



# Learning To Teach

*Students On Teaching Practice In Irish Primary Schools*



AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

INSPECTORATE

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# FOREWORD BY THE CHIEF INSPECTOR



The Department of Education and Science and the colleges that provide initial teacher education programmes for primary teachers are committed to ensuring the highest standards in the professional preparation of new teachers. The Inspectorate has worked closely with the colleges over many years and, in accordance with its quality assurance remit, evaluates the work of a sample of student teachers who are on final teaching practice

During the school year 2003/04 the Inspectorate carried out a structured review of teaching practice, focusing on the work of a sample of students from five colleges involved in initial teacher education for primary teaching in Ireland. Inspectors observed student teachers working in classrooms and evaluated their practice in four key areas: planning, teaching, learning and assessment. The Inspectorate prepared an individual report for each college, highlighting evaluation findings in each of the core areas reviewed.

This composite report, based on the five individual college reports, was prepared in order to provide an overview of the main trends in standards of practice across the sample reviewed. The publication, therefore, provides a useful reference point regarding the quality of teaching at a critical phase in the professional formation of teachers.

It is hoped that the findings and recommendations will make an important contribution to the further development of policy and practice in initial teacher education generally, and to enhancing the teaching practice dimension in particular. I am sure that the report will be of interest to the staff and management of the colleges, and to colleagues involved in other phases on the continuum of teacher education. It will also be studied carefully by colleagues in the Department of Education and Science with responsibility for the development of teacher education policy.

In publishing this report, I would like to acknowledge the valuable contribution of the colleges, the schools in which the students taught and, of course, the student teachers themselves whose work was evaluated.

**Eamon Stack**  
**Chief Inspector**

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The contribution of the inspectors who carried out the evaluation is also acknowledged: Pat O' Neill, Carmel O'Doherty, Máire Ní Ghógáin, Eamon Mac Coitir, Eamon Ó Breacháin, Eoghan Ó Súilleabháin, Seán Ó Cearbhaill, Risteard Ó Broin, and Séamus Caomhánach.

Gearóid Ó Conluain, Deputy Chief Inspector, and Éamonn Murtagh, Assistant Chief Inspector, provided informed and constructive advice at various stages of this work. Bernie Flannery from the Office of the Inspectorate, Sligo, provided valuable administrative support and the project was managed by Risteard Ó Broin, Divisional Inspector under the direction of Emer Egan, Assistant Chief Inspector, Teacher Education Policy Support Sub-division.

# INTRODUCTION

*Learning to Teach* is a report describing an evaluation by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science of the quality of teaching of a sample of students from five teacher education colleges in Ireland. The evaluation was carried out during the school year 2003/04 at a time when the students were completing their final period of teaching practice in schools. The teaching of 143 students was assessed. This represents a sample of 10% of the final-year cohort of students who were studying for a bachelor of education (BEd) degree or for a postgraduate diploma in primary teaching.

Teacher quality is the most important school variable that influences the achievement of pupils (OECD, 2005, p. 26). For that reason alone it is worth considering aspects of the quality of teacher education programmes and examining, at a policy level, factors that are likely to influence teacher quality. It is acknowledged that teachers, in addition to having a thorough understanding of the curriculum, should also be intellectually capable people who are articulate and knowledgeable and who can think, communicate and plan systematically (OECD, 2005, p. 99). Some aspects of teacher quality can be evaluated using indicators such as tests of academic ability, qualifications, and experience in schools. However, characteristics that are harder to measure but are nevertheless important to the quality of pupils' learning include the ability to convey ideas clearly and convincingly, to create effective learning environments, to foster productive teacher-pupil relations, to be creative and enthusiastic, and to work effectively with colleagues and with parents.

Given the complexities of teaching, and the challenges facing teachers in today's knowledge-based, dynamic society, the provision of initial teacher education is an important and demanding activity and is seen nowadays not as an end in itself but rather as the launching-point for the continuing professional development of teachers. The initial teacher education programme is considered to be the first step on a continuum that extends through induction and continuing professional development where teachers' knowledge and skills are enhanced throughout their careers.

A central aspect of all teacher education programmes in Ireland is the provision of experience in schools or teaching practice to student teachers. During teaching practice, students are given opportunities to observe experienced teachers at work and to develop practical skills, particularly in the areas of planning, teaching, classroom management, and the organisation of learning activities for pupils. Additionally, when students are on teaching practice, college authorities have an opportunity to assess their work in the classroom, particularly in the way they communicate and interact with pupils, and how they plan and manage teaching and learning. Ultimately, teaching practice provides the colleges with a means of assessing a student teacher's suitability for teaching.

*Learning to Teach* is set out in nine chapters. Chapter 1 provides background information and a brief overview of the arrangements for teaching practice in the five colleges. In chapter 2 the purposes and scope of the evaluation are described and details of the selection of the student sample are provided. In addition, the evaluation procedures and limitations are set out together with a description of how the

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findings are presented and analysed. The evaluation findings and recommendations in relation to the quality of planning and preparation, the quality of teaching, the quality of learning and the quality of assessment processes are set out separately in chapters 3–6. In chapter 7 the overall findings are summarised, and in chapter 8, conclusions and recommendations are offered. Finally, in chapter 9, *Looking to the Future*, the development of teacher education in a changing context is examined.

# Chapter 1

## BACKGROUND

### Overview of teaching practice in OECD countries

A common feature of all teacher education programmes in OECD countries is the provision of field experience or teaching practice for student teachers. The duration of teaching practice varies widely from country to country. Some programmes provide for brief periods of classroom placement, others have year-long internships, with students being assigned regular teaching obligations. Many OECD countries are now rethinking the role of teaching practice. Increasingly, students are being given experience in schools earlier in their teacher education programme, and practice is being broadened to encompass the responsibilities of teachers beyond the classroom, particularly in such areas as curriculum and school development planning, research, evaluation, and collaboration with parents and external partners. Additionally, in many OECD countries student teachers are being asked to spend some time observing in classrooms, tutoring individual or small groups of children or serving as teacher aides, before engaging in actual practice teaching. The trend towards establishing specific school and college partnerships that create linkages between teacher education coursework and school practice is also gaining ground (OECD, 2005, p. 108).

### Colleges of education in Ireland

There are five colleges in Ireland that provide full-time initial teacher education courses leading to a qualification that is recognised by the Department of Education and Science for the purpose of employment as a primary teacher. The five colleges are:

Church of Ireland College of Education, Rathmines, Dublin

Coláiste Mhuire, Marino, Dublin

Froebel College of Education, Blackrock, Co. Dublin

Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin

All the colleges are affiliated to a university and provide undergraduate courses leading to a bachelor of education (BEd) degree. In addition, four of the five colleges provide postgraduate courses leading to a higher diploma in primary teaching; the Church of Ireland College provides degree courses for undergraduates only. In recent years the higher diploma in arts in primary education, an on-line course for postgraduate students provided by Hibernia College, was recognised as a qualification for primary teaching; however, when the present survey of teaching practice was undertaken students enrolled in Hibernia College had not yet begun their final period of teaching practice in schools. For that reason students from Hibernia College were not included in this evaluation.



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## Structure of teaching practice in the colleges

Provision for teaching practice varies between the colleges in its organisation, in the amount of time devoted to it, and in how students' progress is monitored. In general, about a fifth of a student's time in college is spent on teaching practice (Department of Education and Science, 2002, p. 120). Each of the colleges has built up a network of schools to which they assign students on practice. While close working relations and informal partnerships between colleges and schools have developed in many instances, there are no formal contracts between schools and the colleges in relation to the provision of teaching practice and conditions governing student placement.

Most of the colleges provide block placements whereby students spend at least three weeks in schools, generally in the autumn and spring terms. Students undertake at least one teaching practice placement in a school in their own home area. The amount of time students spend teaching varies according to whether they are in the first, second or third year of the course. It generally increases from teaching three lessons per day in the first year to full-day teaching in the second and third years. Individual colleges also vary with regard to their requirements for teaching practice, but in general, BEd students spend between eighteen and twenty-two weeks on school experience over the three-year programme, while postgraduates spend approximately ten to fifteen weeks in schools over their eighteen-month diploma programme. Generally students are provided with opportunities to visit the school before teaching practice to consult with the class teacher and to meet the pupils, the principal and other members of staff. Students, especially in first and second year, spend some time on classroom observation in schools. School-experience placements throughout the BEd programme are in mainstream classes. In addition, serial or block periods are provided to second-year and third-year BEd students and to postgraduate diploma students for observing children with special needs. Most of the colleges arrange teaching placements in such a way that by the time students reach their final year they will have had experience of teaching in a variety of class levels. The colleges also aim to provide students with experience of teaching in a variety of settings: in single-grade and multi-grade classes, in urban and rural schools, in Irish-medium schools, and in schools for children with special needs.

## Practical issues in relation to student placement on teaching practice

The logistics of placing large numbers of students on teaching practice in schools are formidable. The acceptance of students on placement is at the discretion of the school authorities. Teachers voluntarily take students into their classrooms and do not take any formal part in monitoring or evaluating the students' work. Cannon (2004) reports a growing anxiety within colleges about their ability to match student placement demand with classroom supply. The increasing complexity of schools as dynamic organisations dealing with children from a range of ethnic and social backgrounds, coupled with the fact that a new school curriculum is being implemented, have meant that some schools, particularly those in areas where there is a regular demand for teaching practice placements, are sometimes reluctant to take students into their classrooms (Cannon, 2004, p. 26, 27).



## How colleges assess students on teaching practice

All the colleges set out detailed requirements for their students with regard to short-term and long-term planning, lesson preparation, classroom performance, and pupil assessment. Students are also advised about protocols for making contact with schools, dealing with pupils, punctuality, attendance, and dress code. During teaching practice the students are required to keep reflections on their teaching and to evaluate aspects of their own work.

