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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
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*Providing Inspection Services for*  
**Department of Education**  
**Department for Employment and Learning**  
**Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

### **Report of the Evaluation of**

### **An tÁisaonad Lán-Ghaeilge/Irish-Medium Resource Unit St Mary's University College, Belfast**

**Inspected: February-June 2006**

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## **1. BACKGROUND**

1.1 The Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) was commissioned by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) to carry out an external evaluation of the work of An tÁisaonad Lán-Ghaeilge (the Áisaonad), the Irish-Medium Resources Unit based at St Mary's University College (the College).

1.2 The DCAL provides proportionate funding to Foras na Gaeilge, the body responsible for the promotion of the Irish language throughout the island of Ireland, and Foras na Gaeilge provides an annual grant to the Áisaonad. Last year, the Áisaonad received almost £400,000, a sum which includes the salaries of all the employees of the Áisaonad. The Department of Education (DE) also provides occasional funding for the production of Irish Medium (IM) resources.

1.3 The Áisaonad formally became part of St Mary's University College in 1998. Since then, its overall management has resided with the College authorities and it is now an integral part of the College's structures. The College governors were concerned initially to seek clarification of the legal status of the Áisaonad. There were terms of reference and a financial memorandum between the College and Foras na Gaeilge but certain issues lacked clarity from the College's point of view. The evaluation by the Inspectorate has contributed to the further clarification of these issues.

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

2.1 Between February and June of 2006, the Inspectorate undertook an evaluation of the quality, range and appropriateness of the teaching and learning materials provided by the Áisaonad for IM schools in Northern Ireland (NI) and undertook visits to ten primary and three post-primary schools (see Appendix 1) across the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs).

2.2 The inspectors held discussions with school principals, co-ordinators and teachers to elicit their views on the quality of the materials they had purchased, and to gauge how they use and value the Áisaonad's materials. In addition, the evaluation focused on the communication and liaison between the Áisaonad and IM schools, and between the Áisaonad and Foras na Gaeilge. Interviews were held also with the Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Education Services of Foras na Gaeilge, the Manager and the Education Adviser of the Áisaonad, and senior managers in the College.

2.3 A self-evaluative report produced by the Áisaonad, setting out its work and progress, formed a useful basis for discussion with the inspectors. The report outlined the Áisaonad's role, current priorities and management arrangements in relation to the provision of Irish-medium textbooks and materials.

## **3. CONTEXT**

3.1 The Áisaonad was set up in 1998 with the clear remit to research existing material and develop new, high quality resources that could be used to teach the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) through the medium of the Irish language. The Áisaonad was also charged with providing curricular advice and support on issues related to the teaching and learning resources which it produces.

3.2 The initial focus of the *Áisaonad*'s work was on meeting the immediate needs of the IM primary sector, although it was foreseen that the production of materials for the post-primary sector would be undertaken at a future date. As the IM sector expanded, the *Áisaonad*'s funding was increased to reflect its growing remit.

3.3 The *Áisaonad* plays a central role in producing resources for IM schools, with a specific remit for school children in NI. It is, however, not the sole provider. Schools can, and do access textbooks and other materials from a number of other sources.

3.4 There is a high degree of co-operation between the *Áisaonad* and An Gúm (its southern counterpart), in relation to the production of textbooks. In addition, the Senior Editor of An Gúm chairs the *Áisaonad*'s Editorial Group (EdG), thus ensuring that there is no duplication of resources.

3.5 The *Áisaonad* has a distinctive ethos and rationale. In St Mary's University College, there is a rich Irish language environment and IM teachers are trained on site. There is a thriving international dimension and the students of Irish have the opportunity to experience the education systems of other bilingual societies through the Erasmus programme. College staff are available to offer a range of support and advice. Some of the projects undertaken by the *Áisaonad* were recommended by other College staff to the EdG; the literacy resources on the theme of international artists were undertaken with the encouragement of the College's art department and have proved very popular in IM schools in the north and beyond.

