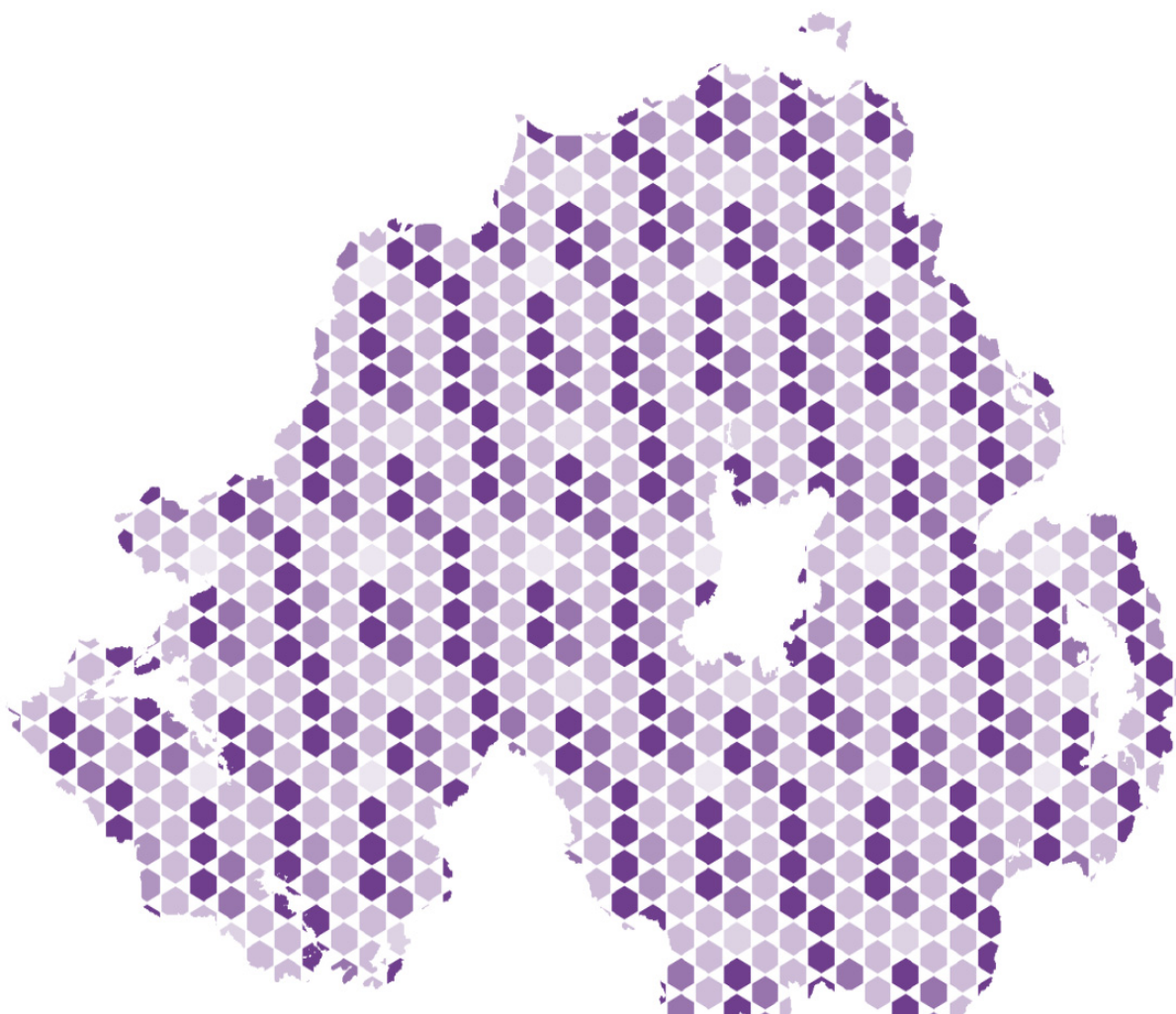


# TEACHER/HIGHER EDUCATION INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

An Inspection and an Evaluation of  
the Pilot Irish-medium Enhancement  
to the Post-Primary PGCE  
Programmes, with a focus on  
Literacy and Numeracy, St Mary's  
University College  
Inspected: June 2010

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## 1. SELF-EVALUATION AND INSPECTION

1.1 The inspection of the pilot Irish Medium (IM) post-primary enhancement provided by St Mary's University College (College) of the postgraduate Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) programmes provided by Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and the University of Ulster (UU), was conducted in keeping with 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 the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) to be at least satisfactory.