Because of the increased number of students in all the colleges, it is necessary to engage external supervisors in addition to using members of the college staff to assess the students on teaching practice. The supervisors both advise and evaluate students. Many of the external supervisors are retired primary school principals or retired members of the Inspectorate. Following each classroom visit the supervisor gives immediate feedback to the student in both oral and written form, where strengths and weaknesses are identified and strategies for improvement are recommended. All the colleges use criteria for assessing student teachers' work, particularly in the areas of planning, preparation, and classroom performance. Supervisors are required to complete assessment forms for each student and also to contribute to the determination of each student's final rating for teaching practice. All the colleges have an internal moderating process to ensure that teaching practice ratings are equitable and consistent. Additionally, teaching practice procedures and ratings are overseen under the external moderation system operated through the university structure.

A fundamental requirement in all the colleges is that a pass in teaching practice is necessary in order to progress to the next year of the course. Considerable advances have been made in recent years in all the colleges towards providing a range of supports to assist weaker students to reach satisfactory standards of teaching. Following these interventions, students who continue to fail or who are found to be unsuitable for teaching for other reasons are counselled and advised to reconsider their suitability for the profession. In all the colleges the failure rate in teaching practice is very low. While colleges vary in their practices for evaluating students, all give a significant weighting to classroom performance. In all the colleges a high proportion of the overall marks for education in the BEd degree is allotted to teaching practice. A pass in teaching practice is a precondition of graduation in all the colleges (Cannon, 2004, p. 26, 27).

## Involvement of the Inspectorate in the evaluation of teaching practice

The Inspectorate has had a role, with the colleges, in monitoring the standard of teaching practice of final-year students since the foundation of the State. Initial teacher education for primary teachers goes back to the establishment of national schools in the 1830s. Following independence, training colleges provided a two-year course in single-sex, denominational institutions with a heavy emphasis on the socialisation of student teachers to fulfil well-defined tasks in schools. By 1933 a new framework was given to the course of studies in the colleges. This new framework meant that the course was divided into three components: a professional course in educational studies, a general education in academic subjects, and an optional

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course. Teaching practice was known as “practical teaching,” and for the first time in the colleges success in both “practical teaching” and the “principles of teaching” was considered obligatory for a student to qualify. Teaching practice tended to be organised in block release periods, amounting to six weeks per annum for each student. The practice took place in nearby schools associated with the colleges. Senior inspectors from the then Department of Education monitored standards by evaluating a cross-section of student teachers each year (Coolahan, 2004, p. 3, 4).

More specifically, rule 153 (2) of the Rules for National Schools states that  
before aid is granted to a Training College the Minister must be satisfied . . . that adequate provision is made whereby the students may obtain, as part of their training, practice in teaching under supervision in national schools.

Section 13 of the Education Act (1998) describes the statutory quality assurance functions of the Inspectorate, particularly with regard to the evaluation of the work of schools and teachers. The assessment of the quality of teaching of final year students, who are about to take up posts as teachers in primary schools, is considered to be an important part of the Inspectorate’s overall evaluation remit.

## Chapter 2

# EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

### Purposes of the evaluation

The following were set out as the general purposes of the evaluation:

- to collect data in order to advise the Minister for Education and Science about the quality of the teaching practice aspect of the initial teacher education programme in the five colleges
- to compile an overall report to support the formulation of future policy decisions in respect of initial teacher education
- to promote collaboration and communication between the Department of Education and Science and the colleges
- to provide feedback to the colleges in order to promote further development in the area of teaching practice.

### Scope of the evaluation

In Ireland the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) is underpinned by three broad aims: to enable children to live a full life as children and to realise their potential, to enable them to develop as social beings through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society, and to prepare them for further education and lifelong learning. Additionally, a number of defining features and goals permeate all curriculum areas and include a significant emphasis on the quality of teaching, learning, assessment, and planning (*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, p. 7).

Guided by these principles of teaching and learning, the evaluation set out to assess the student teachers' work in the following four areas:

- Planning and preparation
- Teaching
- Learning
- Assessment

### Selection of the sample

The evaluation aimed to gather data during classroom visits by inspectors based on their observation of a sample of final-year student teachers. Nine inspectors altogether were involved in the exercise; some assessed students from more than one college. Initially, all the colleges provided lists of students, the name and address of the schools where they were on teaching practice, the classes they were teaching, and contact details for the schools. Additionally, the colleges provided either provisional teaching practice results for the school year 2003/04 or teaching practice ratings for previous years for each student.

It was recognised that there were constraints on the inspectors with regard to the location and the time available for carrying out the school visits. Therefore, to ensure that the work of approximately three students per day was assessed, defined geographical regions were assigned to each inspector. Within these regions the inspectors were asked to select a sample of students using the following criteria:

- **Teaching practice results** Based on the results that had been supplied by the colleges, students in the top, middle and lower bands of achievement were selected.
- **Gender** In each college the gender composition of the cohort of final-year students was examined, and a representative number of male and female students was selected.
- **School type and location** Every effort was made to sample students teaching in large and small schools, in single-sex and co-educational schools, and in schools in disadvantaged areas and in areas not designated as disadvantaged.

In some respects the sample selected for the survey was a convenience sample. Because it was not a random sample, the confidence levels for the statistical estimates obtained are unknown, and caution is therefore urged in generalising findings to the full cohort of final-year student teachers. However, the size of the sample (10%) was relatively large, and the survey was carried out in a variety of schools throughout the country; the findings, therefore, are likely to be an accurate reflection of trends in relation to student teachers' performance in the four areas assessed.

## Meetings with the colleges

Before the inspectors visited classrooms, representatives of the Inspectorate met members of the teaching practice management team in each of the five colleges. The purposes and scope of the evaluation, together with the protocol for inspection, procedures for the selection of the student sample and the evaluation instrument were discussed at these meetings. Copies of the evaluation instrument were circulated to the colleges and feedback was invited. A post-evaluation meeting was also held with the colleges, at which the principal findings, conclusions and recommendations from the evaluation were presented.

## Evaluation procedures

An evaluation instrument or schedule (appendix 1) was used to assess the four areas of planning, teaching, learning, and assessment. Criteria for each of the areas were briefly described, and an open comment box was provided for the inspectors' remarks. A seven-point rating scale corresponding to the following broad categories of performance was used.

Rating	Corresponding broad category of performance
A	Excellent: optimal performance
B	Very good: competent performance, with significant strengths
C+	Good: effective performance
C	Fair: a range of strengths, with significant weaknesses
D	Satisfactory but experiencing some difficulty
F	Unsatisfactory: ineffective performance
NE	No evidence available for these criteria



Given that the teaching of the students was assessed following a single classroom visit, and that the inspectors did not engage in discussion with student teachers during or after the visits, it was considered best to use an NE rating when insufficient evidence was available to make an evaluation on a particular criterion.

## Synthesis of findings for the composite report

The inspectors completed an evaluation schedule following their visit to each student teacher. Data from these schedules were entered in a spreadsheet and stored centrally. This was used to generate tables and graphs on the work of students from each of the five colleges. At that stage an individual report was prepared and was furnished to each college. The data were then synthesised to generate composite tables and graphs, which are used in this report.

## Presentation of findings

The outcomes of the evaluation are presented in chapters 3–7. Initially, the main findings for the chapter are summarised. Then, reference is made to relevant statements from the *Primary School Curriculum*, and the evaluation criteria are briefly described. The findings are presented in graphic and tabular form. With regard to the percentages in these tables it should be noted that they have been rounded to the nearest whole number; as a result, some percentages may not add up to 100. However, it is considered that rounding percentages in this way makes no significant difference to the overall findings.

## Analysis of findings

In chapters 3–7 the evaluation findings are analysed and the inspectors' comments are synthesised. Additionally, a selection of inspectors' positive comments and concerns is presented. In the analysis of the findings the ratings A, B and C+ are broadly classified as excellent, very good, and good, respectively. The ratings C and D are considered to indicate a fair or weak performance, while an F rating is considered to indicate an unsatisfactory performance. Generally, neither a positive nor a negative interpretation is put on NE ratings in the report. However, for criteria where it would be reasonable to expect evidence of practice available in the classroom, for example evidence of written planning or of assessment procedures, an NE rating is considered to indicate that these practices were deficient.

In the analysis of the findings the following quantitative terms and their corresponding percentage bands have been used:

Quantitative terms used	Percentage bands
Almost all	More than 90
Most	75–90
Majority	50–74
Some, fewer than half	25–49
A small number	16–24
A few	Up to 15

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## Limitations of the evaluation

A number of limitations to this evaluation must be acknowledged at the outset. Firstly, the evaluation is based on single visits by members of the Inspectorate to student teachers in their classrooms. It did not involve any discussions with the students in relation to teaching practice matters. It is recognised that there may be particular reasons why the performance of some students on the day would not be typical of their ability. Secondly, it is accepted that student teachers were restricted occasionally in the level of change and reorganisation they were permitted to make to the classroom where they were working. This may have hampered their teaching style and their capacity to create a stimulating learning environment.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the evaluation was carried out in a rigorous and structured manner, and it is expected that the findings and recommendations will make a contribution to the development of the teaching practice aspect of initial teacher education.

## Protocol for the evaluation

Each student was observed teaching for between one and two hours, which generally meant that two lessons were reviewed. Because the aim of the evaluation was to review the quality of teaching practice in the five colleges generally, rather than a specific assessment of particular students, it is important to point out that ratings assigned by the inspectors during this exercise had no bearing on the final teaching practice grade that the colleges awarded their students. For this reason, considerable attention was paid to the issue of anonymity. The inspectors used a random number rather than a student's name when completing the evaluation schedule. Student teachers were not given oral feedback at the end of the classroom visit, as is normal practice when inspectors visit teachers. This procedure was adopted in order to ensure that an inspector's comments could not be cited in any case where a student might appeal the final teaching practice grade awarded by the college.

The Inspectorate is committed to the evaluation of schools and teachers in a spirit of professional collaboration and in accordance with the highest professional standards. *The Professional Code of Practice on Evaluation and Reporting for the Inspectorate* (2002) outlines the professional codes of practice and procedures under which this evaluation was undertaken. A copy of this code, which is available on the department's web site ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)), was given to the colleges before evaluations in classrooms began.