#### 4. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 The *Áisaonad* has five members of staff, four full-time and one part-time (the full-time equivalent of 4.2): they are the Manager, the Education Adviser, the Senior Editor, the Administrative Officer (part-time) and the Information Technology (IT) and Technical Officer. The *Áisaonad* has always drawn on a range of external expertise for specific purposes, as necessary.

4.2 There have been numerous changes to staffing in recent years with secondments and resignations. There have been difficulties in recruiting and retaining suitable and reliable staff with appropriate expertise and key personnel, including the Manager and the Education Adviser were released on secondment for long periods, and the *Áisaonad* was obliged to operate with skeleton staffing. Consequently, production levels fell and two projects were not completed in 2005, due to a lack of sufficient personnel, even though funding for them had been agreed and was made available by Foras na Gaeilge. The secondments, approved by both St Mary's University College and Foras na Gaeilge, were untimely and overlapping, and the new posts were not filled promptly. Greater harmonisation of procedures is required for the appointment and replacement of staff.

4.3 The Manager supervises all aspects of the *Áisaonad*'s work. Along with the Education Adviser, he takes the lead in setting targets and drawing up an action plan for the annual work programme. This plan is presented to the EdG for approval. The annual and the financial plans are examined by the College and approved also by the EdG before submission to Foras na Gaeilge. The *Áisaonad*'s finances are managed and monitored on a monthly basis by St Mary's University College. The Manager of the *Áisaonad* reports to Foras na Gaeilge on the progress of the annual plan and outlines the projects completed. He submits currently

a monthly report for the authorities in St Mary's University College; this practice was initiated from January 2006.

4.4 The Education Adviser plays a key role in choosing materials, achieving a first draft of the new materials and consults with various groups and sub-groups. She has an overview of any gaps in provision, and, in consultation with the Senior Editor, ensures that an appropriate level of language is built into the new texts. The Senior Editor is involved in editing and translating all work.

4.5 The EdG is made up of a variety of personnel and key stakeholders: the Manager and the Education Adviser of the Áisaonad, four teachers from three different schools, representative of the interests of pupils in the four key stages, and the Inter-board IM adviser. In addition, the Senior Editor of An Gúm chairs the group. The EdG acts in an advisory capacity and as a 'sounding board'. In theory, the role of the EdG is to monitor the priorities set and the intended outcomes; in practice, this is not happening as the EdG, and its sub-groups and focus groups do not meet on a regular basis.

4.6 Most schools reported that they did not understand how the Áisaonad's priorities for the production of IM materials are drawn up and presented to the funding organisation. Few teachers considered that they have played any part in this exercise. A minority of schools visited were aware of the work of the EdG and only a few knew the present members of the group. The role and membership of the EdG should be clarified and shared further with the sector generally.

4.7 Some members of the EdG met with inspectors during the course of the school visits. They expressed a certain frustration about their role, the informality of its work, the lack of regular, structured meetings and the need for more feedback from the Áisaonad on the issues discussed and priorities identified. The arrangements pertaining to the EdG are too informal and its role is too vague. Currently, the Manager of the Áisaonad is not sufficiently accountable to the EdG nor to the IM sector in general. The EdG needs to seek more actively the views of IM teachers and should be developed as a forum where the Áisaonad is held to account by the IM sector generally.

4.8 There are plans for the EdG's focus groups to meet more often with teachers in order that further output is driven by the IM sector and accountable to it. The Áisaonad translates most of the materials produced; it relies on teachers and wants to involve them more, although schools cannot always release them. It will be important for the Áisaonad to strengthen the role of teachers and key stage specialists in all areas of its resource production and to seek more actively the views of IM teachers.

