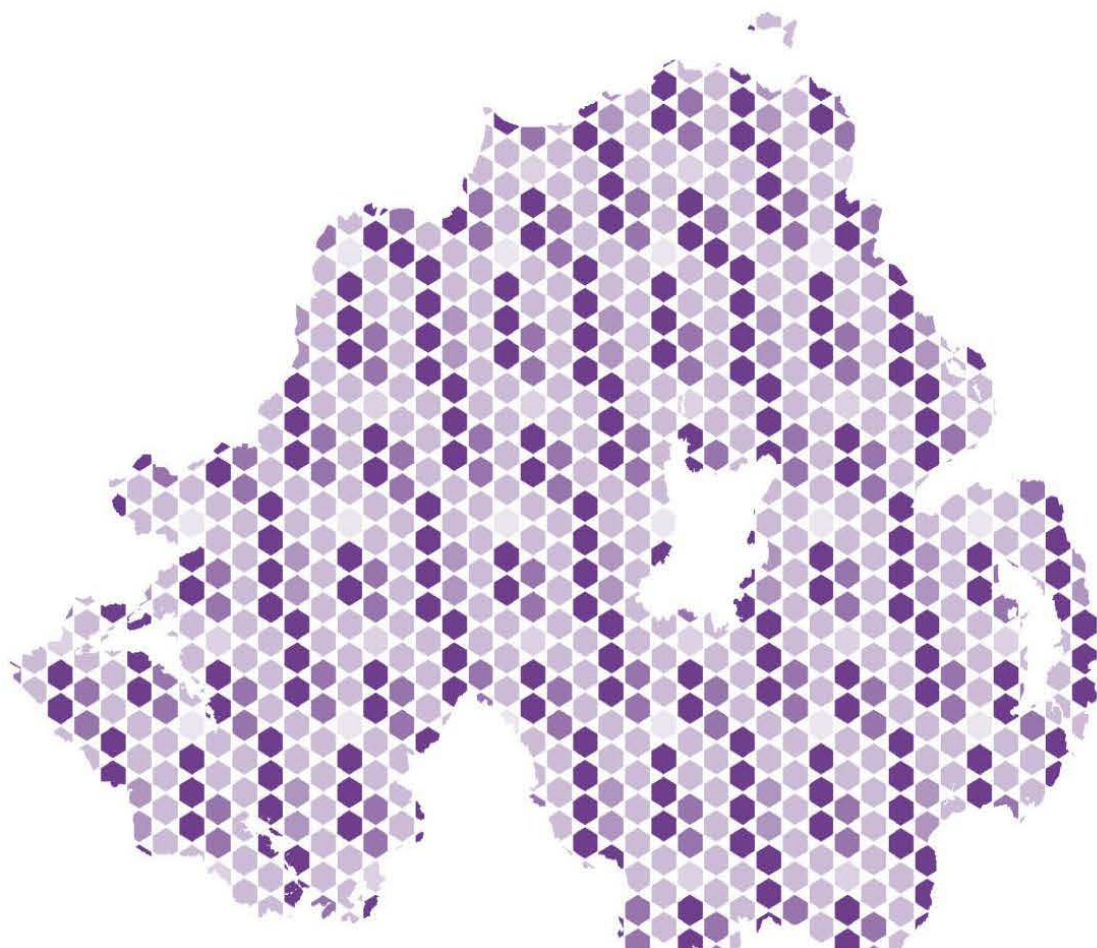


# INITIAL TEACHER/HIGHER EDUCATION INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Postgraduate Certificate in Primary  
(Irish-medium) Education

St Mary's University College, Belfast

Inspected: February 2019



The Education and Training Inspectorate  
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education  
Department for the Economy  
and other commissioning Departments



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## **1. Context of the Postgraduate Certificate of Education Primary (Irish-Medium) Programme in St Mary's University College**

St Mary's University College offers a Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) Primary (Irish-Medium) programme for students wishing to enter the Irish-medium Education (IME) school sector. The College has a strong commitment to the promotion of the Irish Language and Irish-medium Education, for example, it hosts an IME learning resources unit, An tÁisaonad.

Irish-medium initial teacher education dates back to 1995, as an outcome of a research project funded in 1994 by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DE), to explore the most effective and appropriate design for an Irish-medium dimension to initial teacher education programmes. The supportive linguistic and cultural environment at St Mary's was identified as a significant factor in the introduction and development of IME provision.