## Chapter 3

# QUALITY OF PLANNING AND PREPARATION

### Summary

This chapter describes the evaluation of the quality of planning and preparation provided by the student teachers. Among the more significant findings were:

- The planning and preparation of most student teachers was excellent, very good, or good.
- Most of the students outlined appropriate curriculum aims and objectives and planned suitable content for their lessons.
- Most students planned satisfactorily for the use of teaching resources.
- Planning for cross-curricular integration and planning a differentiated approach to cater for the variety of abilities and learning styles of children were two areas that presented difficulty for students.

### Role of planning in teaching and learning

The importance of planning is emphasised in several places in the *Primary School Curriculum*, and detailed advice on planning is offered for each curriculum area in the teacher guidelines. The curriculum states that planning should be based on a concern for the needs and abilities of each child. Teachers should have a clear perception of the aims, broad objectives and essential nature of the content of each curriculum area, which will enable them to provide relevant and effective learning experiences for children (*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, p. 65). The curriculum also notes that it is the

responsibility of the teacher to ensure that the complexity of children's learning needs is served by a learning process that is rich and varied. This involves the teacher in classroom planning and in the wider process of school planning, making judgements and decisions about the choice of content, the way different elements of content are combined, and the sequence in which these are introduced (*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, p. 21).

### Criteria used to evaluate planning and preparation

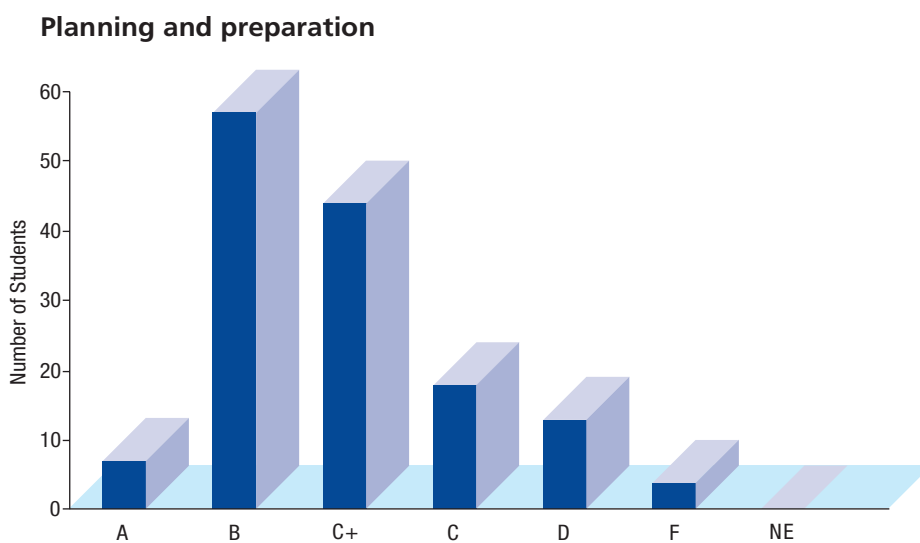
Nine criteria were selected against which the quality of planning was measured. These were:

- the extent to which the aims and content of lesson plans were in accordance with the Primary School Curriculum
- the quality of the instructional objectives outlined in the planning documents
- the extent to which relevant curricular principles were incorporated in planning
- the appropriateness of planned content and activities
- the extent to which written plans provided for individual differences among pupils



- the extent to which written plans provided for continuity and progression throughout the curriculum
- the extent to which integration and linkage were included in planning
- the provision made in planning for the use of resources
- the provision for review and evaluation in planning.

## Ratings awarded to students for planning and preparation



## Percentage of students awarded ratings A to NE for each of the planning and preparation criteria

The following table shows the percentage of students who were awarded ratings A to NE for planning and preparation. The boxes in the top row contain a keyword representing each of the criteria.

	Aims	Objectives	Principles	Content	Differentiation	Progression	Integration	Resources	Evaluation	Overall rating
A	10%	9%	10%	10%	1%	5%	8%	12%	4%	5%
B	41%	36%	39%	43%	13%	35%	23%	36%	29%	40%
C+	29%	28%	27%	23%	20%	33%	27%	25%	22%	31%
C	12%	14%	13%	10%	28%	12%	16%	13%	14%	13%
D	5%	11%	5%	8%	9%	6%	6%	6%	8%	9%
F	3%	2%	4%	4%	7%	5%	6%	2%	4%	3%
NE	0%	0%	2%	2%	22%	5%	14%	5%	19%	0%



## Analysis of findings

The findings indicate that just over three-quarters of the student teachers were rated excellent, very good or good in respect of their written planning and preparation. A closer examination of the data shows that most of the students set out teaching and learning aims and objectives that were in line with the curriculum. Just over three-quarters provided for satisfactory activities and lesson content that reflected the relevant principles of the curriculum. However, with regard to planning appropriate content and activities, one in ten of the students was considered to be fair, and a few were considered weak or unsatisfactory.

One of the essential principles of the curriculum is the importance of catering for differences among children. In this evaluation, fewer than half the student teachers (34%) had planned adequately to cater for individual differences, and more than a quarter were considered weak in this respect. In the case of more than a third of the students there was either no evidence of differentiation in their plans or they were considered to be weak or unsatisfactory in this aspect of their work. Another essential feature of the curriculum is the integrated nature of learning for children. Making connections between subjects to ensure that pupils experience a coherent learning process is an important task for teachers. In this evaluation, a little over half (58%) of the student teachers were rated excellent, very good or good in respect of their planning for integration. The inspectors found that almost three-quarters of them planned satisfactorily for the use of resources, with a few in this group being given the optimal rating.

## Inspectors' comments

The inspectors commented favourably on the planning and preparation provided by many of the students. They noted the well-arranged planning folders and the obvious effort that had gone into the preparation of comprehensive short-term and long-term schemes of work. They commented favourably in instances where they observed plans that set out clear aims and objectives in line with the curriculum. They noted instances where the students planned effectively for the use of resources and commented in positive terms when they observed plans with satisfactory lesson content. In some instances the inspectors judged the content of lesson plans to be insufficiently challenging for pupils. Similarly, they noted plans that failed to make adequate provision for the different abilities and learning styles of pupils. Student teachers in all the colleges are required to provide written reflections on their own work. These reflections are normally kept in their planning folder. The inspectors commented favourably on the quality of self-review that many students had undertaken, and they noted instances where the students had obviously learnt from the experiences gained during their time on teaching practice.

The following is a selection of the inspectors' favourable comments and also some of their concerns.

### Positive comments

*This student teacher's schemes of work and lesson notes are very well laid out and are very relevant to the educational needs of the children under her care. She has planned very well for the use of suitable resources and she evaluates her own work honestly.*

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*Preparation was done carefully and the planning folder was well presented. Aims and objectives are in line with the Primary Curriculum and due attention is given to integration. Methodologies outlined in preparation are varied and indicate a good understanding of the principles of the curriculum.*

*This student provided excellent preparation for her lessons. Her differentiated learning objectives were very well described and relevant to the age range of children.*

### **Concerns**

*The aims of the lessons were the subject of confusion. One would question the sufficiency of the objectives outlined in the preparation notes to constitute a full lesson.*

*The student teacher presents long and short-term planning. Her long-term planning does not link explicitly to the curriculum. There is a lack of focus in respect of the short-term objectives outlined.*

*The student's planning – both long term and short term – is written in very general terms. The student is not specific enough in his description of lesson objectives and he confused assessment during the lesson and reflection on how well the lesson went.*

## **Recommendations for developing the quality of planning and preparation**

Arising from the evaluation of planning and preparation, the following recommendations are offered to colleges with a view to enhancing the quality of student teachers' work in this area:

- Colleges should provide additional support to students to enable them to better plan for integration and differentiation.
- Exemplars of good planning practice in the two areas above should be provided to students in addition to a sound rationale for the inclusion of integration and differentiation in their planning.
- Colleges should encourage students to ensure that their lesson content is sufficiently challenging for all pupils, particularly those who are more able.

## Chapter 4

# QUALITY OF TEACHING

### Summary

This chapter reviews the quality of the students' teaching. Among the more significant findings were:

- A majority of students organised and managed classroom activities well.
- Most students displayed a confident presence in the classroom and communicated satisfactorily with pupils.
- A majority of students employed an appropriate range of teaching methods.
- A majority of students employed good questioning strategies in their teaching.
- About a third of the students were poor or weak at promoting collaborative work among pupils.
- Fewer than half the students employed the best strategies for developing pupils' higher-order thinking skills.
- Catering for individual differences was an area of weakness for a majority of the students. Fewer than one in three were rated excellent, very good or good in this aspect of their work.
- A majority of students used resources well and created a stimulating learning environment. However, the inspectors found that ICT resources were generally underused.

### Importance of teaching

The *Primary School Curriculum* notes that it is the quality of teaching more than anything else that determines the success of children's learning and development in school. The teacher offers a wide repertoire of expertise and competence and exercises professional discretion in planning and directing the learning process. The teacher is regarded as the facilitator and guide of pupils' learning, who assesses the individual needs of each child and responds appropriately by providing a range of effective learning experiences. A concern for the uniqueness of the child and a sense of respect for the integrity of children as learners underpin the work of the primary school teacher. The curriculum advocates that teachers should possess a sense of enthusiasm and commitment and a professional expertise that enables them to interpret the needs of children and meet the requirements of the curriculum. The curriculum notes that it is the relationship between the teacher and children that is of paramount importance to the success of children's learning. Teaching is concerned with building on the child's existing knowledge and providing learning experiences in an integrated way to effectively contribute to the expansion of each child's conceptual framework.

Additionally, the curriculum notes that it is the responsibility of each teacher to ensure that children's learning is fostered through a process that is rich and varied. Teachers are expected to provide different forms of classroom organisation that will complement the variety of learning the curriculum has to offer.

