

Beginning to Teach

Newly Qualified Teachers in Irish Primary Schools

Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science



2005

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Foreword by the Chief Inspector



Teachers form the core of the primary school system. The quality of teaching is a crucial factor influencing pupils' achievement and in creating an educational system that is characterised by high standards. All primary teachers are required to complete a probationary period, normally of one year's duration. During the probationary period, as per the current model, teachers are advised, supported and evaluated by school inspectors.

The number of probationary teachers has increased very significantly over the past number of years. During the 1990s, about 400 newly qualified teachers commenced their teaching career annually. In 2003/2004 the Inspectorate supported and evaluated the work of 1,566 primary teachers on probation. While the infusion of energy and fresh ideas represented by this growth in numbers has the potential to greatly enhance the quality of teaching, it also represents a challenge to the education system to maximise the contribution that new teachers make. As the probation period is critical to the formation of lifelong effective teachers, I welcome the analysis of both the inspectors' and beginning teachers' views of the probationary period provided in this report, *Beginning to Teach: Newly Qualified Teachers in Irish Primary Schools*.

The report incorporates the perspectives of teachers who began their teaching career in 2003/2004. It also draws on evaluative comment from inspectors' reports written during the period. The report focuses attention on many examples of good practice in the teachers' work. It highlights the importance of professional support from principals and other school personnel in enabling newly qualified teachers to achieve their potential. Boards of management have primary responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning in their schools and this report makes recommendations to support them in fulfilling their role. The report also identifies areas where the knowledge and competence of newly qualified teachers require further support.

The Inspectorate is committed to adopting consistent, fair and reliable approaches in its advisory and evaluative work. I am confident that the findings of this report will assist the Inspectorate further in developing its role in contributing to quality assurance in primary schools.

This report is intended for teachers, principals, school management, initial teacher education providers, support services for schools funded by the Department of Education and Science, and policy-makers. It will also assist the recently established Teaching Council in considering this important phase of the teaching career. I hope this document will serve as a resource for policy discussion and action at classroom, school and system levels and contribute to future policy renewal in relation to the probationary process for beginning teachers.

Eamon Stack

Chief Inspector

October 2005

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Introduction

The probationary period is a critical phase in every primary teacher's professional development. When primary teachers successfully complete their probationary period, they become eligible for full recognition to teach in Irish primary schools. The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science is centrally involved in the probation of primary teachers in both an advisory and an evaluative capacity. In this context, and in light of recent developments in the education system, the Inspectorate has published this report, *Beginning to Teach: Newly Qualified Teachers in Irish Primary Schools*. The backdrop for this report included an unprecedented growth in the number of probationary teachers in recent years, an awareness at school and system levels of the necessity for a national induction programme for teachers and the publication of legislation establishing the Teaching Council. The Council now has a statutory role in providing policy advice regarding the professional development of teachers. It is envisaged that some of the present arrangements regarding the probation and induction of teachers will be reviewed in light of the statutory role given to the Council under the Teaching Council Act 2001.

This report seeks to capture the perspectives of newly qualified teachers and inspectors involved in the probationary process. In April 2004, during the final term of their probationary period, postal questionnaires were issued to 354 newly qualified teachers who were graduates of the five recognised colleges of education in Ireland. More than half (54 per cent) of the teachers surveyed responded to the questionnaire. This report presents their views in relation to the effectiveness of the various supports available to them and their preparedness for teaching in their first year as classroom teachers. The work of these teachers was reviewed by the Inspectorate as part of the overall probationary case load of 1,566 teachers for the school year 2003/2004. This publication also draws on an analysis of inspectors' reports and recommendations on the work of newly qualified teachers during that school year.

Beginning to Teach: Newly Qualified Teachers in Irish Primary Schools takes timely stock of the current model of support and guidance for entrants to the primary teaching profession in Ireland. Chapter 1 describes and details the involvement of the Inspectorate in that process. Chapter 2 outlines the design and operation of the survey which informed the report. In chapter 3, newly qualified teachers identify the supports that were helpful to them and in chapter 4, they comment on their preparedness to teach the range of curriculum subjects and to implement the emphases of the primary school curriculum. These chapters also include inspectors' findings in this regard. Chapter 5 outlines the teachers' perceptions of their preparedness for planning their teaching, for organising their classrooms, and for managing pupils' behaviour. The chapter also provides the inspectors' evaluative judgements on these central teaching skills. Chapter 6 presents beginning teachers' views on their pedagogical skills and includes the inspectors' evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in these classrooms.