1.2 The Inspectorate was also asked to provide this report in the form of an evaluation of the pilot programme, in its third year (2009-2010). At the same time, the post-primary PGCE programmes at UU and QUB were inspected; the respective inspection reports will be published simultaneously on the Inspectorate's website<sup>1</sup>. This inspection report deals only with the Irish-medium enhancement provided by St Mary's University College.

1.3 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.

1.4 In advance of the visit, the College produced a self-evaluation (SE) report (Annex 1 provides a summary). 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, form 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.

1.5 Finally, the College and the Inspectorate independently reported overall levels 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 the academic year 2009-2010, inspectors visited the College, accompanied the students on fieldwork in the Gaeltacht and observed a sample of three students during their school-based work experience. The inspectors observed instances of learning and teaching; talked, formally and informally, to lecturers and leaders, and to all of the students; they read policy, planning and evaluation documents; and reviewed the resources, including the

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<sup>1</sup> [www.etini.gov.uk](http://www.etini.gov.uk)

provision for online learning. Inspectors held significant discussions with staff co-ordinating the IM students in UU and QUB, and with the co-ordinator and senior managers in the College. The visits to schools also allowed for a range of informal talks with, for example, teacher-tutors, classroom teachers, heads of department and principals.

### **3. THE PILOT IRISH-MEDIUM ENHANCEMENT OF THE POST-PRIMARY PGCE PROGRAMMES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER AND AT QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY, BELFAST**

3.1 Discussions on the need to provide Irish-medium (IM) post-primary initial teacher education started in 2004. The Department of Education (DE) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) supported a three-year pilot project involving the College, collaborating with Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and the University of Ulster (UU), beginning in August 2007. Additional student teacher places were authorised by DE in UU and QUB for the programme (six places in 2007-08, eight in 2008-09 and again in 2009-10) and it was agreed that the Inspectorate would conduct an evaluation of the programme during the third year.

3.2 According to the Memorandum of Agreement between DEL and St Mary's University College, the three-year pilot project will:

- increase the linguistic quality and the level of fluency of the individual student teacher's own Irish language;
- develop the professional knowledge, understanding and skills of the individual student teacher, pertaining to his/her specialist subject/discipline; and
- increase the understanding of the individual student teacher of the philosophical, methodological and pedagogic aspects of Irish-medium education.

3.3 As is the case for all student teachers, IM students on the pilot programme must satisfy all of the prerequisites for recruitment to the PGCE programme. However, they will generally not have studied Irish as a main subject to degree level.

3.4 The students are recruited by and registered either with QUB or UU depending on their specialism and undertake the Irish-medium enhancement and extension provision at St Mary's University College. Four subjects were identified as priority areas at the beginning of the pilot (English with drama and media studies, technology and design, mathematics and science), but it has not been possible to recruit any suitable students onto the technology and design nor onto the mathematics programmes.

3.5 The College's provision begins in July of the academic year and comprises two periods of activities in the Gaeltacht, a week of IM orientation work in the College towards the end of August, two one-day workshops in the College, and a final week of College-based work. All programme activities organised by the College are conducted through the medium of Irish.

### **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

4.1 Throughout the year, the College's programme co-ordinator works closely with key academic staff in QUB and UU and provides ongoing support to the students, particularly during their preparation for school experience in an Irish-medium post-primary school.

4.2 The strengths of the leadership and management include:

- the strong educational vision of senior management based on the distinctive ethos of the College;
- the clear commitment of the College to systematic self-evaluation and reflection to bring about continuous improvement of all its IM provision, including the PGCE enhancement programme;
- the very effective partnerships between the College and UU and QUB in relation to this programme;
- the excellent relationships between the College, IM schools and other key stakeholders within the IME sector and beyond;
- the College-wide commitment to addressing the needs of the IME sector; and
- the prompt and effective response of the College to feedback from students.

4.3 The areas for development include:

- the need to convene full meetings of the Partnership Committee to ensure that all schools have a clear understanding of their responsibilities in relation to the partnership; and
- in collaboration with QUB, UU and other stakeholders, to explore further recruitment strategies to attract applicants with as wide a range of specialist disciplines as possible.

**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 generally have an honours primary degree, but Irish is not usually their main subject. They must, nevertheless, demonstrate a level of Irish sufficient to the needs of the course and, importantly, a commitment to extending and improving their competence in the Irish language as part of their professional development.