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The curriculum envisages children working collaboratively in groups, working individually and as a whole class in order to achieve the learning goals. Teachers are expected to bring a rich, imaginative and innovative range of teaching strategies and resources to the learning process (*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, p. 20, 21).

Informed by this conceptualisation of teaching and learning, the inspectors examined the following three aspects of teaching: classroom management and organisation, methodology, and the use of resources. Each aspect is reported on separately.

## **CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION**

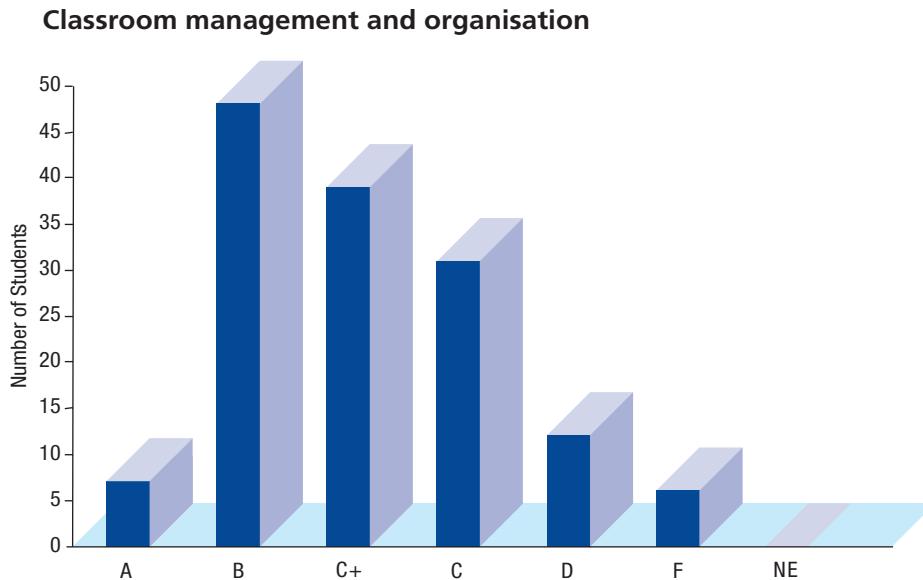
### **Criteria used to evaluate classroom management and organisation**

The quality of the student teacher's classroom management and organisation skills were assessed according to the following twelve criteria:

- the degree to which a positive classroom atmosphere was promoted
- the effectiveness of the student teacher's communication
- the degree to which an appropriate instructional pace was evident during lessons
- the extent to which motivation, interest and good behaviour were promoted among pupils
- the extent to which the student teacher engaged pupils in their learning
- the extent to which the student teacher incorporated pupils' contributions in the lessons and built on their experiences
- whether high expectations were set in order to challenge pupils
- whether effective questioning techniques were used
- the resourcefulness displayed in dealing with unplanned issues that may have arisen during a lesson
- the extent to which the student teacher promoted independent learning and collaborative work among pupils
- the extent to which the lessons were subject to constant review
- the extent to which homework was monitored.



## Ratings awarded to students for classroom management and organisation



## Percentage of students awarded ratings A to NE for each of the classroom management and organisation criteria

	Atmosphere	Communication	Pace	Motivation	Engagement	Experiences	Expectations	Questioning	Resourcefulness	Independent	Review	Homework	Overall rating
A	15%	8%	8%	8%	7%	4%	6%	5%	4%	6%	1%	1%	5%
B	39%	34%	28%	36%	32%	29%	22%	31%	24%	21%	29%	8%	34%
C+	29%	34%	24%	27%	30%	29%	23%	24%	16%	22%	13%	8%	27%
C	9%	13%	22%	17%	10%	22%	24%	22%	17%	17%	20%	5%	22%
D	7%	5%	9%	6%	13%	8%	15%	10%	9%	8%	11%	1%	8%
F	1%	4%	7%	6%	5%	5%	6%	2%	4%	6%	6%	1%	4%
NE	0%	1%	1%	2%	2%	3%	5%	4%	25%	20%	19%	76%	0%

## Analysis of findings

Of the 143 student teachers assessed, ninety-four (66%) were rated excellent, very good or good in respect of the quality of their classroom management and organisation. A little over a fifth were considered to be fair practitioners, while a further 12% were considered to have significant weakness or were ineffective in this aspect of their work. When looked at more closely, the data indicate that most

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student teachers structured a classroom where a positive atmosphere was promoted. Similarly, most students were considered to be effective communicators. Regarding the instructional pace of lessons, the inspectors considered that a majority of students had conducted lessons at an appropriate pace, but some were seen to be having difficulty in this area.

A majority of students were judged to have satisfactorily motivated pupils and to have engaged them in learning. Similarly, a majority demonstrated that they were able to employ effective questioning techniques. About half (51%) were considered to have set high expectations in order to challenge their pupils, with a comparable proportion (49%) shown to have fostered independent learning and to have made arrangements to promote collaborative work among pupils. However, about a third of the students were shown to be poor or weak when it came to organising pupils to work collaboratively. Additionally, the evaluation found that more than two-fifths of the students (44%) were poor or weak in the area of setting high expectations with a view to challenging pupils' thinking and learning.

## Inspectors' comments

In general, the inspectors commented favourably on the students' ability to organise and manage classroom activities. They noted that the students were generally confident and assured in front of the class, had cultivated good professional relations, and generally displayed a positive interactive style when dealing with their pupils. The inspectors noted the enthusiasm, energy and purpose with which most students approached their teaching, and they noted instances where students used good, effective questioning strategies and were concerned to ensure that all pupils were involved in the lessons. On the other hand, in many instances the inspectors commented that lessons were conducted at a very slow pace and that some students did not ensure that the content was sufficiently challenging for pupils. Some inspectors noted instances where student teachers rushed to assign a written task or conducted the lesson in a way that did not allow enough opportunity for pupils to engage fully with the resources or to ask questions.

The following is a selection of the inspectors' favourable comments and also some of their concerns.

### Positive comments

*Very good rapport with children and succeeds in getting pupil participation in the work. This student teacher listens to the pupils and has a good questioning technique.*

*The student teacher promotes a very positive classroom atmosphere. She pitches her instruction at the appropriate level for the pupils. Her communication is very effective and she has the ability to use the pupils' contributions to enhance the learning experiences.*

### Concerns

*This student teacher is pleasant in her interactions with the pupils. However, the observed lesson was conducted at an inappropriate pace and the teacher lacked presence. The lesson provided no challenge for the pupils. There was no attempt to focus on higher-order thinking skills.*

*As the lesson progressed the pace drifted and the student encountered difficulty in maintaining the*



*interest of the majority of the pupils. The student teacher seemed to be unclear in regard to the learning outcomes and the work did not proceed progressively.*

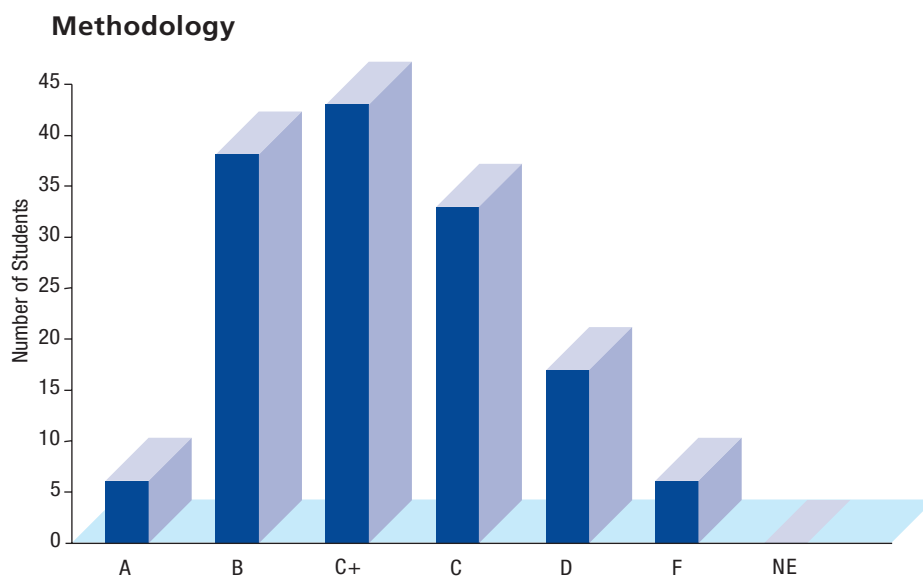
## METHODOLOGY

### Criteria used to evaluate methodology

Methodology was the second aspect of the quality of teaching that was assessed. For this the following eight criteria were applied:

- the extent to which teaching strategies and methodologies were appropriate and varied
- the extent to which the strategies and methodologies incorporated the use of a wide range of concrete materials and resources
- the degree to which lessons were logically structured and linked
- the extent to which the methodologies provided opportunities for pupils to engage in collaborative (group or pair) work
- the extent to which links with existing knowledge and skills were made
- the emphasis put on the development of higher-order thinking skills
- the extent to which there was provision for individual differences, abilities, and learning styles
- the extent to which there was cross-curricular provision.

### Ratings awarded to students for methodology





## Percentage of students awarded ratings A to NE for each of the methodology criteria

	Varied	Concrete materials	Structure	Collaborative	Prior knowledge	HOTS	Individual difference	Cross-curricular	Overall rating
A	5%	11%	6%	11%	6%	3%	1%	2%	4%
B	33%	17%	35%	17%	38%	8%	13%	21%	27%
C+	27%	34%	30%	22%	22%	30%	17%	25%	30%
C	19%	22%	15%	20%	15%	21%	24%	20%	23%
D	12%	10%	6%	13%	10%	17%	16%	9%	12%
F	4%	5%	6%	2%	1%	6%	4%	6%	4%
NE	0%	1%	1%	16%	6%	14%	24%	17%	0%

## Analysis of findings

The *Primary School Curriculum* accords equal importance to what children learn and the process by which they learn. It is therefore in order to expect that student teachers have a clear understanding of a variety of teaching approaches and that they are capable of employing a set of appropriate methods to suit the lessons being taught. The data from this evaluation indicate that eighty-seven students, or just over 60% of the sample, were considered excellent, very good or good in the ways they employed teaching strategies and methods. More than a third (35%) were considered fair or weak in their employment of appropriate methods, and a few (4%) were judged to be unsatisfactory in this aspect of their teaching. A closer examination of the data indicates that a majority of the students employed teaching methods that were appropriate and varied. However, almost a third were considered to have had some difficulty in the way they used teaching methods, and a few (4%) were considered to be ineffective in this aspect of their teaching. Similarly, a majority of the student teachers conducted lessons that were logically structured and linked, but a small number (21%) displayed weakness in this regard and a few (6%) were rated unsatisfactory.