Five per cent of newly qualified teachers did not successfully complete their probationary period in 2003/2004 and chapter 7 provides details regarding extensions to the probationary process. Chapter 8 provides a summary of the findings from the report. The chapter includes recommendations for the in-school support of newly qualified teachers, for boards of management, principals, teachers, and the advisory services. In addition, recommendations are made for system support of new teachers and for initial teacher educators. Actions for the Inspectorate are also included so that its involvement in the probationary process might be enhanced.

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The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science acknowledges the co-operation of the newly qualified teachers who responded to the postal questionnaire during their probation year of 2003/2004. Their responses have proved helpful and informative.

The Evaluation Support and Research Unit (ESRU) of the Inspectorate co-ordinated the preparation and publication of this report. The project team included Éamonn Murtagh, Suzanne Conneely, and Carmel O'Doherty. They wish to acknowledge the assistance of the Senior Management Group of the Inspectorate and in particular the contribution of Emer Egan, Harold Hislop, and Pádraig Mac Sitric. The ready co-operation of individual primary inspectors throughout the division and of the administrative staff working directly with the Inspectorate is recognised.

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Carbury National School, the Mall, Sligo
Scoil Naomh Molaise, Grange, Co. Sligo
St Clare's National School, Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim
St Joseph's National School, Templeboy, Co. Sligo
High Park National School, Dromard, Co. Sligo.



Chapter One

The probation of teachers in Irish primary schools

This chapter describes the circumstances in which teachers' probation takes place and explains the probationary process. The central involvement of the Inspectorate in teachers' probation is described, and recent developments with regard to support for newly qualified teachers are noted.

1.1 Routes to a career as a primary teacher

The majority of newly qualified teachers appointed to teaching posts in Irish primary schools are graduates of one of the five recognised colleges of education in the State (see appendix 1). They are awarded either

- the Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree, following successful completion of a full-time three-year course, or
- a higher diploma in primary teaching, following successful completion of a full-time postgraduate course of eighteen months.

A further course, leading to a higher diploma in arts in primary education (Hibernia College), has been recognised recently by the Department of Education and Science for the purposes of employment as a primary teacher (see appendix 1). In addition a significant and increasing number of newly qualified teachers trained outside the State are appointed each year to teaching positions in Irish primary schools. Once the Department of Education and Science validates their qualifications, and the Irish-language qualification required for teaching in primary schools has been achieved, these newly qualified teachers are eligible to begin the probationary process in order to obtain full recognition to teach in Irish primary schools. Evidence of probation in another jurisdiction may be considered.

1.2 The appointment of teachers to primary schools

The Department of Education and Science determines the number of teachers that a school can employ on the basis of pupil-teacher ratios. The board of management of each school is responsible for the appointment of teachers. Teaching vacancies are advertised in the national media, and applicants are requested to submit their application directly to the chairperson of the board. The board of management appoints a selection committee, and the applicants who possess the necessary teaching qualifications and attributes sought by the board are considered for interview. The selection committee conducts interviews and makes a recommendation for the appointment to the board of management. Following the authentication of teaching qualifications by the Department of Education and Science, the successful applicant is appointed to the school by the board of management.

1.3 The probation of teachers

1.3.1 The probationary process

When newly qualified teachers are appointed to a primary school they undergo a period of probation. The probation of primary teachers is an essential element in their professional recognition and, once successfully completed, marks their full recognition to teach in an Irish primary school.

The general administrative responsibility for the probation process lies with Primary Administration Section 2 of the Department of Education and Science. Matters of professional guidance, the carrying out of inspection visits during the probationary period and reporting on such visits are functions of the Inspectorate. During the probationary period the Inspectorate evaluates the teacher's effectiveness in a classroom environment and in teaching the appropriate range of curricular areas and subjects. Circular 22/05, "Probationary Requirements for Primary Teachers" (DES, 2005), explains the probationary process for primary teachers and clarifies the length of service and professional qualifications required.

1.3.2 Service as a teacher in a special education setting where Irish is not a curricular requirement

Teachers educated in a recognised college of education in the State, teachers who have otherwise successfully completed a course in the State recognised for the purposes of employment as a primary teacher and certain Montessori-trained teachers (see appendix 1) may undertake their probation in a special school or in a special class in a mainstream school where the full range of curriculum, with the possible exception of Irish, is taught. The normal service and professional requirements apply.

Subsequently, if a teacher who has completed probation in a special education setting wishes to transfer to a mainstream setting where the teaching of Irish is a requirement, they must receive a satisfactory additional report from an inspector on their competence in the teaching of Irish. To achieve full recognition status (see appendix 2) this must be completed as soon as possible but at most within two years of taking up such a mainstream position.

