

Department *of* Education

***Report on
The Educational
Themes***

Primary Inspections

1998-99

eti

*The Education and Training
Inspectorate*

Report on The Educational Themes

1998-99

1. INTRODUCTION

The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 introduced four educational themes, Cultural Heritage, Education for Mutual Understanding, Health Education and Information Technology, as part of the curriculum for all grant-aided primary schools in Northern Ireland. The statutory provisions relating to these educational themes became operative for all pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 from 1 August 1992. The themes were not intended to be additional subjects on the timetable but rather to be part of the whole curriculum and integrated into the everyday teaching and learning. Each of the themes has two dimensions:

- skills, knowledge and understanding;
- personal qualities, attitudes and skills.

This report draws on evidence from 92 primary inspections during 1998/99. Seventy-three of these were focused inspections, including 20 which focused specifically on the Educational Themes. The findings are based primarily on the evidence from 19 general inspections and 20 focused inspections.

Throughout the report a number of quantitative terms are used which may be interpreted as indicated below:

almost/nearly all	more than 90%
most	75% to 90%
a majority	50% to 74%
a significant minority	30% to 49%
a minority	10% to 29%
very few/a small number	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of provision, the Inspectorate relate their judgements to four performance levels which may be interpreted as follows:

Grade

1	Significant Strengths	good (ranging to outstanding)
2	Strengths outweigh any weaknesses	satisfactory (ranging to good)
3	Weaknesses outweigh strengths	fair (ranging to satisfactory)
4	Significant weaknesses	poor

2. ANALYSIS OF MAIN FINDINGS

The provision for cultural heritage, education for mutual understanding and health education was judged to be satisfactory or better in a majority of the schools inspected. These findings are similar to those recorded in the Primary Report (1992-98) *Children and Their Learning*. The quality of the work in ICT remains disappointing, with just 47% of the work judged to be satisfactory or better. The emerging issues for consideration, relating to provision in ICT, are noted later in this report.

In a minority of schools, where excellent practice was identified in all of the education themes, the following common characteristics emerged:

- the caring and supportive learning atmosphere and good relationships at all levels ensured a sound basis for developing the work associated with the themes;
- the schools made good use of the expertise within the staff, external agencies, and community links to support the development of the themes in their provision;
- the themes were integrated effectively into the teachers' schemes of work and daily planning;
- there were co-ordinators were in post for all of the themes, monitoring progress, giving advice and support to colleagues, and organising school-based INSET matched to identified needs;
- the availability, accessibility and use of resources were generally good.

MAIN FEATURES OF PROVISION FOR THE EDUCATION THEMES

The main purposes of the report are to:-

- summarise the Inspectorate's findings of the quality of the work in the Educational themes in a sample of primary schools inspected in 1998-99; and
- identify the main trends, and the particular strengths of the provision.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

In 70% of the schools inspected in 1998-99 the provision for cultural heritage was judged to be satisfactory or better.

The main features of good practice in cultural heritage were:

- a keen appreciation of the value of the local environment as a resource for learning, including a strong emphasis on local traditions and traditional stories and legends;
- a notable emphasis on the study of townland names, their location and derivations: this feature was particularly evident in rural schools;
- imaginative embedding of the theme in subjects such as geography;
- good use of resources, including human resources, in the community; in several schools older members of the community shared with the children their experiences of customs and traditions of years past.

EDUCATION FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Provision for education for mutual understanding (EMU) was judged to be satisfactory or better in almost 80% of schools. Those schools with a caring, supportive ethos where children are valued also make good provision in EMU. A continuing feature of the provision is the value placed by many schools on maintaining links across the community divide. Occasionally these links are strong and well-developed, and include opportunities for the children to engage in joint curricular activities and residential; more frequently, however, they are limited to shared activities or sporting events. There was evidence of an increasing emphasis on establishing European links; and in many cases useful contacts are developing through the Comenius Project resulting in the exchange of materials and information, and visits by staff.

The main features of the good practice seen in EMU were:

- a culture of openness, acceptance, inclusiveness and mutual respect promoted actively at all levels. There were, for example, instances of children with moderate learning difficulties being integrated well into the life and work in the mainstream school, and of the culture of minority ethnic groups, such as the Chinese community, being celebrated at appropriate times;
- a whole-school appreciation of and adherence to the objectives of EMU; co-ordinators having the commitment, expertise and vision to motivate teachers and to carry the programme forward;

- well-planned opportunities for promoting key elements of EMU;
- planned cross-community programmes established through a variety of educational, cultural and sporting contacts with neighbouring schools;
- effective links established with the local community;
- the production and exchange by the children of high quality materials with other schools, including video and audio tapes depicting the culture and life of their school and community.

HEALTH EDUCATION

As stated in the Primary Report (1992-1998), provision in health education was judged to be satisfactory or better in some 86% of the schools inspected; in almost 30% of the schools inspected there were significant strengths in the teaching of health education. In less than 15% of the schools there were notable weaknesses in the implementation of this theme.