Half the student teachers were judged to have provided opportunities during lessons for pupils to engage in collaborative work, while about a third were considered weak in this respect. The curriculum places a particular emphasis on the development of skills and abilities to enable children to think critically, to apply learning, and to develop flexibility and creativity. The strategies that student teachers used to develop pupils' higher-order thinking skills were among the criteria the inspectors used. In this respect some student teachers (41%) were considered to be excellent, very good, or good; however, almost a similar number (38%) were considered to be fair or to have significant weaknesses in this aspect of their work. A few students (6%) were considered unsatisfactory. Similar general weaknesses were evident in the student teachers' ability to cater for individual differences among pupils. Slightly less than one-third of



them were rated excellent, very good or good in this aspect of their teaching. Two-fifths were considered to be experiencing difficulty, and a small number (4%) were judged to be unsatisfactory.

Interestingly, with regard to about a quarter of the students the inspectors found that there was insufficient evidence on the day to enable them to make a valid judgement on this aspect of their work. A similar picture emerges from the data on the provision the student teachers made for cross-curricular integration. The curriculum recommends a developmental approach to learning, recognises the integrated nature of knowledge and thought, and stresses the connections in content in the different curriculum areas (*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, p. 11). In this evaluation almost half the students (48%) were considered excellent, very good or good in the way they made connections in their teaching between different areas of the curriculum. However, some were considered to have had weaknesses in this aspect, and a few (6%) were considered unsatisfactory.

## Inspectors' comments

The inspectors commented positively on the variety of teaching methods that some students employed. They noted the well-structured lessons and good use of resources in the majority of instances. They commented favourably when they observed students who had succeeded in fully engaging all the pupils in the learning and when the students had made provision for the various abilities among pupils in the class. However, in other instances the inspectors noted students who relied exclusively on a whole-class approach when teaching and did not allow pupils to work in pairs or in groups, even though the lesson provided suitable opportunities to do so. In a number of instances the inspectors noted that students had planned to use a variety of approaches and methods but when the lesson was observed they relied exclusively on a whole-class approach. This suggests that the students were aware of the various methods advocated in the curriculum but were not comfortable with them or had insufficient confidence at this stage to use them when an evaluation of their work was underway. In a small number of instances the inspectors noted that student teachers translated directly to English during Irish lessons and that they did not employ the communicative approach advocated in the curriculum.

The following is a selection of the inspectors' favourable comments and also some of their concerns.

### Positive comments

*The student teacher sets out clear objectives for the various lessons, she provides very good resources and she is well able to deal with whole-class and group activities.*

*The student taught two very good lessons in English and Mathematics. Very good use was made of suitable materials to illustrate the lessons; the work was well sequenced and children had opportunities to work in small groups. Some pupils were given individual attention.*

*Lessons were logically structured and linked to children's existing knowledge.*

### Concerns

*The student used a whole-class approach only. Even though there were opportunities for paired or group learning—especially at the start of the writing lesson—this was not incorporated into her methodologies.*

The student teacher is aware of different methodologies according to her notes, but she used only a whole-class approach.

The lessons were logically structured and sequenced. Good resources were prepared but the children were not afforded adequate opportunity to benefit fully from them. The teacher was inclined to do most of the talking.

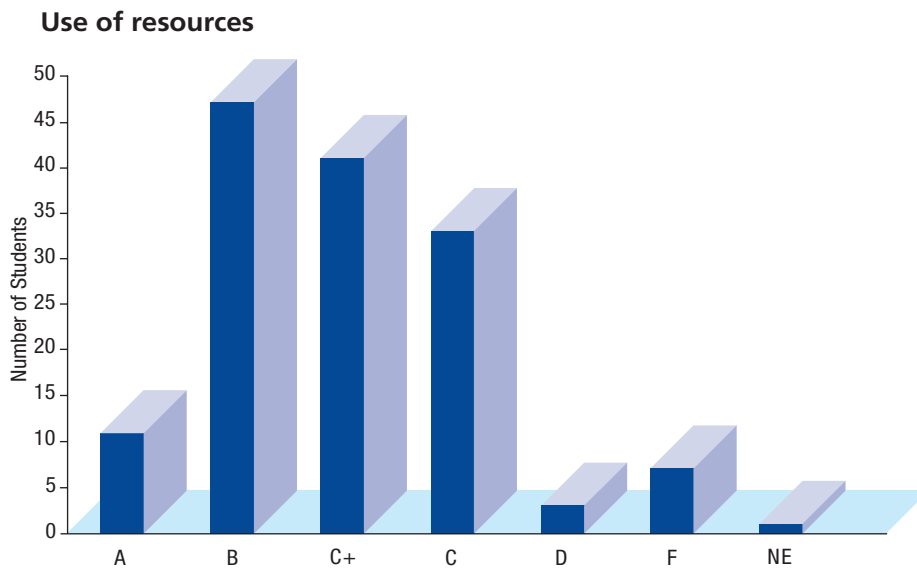
## USE OF RESOURCES

### Criteria used to evaluate the use of resources

The third aspect of teaching that was assessed was how the student teachers employed a range of resources. The following criteria were used:

- the extent to which appropriate resources were used in implementing the teaching and learning programme
- the extent to which a stimulating classroom environment was created
- the way pupils were grouped and seating was arranged in the classroom.

### Ratings awarded to students for the use of resources





## Percentage of students awarded ratings A to NE for each of the resources criteria

	Resources	Environment	Seating	Overall rating
A	8%	10%	8%	8%
B	29%	34%	32%	33%
C+	25%	27%	28%	29%
C	17%	20%	20%	23%
D	1%	7%	7%	2%
F	3%	2%	5%	5%
NE	17%	1%	1%	1%

### Analysis of findings

The data indicate that a majority of the student teachers (90 of the 143, or 70%) were considered to be excellent, very good or good in their use of resources and in the way they structured the learning environment. However, a quarter were considered to have some difficulty with this aspect of their work. A closer analysis of the data suggests that a majority of students made use of an appropriate range of resources and that a similar proportion created a stimulating learning environment and provided suitable seating arrangements in the room to group children. As was noted in chapter 2, some students may not have had complete discretion with regard to the way furniture was arranged in their classroom.

### Inspectors' comments

The inspectors commented favourably in many instances on the range and number of resources the student teachers had provided. They were particularly complimentary when students provided sufficient resources to enable all the children to have an individual item of equipment. In some instances the inspectors noted the attractive displays of pupils' work and the creative ways the students had arranged seating in the classrooms. However, they noted a general underuse of ICTs in teaching and learning. In other instances the inspectors commented critically on the lack of printed material in certain classrooms and the over-reliance on textbooks as a learning resource. In a small number of instances they noted that children were given resources, generally in mathematics, without a satisfactory introduction or sufficient guidance by the student teacher. Where this occurred, or when the learning resources were considered to be unsuitable for the age of the children, the inspectors judged that little benefit had accrued.

The following is a selection of the inspectors' favourable comments and also some of their concerns.

#### Positive comments

*A wide range of resources is used effectively in a stimulating learning environment.*

*This student made very effective use of an overhead projector during lessons.*

*This student teacher made good use of calculators during a Maths class.*

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*Even though the classroom was quite small, good use was made of the available space and display areas to create a stimulating learning environment.*

### **Concerns**

*The quality of resources was of a low standard. A small English book was used for illustrative purposes with the whole class. Many children were unable to see the picture.*

*The only resources used were the pupils' written work and a textbook.*

*Even though there were four PCs in the classroom, there was no evidence that these were used by the student teacher during any of her lessons.*

## **Recommendations for developing the quality of teaching**

The following recommendations are made with a view to developing the quality of teaching of student teachers:

- Colleges should provide additional instruction and develop a range of exemplars for students to familiarise them with strategies that enable pupils to work collaboratively during lessons.
- Colleges should encourage students to make greater use of available ICT resources in schools.
- Colleges should further emphasise the necessity to foster a communicative approach when teaching Irish and to be particularly careful not to translate to English during these lessons.
- Colleges should urge that students not fall back on employing an exclusively whole-class approach during teaching practice but should explore a wide range of methods to foster children's learning.

## Chapter 5

# QUALITY OF LEARNING

### Summary

This chapter reviews the quality of pupils' learning during the time they were in the care of the student teachers. Among the more significant findings were:

- Most student teachers had fostered a positive, secure and pleasant classroom atmosphere that was conducive to good-quality learning.
- In a majority of the classrooms purposeful learning occurred and pupils were seen to be motivated, co-operative, and willing to learn.
- In most of the classrooms discipline was good and the pupils respected the code of behaviour that had been agreed.
- About 30% of the student teachers were considered to have displayed weaknesses in the manner in which they set about promoting pupils' learning.
- About 40% of the student teachers were judged to have had some difficulty organising suitable activities to ensure that pupils were actively involved in their own learning.

### Quality of learning in the curriculum

The curriculum puts a clear emphasis on the quality of children's learning. One of its essential features is a recognition that there are different kinds of learning and that individual children learn in different ways. The curriculum articulates not only the content to be learned and the outcomes to be achieved but a wide range of approaches to learning. The principles of learning are judiciously outlined, and there is an understanding that children should be enabled to learn how to learn and to develop an appreciation for the value and practice of lifelong learning. The curriculum aims to ensure that children enjoy learning. It is noted that the overall purpose of the work in primary school is to enhance the quality of children's learning and to provide them with developmental experiences that are relevant to their present and future needs (*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, p. 10, 75).