1.3.3 Teachers trained outside the State and Montessori teachers trained in Ireland

General conditions and procedures for the recognition of teachers trained outside the State, including those to whom the terms of EU directive 89/48/EEC apply, are set out in Circular 25/00, "Recognition of Teacher Qualifications for the Purpose of Teaching in National Schools."

Restricted or provisional recognition is awarded to applicant teachers trained outside the State whose primary teaching qualifications have been accepted by the Department. (Details of restricted and provisional recognition granted to teachers trained outside the State are given in appendix 2). If the teacher has not already satisfactorily completed a probationary period of at least one year outside the State they must undergo the probationary process.

A teacher trained outside the State, or a Montessori teacher trained in Ireland, who is employed in a setting where the teaching of Irish is a requirement must satisfy the Department that they are competent to teach Irish and to teach the full range of primary subjects through the medium of Irish before being granted full recognition to teach in mainstream classes in primary schools. Such teachers normally have five years in which to pass the qualifying examination in Irish, the *Scrúdú le hAghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge*. On passing the qualifying examination, and in cases where the teacher has already completed probation in another jurisdiction, the teacher's ability to teach Irish is evaluated by the Inspectorate, and a report pertaining to the teaching of Irish is submitted to the Department. On passing the qualifying examination in Irish a teacher who has not satisfactorily completed a probationary period of at least one year outside the State is required to undergo a probationary period. The service and professional requirements for such teachers are similar to those applying to teachers trained in the State.

1.4 The role of the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science

1.4.1 The role of the Inspectorate in the probationary process

Inspectors of the Department of Education and Science visit teachers during the probationary period to monitor their progress, to provide advice and guidance, and to report on their performance in teaching the range of curricular areas and subjects appropriate to the teaching setting. The average time spent by an inspector on probationary work with an individual newly qualified teacher is 2.5 days.

The interim report (beagthuairisc)

Where a teacher has given continuous service, the inspector normally furnishes an interim report on the teacher's work during the first half of the probationary year. A copy of the interim report template is included in appendix 4.

The inspector evaluates the teacher's performance in the areas of

- planning, preparation and recording of progress
- classroom management and organisation
- quality of teaching throughout the curriculum
- quality of pupils' learning in curriculum areas.

A four-point scale is employed to record the inspector's judgements of quality in the four areas consisting of the ratings *optimal performance*, *competent practice*, *scope for development*, and *experiencing significant difficulty*. Where significant difficulty or scope for development is reported, more specific detail is provided to identify precise areas of difficulty. In addition, the inspector provides evaluative text to support the ratings allocated and records the advice given to the teacher. The report is discussed fully with the teacher before being submitted to the Department, and in this way the newly qualified teacher is aware of the areas of strength and areas requiring development in their practice.

The general inspection report (mórtuairisc)

A general inspection report is normally furnished in the second half of the year following a full-day general inspection of the teacher's work. This report provides detailed evaluative commentary on the teacher's work under the headings

- planning, preparation and recording of progress
- classroom management and organisation
- overall teaching and learning
- curriculum implementation.

The general inspection report identifies strengths and aspects for further development and provides an overall rating of the teacher's work (*satisfactory or not satisfactory*).

Primary Administration Section 2 of the Department of Education and Science issues a copy of this report to the newly qualified teacher and to the board of management.

In the event of a general inspection resulting in the rating *not satisfactory*, the teacher will be required to undertake a further probationary period of not less than 183 school days (excluding school closings), with effect from the date of that general inspection.

The Inspectorate is committed to evaluating 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) and *Procedure for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers* (2002) describe the professional codes of practice and procedures under which inspections are undertaken (see appendix 5).

1.4.2 The role of the Inspectorate in initial teacher education

The Teacher Education Section (TES) of the Department of Education and Science has responsibility for policy formulation and implementation in relation to the three stages of the teacher education continuum: initial teacher education, induction, and continuing professional development. The contribution of the Inspectorate to this work is provided through the co-ordination of policy advice by an assistant chief inspector and through the assignment of inspectors as advisors to the TES.

Each year the Inspectorate undertakes an evaluation of 10 per cent of students in recognised colleges of education during final teaching practice. During the school year 2003/2004 a team of nine inspectors evaluated 100 students studying for the Bachelor of Education degree and 43 postgraduate students. The purpose of this work is to review the quality of the teaching practice aspect of initial teacher education in the colleges, to promote collaboration and communication between the Department and the colleges, and to support the on-going development of policy in respect of initial teacher education.

