understanding of, and have begun to contribute more fully to, the process of self-evaluation and the strengths and areas for improvement identified. It will be important that the very good start made in establishing a collaborative approach to the continuous improvement of the programme becomes embedded within the culture of the College and that the channels of communication between lecturers and management continue to become more open and transparent.

Following recent discussion and deliberations, including self-evaluation, on the key principles of the Teacher Education Programmes, the College has recently undertaken:

- major refurbishment of teaching spaces;
- the development of a number of key strategic partnerships; and
- the implementation of a robust internal education strategy to enhance interdisciplinary working.

4.4 The strengths include the:

- the positive impact of the distributed leadership structures and the clear vision for future development and continuous improvement;

<sup>1</sup><http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/inspection-reports/inspection-reports-higher-education-initial-teacher-education/inspection-reports-higher-education-initial-teacher-education-2009/stranmillis-university-college-an-inspection-report-on-literacy-and-numeracy-across-the-bed-programmes.pdf>

- the very effective role of the assistant Vice–principal in developing a sense of collegiality within the team who deliver the PGCE Early Years programme;
- the prompt response to the feedback from the students, schools and external examiners;
- the commitment and very good methods introduced during the academic year to strengthen the relationship, involvement and partnership arrangements with schools;
- the recently revised selection of school placements in order to promote the most effective classroom practice for the students; and
- the development of a co-ordinated approach towards the promotion of literacy and numeracy across all areas of the curriculum.

In response to student demand to enhance confidence and competence in the area of Special Needs, all students participate in a placement at Harberton Special School where they experience weekly on-site tutorials hosted by college lecturers and expert teachers from the host school. During organised activities they have opportunities for peer learning and practice in devising Individual Education Plans with experienced colleagues. The students commented on how they could now begin to write Individual Educational Plans and are aware of where to go for advice when required in the future.

4.5 The areas for development include:

- the need to develop a shared thinking and understanding amongst the staff of how children learn and develop and to promote the most effective practice across the PGCE Early Years, the Bachelor of Arts (BA) Early Childhood Studies and the Primary Bachelor of Education (BEd) programmes.

4.6 Based on the evidence from the inspection visits, which took place over the full course of the academic year 2009-10, the Inspectorate concludes that all aspects of the provision and the response are improving significantly.

4.7 The College is very good at ensuring improvement through evaluating the quality of its own provision, taking action to build on its own strengths and addressing the areas for development, both those which they have identified and the small number of additional recommendations made in this inspection report. The College has the capability to address these areas effectively.

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 entering the PGCE course are graduates with an honours degree in Early Childhood Studies, Psychology, Education or Early Years with Human and Biological Services. They possess a 2:1 degree or higher within the subject on offer. Nine of the fifteen students acquired their degree in Northern Ireland.

## 5.2 The strengths include:

- the very good understanding of the students with regard to the Northern Ireland teaching competences, the Northern Ireland curriculum and related educational priorities;
- the high standards achieved by the students in the quality of their assignments, and their developing understanding and demonstration of the link between practice, reflection and research;
- the high retention rates in the programme;
- the high level of insightful, evaluative comments made by the students on their school-based work and their ability to prioritise the areas for their continued professional development;
- the developing understanding of the students in how to promote literacy and numeracy in their teaching;
- the students' confidence and competence in using educational technologies resulting from the priority given to the promotion of best practice;
- the high level of commitment, dedication and attention demonstrated by the students to the pastoral needs and progress of the learners; and
- the maturity, enthusiasm, breadth of experience and effectiveness of the students in the classroom, as reported by the placement schools.

The students have an opportunity to complete a Certificate in English as an Additional Language. In addition to helping them to develop children's talking, listening, reading and writing skills across the curriculum, it also enables them to reflect on how to deal with many of the issues presented when meeting the needs of children whose first language is not English.

Overall, the quality of standards achieved by the students is outstanding.