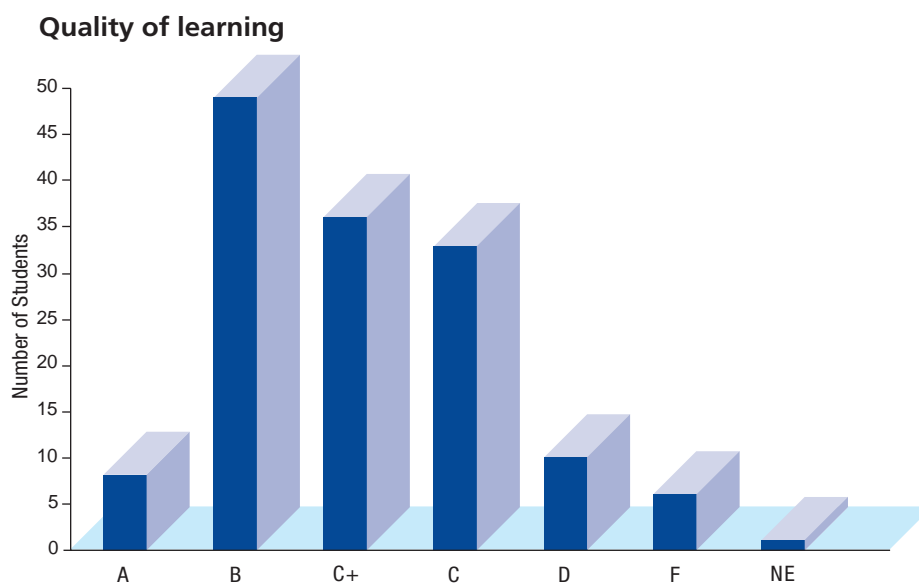
### Criteria used to evaluate the quality of learning

The quality of learning was the third area assessed. The following criteria were used:

- the extent to which the classroom atmosphere was secure and attractive
- the level to which interaction, response and purposeful learning were promoted
- the extent to which a code of behaviour was respected
- the extent to which pupils' motivation and interest were encouraged and maintained
- the level of enthusiasm and purposeful work displayed by pupils and the extent to which they displayed a keen interest in and a commitment to the completion of the task in hand

- whether active learning was evident
- the extent to which pupils listened attentively and the degree to which the quality of their own questioning and responses reflected their level of understanding
- the extent to which pupils demonstrated a willingness to co-operate with their peers and with teachers in their learning
- the degree to which the pupils' learning was at an appropriate level and pace in each curricular area.

## Ratings awarded to students for the quality of learning



## Percentage of students awarded ratings A to NE for each of the quality of learning criteria

	Atmosphere	Interaction	Behaviour	Motivation	Enthusiasm	Active learning	Co-operation	Level	Overall rating
A	11%	5%	12%	6%	7%	3%	8%	6%	6%
B	47%	38%	43%	36%	32%	28%	36%	29%	34%
C+	23%	22%	24%	22%	32%	22%	27%	19%	25%
C	13%	22%	10%	20%	16%	29%	13%	27%	23%
D	4%	10%	7%	10%	5%	12%	8%	7%	7%
F	1%	2%	1%	4%	5%	3%	3%	6%	4%
NE	1%	1%	3%	1%	3%	2%	5%	5%	1%



## Analysis of findings

In this evaluation, ninety-three student teachers (or 65% of the sample) were judged to be excellent, very good or good in the ways they advanced children's learning. However, about one in three was considered to have weaknesses in this regard, and a further six students (or 4% of the sample) were considered to be unsatisfactory. Specifically, most students created an atmosphere in their classrooms that was considered to be secure and attractive and conducive to good learning. A majority of the sample demonstrated that their classrooms were places where purposeful learning occurred and where the pupils were motivated, co-operative, and willing to engage. In most instances discipline was good and pupils respected the code of behaviour that had been agreed.

However, only in a little over half the classrooms (53%) were pupils seen to be active agents in their own learning. About two-fifths of the student teachers were considered to have had some difficulty organising activities to foster pupils' active involvement during lessons, and a few were judged to be ineffective in this area of their teaching.

## Inspectors' comments

The inspectors commented positively when they witnessed pupils actively involved in classroom work and where the children were obviously well motivated and anxious to learn. The inspectors sometimes remarked on context factors and conditions in the classroom environment in which the student teacher operated. In some instances they noted good examples of students working in designated areas of disadvantage, where they had arranged appropriate activities for the pupils and where the children had responded enthusiastically. The inspectors commented positively when they observed students giving clear directions to pupils and where the expected learning outcomes were unambiguously set out. However, they also noted instances where the children were required to be merely passive listeners and the student teacher was apparently more concerned with maintaining a quiet classroom than with advancing the learning. Sometimes the inspectors observed instances where too much time was spent organising pupils to participate in activities and not enough time devoted to engaging in the activities. Similarly, they noted instances where students allowed the pace of lessons to falter, which usually resulted in pupils becoming distracted.

The following is a selection of the inspectors' favourable comments and also some of their concerns.

### Positive comments

*It is evident from the pupils' enthusiasm that they enjoy the activities set by the student teacher. They work purposefully and are willing to share their efforts with the rest of the class.*

*The teacher has a very dynamic teaching style and keeps the children attentive and active. He has a very good working relationship with the children and he succeeds in getting them to work diligently.*

*The pupils were enthusiastic and well motivated which ensured that the expected learning outcomes were achieved. They displayed a willingness to participate in the work and to co-operate with the student teacher and with their peers.*



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*The atmosphere in this classroom was positive and supportive of children's learning. A high standard of good behaviour and co-operation with the student was evident. Pupils were obviously enjoying the lessons.*

### **Concerns**

*Pupils are enthusiastic in their approach to learning but there is no real challenge for them. Most of the learning experiences are rote in nature.*

*Even though the physical setting was secure and appropriate, the lessons were insufficiently interesting or challenging to promote pupil motivation and enthusiasm. The pupils were often unclear in regard to what was required.*

*Despite the uninviting surroundings of the classroom the student teacher interacts purposefully with the pupils and maintains a high level of interest and activity in the work. Pupils respond willingly but appear to be under-challenged by the quality of the tasks set.*

## **Recommendations for developing the quality of pupils' learning**

The following recommendations are made with a view to enhancing the quality of pupils' learning:

- Colleges should encourage students during their time on teaching practice to clearly articulate expected learning outcomes for each lesson.
- Students should be reminded to provide opportunities for pupils to actively engage in their own learning, and activity-based learning should form a core part of the work during teaching practice.

## Chapter 6

# QUALITY OF ASSESSMENT

### Summary

This chapter reviews the quality of assessment practices the student teachers employed during teaching practice. Among the more significant findings were:

- Fewer than half the student teachers were given the top ratings in relation to their assessment practices.
- More than a third of the students were considered to be experiencing some difficulty with assessment, and a few were considered to be ineffective in this aspect of their teaching.

### Assessment in the curriculum

The final area that was evaluated was assessment. In the curriculum, assessment is accorded a central role in the teaching and learning process. The curriculum indicates the elements of each subject that should be assessed and suggests several assessment procedures that may be used. It notes:

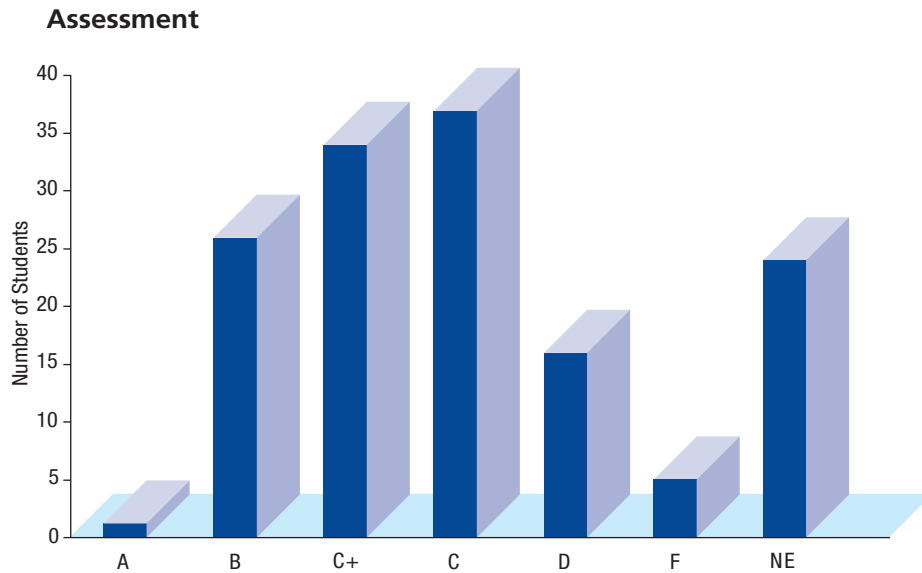
In order to take account of the breadth and variety of learning it offers, the curriculum contains a varied range of assessment tools. These range from informal tools such as teacher observation, class work, homework and discussion with pupils to more formal tools such as diagnostic tests and standardised tests. Assessment tools such as projects, portfolios and curriculum profiles that can be used to link formal and informal approaches are also recommended (*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, p. 18).

### Criteria used to evaluate the quality of assessment

To evaluate this area the following four criteria were used:

- the extent to which a range of systematic and efficient assessment modes, procedures and practices were employed
- the extent to which copybooks and other work samples were corrected and monitored consistently
- the extent to which the outcomes of assessment affected teaching and classroom organisation
- the extent to which records of pupils' progress were maintained.