4.9 Specific curriculum funding is allocated by DE to all IM schools on a per capita basis; primary schools receive £100 per capita, and post-primary schools £25 for additional curricular support. The inspection findings indicate that most IM schools do not ring-fence these finances; they are generally subsumed into the overall school budget. The teachers, therefore, in all IM schools, spend an inordinate amount of time creating and, in many cases, duplicating basic resources; this practice places pressure on teachers, but particularly on newly qualified teachers, often working on their own, isolated, in small recently established schools. The Áisaonad should consider the co-ordination of these resources into a central bank, in order to reduce the burden on otherwise very busy teachers.

4.10 There are important gaps in provision. There are shortages in all areas of the primary curriculum. The major, teacher-guided reading scheme promoting independent reading and reading for enjoyment, Céim ar Chéim, caters mostly for children in key stage (KS) 1. The development of KS2 reading materials needs to be addressed immediately to facilitate greater progression in the pupils' reading. There has been a clear need for more texts aimed at the year 6-7 age group for some time; however, the Áisaonad only contacted IM schools by email about the next stage of its literacy output in January 2006. In addition, support materials are required in order to provide opportunities for written work and to integrate further the language skills, thus obviating the need for teachers to produce supplementary materials themselves. The Big Books produced to date have been welcomed, but overall, more imaginative texts and fiction to promote independent, shared and guided reading approaches are required. Most schools report that a graded reading scheme is still the top priority for the IM sector. A range of suitable reading materials including poetry, short stories, short novels, Big Books, non-fiction, was also a high priority for a majority of the primary schools. The planning and co-ordination of the supply of resources needs to be more formalized and improved.

4.11 Céim ar Chéim and Matamaitic Bhunscoile Collins were two large-scale, long-term projects identified by the EdG as the two most pressing priorities for the IM primary sector addressing the key areas of literacy and numeracy. Both schemes, or parts thereof, have been purchased and used by all schools visited in the course of the external evaluation by the Inspectorate. Many schools are unhappy with aspects of both schemes and are using other materials to support learning in these curricular areas.

4.12 Matamaitic Bhunscoile Collins has a suitable emphasis on extension and support materials; however the linguistic content is deemed to be too difficult at the upper end of the primary years. In addition, the accompanying teacher's guide is not well used or understood and there is a lack clarity in the rationale for the approaches to be used with this text. Several schools purchased the new mathematics scheme without the explanatory teacher's guide. Two schools report that they do not use this new resource at all.

4.13 Many teachers in the schools visited expressed concerns about the high level of language used in Matamaitic Bhunscoile Collins, in particular, for the upper primary years. Other teachers observed that their pupils experienced difficulties with the problem solving approaches inherent in the new text and with the mathematical concepts that were unfamiliar to them. They mentioned that there are issues surrounding the introduction and staging of a new resource and the need for the pupils' prior learning to be considered more fully.

4.14 The Áisaonad has been slow to organize effective training, a key element of its remit, for the more efficient introduction of important and expensive resources. This has been a particular problem in relation to its major productions of core subject texts. Although the teachers in a few schools received training for the introduction and interpretation of Céim ar Chéim and Matamaitic Bhunscoile Collins, the training offered was infrequent and lacking in overall co-ordination. A small number of the schools reported that they did not have any specific training on the resources produced by the Áisaonad, from either Áisaonad staff or the Inter-board IM Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) team. A matter of concern is that several schools reported that they had received mixed and contradictory messages from the Áisaonad and CASS in respect of the reliability and suitability of Matamaitic Bhunscoile Collins. The Áisaonad and the Inter-board IM CASS team need to cooperate more effectively to address this area as a matter of urgency.

4.15 There is a need for principals and teachers in IM schools to be able to channel their requests for resources through a more formal and systematic structure. It would be beneficial for panels of teachers, comprising expertise at each key stage, to identify the needs and to develop resources. Experienced teachers who are knowledgeable about the appropriateness of the content and language, should be involved more in trialling sample materials and acting as ‘readers’ to comment on, for example, the suitability of draft translations. The Áisaonad intends to involve more teachers in drafting and versioning work and in working with the language experts, but systematic procedures to ensure this have not been set up. There is a need for more systematic and regular communication with a wider range of schools and teachers. The Áisaonad needs to reach out more directly and effectively to IM teachers in order to gain their purposeful collaboration in the production of important materials.