Inspectors also address final-year student teachers in the colleges of education to outline for them the procedures and requirements of probation in advance of their first teaching appointment.

1.5 The school principal and the induction of newly qualified teachers

The responsibilities and duties of school principals are set in Circular 16/73, “Responsibilities and Duties of Principal Teachers and Teachers in Charge of National Schools.” Furthermore, the Education Act 1998 provides a legislative basis for the functions of the school principal. Many of the principal’s functions, as listed in section 23 (2) of the Act, have particular relevance for newly qualified teachers, and include

- the day-to-day management, including “guidance and direction,” of teachers and other members of the staff
- providing leadership for staff and pupils
- setting objectives for the school, in consultation with local partners and pupils, where appropriate, and monitoring their achievement, and
- working with the board, parents and teachers in creating a school environment that is supportive of pupils’ learning and the professional development of teachers.

In this context, school principals have a significant role in the induction of new teachers. To fulfil their duties successfully they should avail of regular opportunities to visit new teachers’ classroom. They should monitor the work practice of new teachers and offer advice and recommendations for improvement. In addition they should provide or arrange for demonstrations of best practice.

It is important that the new teacher is familiar with the policies and procedures of the school. Through guidance from the principal, the newly qualified teacher should become aware of the approach of the school in respect of

- discipline, health, safety and welfare, equality and inclusion, home-school communication, attendance, the role of special-needs assistants (where relevant), and dealing with parents,
- individual planning and preparation, recording of work progress, timetabling, and involvement in the whole-school planning process,
- teaching methods, learning outcomes, the monitoring of pupils’ learning, assessment, and provision for pupils with additional learning needs, and
- the maintenance of official school records, for example, the roll-books.

The school principal should arrange for a more experienced teacher to act as a mentor to the new teacher. Ideally the mentor should have opportunities to observe the new teacher at work in the classroom and should provide examples of good teaching and classroom management and organisation, as necessary. The mentor could also support the new teacher’s initial experiences of home-school and community events.

1.6 Education Centres and the induction of newly qualified teachers

Education Centres are a central element of the Department's in-service training infrastructure (see appendix 7). The Education Centre system, through its geographically strategic network of twenty-one full-time and nine part-time Education Centres, provides teachers with access to professional development programmes in respect of curriculum reform and special education initiatives and also provides support for locally identified training needs.

At present some Education Centres provide facilities for providers of induction courses. Others organise occasional information sessions, concentrating on newly qualified teachers' needs. In general, however, Education Centres provide professional development and support for all teachers, rather than specific support for the needs of new teachers.

1.7 Some developments with regard to newly qualified teachers

1.7.1 Induction of new teachers

The first year of teaching is an important one in every teacher's professional development, and it can be a demanding period for newly qualified teachers. There is a recognition at school and system levels that newly qualified teachers benefit from access to supportive professional assistance within schools and opportunities to avail of external in-service courses offered through colleges and through the network of Education Centres. It is also recognised that the probationary process is distinct from induction and mentoring processes, as probation carries with it an evaluation function. In recent years the colleges of education, education departments of universities, teachers' unions and the Department of Education and Science have taken a lead in organising induction and school-based mentoring supports for newly appointed teachers.

In September 2002 the Department established a pilot project of teacher induction for newly qualified teachers with the aim of informing the development of a national policy on induction (see appendix 8). The initiative also involved St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin, the teachers' unions, and Education Centres. The project is managed by a national steering committee consisting of members of the Teacher Education Section of the Department and representatives of partner groups.

Colleges of education also provide induction courses for newly qualified teachers. For example, Coláiste Mhuire, Marino, Dublin, runs a pilot induction scheme entitled the Beginning Teachers' Network (see appendix 8). Beginning teachers are clustered in groups according to the class level taught, and experienced teachers or teacher educators facilitate monthly meetings of these clusters.

1.7.2 The Teaching Council

Under section 7 (2) (g) of the Teaching Council Act 2001 the newly established Teaching Council has been given a statutory role in relation to the probation of teachers at primary and post-primary levels. The Council is called on to “establish procedures and criteria for probation of teachers.” It is envisaged that some of the present arrangements regarding the probation and induction of teachers will be reviewed in the context of new procedures for the registration of teachers.



Chapter Two

Design and operation of the survey

2.1 Objectives of the survey

The purpose of the survey was to generate new teachers' views on their first year's teaching and to report on the general standards of work of a sample of teachers on probation in primary schools in the school year 2003/2004. The survey sought to identify strengths and challenges in the newly qualified teachers' work practice in order to

- provide feedback to those involved in initial teacher education, those leading pilot programmes for teachers' induction, principals and others involved in assisting teachers on probation;
- assist teachers on probation in future by identifying areas of professional development that may need to be addressed; and
- contribute to continuous improvement in the inspection of teachers on probation.