## Ratings awarded to students for assessment



## Percentage of students awarded ratings A to NE for each of the assessment criteria

	Range	Copybooks	Outcomes	Records	Overall rating
A	1%	0%	3%	1%	1%
B	15%	19%	20%	14%	18%
C+	24%	20%	17%	19%	24%
C	27%	18%	19%	17%	26%
D	8%	6%	8%	10%	11%
F	3%	3%	3%	0%	3%
NE	22%	34%	29%	38%	17%

## Analysis of findings

The noteworthy feature of the data is the high proportion of instances (17%) in which the inspectors reported that insufficient evidence was available to rate the quality of assessment practices in the classroom. It is difficult to interpret this finding accurately. As previously noted, generally neither a positive nor a negative interpretation is put on an NE rating. However, in the case of assessment there is a reasonable expectation that evidence of assessment practices would be available in the classroom. Therefore, the non-availability of this evidence suggests that assessment practices for 17% of the students evaluated were at best somewhat deficient.

The data indicate that the inspectors rated fewer than half the students (43%) as excellent, very good or good in their assessment practices. More than a third were considered to be experiencing some difficulty



with assessment, and a few were considered to be ineffective. Generally, fewer than half the students were considered to have a range of assessment modes and procedures that were systematic and efficient. In a similar number of instances the outcomes of assessment were considered to have had an impact on teaching and organisation in the classroom. About a third of the students were judged to have maintained good records of pupils' progress.

## Inspectors' comments

The inspectors commented positively when they witnessed a range of assessment practices being implemented and where they saw that student teachers had a clear understanding of the importance of assessing and giving feedback to pupils. They noted many instances where the student teachers monitored the pupils' written work carefully and where project work had been carefully examined. They noted also examples where the student teachers assessed the work of a number of children individually and where case studies on children were undertaken.

The inspectors commented positively where they observed students who had clearly defined learning outcomes for their lessons and who were then able to assess whether or not the children had achieved these outcomes. They also noted many fine examples of student teachers reviewing their own work, where they demonstrated clear insights into their own performance and subsequently planned to modify their approach in the light of their findings. The inspectors also noted instances where the students were unsure of their role when pupils were engaged in quiet activities. They noted that some students moved about the classroom but did not conduct any form of assessment or gave little feedback to the pupils. The inspectors also noted instances where student teachers treated the class as a unit and failed to assess the progress of individual children. In many instances the inspectors commented adversely when they observed student teachers using questioning as their sole mode of assessment, and where they did not maintain any record of pupils' progress.

The following is a selection of the inspectors' favourable comments and also some of their concerns.

### Positive comments

*There is evidence that the student monitors written work and provides positive feedback to pupils.*

*Assessment techniques are an integral part of the teaching process. The student teacher is learning well from her evaluation and reflection and she is very mature about her work.*

*The student teacher sets out clear objectives for her lessons. She gathers information about the children's progress and she is clearly learning from her own evaluations and reflections.*

*The first draft of children's written work was assessed and formed the basis for further drafts.*

### Concerns

*Questioning was the only mode of assessment. No account of differences.*

*There was no reference to assessment procedures in the planning documents.*

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*The student does not carefully monitor pupils' written work. She moved about the classroom while pupils were writing but did not make any attempt to correct their efforts or to offer suggestions for improvement.*

## **Recommendations for developing the quality of assessment**

The following recommendations are made with a view to enhancing the quality of assessment:

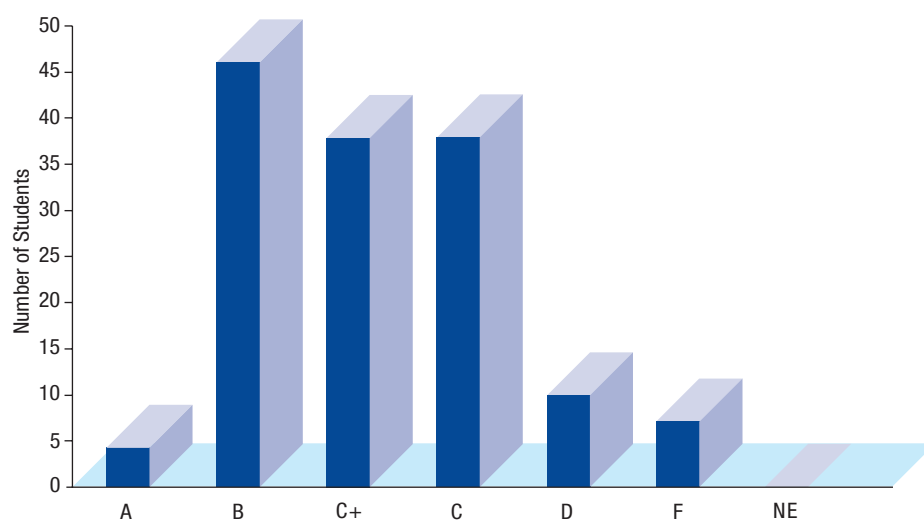
- Colleges should provide students with further clear exemplars of good practice in the area of assessment of and for learning.
- Colleges should provide students with effective strategies for recording pupils' progress.

## Chapter 7

# OVERALL RATINGS OF THE WORK OF THE STUDENT TEACHERS

Having considered the ratings achieved by the students in the four areas assessed, the inspectors awarded an overall rating to each student. The graph and table below show the ratings that were given.

### Overall ratings



### Percentage of students awarded ratings A to NE as an overall rating

A	3%
B	32%
C+	27%
C	27%
D	7%
F	5%
NE	0%

### Analysis of findings

In this evaluation a majority of the student teachers (62%) were found to be excellent, very good or good in their general work in the classroom. More than a quarter (27%) were rated fair, showing strengths but also some significant weaknesses. A few (7%) were considered to be experiencing general difficulty in their teaching, and about one student in twenty was considered to be unsatisfactory.

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## Inspectors' comments

In many instances the inspectors commented very favourably on the quality of the students' general teaching. They noted the careful provision of comprehensive planning schemes, the positive interactive style the students employed when dealing with pupils, the general high-quality classroom management strategies, and the responsive, involved demeanour of pupils. They noted examples where the student teachers were obviously aware of the needs of individual pupils and where they had arranged suitable learning activities to meet those needs. They commented in a generally positive way on the confident, assured manner in which students conducted classroom activities and the constructive, affirmative classroom atmosphere that had been cultivated. They also commented positively on the instances where they observed students employing good teaching methods and where pupils were actively engaged in the learning process.

However, the inspectors expressed concern in instances where the students' planning was not sufficiently clear and focused and where the learning outcomes had not been fully thought through. Regarding the majority of students, the inspectors expressed concern about the lack of assessment practices. They also expressed concern when students relied exclusively on a whole-class approach or when the students themselves demonstrated an activity rather than allowing the pupils to have appropriate experiences.

The following is a selection of the inspectors' favourable comments and also some of their concerns.

### Positive comments

*This student teacher has provided very good preparation for her work and directs the learning activities quietly and effectively. The pupils are very responsive and they engage with the teacher and with one another in a collaborative, pleasant manner.*

*This student has a good understanding of the skills required of a good teacher. She interacts effectively with her pupils and uses appropriate methodologies.*

*This is a talented conscientious student teacher who treats the children with great dignity. She prepares very well for her work and provides a very stimulating environment for her pupils. The children respond very well.*

### Concerns

*This student did not communicate effectively with the class. She generally lacked presence in the room and the pace of her lesson was too slow. Her planning was very general in nature and lacked the specificity required.*

*There is a lack of clarity in relation to the intended outcomes for the lessons observed.*

*The fact that pupils and teacher were operating from a seated position did not help to generate sufficient enthusiasm for the lesson and the teaching pace suffered accordingly.*

## *Chapter 8*

# *MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS*

### **Main findings**

This evaluation of the work of a sample of student teachers was carried out when the students were in the last weeks of their final period of teaching practice in schools. During the evaluation the areas of planning, teaching, learning and assessment were examined. The following are the principal findings.

The evaluation found that the majority of student teachers were excellent, very good or good in their general work in the classroom. However, more than a third were found to be fair or weak, and one in twenty was judged to be an ineffective practitioner.

In the area of planning and preparation most students were rated as excellent, very good, or good. However, planning for cross-curricular integration and planning a differentiated approach to cater for the variety of abilities and learning styles of children were aspects that presented difficulty for many student teachers. The evaluation also found that a majority of students had provided a good range of resources to support their teaching and that they used these effectively in the classroom. Nevertheless, the inspectors noted that ICT resources were generally underused.

With regard to the quality of teaching, the evaluation found that most students displayed a confident, assured presence in the classroom and communicated effectively with their pupils. A majority were considered to have organised and managed classroom activities effectively, to have employed an appropriate range of teaching methods, and to have used good questioning strategies. However, more than a third of the students were rated fair or weak in the way they used teaching methods, and fewer than half employed the best strategies to develop pupils' higher-order thinking skills. Similarly, catering for individual differences in the ability and learning styles of pupils was an area of weakness for a majority of students. Fewer than one in three were rated excellent, very good or good in this aspect of their work.

With regard to the quality of learning, the evaluation considered that purposeful learning occurred in a majority of the classrooms, and pupils were seen to be motivated, co-operative and willing to learn while they were in the care of the student teachers. In most instances discipline was good and pupils respected the code of behaviour that had been agreed. About one student in three was found to be poor or weak at promoting collaborative work among pupils.

With regard to the quality of assessment, the evaluation concluded that more than a third of the students were experiencing some difficulty in managing assessment practices, and a few were considered to be ineffective in this aspect of their work.



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## Recommendations

Arising from these findings, the following recommendations are presented with a view to further enhancing the generally good work that student teachers carry out on teaching practice.

The colleges should provide additional exemplars of good planning practice in differentiation and integration to students, together with a sound rationale for the inclusion of integration and differentiation in their planning. They should encourage students to ensure that their lesson content is sufficiently challenging for all pupils, particularly those who are more able.

The colleges should ensure that students do not rely on an exclusively whole-class approach during teaching practice but should explore a wide range of methods to foster children's learning. They should provide additional exemplars for students so as to familiarise them with strategies that enable pupils to work collaboratively during lessons.

The colleges should provide students with clearer exemplars of good practice in the area of assessment of and for learning. In addition, they should encourage students to make greater use of available ICT resources for teaching and learning in schools.

