

Launch of Chief Inspector's Report (2008-10): 13 October 2010: W5

Chief Inspector's Address

- Good morning colleagues I bid each one of you a sincere and warm welcome to W5. [Reference to Minister Ruane; Alan Shannon and Paul Sweeney.]
- The shared interest we have in providing the best educational and training opportunities for the learners in our care is, I believe, what has brought us together today.
- Thank you for your attendance; and my thanks also to those children, young people and adult learners who have added so much to the proceedings through sharing their experiences with us both as part of the launch programme, and through the excellent displays established in the area adjacent to the entrance to the lecture theatre; and in the area where we will have lunch.
- The presence of the children, young people and adult learners, and their invaluable contribution, reminds all of us to keep the

- A word of thanks too, to Dr Sally Montgomery for once again allowing us access to this excellent, educational venue, W5; a venue which combines the best of learning with exploration, enjoyment and, most importantly, fun.
- This is the second biennial report which I have had the privilege to publish and to present to the Ministers of the three Departments for which we provide inspection services, namely DE, DCAL and DEL. The evidence for the findings set out in the report is based on over 700 programmed

- In this the European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, it is incumbent on all of us involved in the education of our children and young people, to do what we can to ensure that there is no poverty of aspiration, and that all of our learners, in so far as is possible, are dealt with in an inclusive and equitable way. The education, work-based learning and youth sectors must continue to work towards providing consistently good opportunities for learners, in order to prepare our children and young people for work: for their own fulfilment and reward; to support the economy; and

- In all aspects of our work in the Education and Training Inspectorate, we retain a clear focus on the experience and outcomes for learners. And it is an absolute privilege to observe at first-hand the often very good and indeed outstanding work of many leaders, managers, teachers, training suppliers and youth workers as they support learners of all ages and backgrounds to fulfil their potential; and to report these outcomes publicly.
- Equally, as inspectors, it is our public duty and responsibility to report clearly and honestly where the provision does not serve the learners well and simply is not good enough. While inspection provides assurance to the three Departments regarding the effectiveness of their policies, it also provides assurance for learners, parents, and the wider community of the quality of provision within and across a wide range of organisations inspected during the reporting period, in both formal and informal educational settings.

- The Chief Inspector's biennial Report is written within the context of those factors which influence the society in which we live. The 'credit crunch' and the ensuing implications were mentioned in the previous biennial report; this biennial report is published at a time of economic recession and financial stringency. Taken in conjunction with the growing and developing political landscape in which we are learning to work together and to make democratic decisions, there remain, and will continue to be, many challenging financial and policy decisions to be made. If we retain the learner at the centre of all decision-making, if we aim to include all learners and to give them the best possible start in life, our decisions will be well guided.
- Much has been said in recent weeks about the price of a segregated education system; and it is not my place to speak in favour or otherwise about integrated education. In the economic scenario which is unfolding we may, as a society, eventually face a situation whereby we have less rather than more choice in education.
- Evidence from inspection over the reporting period shows that the implementation of the revised curriculum is

- The three recurring themes of the last two biennial reports remain: put simply, we need to support learners more effectively across the key **transitions** encountered along their educational journey; including establishing clear **connections** for learners between the various stages and types of learning; and **inclusion** which ensures that all learners receive an education and training which is effective and equitable.
- Against the background of these themes, let us consider the areas of literacy and numeracy; leadership and management; and achievements and standards. And thereby explore some of the key findings of the 2008-10 biennial report.
- Working towards overall **improvement in the standards of literacy and numeracy** remains a priority for all the phases in education and training. And that means literacy and numeracy within and across the curriculum, and beyond the curriculum. All educational experiences, whether in the formal or non-formal sectors, can and should support the development of good quality literacy and numeracy skills. By not achieving security and success in these basic skills, learners are significantly disadvantaged.

- During the reporting period, the development of the children's language and communication skills was promoted more consistently across all types of the pre-school settings inspected, reflecting a significant improvement in both the statutory nursery units and the voluntary/private settings. Most of the pre-school settings inspected provided good or better opportunities for the development of early mathematical experiences, with a significant improvement in almost one-half of the statutory nursery units.
- In the primary sector, the teaching of literacy and numeracy was evaluated as good or better in just over four-fifths of the lessons observed. The fact remains that one child in five is leaving primary school education with a literacy and numeracy deficit, and that is not good enough – we are, I believe, all of us, letting them down. Put simply, there needs to be a more concerted effort to improve the reading and writing skills and the numeracy of these children.
- There have been slight improvements in the standards for school-aged learners in literacy and numeracy in post-primary schools – improvements which are more evident at key stage 3 but moving slowly upwards at the end of KS4. Overall,

- Within Further Education and Work-based Learning, learners continue to need support in the essential skills of literacy and numeracy. In the Training for Success programme, for example, many of the trainees have significant impediments to learning due to low levels of literacy and numeracy; and it does not help that the transfer of important information from their schools is insufficient to allow suppliers to make an informed determination of the trainees' additional learning needs.
- There is a direct correlation between **the quality of leadership and management** (at both senior and middle management levels), and the quality of provision in both formal and informal educational settings. Effective management decisions are guided within a culture of self-evaluation; are based on evidence from within the organisation; and have as the main objective, the raising of expectations of both teachers and learners with a consequent raising of standards and achievements. Leadership is not easy