5.2 The strengths of achievement and standards include:

- the commitment of all students observed to the welfare and pastoral care of the pupils;
- the very good approach by students to self-reflection;
- the very good understanding of the students of their specialist subject in the context of the Northern Ireland Curriculum;

- the good understanding by students of the Northern Ireland teacher competences; and
- the good preparation of the students for progression to employment.

The quality of standards and achievements is very good.

## 6. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

6.1 A representative of the College's Governing Body met with the inspection team to learn of the evaluative purpose and focus of the inspection. He spoke of his pride in the work and achievements of the College and talked about his hopes and vision for the future, in particular the important role the College plays in the IM sector and the important place IME has in the work and life of the College.

6.2 The students talked of their appreciation of the caring, supportive ethos of the College and the commitment of the whole College community to meeting their needs. They spoke of their loyalty to Irish-medium education (IME) and are very aware of their need to continue to develop their Irish language skills, particularly in the context of the teaching competence 3(ii).

A main objective of the Irish-medium PGCE Enhancement Provision at St Mary's is to nurture a sense of community among the QUB and UU students as a specific Irish-medium group who spend a great deal of their year spread across different disciplines and between institutions. These QUB and UU students complete various IM elements throughout the PGCE year during which they come together as an Irish-medium group. These elements include:

- 10 day language intensive course in the Donegal Gaeltacht in August;
- one week orientation and IM induction in St Mary's in August;
- two Saturday IM seminar days in St Mary's during the year;
- regular and on-going participation in online discussions and debates.

There is a vibrant and dynamic Irish-medium and Irish speaking community which is unique to St Mary's University College and it is important that opportunities are planned that enable the post-primary students to develop as valuable members of this larger Irish-medium/Irish speaking population of St Mary's. These opportunities during which all of the students come together include:

- attendance at lectures given by international immersion experts;
- attendance at annual Irish-medium conference;
- five day course in Connemara Gaeltacht in April;
- final Irish-medium week in June in St Mary's, including field trip.

During the final college-based week the post-primary QUB and UU Irish-medium students are very much a part of the wider IM community in St Mary's. This community is nurtured through the various workshops and activities planned and also the preparation that the students put into the final presentation ceremony. A great emphasis is placed on the importance of community and one student, who is deemed to have demonstrated a significant understanding of and contribution to the Irish-medium community, is presented with an award, 'Corn Ghaeltacht Bhéal Feirste'.

6.3 The strengths of the enhancement provision include:

- the outstanding working relationships between the lecturers and students;
- the outstanding quality of pastoral care for the students;
- the very good approach to supporting students to develop the capacity to reflect on their own practice;
- the very good support provided by the College co-ordinator for students preparing for and during their IM school experience;
- the development of a range of dedicated activities to meet the needs of students during the pilot programme;
- the effective, active involvement of key IM partners in delivering aspects of the programme;
- the very good co-operation and collaboration between the College, QUB and UU;
- the very good opportunities to extend the exposure of students to the IME community within and beyond the College.

6.4 An area for development is:

- the need for the College to support the further development of the students' Irish language competence.

#### SCHOOL-BASED WORK

6.5 During the year, students on the pilot project spend a week observing practice in an IM primary school, visit and observe teaching in a Gaeltacht school during their Gaeltacht work, and undertake one extended period of school-based work in an IM post-primary setting. This work is valued by the students and the College, and also by IM schools and the wider IM community.

Whilst on a school-based placement in an IM post-primary school, two QUB science students embarked on the innovative practice of co-teaching for one class each week. This proved to be a very successful model of instruction which all concerned found to be effective and beneficial. The student teachers benefited in a number of ways:

- enjoying planning and reflecting with each other;
- learning with and from each other;
- feeling less isolated;
- feeling that they were in a more supportive environment;
- observing and participating in different teaching methods; and
- being able to give attention to individuals.

The student teachers felt that the additional time required for planning and reflection for co-teaching could add to workloads, although they personally welcomed this shared time together. They also recognised that the nature of their own personalities and the positive professional relationship that they had together were significant factors in ensuring the success of their co-teaching.

6.6 The strengths in the school-based work include:

- the high quality of the teaching by students, all of which was good or very good;
- the very thorough planning undertaken by all the students, including curricular language planning;
- the students' reflection and evaluation of their practice which had a clear focus on learning intentions;
- the opportunities for students to experience collaborative teaching;
- the outstanding quality of the feedback observed between the College's programme co-ordinator and the students; and
- the good progress made in developing partnerships with IM schools in the border counties.

6.7 An area for development in school-based work is:

- the need for all host schools to have a clearer understanding in relation to their responsibilities to support students.