## 6. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

6.1 In the formal and informal discussions with the students during the year the students commented favourably on:

- their good working relationships with the lecturers, the supportive and informative approach to their welfare and the caring ethos of the College;
- the emphasis given to promoting effective literacy and numeracy throughout the programme and the centrality of the Northern Ireland curriculum to all taught sessions;

The students are provided with the opportunity to complete the Fundamental Movement Skills Teachers Certificate. This course provides the student teachers with quality professional development, support materials and strategies that will enable them to deliver Physical Development and Movement in the early years and Physical Education programmes in the primary school. On completion students are awarded a certificate in the teaching of Fundamental Movement Skills.

- detailed arrangements for information regarding opportunities to access and attend the 'Additionality' courses, such as special educational needs and training in the use of the Interactive Whiteboard; and
- their awareness of their own developing confidence in becoming self-reflective practitioners.

6.2 The students commented that there is a need for the procedures on providing feedback on their progress and on their written assignments to be more prompt and consistent. They also said that the Early Years Centre needs updated and access to the library resources improved.

The students frequently avail of workshops run by practitioners who were past students of the College. For example, a recent workshop on '**Good practice in Technology Enhanced Learning Across the Curriculum**' provided them with informative insights of cutting-edge practice and how it can be integrated across all the Areas of Learning. They reported how they felt more confident to use the Interactive Whiteboard within the classroom and had a greater understanding of how it could be an integral part of every day teaching and learning.

6.3 The quality of the teaching by the academic staff observed during the inspection was always very good or outstanding. Sessions on key curricular areas such as literacy, numeracy, the world around us (WAU), music and special educational needs were observed and, on occasions, the literacy and numeracy lecturers delivered sessions together.

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

The College has developed a strategy to expand the range of courses offered as additional qualifications for undergraduate and full time post-graduate students under 'Degree Plus' as part of the Professional Development continuum.

- the high quality of the preparation by the lecturers as demonstrated through the taught sessions observed;
- the excellent working relationships established between the students and the lecturers and the lecturers' strong support for their learning;
- the high quality of the training and support provided on child protection;
- the additional use of cross-college specialists to extend the range of provision within the pre-school focus;
- the recent significant improvements in the accommodation and resources;
- the recent improvements to the recruitment, induction and continuing support arrangements for the students;



- the very good to outstanding expertise and experience of the lecturers and the high quality of most of the assessment and feedback given to the students;

Multi Media Learning Objects are being developed for use with future students in order to provide contextualised opportunities for discussion and reflection and to disseminate best practice. These objects are created using video footage of examples of students' good practice. For example, a student returned to her Foundation Stage class to record a lesson on 'Using Puppets in the World Around Us'. This lesson demonstrated clear links between History, Literacy and Drama and the children were engaged purposefully by her approach and management.

- the opportunities observed where lecturers promoted examples of excellent scaffolding, modelling, and questioning based on their very good knowledge and understanding of effective early years practice; and
- the recent focus and attention provided to ensure all resources, including the involvement of excellent external practitioners, promote effective practice.

#### 6.5 The areas for development include:

- the need to ensure a consistency of approach by all the lecturers in embedding the teaching competences within all aspects of the programme; and
- the need to promote further connected learning across all areas of the curriculum, through the development of a more enriching and inviting Early Years Centre and a more explicit link between research and practice.

### SCHOOL BASED WORK

6.6 Students have a period of school experience in each of the four parts of the programme. During the inspection, five students were observed teaching in pre-school, foundation stage and key stage 1.

The benefits of promoting the use of real life contexts in mathematics and in connecting learning across the areas of the curriculum are made evident for the students. For example, during a visit to the Ulster American Folk Park, students had the opportunity to participate in a mathematics trail designed for primary school children. They were challenged to reflect on how to make effective use of similar experiences for the children as they observed groups taking part in the various maths trails within the park.

#### 6.7 The strengths of the school-based work include:

- the development of partnerships with schools, which provide exemplary experience for the students, and the commitment of the host schools to that partnership;
- the quality of the students' teaching observed, most of which was good or better;
- the thorough preparation and detailed planning undertaken by the students and their commitment to the school placement;

- the progress made by the students, throughout the year, in developing a self-reflective approach to their work; and
- the high quality of support for and the excellent quality of almost all of the feedback sessions observed between the student, the tutor and the school mentor.