The initial cohort of five primary PGCE students joined their English-medium peers in the College's existing programme, within a multilingual environment, and focused on immersion and Irish-medium issues as a separate, cohesive, Irish-medium (IM) group during other activities. Since then the PGCE primary programme in the College has developed to become an IME programme of currently 20 students.

Beginning in 2007, in partnership with the post-primary PGCE providers at Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, St Mary's University College has developed and offers an IM enhancement course for students enrolled in the post-primary PGCEs at Ulster University and Queen's University, Belfast.

An evaluation of the enhancement course, successful completion of which leads to an award by St Mary's University College of a Certificate in Bi-lingual Education, is presented in Section 8 of this report.

## **2. Focus of the inspection**

The inspection was conducted in the terms of the DE *Circular [2010/03](#) Initial Teacher Education: Approval of Programmes*<sup>1</sup> which sets out the requirements which programmes must meet to be approved by DE.

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all students the inspection evaluated:

- the quality of the provision and the outcomes for the students; and
- the College's leadership and management and its capacity to effect and sustain improvement in its provision and standards.

Furthermore, the inspectors considered how well a number of broad themes, which reflect DE policy priorities for schools, are represented in the initial PGCE preparation of teachers.

The themes are:

- the extent of the students' understanding of the overarching aims, values and purposes of the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) and their preparation to put their understanding into practice in schools;
- the extent to which the students recognise, understand and respond to a wide range of individual difference amongst learners in schools; and
- how well the students are being developed to take an evaluative and critical approach to teaching, assessment and learning.

Where evidence is available to report on aspects of the broad themes, they are included in this report. More detail on the purpose and method of inspection and of the evidence base is given in Appendix A. The school visits were undertaken in early in December 2018 and the campus inspection visit took place in the middle of the PGCE programme.

The aim of the DE Learning Leaders strategy is to, 'empower the teaching profession to strengthen its professionalism and expertise to meet the challenging educational needs of young people in the 21st century'. Therefore, the inspectors reviewed the 'opportunities and responsibilities,' (Learning Leaders: A strategy for teacher professional learning (DE, 2016, page 23)) of the strategy as they relate to student teachers. The PGCE programme, by design, enables the students to develop relevant responsibilities in an effective way for this stage of their development as teachers. Furthermore, the PGCE programme was reviewed against the expectations in the Learning Leaders strategy for 'providers of professional learning' (Ibid, page 25) and, where evidence of relevant expectations to initial teacher education was available there was a reasonable match with the strategy.

The inspection process also informs the self-evaluation and improvement planning of the provider. The report contains brief illustrations of effective practice, as evaluated by the provider and validated by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

### 3. Overall findings of the inspection

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>The provider has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners</b>
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Outstanding
<b>Quality of provision</b>	Outstanding
<b>Leadership and management</b>	Outstanding

### 4. Outcomes for learners

The achievements and standards attained by the students are very high, as evidenced by their outcomes in a range of appropriately challenging and varied college-based written and practical assessments and in their school-based assessments.

All of the students enter the PGCE programme having attained a good honours degree in Irish and/or another subject. They are also required to have a high level of competence in Irish and English; both of which are assessed at the interview stage of the recruitment process.

During the course of the PGCE year, the students are given meaningful and relevant opportunities to build on the competences and skills they have developed in their primary degrees. They develop, progressively and holistically, their professional values and practice and their knowledge, understanding and skills application, in relation to their academic progression and development as practitioners.

The student retention rates are exceptionally high at 98.5% over the past ten-year period. Almost all proceed to gain employment in the IM sector although evidence would indicate that there remains a shortage of teachers in the primary education sector.

The students are highly competent and committed to all aspects of their learning and professional development. They have a good understanding of the NIC and of the immersion classroom. They are developing well: their confidence as practitioners, appropriate classroom management strategies, a range of effective learning and teaching approaches, including assessment for learning, high quality and detailed planning, supported by ongoing evaluations of learning, which develop well their critical reflection, on and in practice.

Reflective practice underpins every aspect of the PGCE programme and diverse methods are employed to facilitate high-quality reflection, both individually and collaboratively. Recall Days are one of the enhancements suggested by the External Examiner. Each block of school experience draws to a close with a Recall Day when PGCE students re-convene in College for a structured programme that stimulates students' reflection on their experience while it is still immediate. Students receive a programme for the event while on placement and some may be asked to prepare a short presentation. The day begins with an opportunity to re-connect, as communication may have been restricted to on-line contact during school experience. Tutors guide collaborative, critical discussion of student observations, encouraging deeper discussion and attentiveness to concerns. Tutors provide formative feedback based on general observations. The day closes with a look ahead at the next phase in the students' developing competences. Recall days encourage students to celebrate their progress in initial teacher education. As a community of learners, they share examples of best practice as well as learning from lessons that did not go well. Recall days promote student engagement and effective communication between students and staff.