4.16 For the purposes of internal quality assurance, the Áisaonad has sought feedback and collected evidence regarding its work from teachers and principals. There have been two surveys of need since its establishment. In 1998, this was carried out by means of a combination of meetings with teachers and questionnaires to determine the needs of the IM sector. In 2003, the Education Adviser visited IM schools, and, in 2004, followed up with an issued questionnaire. Although the information was collated, analysed and shared with the EdG, it was not shared with the teachers, customers and stakeholders. The Áisaonad needs to establish more rigorous and systematic procedures for monitoring its work.

4.17 According to the Áisaonad, feedback received has been mixed and not always positive; levels of satisfaction with all resources are not high. While teachers commended the improved presentation of the materials, they were unhappy at the delays they experienced in waiting for new textbooks. The linguistic integrity, in particular, the pitch and level of language, for example, in some texts, has been questioned by experienced teachers who noted certain difficulties.

4.18 Successful IM education depends on many determinants, not least on an abundant and ready supply of appropriate and fit for purpose resources, textbooks and other materials. The translation and production of suitable materials for bi-lingual learners whose first language is English, is complex. Many factors are involved; these include, the level of language of the learners, in particular their reading abilities, the range of vocabulary and their understanding of grammar. In addition, the level of language of the teachers is crucial and the role played by the language experts, translators and editors in establishing the right pitch and in using suitable, consistent and understood terminology. The materials produced, therefore, must be proportionate, take into account the above factors, and, at the same time, strike a proper balance and challenge the learners. Moreover, the language of the textbook will always be filtered and mediated through the teacher. This presupposes that the teachers involved are sufficiently fluent in Irish to teach effectively the complete range of subjects in an immersion setting, and that the pupils are similarly proficient enough in the language to study all their subjects through Irish. It may be prudent to consider the production of dual language texts or the provision of glossaries for difficult Irish words and phrases.

4.19 The issue of the level of Irish language used in a number of the Áisaonad’s resources proved problematical, and was raised with inspectors during school visits. There would appear to be a particular difficulty with the later stages of Matamaitic Bhunscoile Collins. Many teachers consider that, at times, the language used is too difficult and makes the subject matter inaccessible. In an immersion setting, all curricular areas are a vehicle to promote

literacy and all curricular resources must fulfil this dual role. It was clear during discussions with teachers that there is a lack of consensus on the inter-relationship between the subject matter of texts and the level of language used in order for learners to properly access them. The Manager of the Áisaonad is aware of the different perceptions and opinions as to what constitutes good practice. He intends to carry out some research and, if appropriate, adopt a different approach for the development of the final material in the series. It is vital that translators and editors working in the area do not depend solely on their own experience or on conflicting advice given by classroom teachers and that the linguistic integrity and rigour of materials are maintained and not reduced to the lowest common denominator in an attempt to focus exclusively on the subject matter. The language level and readability of texts needs to be discussed more robustly with classroom teachers.

4.20 The quality assurance procedures employed by the Áisaonad for the writing and the trialling of materials, and for the greater involvement of teachers in proof reading need to be reviewed and strengthened in order to alleviate any future difficulties. The Áisaonad needs to act more swiftly on the concerns expressed and on the feedback received, and to instigate a more rigorous approach to lexical work to ensure that texts are fit for purpose and that teachers in the sector are comfortable with them.

4.21 The Áisaonad's website, which can be accessed through the main website of St Mary's University College, is difficult to locate as there is no link from the College's homepage. It contains downloadable, black and white worksheets, many of which are useful but need to be presented to a higher quality. Both teachers and learners would benefit from the production of more learning and support materials on line, easily facilitated with the growth of digital media. The Áisaonad does not record the number of hits to its website as part of its monitoring procedures. The website requires further development and needs to be updated more regularly.