6.8 The areas for development are:

- the need to ensure full consistency in implementing the school placement procedures by all of the lecturers; and
- the need to promote further a consistency of approach by the lecturers between when the students are in the College and when they are on school based placements.

Overall, the quality of provision for learning 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) is very good.**

## SUMMARY OF SELF-EVALUATION BY STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

**Assessment of Performance:** Overall performance is good with some examples of very good/recently improved performance and areas for further improvement identified.

<p><b>(A) How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement, supporting the student teachers and enhancing quality?</b></p>	<p><b>Main Strengths:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An extensive programme of refurbishment is a current strategic priority in order to provide a high quality learning environment.</li> <li>• In order to provide a stronger coherence within and across programmes, and to ensure that all activities are closely aligned to the strategic targets, the College's Governing Body recently appointed an Assistant Vice-principal with responsibility for Teacher Education.</li> <li>• The appointment of two cross-college coordinators in 0809 has strengthened leadership in the areas of Literacy and Numeracy and there is increased evidence of research-led practice.</li> <li>• There are clear and responsive quality assurance systems in place which operate at module and pathway levels. The procedures enable students and other stakeholders to contribute to the review process. There is strong evidence that module content and delivery is refined as a result of self-evaluation.</li> <li>• As well as evidence of a highly qualified and experienced staff, there is evidence to show ongoing professional development, engagement in research/scholarship and international partnerships.</li> </ul> <p><b>Areas for further development:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a need to further develop school partnerships in order to strengthen the reciprocal nature of the relationship. The College is also developing the following strategies which will increase the involvement of staff with schools: encouraging more staff to gain recent relevant experience, engaging in consultancy and research work. There is also a focus on the need to strengthen the ambassadorial role of College staff as they visit schools.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The College needs to continue to work hard at developing a research culture which not only adds to its RAE 2008 profile but supports and enriches its core business. This is regarded as an essential part of the aspiration to be recognized as World Class.</li> <li>• The strategy of building and consolidating key international partnerships which contribute both to the development of staff and students is critically important. This strategy is regarded as an essential part of the aspiration to be recognized as World Class.</li> </ul> <p><b>Overall the College would describe its performance in this area as good. Significant changes have been implemented over the past year and we believe that there is emerging evidence of very good practice.</b></p>
<p><b>(B) How well do student teachers achieve and what is the quality of provision for learning?</b></p>	<p><b>Main Strengths:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is evidence to show that students are committed to the professional values as articulated by the GTC (NI) and promote a positive ethos in the classroom. Students enter the College with excellent profiles both in terms of qualifications, relevant EY experience and a commitment to teaching. They demonstrate a growing understanding of teacher competences and the current educational priorities.</li> <li>• Critical self-reflection and self-improvement is promoted throughout the College.</li> <li>• Attainment and retention rates verify the high levels of achievement against national and local benchmarks. An extensive programme of refurbishment is a key strategic priority and a number of key projects are being planned and implemented to enhance the current provision.</li> <li>• The structure of the programmes and expertise of the staff ensure that students achieve appropriate competences.</li> <li>• The College is using ICT/web based technologies such as Queen's On-line and CETL to promote effective learning.</li> <li>• Review of the evidence indicates the use of a range of teaching approaches.</li> <li>• There are effective arrangements for admissions, induction and ongoing pastoral and learning support.</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Areas for further development:</b></p> <p>The College is seeking to develop strategies which will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• extend access to activities outside the degree programme that add value in the employment market;</li> <li>• embed themes such as the international perspective and cultural diversity across the curriculum;</li> <li>• expand the use of a reflect, select, defend viva model for demonstration of the GTC (NI) competences; and</li> <li>• promote more collaborative learning, including involvement with the related professionals.</li> </ul> <p>The College is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• committed to promoting recent relevant school experience and involvement in scholarly activity so that the quality and relevance of teaching/learning can be further enhanced;</li> <li>• promoting the use of a range of teaching approaches which model best practice; and</li> <li>• reviewing its strategies and resources to ensure that there are more opportunities for the innovative use of ICT/web based technologies as a tool to promote effective learning.</li> </ul> <p><b>Overall the College would describe its performance in this area as good with some examples of practice which is very good. Areas for further improvement have been identified.</b></p>
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