2.2 Data and methods

The Evaluation Support and Research Unit (ESRU) of the Inspectorate designed and managed the research. This involved obtaining information and opinions from teachers through requesting respondents to complete postal questionnaires. To encourage forthright responses to the questionnaire the teachers were assured that data from the evaluation would be confidential to the survey team.

Inspectors were asked to provide copies of interim reports on the work of the teachers surveyed and also completed questionnaires. An extensive information base reflecting teachers' views and inspectors' judgements was compiled. The ESRU managed the data analysis and compiled the composite report, which captures the professional views of newly qualified teachers and inspectors.

2.3 Selection of the sample

Using a random sampling technique, 354 newly qualified teachers, or 24 per cent of the total number of teachers eligible for probation in 2003/2004, were identified.

Graduates from both the Bachelor of Education course and the higher diploma in primary teaching course were surveyed; the numbers who responded are shown in table 2.1.

Teaching qualification awarded	
Qualification	Numbers surveyed
Higher diploma in primary teaching graduates	110
Bachelor of Education graduates	244

Table 2.1

A postal self-completion method was used in the project, and a questionnaire was sent to all 354 newly qualified teachers. There were 192 responses – a response rate of 54 per cent. The respondents to the questionnaire were only a sample of the total “population,” and we cannot therefore be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those that would have been obtained if all newly qualified teachers for the school year 2003/2004 were surveyed (the “true” values).

2.4 Questionnaire completed by newly qualified teachers

The questionnaire required the newly qualified teachers to apply a rating to various statements. Details of the questionnaire statements are as follows:

Section 1

The following sources of support have been helpful to me during this probationary year.

- Principal teacher
- Other teachers in the school
 - Fellow class teacher
 - Mentor identified by the school
 - Other (please give detail)
- Education centre
- Induction courses
- Department of Education and Science inspector

Section 2

To what extent do you feel that your teacher education course prepared you for the following aspects of teaching during this probationary year?

- Planning and preparation
- Differentiation for pupils with additional needs in planning and preparation
- Classroom management/discipline
- Classroom layout and organisation
- Knowledge and implementation of the curriculum
- Pupil engagement and achievement
- Monitoring pupil progress and assessment
- Recording of monthly progress

Section 3

To what extent do you feel that your teacher education course prepared you for teaching the following areas during this probationary year?

- The teaching of Irish
- The teaching of English
- The teaching of mathematics
- The teaching of social, environmental and scientific education (SESE) (history, geography and science)
- The teaching of arts education (visual arts, music and drama)
- The teaching of physical education (PE)
- The teaching of social, personal and health education (SPHE)

In section 1 the respondents indicated the level of their agreement with each statement on a four-point Likert scale: *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. In sections 2 and 3 they stated their level of agreement as *very well prepared*, *well prepared*, *poorly prepared*, or *very poorly prepared*.

The questionnaire also featured an open comment box, inviting respondents to comment on their experience during the probationary year.

2.5 Involvement of inspectors in the survey

The sixty-four inspectors engaged in visiting and evaluating the work of the 354 newly qualified teachers were asked to supply electronic copies of the interim report completed for the selected teachers allocated to them. (A copy of the interim report template is provided in appendix 4.)

Table 2.2 shows the number of visits made by these inspectors to teachers before writing the interim report. In the majority of instances the newly qualified teacher received two visits or more.

Number of visits by inspector before the writing of the interim report	
One visit	16%
Two visits	46%
Three visits	31%
Four visits or more	7%

Table 2.2

Inspectors used a standard form to record all probationary visits and to compile the evaluation reports. The interim report required the inspector to provide an overall rating of the teacher's performance at the mid-point of the school year under the headings

- planning, preparation and recording of progress
- classroom management and organisation
- quality of teaching throughout the curriculum
- quality of pupils' learning in curriculum areas.

Inspectors employed the following four-point scale in rating a newly qualified teacher's approximate overall performance. The use of this scale facilitates the collation and data analysis processes used in preparing composite reports such as this one, and the aggregation of statistical data enables trends and patterns to be identified.

Rating scale employed in the interim report	
Level	Approximate level of performance
1	Experiencing significant difficulty
2	Scope for development
3	Competent practice
4	Optimal level

Table 2.3

Furthermore, inspectors also provided evaluative text to support the ratings allocated. This text was analysed to identify common strengths and areas requiring development in the work of teachers on probation.