During college-based work, the students participate fully in all sessions and show leadership as they assume willingly different roles and responsibilities during individual, paired, small group and whole-class tasks and activities. They engage in highly professional, well-informed discussions and debates, mostly through the medium of Irish, and link skilfully their practical experiences in the classroom to relevant educational theory and research. The students have created a unique and supportive learning community with each other and with college and associate lecturers. As a result of this, they share successes and challenges openly and honestly and reflect maturely on their experiences to date.

## 5. Quality of provision

The quality of the provision is outstanding. Approaches to learning and teaching reflect and model the theoretical underpinnings and the teaching methodologies that are considered, globally and locally, to be characteristic of effective immersion education. Opportunities for researching and debating immersion issues are incorporated into the course. The philosophy and pedagogies of immersion education are also experienced by students in practical ways, in the context of workshops and practical activities, with language planning centrally placed in all teaching and learning experiences.

PGCE students demonstrated their competence in integrating their linguistic repertoires and their teaching competences within art, learning, teaching and assessment. Having experienced learning and teaching through the medium of English they subsequently collaborated in groups to plan and teach an art lesson through the medium of Irish to a year 4 and a year 5 class from a local Irish medium school. “Translanguaging” is defined as ‘the strategic and flexible use of multiple languages within a single learning event, the expectation that content learned in and through one language informs academic performance and participation in the other’ (Hopewell, 2017). A creative bilingual dynamic was evident as students demonstrated their translanguaging skills by adapting resources and teaching strategies and by engaging in careful language planning in order to present and scaffold IM pupils’ learning experiences. The bilingual nature of the PGCE students’ teaching competences was acknowledged within the assessment process. The delivery of the lesson and a documentary board which illustrated the pupils’ cognitive learning processes were both assessed by an English-Medium art tutor and an IM tutor in order to ensure that both the quality of the art content in the lesson and the quality of the spoken language were assessed in an integrated way.

Planning for all elements of the PGCE programme: is coherent and detailed, ensures integration across and within the three modules and, is informed by a continuous and rigorous process of monitoring and evaluating, which includes robust procedures of module and programme review and continuous student evaluation. The programme, which aligns at all levels with the Competence Framework of the General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland (GTCNI) (Teaching: the Reflective Profession (GTCNI, 2006)), is broad, balanced and relevant and facilitates continuity and progression in learning through the year. The extensive schedule of enhancement events and partnerships with a wide range of educational, health, community and environmental groups, ensures that Shared Education, inclusion and diversity are integral to the programme.

All of the taught sessions observed during the college-based element of the inspection, were very good or outstanding in promoting high-quality learning and teaching.

In these sessions: a range of high quality resources, including digital resources, and innovative approaches to learning and teaching were employed by the skilled practitioners to enlighten, engage and challenge the students. All of the lecturers, college and associate, model skilfully effective classroom practice and integrate seamlessly relevant research, educational theory and classroom practice. They

facilitate high-level discussion and debate among the students, provide a meaningful context for them to reflect on their own practice to date, and support the students in developing further their own skills and capabilities and their understanding of the NIC and of immersion-specific pedagogy.

Video Enhanced Reflective Practice (VERP) is a reflective professional development tool that supports professionals to analyse and reflect on moments of their effective interaction through shared review of video clips of their day-to-day practice. It focuses on enhancing attuned interactions. Three lecturers, including PGCE teaching staff, introduced VERP as a professional development opportunity and as a research initiative in 2018. To date, students have participated in the VERP initiative during a range of interactions, such as receiving individual feedback on school experience and engaging in a class discussion in College. Guided by a supervisor, each of the three lecturers conducted a micro-analysis of the recorded footage of interactions and engaged in a shared review with colleagues, using the strength-based approach which underpins VERP. Engagement in VERP has triggered positive change as participants have analysed their own strengths and developed their attuned interaction skills. PGCE students gained from participating in the research on VERP, as this example of reflective practice was modelled for them in practical, professional settings, fully aligned to the GTCNI values and competences. Modified interactions have led to enhanced relationships, a creative human dynamic, more effective communication and the actualisation of values in practice.