4.22 There is scope for the Áisaonad to develop further links and partnerships with other key educational agencies, in particular, with CASS, to provide complementary training to overcome problems with terminology and approaches associated with core texts. There is a clear need for closer liaison between the Áisaonad and Learning Northern Ireland (LNI) given the general shortage of on-line curriculum support materials in Irish. Closer and more effective links would also facilitate the exchange of materials.

4.23 There is much activity in the area of resource production for the IM sector in NI, apart from the work of the Áisaonad. This activity needs to be co-ordinated and managed more effectively to ensure quality and consistency and to remove any possibility of duplication. The Áisaonad needs to establish itself as the recognised centre of excellence in this field, and encourage all such activity to be channelled through it.

4.24 Foras na Gaeilge provides core funding to 17 separate groups. In September each year, it requests the annual work plan from the manager of the Áisaonad. This plan is evaluated by the directors, using Foras na Gaeilge's in-house marking system, and then submitted for consideration to its grants committee. Subsequently, it is discussed with the directorate, management and board before approval is given. The Áisaonad's application for funding is one of many that is processed by Foras na Gaeilge. It is, therefore, essential that the tight deadlines are adhered to and the application forms and accompanying documentation, are completed as fully and as promptly as possible by all groups. This was not the case with the Áisaonad last year despite the provision of training in the new

procedures by Foras na Gaeilge. It is a matter of concern that working relationships are strained between the Áisaonad and Foras na Gaeilge, and that there is insufficient co-operation between them. On occasions, the Áisaonad has been slow to meet important deadlines required by Foras na Gaeilge and lacking in appropriate detail when submitting key forms and documentation.

4.25 The Áisaonad submitted a self-evaluative report in order to reflect on and assess its work and progress. Although the document is informative, it is overly descriptive. The analysis of the findings that it sets out would benefit from the inclusion of further objective evidence, qualitative evaluations and more quantitative data to support the accuracy of the statements and to inform better the conclusions it contains.

4.26 Most schools report that they find the Áisaonad accessible, and the quality of communication about their current resources to be good. They do not find that the Áisaonad is responsive enough or acts on their suggestions for resources. Schools mentioned, in particular, the need for more information and debate on the suggestions for resources submitted to the Áisaonad.

4.27 The schools in the sample praised the quality of presentation of the resources produced by the Áisaonad, but a majority found that there was at times a mismatch between the level of language used in texts and the language of the children. The teachers considered that the needs of children in IM schools are too often confined narrowly to models that are more appropriate for a monolingual context. There needs to be a more open debate about the real needs of the IM bi-lingual sector.

4.28 The Áisaonad does not have a clear overview of the development work being undertaken by teachers in the IM sector; this can at times lead to a certain amount of duplication. The Áisaonad should consider compiling a database of materials produced by teachers in schools and posting this on their website. Few schools were aware of the facility of posting ‘teacher-produced’ resources on the Áisaonad’s website. It is necessary for the Áisaonad to develop further this facility and to publicise it universally if it to make a more meaningful contribution to the sector.

4.29 All of the schools visited make use of resources produced by the Áisaonad, to a greater or lesser extent, as well as resources from a range of other suppliers. The schools report, however, that children in the IM sector still depend, to a large extent, on black and white photocopiable resources produced before the Áisaonad was established and on materials produced by their teachers.

4.30 Irish Medium post-primary schools and units remain largely self-sufficient in resource production, obtain textbooks from other sources, for example An Gúm, or, in some cases, they adapt primary school materials. The post-primary sector is greatly under-resourced at present and the schools and IM units expressed disappointment with the general lack of output and materials available to them. Some reported that they had submitted materials, but the Áisaonad had not dealt with them. The Principals reported that the lack of attractive resources affects adversely curricular expansion and the range of subjects that can be offered in IM post-primary schools. Indeed, one post-primary school reported that they were considering not offering one particular subject at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level, despite its popularity among pupils, due to a lack of suitable materials in Irish.