After the school year 2003/2004 had ended, the inspectors completed a short electronic questionnaire providing details as to why any teacher on their list had not successfully completed their probation. Where the probationary process was extended, the inspector provided a summary of the reasons for this decision. Where a general inspection report was completed that found the teacher's work to be unsatisfactory, the inspector was asked to supply the report. These general inspection reports provided further evidence regarding the quality of a teacher's work towards the end of the school year.



Chapter Three

Supports received by newly qualified teachers

The general perceptions of the newly qualified teachers regarding the support they received during their probationary year are reported in this chapter. Newly qualified teachers were issued with a questionnaire seeking their views and attitudes on various supports that had benefited them during their first year's teaching. A four-point Likert scale – *strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree* – was provided for teachers to use in rating the supports provided by personnel and services. They also rated their preparedness for teaching the various curriculum areas and subjects, and to do this they selected from *very well prepared, well prepared, poorly prepared, and very poorly prepared*.

The questionnaire also featured an open comment box, inviting respondents to comment on their experience during the probationary year.

3.1 Sources of support for the newly qualified teacher

The newly qualified teachers were asked to respond to the following statement, using a four-point Likert scale: *"The following sources of support have been helpful to me during the probationary year."* The questionnaire specifically asked them to rate support given to them by

- the school principal,
- other teachers in the school,
- the inspector from the Department of Education and Science,
- Education Centres, and
- induction courses in which they may have been participating.

In addition, 65 per cent of the respondents provided narrative comment in the open dialogue box. Details of both the ratings and the narrative comment are provided under each of the five categories listed above.

3.2 In-school support

3.2.1 Support provided by the principal

Almost all newly qualified teachers (96 per cent) rated the support given to them by their school principal very positively. Table 3.1 shows the rating given to this support.

The following sources of support have been helpful to me during the probationary year

N=192	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Principal teacher	1%	3%	34%	62%

Table 3.1

In addition, the vast majority of narrative commentary provided by the newly qualified teachers was positive in respect of principals. The following comment illustrates the support and advice provided by principals:

The principal teacher has been very open to any new ideas that I've picked up in college and we have worked well together and learnt from each other.

3.2.2 Support provided by other teachers in the school

The general ratings for support given by other teachers and staff members in the school to the newly qualified teacher were very positive. Almost all respondents (97 per cent) considered the support other teachers provided as helpful. Many schools identified experienced teachers to support and mentor newly qualified teachers. The support provided by mentors received a general positive rating from most of the respondents (79 percent positive response).

The questionnaire also invited teachers to list other supportive personnel in the schools. Those listed as supportive included the deputy principal, partner teachers (other teachers teaching the same class level), and learning-support and resource teachers. Some respondents also mentioned the support they received from the school secretary and the in-class special-needs assistants assigned to pupils with special care needs.

The following sources of support have been helpful to me during the probationary year

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Other teacher in the school				
(a) Fellow class teacher (N=166)	1%	2%	30%	67%
(b) Mentor identified by the school (N=83)	6%	15%	31%	48%
(c) Other (N=23)	13%	4%	9%	74%

Table 3.2

The narrative commentary provided by newly qualified teachers in relation to the advice, support and encouragement provided by other colleagues is predominantly positive (85 per cent). The following comment exemplifies those submitted:

I feel the most influential person in my probationary year was my fellow teacher without whom I would have been lost particularly at the beginning of the year.

Negative comments provided by the new teachers revealed feelings of isolation and of working without adequate support from other school personnel. For example:

I have come to rely on myself as regards class planning and preparation because the other first class teachers do their own thing.

3.3 Support provided by the Inspectorate

Within the probationary process, inspectors have a dual role in providing advice and evaluating a teacher's practice. The inspector normally furnishes two reports on the work of the newly qualified teacher during the probationary year following a review of preparation and planning and of teaching and learning in the classroom environment.

Most respondents (86 per cent) gave a positive rating to the inspector as a source of helpful support. Table 3.3 shows the rating given to this support.

The following sources of support have been helpful to me during the probationary year				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
DES Inspector (N=190)	5%	9%	63%	23%

Table 3.3

Narrative comment in respect of inspectors was mainly positive. In general, these comments referred to two areas: the advice and support provided to the newly qualified teacher, and the general approach of the individual inspectors.