A number of the taught sessions during the College-based week also focused appropriately on the students' current state of well-being and on preventative strategies to support their future health and well-being when they enter the teaching profession as beginning teachers. Students are made aware that their initial teacher education is the first stage in a lifelong process of professional learning, reflecting the DE strategy on teacher professional learning (DE Learning Leaders). From early in the PGCE year, the students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own professional development and the College processes of professional development and career-entry profiling prepare the students well for future employment.

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the College's approach to the care and welfare of the students impacts positively on learning, teaching and outcomes. There is a dedicated team and a range of comprehensive measures in place to provide the highest standard of support and guidance to the students, all of which the students are fully aware and appreciative.

## **6. Leadership and management**

The quality of leadership and management of the PGCE programme is outstanding. There is a highly strategic and distributed model of leadership across the College and an effective organisational structure which ensures that the PGCE programme and IME are integral to all aspects of the life and work of the College. There is a clear focus at all levels on continuous improvement which is guided by a shared vision for sustainable excellence and underpinned by robust processes of monitoring, evaluating and reviewing, as articulated within the College's corporate plan, *Strategy 21*.

The voice of the student is valued, the College consults with them in a variety of ways and their feedback is integral to the process of monitoring, evaluating and reviewing and improving aspects of the programme.

The strategic importance placed on continuous professional development across the College ensures that staffing at all levels of the programme is of a consistently high calibre. The core IM team consists of highly-skilled individuals, each of whom holds qualifications to doctorate level, is active in the field of IM research and has a wealth of relevant experience. The wider team is made up of highly qualified and competent subject specialists from a range of curricular areas who make valuable and enriching contributions to the students' academic and professional experience in St Mary's. Many of the College team serve on boards of governors in both IM and English-medium schools and hold posts as external examiners in a range of national and international third-level institutions.

Close partnerships with the local community, schools and other related local and global bodies, are given a high level of priority in St Mary's University College. These partnerships add a vital dimension to the programme and enhance the students' overall experience, model effective collaboration and reflect the shared values of the wider community.

## **7. Overall effectiveness**

St Mary's University College has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners.

## **8. An evaluation of the post-primary Irish-medium enhancement course**

### **8.1 Context**

The IM Post-primary Enhancement Course has been coordinated and delivered by St Mary's University College since 2007 as a result of an innovative partnership and collaboration between St Mary's University College, Queen's University, Belfast and Ulster University. The course aims to prepare post-primary PGCE students to teach in IM post-primary settings by developing their Irish-language competence and their knowledge and understanding of immersion education and leads to the award of a Certificate in Bilingual Education. The course aims to address the shortage of qualified IM teachers in the developing IM post-primary sector. The college strives to recruit graduates, who are competent in Irish, from a broad range of subject specialisms; this continues to prove challenging.

Eight supernumerary places are available each year for students who are interested in IME and have been successful in gaining a place on the post-primary PGCE at either Ulster University or Queen's University. The students are identified at the point of selection to the PGCE courses and undergo a further selection process by St Mary's to gain entry to the IM enhancement course.



The IM enhancement course begins with a ten-day residential immersion course in the Donegal Gaeltacht at the end of July which is followed by a week-long college-based IM course in St Mary's University College in August. In September, after registering on their respective PGCE course, the students observe the life and work of an IM primary school; this is a two-week observation experience for Queen's University students and one week for Ulster University students. A two-day series of IM specific workshops takes place in St Mary's University College over two Saturdays, one in October and one in February. All of the students complete their second PGCE school placement in an IM post-primary setting. There is a second Gaeltacht-based immersion course in the week before Easter and, after completing successfully their PGCE courses, the students return to St Mary's University College for a final one-week IM course in June, to complete the final elements of the IM enhancement course.

## 8.2 Outcomes for learners

The small cohort of students is hardworking and dedicated to acquiring the specific skills, knowledge and linguistic and professional competences required to work in an IM setting. This dedication is evident through the additional time, effort and commitment that each of them gives in order to complete all elements of the IM enhancement course during their PGCE year.

During the workshops observed, the students: engaged professionally with each other and with the lecturers, through the medium of Irish; contributed meaningfully to all tasks and discussions; and shared honest reflections and evaluations from their first teaching experience placement.