4.31 Although the initial remit of the *Áisaonad* was limited to the primary sector, greater prominence needs to be given to the resource needs of the post-primary sector. The *Áisaonad* should put structures in place to encourage teachers in post-primary schools to identify their needs and to present them to funders. The resources produced across the curriculum at this level by An Gúm are not always suitable for post-primary pupils in NI. In identifying areas where these resources do not meet the specific needs of the IM pupils in the north, it will be important for the teachers to suggest resources that would be suitable for translation in order to bridge these gaps. The *Áisaonad* has completed one resource for Personal, Social and Health Education. It should re-examine the priorities for this phase and perhaps focus on curricular areas that are common across all the post-primary institutions, namely, history, geography, physical education (PE) and religious education (RE).

4.32 It is unsatisfactory that most teachers in the post-primary phase are still obliged to use their own teacher produced, in-house resources as the mainstay of the support they provide. Teachers report that they have been unable to rely on the *Áisaonad* and that they are obliged to make their own plans and devise their own materials in-house, even though there are copyright and financial issues involved. It would be helpful if closer links existed between the *Áisaonad* and the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA); this would help to ensure a greater supply of materials. The CCEA has produced mainstream English-medium (EM) material which was not translated into Irish.

4.33 The *Áisaonad* is currently unable to cope with the demands of the wide range of subjects of the post-primary curriculum. The post-primary schools are, however, pleased with high standard of work, presentation and level of language of the few titles available. As the number of post-primary IM schools and units increases, and the number of subjects offered to examination level continues to increase, it is imperative that the *Áisaonad* is better able and equipped to meet the demand for suitable materials.

## 5. STRENGTHS

5.1 Since the establishment of the unit, there has been improved production for the IM sector. Between 1998-2006, there has been a substantial output of 136 literacy titles supplied by the *Áisaonad*. This has included seven 'Big Books.'

5.2 The more recent publications have taken account, to some extent, of the requirements of the Revised Curriculum for NI, and are in line with aims of the NI literacy and numeracy strategies. For example, two major publications, have resulted: *Céim ar Chéim* is designed to promote independent and shared reading, and *Matamaitic Bhunscoile Collins* emphasises the importance of practical activities and the use of mathematical language.

5.3 A major achievement has been the move from black and white copies of worksheets to full colour, state of the art IM materials as versioned from English, and properly bound. This has coincided with a greater budget afforded to the unit in order to deal with established publishing bodies.

5.4 The quality of the resources produced by the *Áisaonad* is outstanding in terms of presentation; this meets the immediate needs of the IM sector and gives teachers confidence that the learning and teaching materials are attractive, and professionally produced to the same standards as those used in EM schools.

5.5 In addition, the *Áisaonad* has produced many materials that are relevant for the end users, fit for purpose and appropriate to the learning context. They are logical in structure and their internal coherence is good. The textbooks contain variety, some use interactive approaches as necessary and all are adaptable and reliable.

5.6 The translation and production of suitable materials is complex. Many factors are involved. The *Áisaonad* has managed and negotiated successfully the integration of language, subject and skills into many of its productions. The role played by language experts, translators and editors in establishing the right pitch and in using suitable, consistent and understood terminology has been facilitated to a high degree.

5.7 There is close co-operation between the *Áisaonad* and An Gúm, the publication branch of Foras na Gaeilge, in relation to the production of materials and resources suitable for Irish-medium schools.

5.8 The *Áisaonad*'s Manager and Education Adviser have brought a thorough first-hand understanding of the needs of the IM primary sector to bear on the production of resources. Along with the Senior Editors, they have also had wide experience of translating and editing educational material in other contexts.

5.9 Most schools report that they find the *Áisaonad* accessible, and the quality of communication about their current resources to be good.

## 6. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

6.1 In recent years, the *Áisaonad* has been under-staffed. The secondment of key personnel to other work has led to a lack of continuity in the production of important resources and has had an adverse effect on the needs of both teachers and learners in the IM schools sector. Greater harmonisation of procedures is required for the appointment and replacement of staff.