3.3.1 Advice and support

New teachers commented positively on the advice given by inspectors; this advice was described variously as "constructive," "helpful," "good," "valuable," "appreciated," and "useful." The support provided by inspectors was described as "constructive," "encouraging," "definitely necessary," "good," and "great," and there was "a lot" of it given. For example:

I feel that this year was extremely successful, but a lot of hard work. The visiting inspector was very enthusiastic and inspired me to work hard and her presence in the class was helpful and a continuous support throughout the year. She was pleasant and encouraging to the children, the staff and myself. It made a big difference throughout the year and was much appreciated. I will miss the feedback aspect.

3.3.2 General approach

The inspectors' approach to the newly qualified teachers' work was commented on positively as being "supportive and encouraging," "constructive," "sensible," "professional," "very good," and "practical." For example:

I would like to commend the inspector's helpful, sensible and professional approach to the probationary year.

Where newly qualified teachers were critical of the inspectors' general approach they criticised the artificiality of the general inspection visit. A small number of newly qualified teachers perceived these visits as "authoritarian" rather than supportive and the inspectors' comments to be critical rather than constructive. The following are examples of negative comment in this regard:

I also found the day (full diploma day) to be very unrealistic and rehearsed! Continuous assessment from a school-based mentor/principal/senior staff would be more effective.

It is unfair that the diploma year should largely rest with just one day. It is a false situation. A number of visits throughout the year would give a truer reading. Also perhaps two half days for Junior Infants rather than one full day.

Negative references regarding inspectors and their involvement with the newly qualified teacher during the probationary period primarily related to

- planning and preparation
- infrequent visits by inspectors
- the perceived inconsistencies among inspectors
- the date of the final inspection visit.

3.3.3 Planning and preparation

All teachers are required under rule 126 of the Rules for National Schools (see appendix 6) to provide written preparation for their work and to maintain a monthly record of work completed. The negative comments by the new teachers about planning and preparation generally referred to the excessive amount of planning that was expected by the inspector and reflect the teachers' uncertainty about what planning was required and the purpose of the planning. The following are examples of such comment:

The amount of notes and pupil portfolio keeping was beyond reasonable requirement and necessity.

... a written outline of what is expected in notes would be useful. A standard outline for every probationary teacher would also be useful.

The constant making of detailed notes was tough, and as the year drew on I found it harder to motivate myself. However the benefit of doing those notes is clear.

3.3.4 Infrequent visits by the inspector

Negative references by newly qualified teachers in this context concerned the infrequency of visits from the inspector and the change of inspectors assigned to them during the probationary period. For example:

... we had 3 changes of Inspectors which caused a huge inconsistency in what was expected of us. I just feel that this probation year is stressful enough on teachers without the added uncertainty of not knowing what inspectors will be completing each step of the probation period.

... we were told that the inspector would be with us to do a beagthuirisc during Christmas week. This didn't happen and he didn't come until after Easter!

3.3.5 Perceived inconsistencies among inspectors

Some newly qualified teachers perceived that different inspectors were inconsistent and had varying expectations. In general, teachers' comments in this regard referred to variations in inspectors' requirements for written preparation. For example:

I feel that the expectations of inspectors around the country are very varied – some inspectors expect termly and weekly schemes while others expect yearly and fortnightly. In the interest of fairness there should be a set template for all teachers on probation.

Due to a change in Inspector I had to redevelop aspects of my notes. This shows that there is very little cross reference between Inspectors with regard to their expectations regarding notes etc.

3.3.6 Date of the final inspection visit

Newly qualified teachers who were scheduled to have their final one-day inspection visit in late June expressed negative comments on the inappropriateness of the timing for this inspection. An example of such comments was:

My mórtuairisc (diploma) will not be done until 21st June due to the workload of the new inspector. It is very hard to motivate children at this time of year and there are a lot of interruptions at the end of the school year.

3.4 Support provided by Education Centres

Only fifty teachers responded to the statement regarding the effectiveness of support provided by Education Centres. More than half the respondents (58 per cent) stated that the Education Centres provided satisfactory induction support to them. A significant proportion (42 per cent) disagreed with the statement, suggesting that they perceived that the Education Centres were not supportive to them in their probationary year. The newly qualified teachers did not make any specific references to Education Centres in the open comment box.

3.5 Support provided by induction courses

In recent years, colleges of education, education departments of universities and teachers' unions have furthered the organisation of induction and mentoring supports within schools. As described in chapter 1, the Department established a pilot project of teacher induction for newly qualified teachers, with the aim of informing the development of a national policy on induction, based at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin. Other colleges of education also provide induction courses for newly qualified teachers. For example, Coláiste Mhuire, Marino, Dublin, began a pilot induction scheme, entitled the Beginning Teachers' Network, in 2002.