Generally, it is recommended that the colleges should engage in ongoing review of their monitoring and evaluation instruments to ensure that due cognisance is given to the key elements of the curriculum, both content and process.

## Conclusions

This evaluation provided an opportunity to examine a central aspect of initial teacher education for primary teachers. It raises important issues for the Department of Education and Science and for the colleges as they explore how teaching practice will develop in the future.

From discussions held with the colleges and a review of the documents they supplied, in addition to the main findings of this evaluation, the following conclusions can be drawn in respect of the quality of teaching practice in the five colleges:

Teaching practice was well organised and managed by the colleges. The students were carefully supervised, and effective systems existed for ensuring that the ratings awarded to students were based on a fair and systematic assessment of their work. All the colleges had procedures for ensuring that students experiencing difficulties were supported. The schools involved in teaching practice continued to support the colleges in providing field placement for students.

## Chapter 9

# LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

While the Inspectorate has always shared the findings of its evaluations of teaching practice with individual colleges, this is the first time that the findings have been synthesised and presented in composite format. A key purpose of the report is to stimulate professional dialogue at a time when developments at the initial teacher education stage are being explored and the following are some of the areas that might be usefully examined in that context.

### Teamwork

For final-year students, the typical teaching practice placement involves taking full control of a class for a number of weeks. Generally the student plans and organises teaching and learning for the full day. It could be argued that this model perpetuates the notion of a teacher working in isolation, and gives little opportunity to the student to experience the broader context within which schools operate, or to engage with issues of a whole-school nature. Valuable experiences for final-year students would include practice in being part of a school planning team, engaging in dialogue with colleagues and others about pupils with special needs, or in liaising with parents. Involvement in such activities would ensure that newly appointed teachers would begin their career firm in the view that, in addition to classroom work, teachers have wider educational responsibilities and duties. Developing a sense of collegiality and teamwork and seeing schools as growing, learning communities are important messages to give students who are about to take up a career in teaching.

### The role of the class teacher

At present, experienced teachers may have a student on teaching practice in their classrooms for a number of weeks. However, they do not play any formal part in supervising, advising or assessing that student's work. Others, who are either contracted in by the colleges or are staff members in the colleges, act as supervisors. While outside supervisors are fully briefed before they embark on the work, they may have no formal contact with the students either before or after they visit them in classrooms. College staff members will have some contact with the students throughout the year, but supervisors can only visit a student on a limited number of occasions during teaching practice. The class teacher, on the other hand, is with the student throughout the day. The teacher will know the pupils and the school context factors intimately and could therefore be in a position to contribute to the assessment of the student's practice. Additionally, by sharing their expertise, experience and insights with students, the class teachers can make a valuable contribution to their professional development. The collegiality thus established could have long-lasting benefits for both the student and the teacher. An assessment system that involved class teachers would also recognise and enhance the contribution that practising teachers can make to the development of teaching as a profession.

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Initial teacher education, as has been noted elsewhere in this report, is now viewed in most OECD countries as the first step on a continuum of professional development for teachers. A recent report on newly qualified teachers, *Beginning to Teach*, noted that new teachers found that principals and fellow-teachers provided the most helpful form of assistance during their probationary year (Department of Education and Science, 2005, p. 68). Within a new vision for teacher education, where stages of development progress seamlessly from initial teacher education through induction to continuing professional development, the role of teacher mentors in schools takes on a new significance. Developing the mentoring role of teachers for newly appointed colleagues and also for students on teaching practice is both a challenge and an opportunity for the future.

## Partnerships with schools

Under current arrangements, colleges have informal agreements with schools whereby they take students each year on practice placement. Good relations have been built up between the schools and the colleges, and, although it is a logistically daunting task, the colleges successfully manage to arrange field experience each year for all their students. However, a closer and more formal working partnership between primary schools and the colleges would have benefits for both parties. By knowing well in advance how many students a school will place each year, the colleges would be better able to strategically plan the teaching practice programme and so provide a comprehensive range of teaching experiences for their students. Similarly, a close working relationship between a college and a school would provide opportunities for students and practising teachers to undertake short-term action research projects on issues that had been identified as priorities for development within the school. This would enable the school to benefit from the research expertise available in the college and would also ensure that students, as part of their college assignments, were engaged with a real, practical issue of concern to a school.

## Context for further development

Ireland is at an important juncture in terms of the development of its teacher education policies. The report of the working group on primary preservice teacher education, *Preparing Teachers for the 21st Century* (Department of Education and Science, 2002) provided a comprehensive overview and insights into primary teacher education in Ireland. Within the context of a re-conceptualisation of initial teacher education, it made some very specific recommendations regarding the length of programmes, their content and structure, modes of assessment and the need for change at institutional level. More recently, in response to universal acknowledgement of the importance of the induction phase on the teacher education continuum, a National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction, established in 2002, continues to explore models of induction which would be appropriate for Irish teachers and schools. At an international level, Ireland participated actively in a recent OECD study which resulted in the report, *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* (OECD, 2005). This report provides a clear overview and analysis of teacher education policies at OECD level and outlines policy options which countries might consider in reviewing and developing their teacher education programmes. In parallel, in the context of meeting the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy, the European Commission initiated a consultative process in 2004 to examine Common European Principles for Teacher



Competences and Qualifications. These common principles, which are framed in the context of the teacher education continuum, provide an impetus for developing policies which will enhance the quality and efficiency of teacher education nationally and across Europe. Furthermore, under the Bologna Agreement of 1999, European Ministers of Education agreed to work together to adopt a system of comparable university degrees comprising two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate, with the latter leading to a master's degree or doctorate. Finally, at a national level, an important milestone has been the establishment of the Teaching Council, whose core functions are to promote and regulate teaching as a profession.

Taken together, these various reports and initiatives have implications for the development of teacher education policies in Ireland. They provide a unique and timely opportunity to policy makers and college personnel to take stock, to review the framework within which teacher education will operate in the future, and to develop a strategic plan for this vital sector of education.

# APPENDIX 1

## EVALUATION SCHEDULE

### Department of Education and Science 2004

### Evaluation of Standards of Teaching Practice – Evaluation schedule

#### School details

County	Roll number
Name of school and address <i>Use official title</i>	

#### The student teacher

Number	College
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Class	Number of pupils present	Date of visit	Time of visit	Code (office use only)
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#### The classroom context

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#### Work undertaken during the visit

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#### Summary of evaluative comment (please fill this section on completion of template):

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Overall  
Grade:

Grading Scheme			
A	Excellent. Optimal Performance	B	Very Good. Competent performance
C+	Good. Effective performance	C	Fair. Range of strengths with significant weaknesses
D	Satisfactory. Experiencing difficulty.	F	Unsatisfactory. Ineffective performance
NE	No evidence available for these criteria		

**A. Planning and preparation**

	A	B	C+	C	D	F	No evidence
1 Outlines aims and content which are in accordance with the curriculum							
2 Includes instructional objectives							
3 Reflects the relevant curricular principles							
4 Outlines appropriate lesson content and activities							
5 Provides for individual difference							
6 Provides for continuity and progression							
7 Incorporates integration and emphasises cross-curricular links							
8 Includes planning for the provision of resources							
9 Provides for review and evaluation							

Comment

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Grade:	
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**B. Quality of Teaching**

<b>Classroom management and organisation</b>	A	B	C+	C	D	F	No evidence
1 Promotes a positive classroom atmosphere							
2 Effectiveness of teacher's communication							
3 Involves appropriate instructional pace							
4 Promotes motivation, interest and good behaviour							
5 Engages pupils in classroom learning							
6 Incorporates pupils' contributions and builds on their experiences							
7 Sets high expectations in order to challenge pupils							
8 Utilises effective questioning techniques							
9 Resourcefulness in dealing with issues that arise							
10 Promotes independent learning and collaborative work between pupils							
11 Involves constant review of lesson							
12 Involves monitoring homework							

Comment

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Grade:	
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Methodology	A	B	C+	C	D	F	No evidence
1 Teaching strategies and methodologies are appropriate and varied							
2 Teaching strategies and methodologies incorporate the use of a wide range of concrete materials and resources							
3 Lessons logically structured and linked							
4 Methodologies provide opportunities for pupils to engage in collaborative work (group, paired)							
5 Link with pupils' existing knowledge and skills							
6 Emphasis is given to the development of higher-order thinking skills							
7 There is provision for individual differences (abilities/learning styles)							
8 There is provision for subject integration/cross-curricular approach							

Comment

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Grade:	
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Resources	A	B	C+	C	D	F	No evidence
1 Appropriate resources including IT are deployed effectively in implementing the teaching and learning programme							
2 Creates a stimulating learning environment							
3 Grouping/seating of pupils is suitably arranged							

Comment

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Grade:	
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**C. Quality of Learning**

Atmosphere	A	B	C+	C	D	F	No evidence
1 Classroom atmosphere is secure and attractive							
2 Classroom atmosphere promotes interaction, response and purposeful learning							
<b>Behaviour</b>							
3 There is a code of behaviour which is respected							
<b>Pupils' learning</b>							
4 Pupils' motivation and interest are encouraged and maintained							
5 Pupils are enthusiastic and purposeful in their work and display a keen interest in and commitment to the completion of the task in hand							
6 Pupils are active in their learning, listen attentively and their understanding is reflected in the quality of their own questioning and their responses to questions							
7 Pupils demonstrate a willingness to participate and a willingness to co-operate with their peers and teachers in their learning							
8 Pupils' learning is at a level and pace which is to be expected in each curricular area							

Comment \_\_\_\_\_  
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Grade:	
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**D. Classroom assessment**

Assessment modes	A	B	C+	C	D	F	No evidence
1 There is a range of assessment modes, procedures and practices which are systematic and efficient							
2 Copies and other work samples are corrected and monitored consistently							
<b>Outcomes of assessment</b>							
3 Outcomes of assessment have an impact on teaching and classroom organisation							
4 Records of pupils' progress are maintained							

Comment \_\_\_\_\_  
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Grade:	
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