6.2 Many teachers and principals are unaware of the existence of the EdG. The role of the EdG is too vague and the arrangements pertaining to it are too informal. It does not meet on a sufficiently regular basis. It requires a stronger accountability role and needs to seek more actively the views of IM teachers regarding the usability and usefulness of its materials.

6.3 There are important gaps in provision. The planning and co-ordination of the supply of resources needs to be more formalised and coherent. There are shortages in all areas of the primary curriculum. The teachers in IM schools spend an inordinate amount of time creating and, in many cases, duplicating basic resources. The *Áisaonad* should consider the establishment of a central bank to co-ordinate these resources and to assist teachers in optimising their use.

6.4 Insufficient attention has been paid to the current and future resource needs of IM post-primary schools. Clearer targets to determine and prioritise needs, should be set. The *Áisaonad* needs to develop an effective strategy to fill gaps in demand, mapped against existing provision.

6.5 The quality assurance procedures employed by the *Áisaonad* for the writing and the trialling of materials, and for the greater involvement of teachers in proof-reading need to be

reviewed and strengthened. The Áisaonad should establish more rigorous and systematic procedures for monitoring its work.

6.6 The Áisaonad should give greater profile and attention to its training role in order to ensure an improved impact on professional practice, and that the rationale behind the pedagogic tasks and learning strategies inherent in the texts are interpreted, shared and embedded more fully by the end users.

6.7 The issue of the level of Irish language used in a number of the Áisaonad's resources is problematical. It was clear during discussions with teachers that there is a lack of consensus on the inter-relationship between the subject matter of texts and the level of language used in order for learners to properly access them. The level of language and the readability of the texts need to be discussed and agreed more systematically with teacher practitioners.

6.8 The Áisaonad's website, accessed through the main website of St Mary's University College, is difficult to locate, as there is no direct link from the College's homepage. Both teachers and learners would benefit from the production of more learning and support materials on line, easily facilitated with the growth of digital media. The Áisaonad does not record the number of hits to its website as part of its monitoring procedures. The website requires further development and needs to be updated more regularly.

6.9 As a matter of urgency, the Áisaonad should strengthen its links and partnerships with other key educational agencies, in particular, with the Inter-board IM CASS team. In addition, there is a clear need for closer liaison between the Áisaonad and LNI, given the general shortage of curriculum support materials in Irish.

6.10 Working relationships are strained between the Áisaonad and Foras na Gaeilge, and there is insufficient co-operation between them. A more responsible attitude needs to be adopted by the management of the Áisaonad in its dealings with Foras na Gaeilge.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

7.1 The Áisaonad has achieved much over the last eight years in fulfilling the needs of the IM sector through the production, to the highest international standards, of a considerable amount of high quality, IM materials. The Áisaonad has a vital role to play in curriculum access for IM schools and has focused rightly on raising the standard of resources. The substantial growth in IM education places a greater onus on the Áisaonad to increase its production of relevant curricular materials that support good teaching using effective immersion education pedagogy, and that influence positively learning in the IM classroom. Much work remains to be done if barriers to continued success are to be overcome. This report sets out a number of areas for development that will need to be addressed if the Áisaonad is to achieve a more effective service delivery to the ever changing demands of the sector and secure its position as the main source of IM materials and textbooks for schools in Northern Ireland.

## **APPENDIX**

### **SCHOOLS VISITED**

Gaelscoil na bhFál  
Bunscoil Phobal Feirste  
Bunscoil an tSléibhe Dhuibh  
Scoil an Droichid  
Scoil na Fuiseoige  
Bunscoil Ard Mhacha  
Bunscoil an Iúir  
Bunscoil Cholmcille  
Bunscoil Naomh Bríde  
Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh

Coláiste Feirste  
Coláiste Chaitríona  
Coláiste Bhríde

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