The quality of provision is very good.

**Overall, the standards achieved by the students and the quality of provision for learning are 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.

**Overall the quality of the Irish-medium post-primary PGCE enhancement pilot programme 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.**



## **EVALUATION FINDING**

7.2 The unsatisfactory legacy of unqualified teachers working in the IM sector especially at the post-primary phase has been successfully resolved. Of the 13 students who successfully completed the PGCE course at QUB or UU and the IM enhancement at St Mary's University College during the first two years of the pilot, seven have secured full-time employment within the IM sector; one has secured a full-time post in an English-medium post-primary school; four have substantial part-time work, mostly in the IM sector; the remaining student did not graduate until December 2009 for personal reasons.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

7.3 The pilot project has been very successful and could now be mainstreamed in light of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta's aim of establishing five new IM post-primary settings over the coming years.

**SELF-EVALUATION OF THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING IN THE IRISH-MEDIUM POST-PRIMARY PGCE ENHANCEMENT PROVISION**

It was concluded that, in St Mary's, the quality of provision for learning for student teachers taking the Irish-medium Post-primary PGCE enhancement provision is very high.

A wide range of evidence was considered in the evaluation of the quality of provision for learning and the following strengths were identified:

**Strengths**

- relevant, coherent and progressive learning and teaching provision;
- excellent quality of student support and pastoral care;
- high quality of formative assessment and quality feedback;
- enrichment of student experiences through a wide range of varied activities;
- high quality of provision of student learning in schools;
- good range of teaching methods employed by tutors;
- high quality of Library, ICT, Irish-medium Learning Resources and Irish-medium writing support provision.

**Aspects for further development in Quality of Provision for Learning are:**

- further development of a support system, including a mentoring system, for any Post-primary PGCE student who may experience difficulties during their Irish-medium School Experience;
- further development of Irish-medium provision on LearningNI as a learning tool.

**Self-evaluation of Achievements and Standards in the Irish-medium Post-primary PGCE enhancement provision**

It was concluded that, in St Mary's, student teachers taking the Irish-medium Post-primary PGCE enhancement provision achieve at a very high level across the full range of professional and educational areas that might be expected in a high quality initial teacher education programme.

A wide range of evidence was considered in the evaluation of how well the students achieve and the following strengths were identified:

## **Strengths**

- strong commitment by students to professional values and practice;
- high level of achievement by students in an Irish-medium setting;
- students' ability to be reflective, self-critical and professional in their Irish-medium practice;
- high level of satisfaction shown by Irish-medium employers of post-primary students who have experienced the Irish-medium enhancement provision;
- good preparation of student teachers for progression to employment in the Irish-medium sector.

## **An aspect for further development in Achievements and Standards is:**

- further development of the processes of student self-evaluation and reflection, within overall Personal Development Planning.

**The College believes that the performance level in the areas of the Quality of Provision for Learning and Achievements and Standards in the Irish-medium Post-primary PGCE enhancement provision in St Mary's University College is very good.**

## **Self-evaluation of Leadership and Management in the Irish-medium Post-primary PGCE enhancement provision**

It was concluded that, in St Mary's, leadership and management are very effective in raising achievement, supporting the student teachers and enhancing quality in the Irish-medium Post-primary PGCE enhancement provision.

A wide range of evidence was considered in the evaluation of the effectiveness of leadership and management and the following strengths were identified:

## **Strengths**

- very strong College ethos which emphasises dedication to the education of students;
- very strong College commitment to Irish-medium education, thereby providing a highly appropriate environment for the enhancement of the UU and QUB PGCE programmes;
- strong commitment to the maintenance and development of high standards in teaching and learning;

- good mutually-supportive relationships between management and staff in a collegiate culture;
- distributed leadership underpinning high standards of provision;
- strong involvement of staff in educational research and scholarly activity, particularly that related to Irish-medium education;
- excellent relationships with Irish-medium schools and other partners and stakeholders;
- strong commitment to staff development;
- very high quality of accommodation and resources.

**Aspects for further development in Leadership and Management are:**

- development of additional recruitment strategies to attract applicants from as wide a range of disciplines as possible;
- establishment of clearer channels of communication with DE and DEL, particularly in relation to the budget;
- clarification of the future of Irish-medium Post-primary provision and the post of Irish-medium Co-ordinator.

<p><b>The College believes that the performance level in the area of Leadership and Management of the Irish-medium Post-primary PGCE enhancement provision in St Mary's University College is very good.</b></p>
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