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



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Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Follow-up Inspection

**An tÁisaonad Lán-Ghaeilge (Irish-medium Resource Unit)
St Mary's University College
Belfast**

January 2008

FOLLOW-UP TO THE INSPECTION OF AN TÁISAONAD LÁN-GHAEILGE (IRISH-MEDIUM RESOURCE UNIT), ST MARY'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, BELFAST

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

Between February and June 2006, the Inspectorate undertook an evaluation of the quality, range and appropriateness of the learning and teaching resources provided by the Áisaonad for Irish-medium (IM) schools in Northern Ireland.

The report of the evaluation's findings issued by the Inspectorate identified the strengths of the Áisaonad in terms of its substantial output; the quality of the presentation of the resources; the extent to which its publications address curricular developments; the manner in which the Áisaonad effectively integrates language, subject and skills into many of its productions; the close co-operation between the Áisaonad and An Gúm; the expertise and experience of Áisaonad staff in translating and editing educational materials, and their understanding of the resource needs of the IM sector; the accessibility of the Áisaonad to schools in the sector; and the quality of communication with schools.

A number of areas for development were identified at the time of the evaluation including: staffing issues; the further development of the Editorial Group; the establishment of a central bank to co-ordinate resources created by teachers; meeting more effectively the needs of the post-primary sector; the establishment of more rigorous and systematic procedures for monitoring its own work; the promotion of a consensus on the inter-relationship between the subject matter of texts and the level of language used; the further development of the Áisaonad's website; the strengthening of links with other key agencies, in particular, the inter-board IM Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) team; and the fostering of healthier working relationships with Foras na Gaeilge.

The College and the Áisaonad accepted the inspection findings in a very open and positive manner. Shortly after the report was published a detailed action plan was prepared addressing all the areas for development identified in the report. Inspectors visited the College in June 2007 to discuss the action plan and progress made.

During November and December 2007, the Áisaonad carried out a self-evaluation, charted and evaluated the progress made and identified areas for further development. The Inspectorate carried out a follow-up inspection on the work of the Áisaonad in January 2008. Discussions were held with the staff of the Áisaonad, teachers and principals from the IM sector, the Assistant Chief Executive of Foras na Gaeilge and members of the Áisaonad's Consultative Committee.

The following are the most important improvements since the initial evaluation.

- The College has put procedures in place to ensure that a full complement of staff is available to progress the Áisaonad's work plan and that the staffing difficulties identified during the initial evaluation should not re-occur.

- The Editorial Group has been reconstituted as An Coiste Comhairliúcháin (Consultative Committee) and holds regular bi-monthly meetings. Focus groups from all phases have been established as sub-groups of the Consultative Committee to work closely with the Education Adviser. Teachers from the post-primary phase have been well represented at meetings of the post-primary focus group; they have worked closely with the Áisaonad's editor/translator and a number of new titles have been published in the areas of mathematics, business studies, history, physical education, citizenship and Learning for Life and Work. Given the more formal role of teachers at all stages in the production process, problems with language level have largely been negotiated and dealt with at an early stage in the process.
- Quality assurance procedures have been agreed for all projects involving Áisaonad staff, translators and consultants, and teachers and members of focus groups. All projects are documented thoroughly and tracked against targets agreed with the Consultative Committee.
- During the original evaluation many teachers reported frustration at the amount of time they had to spend creating, adapting and translating resources and materials and suggested the usefulness of the establishment of a central bank to manage such resources on behalf of the IM sector and avoid any unnecessary duplication. The Áisaonad have encouraged teachers in all schools to submit materials to be posted on the Áisaonad's website and shared with other teachers. The resources submitted have been edited and redesigned as necessary. It is disappointing that only a small number of resources have been submitted to date.
- Senior Áisaonad staff have established more formal links with the inter-board IM CASS team and are involved in a range of training courses especially on the effective use of recently produced resources, and other relevant, professional activities. Staff are active on a regional, centre-based level, and have responded to training requests on specific subjects in individual schools. Plans are in place to extend this activity.
- Áisaonad staff are currently redesigning the website taking on board the views and opinions of all sectoral partners.
- Áisaonad staff have worked hard to improve the quality of communication with Foras na Gaeilge and to improve their working relationships with this key agency. Foras na Gaeilge is very happy with the quality of correspondence and documentation it receives from the Áisaonad.

Areas for further development by all the Irish-medium partners

All the IM partners should work with the Áisaonad to explore ways in which:

- the Consultative Committee could be further developed as a forum where stakeholders in the IM sector feed back formally on the work of the Áisaonad, or a new external forum established for this purpose; and

- more teachers can be encouraged to submit resources to the Áisaonad's central bank to avoid unnecessary duplication.

The Áisaonad has embarked on an extensive programme of development, and is establishing a rigorous culture of self-evaluation leading to improvement. There are major strengths in important areas of its provision. There are some minor areas still requiring further development which the Áisaonad has the capacity to address.

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