- In this context, it is good to note an improvement in the quality of leadership and management within pre-school settings which was evaluated as good or better in three-quarters of the settings inspected during the reporting period. Across the six further education colleges the quality of the leadership and management of the curriculum, and specifically of the professional and technical areas inspected was evaluated as good or better in four out of the six colleges. There was an increase in those suppliers of work-based learning whose self-evaluation and quality improvement processes were evaluated as very good or outstanding. While the cohort of special schools inspected over the reporting period was relatively small, at 14 schools, there is evidence of outstanding and sector-leading provision in one-quarter of those schools.
- In the formal and non-formal education sectors an improvement in the quality of leadership and management is less evident. While in almost three-quarters of the primary and post-primary schools inspected, and of the youth

- Both DE and DEL now provide robust responses to ETI reports in those organisations in which the quality of provision has been evaluated as ‘inadequate’ or ‘unsatisfactory.’ In respect of DE’s school improvement policy, Every School a Good School, launched in April 2009, some 18 schools have since entered the Formal Intervention Process, which provides intensive, post-inspection support for the schools involved. And, encouragingly, two of those schools have now exited the process.
- The successful embedding of DEL’s Quality Improvement Strategy – *Success Through Excellence* – has been a key driver for improvement in FE colleges and among work-based learning suppliers in the promotion of self-evaluation and quality

- Across the sectors, the development of a culture of self-evaluation to improve leadership and management and to raise standards of the outcomes for learners is a major focus of the work of ETI. A message coming through all of the phase reports – in education, work-based learning and youth provision – is the need for the more effective collation, analysis and use of performance data; data does not always provide answers but it can, and should, raise questions for those in leadership and management roles to consider. And those questions need to be asked with the learners as the prime concern. Many of our schools, their leaders and teachers, use data effectively and provide high quality education, and they are to be congratulated on that good work. There remain, however, schools which perform less

- Throughout all phases there are examples of effective practice which is often very good or outstanding. The sharing of such practice within and across phases in the interests of the learners should underscore the transitions and connections to be made in the curriculum. It is encouraging to note that a number of mainstream schools are beginning to use the expertise which is available to them from the good practice within the special education sector, to secure better provision and outcomes for those pupils presenting with a range of barriers to learning.
- Let me turn finally to **achievements and standards and the inclusion of all learners**. Inspection is not only about asking the question ‘is the quality of provision good?’, but ‘is it good enough?’ In just over four-fifths of the pre-school settings the achievements and standards across the curriculum were evaluated as good to outstanding. There are improvements in important areas other than language and mathematics, and it

- While the achievements and standards were evaluated as good or better in just over two-thirds of the primary schools inspected, it is a matter of concern that they need to improve in approximately one-third of these schools. The key message is this, we need to ensure that all learners of all abilities, receive high quality education, and achieve the outcomes of which they are capable.
- In post-primary schools the standards at GCSE and GCE A Level continued to improve. At GCSE, 70% of the learners in year 12 achieved at least five subjects at grades A* to C; when the figures for English and mathematics are included, this figure decreases to 57%, reflecting the need for a focus to improve in these subjects. It is good to note, however, the decrease in those learners who leave school with no qualifications – from just under 1000 learners to just under 700. However, that is still 700 individual learners too many!

- The majority of the students in FE, and of the trainees in work-based learning, are well motivated, enthusiastic to learn and make good progress. In response to the economic situation, DEL introduced a number of initiatives to support apprentices and to prepare the unemployed for a return to work. The response of the participants has been positive and many acquire appropriate skills whether in specific occupations or in interview skills and techniques, which serve them well.
- In the youth sector, which is the only phase in which young people choose to participate, many of them achieve accreditation which allows them to make a positive contribution to their communities. There continues to be a need for the formal and non-formal sectors to work more closely together, in supporting the learners which they have in common.
- So achievements and standards are good or better in many organisations. But how inclusive are we? A key issue for all organisations is the building of staff capacity to meet a widening range of pastoral and learning needs. The outcomes

Each biennial report is written within a particular context, and during the reporting period we have witnessed the effects of the credit crunch and the fact that we will all have to think about the future of education, work-based learning and youth provision with more limited resources. To continue to provide good quality education for all learners will require clear thinking, a prioritising of objectives and an innovative approach. And, the needs of the learner must remain paramount and at the centre of all that we do.

In the previous biennial report we mentioned areas of uncertainty and for development, which we all would have hoped would be much clearer and settled at this stage. That difficulties remain with regard to matters, such as the transfer of pupils from primary to post-primary education, and the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority, should be a matter of concern for all of us; and we need to redouble our efforts to move the agenda forward – the learners in our care deserve nothing less than our best endeavours in solving these not insurmountable issues.

In this context, we need to appreciate the concern amongst parents, teachers, the educational support services and the wider community. It is to their credit that educational leaders, teachers and the educational support services have maintained their focus on delivering as good quality services as exist. We are, indeed, fortunate to have such a generally good system of education. And I thank those who manage, lead and teach for the quality of provision which many of our learners enjoy.

As I work towards retirement in February 2011 from what has been a fascinating and fulfilling career in education, I exhort

each one of us to respond positively to the challenges that are laid out in this report, and to the financial challenges which lie ahead of us. In the words of the Olympic motto – let us aspire to be ‘Swifter, Higher, Stronger’ and that the next biennial report from the Office of the Chief Inspector will record even further gains for the children, young people and adult learners we rightly care about so much.