The main features of good practice observed in health education were:

- a strong whole-school emphasis given to the general care and well-being of the children, the development of self-esteem and confidence, and hygiene and healthy eating practices;
- an ethos and programmes which encourage the children to have respect for the environment and for the property of others;
- the work in health education integrated successfully and systematically into areas of study, in particular science, physical education, environment and society, English and religious education;
- a broad programme for all year groups ensuring progression and balance in the children's learning;
- a strong emphasis placed on helping the children to respect their bodies, the importance of maintaining health and fitness, and taking responsibility for their own health and well-being;

- regular opportunities for the children to discuss and debate health-related issues, to research information for topics and to record their findings in a variety of ways;
- aspects such as relationships, sex education, personal safety, and awareness of drug and alcohol abuse being introduced sensitively; parents informed about the purpose and the content of these programmes;
- important aspects of personal safety developed well, such as safety in the home and at school; safety in the community and on the road, and caution with strangers;
- good use made of a wide range of resources to support health education including books, video recordings, posters and human resources; many schools making good use of the contribution of school nurses, dental staff and visitors with specific expertise to talk about topics such as personal development and dental care;
- a range of health-related materials, including that produced by the children, displayed widely around the school.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

In some 47% of schools, the provision in ICT was judged to be entirely satisfactory or better. In over 50% of schools, however, there were weaknesses or significant weaknesses. In those schools where provision was good or excellent, there was evidence of the following features:

- a commitment in policy and practice to all children gaining confidence and capability in ICT;
- clear, effective whole-school planning supporting progression and balance in the children's experiences;
- co-ordinators actively monitoring planning and practice in ICT, and working closely with their colleagues, providing advice and support, and developing their confidence and competence;
- adequate resources of appropriate quality and easily accessible to the children;
- good use being made of ICT, including a variety of software and programmable devices, to support teaching and learning in subjects across the curriculum;
- from the early stages in KS1 encouragement for the children to become confident in their use of ICT;
- innovative projects where the children use the computer for research purposes and communicate relevant information by electronic mail to children in other locations or countries;

- opportunities for the children to compose directly on-screen, editing and improving their work;
- the children's enthusiasm about their work with computers, and their recognition of the relevance of ICT in their everyday lives;
- effective, school-based INSET related to the agreed needs of the staff and the school;
- good use made of CD ROMs to locate and retrieve information for topics and to promote independent learning;
- ICT used well to support and enhance the learning of children with special educational needs.

The main weaknesses identified in those schools where provision for ICT was poor were:

- the dated and reportedly unreliable computer hardware; teachers feeling frustrated and disappointed with frequent breakdowns of equipment and delays in repairs;
- the fragmented and patchy nature of the work in ICT; little evidence of progression over the 7 years of primary education;
- insufficient time or opportunity for co-ordinators to develop their role;
- teachers' lack of confidence and competence in using the equipment effectively; limited staff involvement in INSET;

- the narrowness of the children's experiences in ICT, often limited to word processing for presentation purposes, and to the use of games;
- little use made of ICT resources, such as the concept keyboard, in KS1 or with children with special educational needs.

GENERAL ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

In a significant minority of schools, where weaknesses outweighed strengths in at least one of the themes, the following features were common:

- limited co-ordination of the themes in schools; little attempt made to monitor progress or to ensure consistency and continuity in individual teachers' programmes;
- the fragmented and patchy nature of the integration of the themes into the curricular programmes in each year group; a lack of cohesion and progression in this aspect of the children's learning;
- co-ordinators with responsibility for a theme often lacked authority and status, and were unclear about their exact role;
- no suitable INSET for co-ordinators and for staff; the schools' lack of confidence in developing work associated with the educational themes.

CONCLUSION

The Primary Report commented, *“Most schools have succeeded in effectively integrating the themes wholly or in part into the programmes of study, making satisfactory or better provision in terms of balance and quality in three of the four themes.”* This report, based on the 1998/99 primary inspection programme, confirms the earlier generally satisfactory findings in Cultural Heritage, Education for Mutual Understanding and Health Education.

The provision in ICT continues to be disappointing and presents a challenge not only for primary schools but also for those charged with the responsibility of supporting their work.

SCHOOLS INCLUDED IN THE 1998-99 GENERAL INSPECTION PROGRAMME

Ballyduff Primary School, Newtownabbey
Ballymagee Primary School, Bangor
Ballytrea Primary School, Stewartstown
Bocombra Primary School, Portadown
Fair Hill Primary School, Dromara, Dromore
Fountain Primary School, Londonderry
Gortin Primary School, Plumbridge, Omagh
Moneydarragh Primary School, Annalong, Newry
Oakgrove Integrated Primary School, Londonderry
Omagh Integrated Primary School
Primate Dixon Primary School, Coalisland
St Anthony's Primary School, Craigavon
St Brigid's Primary School, Altamuskin, Omagh
St Joseph's Primary School, Ahoghill
St Joseph's Primary School, Newcastle
St Mary's Girls' Primary School, Newcastle
St Mary's Primary School, Comber
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry
St Joseph's Primary School, Madden, Armagh

SCHOOLS INCLUDED IN THE 1998-99 PROGRAMME OF FOCUSED INSPECTIONS OF THE EDUCATIONAL THEMES

Ballyoran Primary, Portadown
Bushmills Primary
Carnalridge Primary, Portrush
Clough Primary, Glarryford, Ballymena
Dromara Primary, Dromore
Evish Primary, Strabane
Forge Integrated Primary, Belfast
Hollybank Primary, Monkstown
Hutton Primary - The, Beragh, Omagh
Kilbride Primary, Doagh, Ballyclare
Laghey Primary, Dungannon
Sion Mills Primary, Strabane
St Anne's Primary, Londonderry
St Brigid's Primary, Augher
St Columba's Primary, Dromore, Omagh
St Mary's Primary, Portaferry
St Mary's Primary, Tempo, Enniskillen
Straidhavern Primary, Crumlin
Tandragee Primary
Tonagh Primary, Lisburn

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 1999

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this booklet may be obtained from the Inspection Services Branch, Department of Education, Rathgael House, 43 Balloo Road, Bangor, Co Down BT19 7PR.

The document may be accessed on the internet site:
www.deni.gov.uk