The PGCE students who undertake the IM enhancement course take part in two Saturday workshops in October and February, the latter just as they embark upon their teaching experience in an IM post-primary setting. The purpose of the Saturday workshops flows from the course vision to inspire and develop highly competent, reflective teaching professionals for the Irish-medium post-primary sector, with a strong sense of moral purpose and a vocational commitment to the holistic development of their pupils and the improvement of society. To this end the college facilitates workshops which are led by current and relevant key players in IME, almost all of whom are IM post-primary practitioners. The focus of the workshops, ten in total, is learning and teaching in the IM post-primary setting. The sessions are led by visiting expert IM practitioners who present research, share strategies and help develop the PGCE students' skills in the following areas:

- **Immersion education pedagogy** including content-based instruction and integration of content and language learning;
- **IME**, including holistic learning as well as current strengths and challenges within the IM post-primary sector;
- **Irish language** including subject specialism (language register and terminology) and fluency and quality of written and oral communication.

Integral to the two days are the opportunities to reflect on students' own and one another's practice and experiences, while developing their professional competences as IM teachers and improving further their Irish language proficiency.

### **8.3 Provision for learning**

Well-planned and innovative opportunities throughout the year enable the students to develop their knowledge and understanding of immersion education and to develop further their competency and confidence in the Irish language.

All of the IM specific workshops observed were very good or outstanding in promoting high quality learning and teaching. In these workshops, the facilitators: were highly effective linguistic role models; used a range of effective teaching strategies and resources to model immersion pedagogy; and, engaged the students skilfully in high-level discussion and reflection.

The students' evaluations of all aspects of the course are very positive. In discussions with the inspectors the students reported that they would welcome more IM-specific input to their PGCE year.

### **8.4 Leadership and management**

The co-ordination of the IM enhancement course sits within the overall highly effective strategic leadership of the College and is integral to its well-established, vibrant IM ethos.

All of the IM core staff, including the course director and coordinator, and the guest facilitators, have a wide range of research and pedagogic expertise and experience in IME.

The success of this unique course is also as a result of the professional partnerships that St Mary's University College has fostered with both universities. While effective, it will be important that these partnerships continue to be developed through more consistent sharing of expertise and information to build a holistic profile of student progress in preparation for, during and after the students' IM post-primary PGCE experience.

### Inspection methodology and evidence base

The inspection was conducted within the terms of the Department of Education (DE) *Circular [2010/03 Initial Teacher Education: Approval of Programmes](#)*<sup>6</sup> which sets out the requirements which programmes must meet to be approved by DE. In order to meet the standard of being at least *satisfactory* as evaluated by the ETI (as set out in the Circular), the provision may have some areas for improvement which are judged by the ETI to be within the capacity of the provider to amend, but must not require significant or urgent improvement in any aspect.

The ETI document [Self-evaluation and inspection of initial teacher education provision](#) (ETI 2018) sets out the approach for the inspection in more detail<sup>7</sup>. In advance of the visit, the provider produced a portfolio for the reaccreditation process as required by the General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland. Tutors were also invited to identify and describe briefly instances of good practice which illustrate aspects of the self-evaluation and inspection framework. A selection of these is included in this report.

The ETI inspected a sample of four school placement sessions and observed the assessment of and feedback to the students. The visits to schools also allowed for a range of informal talks with, for example, teachers and principals.

In the week of 11 February 2019 a team of inspectors carried out a campus-based inspection. They observed ten seminar/practical workshop sessions delivered by College and associate lecturers and a representative from an external organisation.

The arrangements for this inspection included meetings with: the principal of the College; the acting PGCE Programme Co-ordinator; representatives from the PGCE Programme Team; staff with specific responsibilities, including safeguarding and student support; and, with a group of students; a review of documentation and data, including scrutiny of policy, planning, quality assurance and evaluation documents; and samples of the students' written work and teaching experience planning files; and, a review of the resources for learning and teaching, including the provision for learning online.

The arrangements for the evaluation of the IM enhancement course included:

- meetings with the principal of St Mary's University College, the acting course director and the course coordinator as well as lead staff from both QUB and UU, and the students;
- a review of documentation and data, including scrutiny of policy, planning, quality assurance and evaluation documents;
- a review of the resources for learning and teaching; and
- first-hand observation by inspectors of one of the IM Saturday series of workshops, which also included discussions with the lecturers and students.

**Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate**

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%

**Performance levels**

The ETI use the following performance levels when reporting on outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management (and the overall provision in a subject area or unit, as applicable):

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

The ETI use the following levels when reporting on care and welfare:

Impacts positively on learning, teaching and outcomes for learners
Does not impact positively enough on learning, teaching and outcomes for learners

**Overall effectiveness**

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the provider for this programme:

- The provider has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners.
- The provider demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners.
- The provider needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
- The provider needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

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