As the provision of induction courses for newly qualified teachers is at a preliminary stage, the number of respondents who would have had access to any formal induction course is small. This is reflected in the low response rate in the questionnaire to the question regarding the level of support provided by induction courses in the probationary year. There were fifty-nine responses to this query. Though the general rating was negative, with 70 per cent of respondents finding

induction courses an unhelpful source of support, it is quite likely that they were expressing dissatisfaction at not having access to induction courses rather than rating the induction courses that they were attending.

The following sources of support have been helpful to me during the probationary year				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Education Centres (N=50)	18%	24%	58%	0%
Induction courses (N=59)	46%	24%	27%	3%

Table 3.4

Only three comments were provided in the open comment box in respect of induction courses. All were negative. For example:

We received a letter at the beginning of the year about the National Pilot Induction course, stating that we were included but we did not hear anything else after that. My overall feeling is that we are trained for 3 years and then abandoned.

Very few, if any, induction courses have been offered to the teachers in this school, despite a large number (5) teachers experiencing a probationary year at the same time.

3.6 Beginning teachers' views in respect of initial teacher education course

Though the open comment box gave freedom to comment on any aspect of their probationary experience, two-thirds of the respondents made no reference to their initial teacher education course. Sixty-three teachers commented on their course and of these references only 20 per cent were positive.

Positive comments generally referred to a feeling of being prepared to teach during the initial year and to a good knowledge of the curriculum and of various teaching methods. Examples of positive comment were as follows:

I have enjoyed my probationary year. I feel that college prepared me well for teaching and I feel that this year has been a success.

I have great praise for lecturers at (...) in relation to their methods and advice for my future teaching career. I also have to thank my teaching practice supervisors.

Among the negative references to initial teacher education courses, several themes emerged:

- lack of confidence in relation to teaching the curriculum to certain age groups,
- lack of training in practical school matters,
- lack of preparation with regard to planning,
- lack of confidence with regard to classroom organisation and multi-class teaching, and
- lack of preparation with regard to the learning and behavioural needs of certain categories of pupils.

The predominant theme was the newly qualified teachers' lack of confidence in teaching certain curriculum areas and subjects to specific age groups and, in particular, to the most junior classes. For example, one new teacher wrote:

I have found that I was well prepared on the administrative side but found I was sorely lacking in knowledge of how to apply the curriculum to the class level I have. I feel in college we should have had more lecture time on the subjects we would have to teach and we should have been shown how to teach the topics.

Some newly qualified teachers were critical that they have received little preparation for the teaching of certain subject areas:

We received 5 lectures on the teaching of history and geography. These lectures were excellent, but were insufficient in number. The course was a full-time over 18 months. Despite this huge amount of time the course was not practical enough to prepare you for teaching.

The other themes mentioned above received almost equal mention. Newly qualified teachers felt ill-equipped to handle the normal routines of managing a classroom, such as completing roll-books, meeting parents, and managing discipline, pupils' behaviour, and homework. The following are comments in relation to a lack of training in practical school matters:

As I feel I have learnt more this year than in my time in college, I think that perhaps college should prepare you more for the everyday parts of school life and should definitely emphasise discipline and pupil behaviour more throughout the course.

We need basics – how to fill in a roll book adequately, guidance and advice for parent-teacher meetings, where to get additional material on different subjects if the class textbook is lacking. The majority of the course was theoretical, for example, we were told that the curriculum needs to be broad and accommodate various teaching methodologies – but how? A new teacher is none the wiser as to “how” to bring the curriculum to life for children.

Probationary teachers felt that, while much emphasis had been given in the college of education to matters relating to planning and preparation, they were inadequately prepared to plan for composite classes. They also expressed the view that the planning undertaken in the college of education should reflect the planning required of teachers (long-term and short-term) in classrooms, rather than the preparation of detailed lesson notes. Examples of comments in relation to lack of preparation with regard to planning were:

It was not until I started teaching 3 classes at once that I realised the importance of being able to plan well for such a diverse group. Not enough time was set aside on the course for explaining how to create weekly, monthly, yearly schemes etc. Such practical knowledge should not be ignored.

There is a big focus during teacher education on planning for teaching practice but I feel there should be more emphasis on termly and yearly planning as it is difficult for a new teacher to know what is required when they begin to teach.

In particular, newly qualified teachers were concerned about their lack of preparedness for managing the learning and behavioural needs of a wide range of pupils. They were concerned that their initial teacher education course did not equip them to differentiate their teaching, to prepare them for working in disadvantaged areas, or to provide for pupils with special educational needs. Some of their comments were as follows:

The school I'm teaching in has a huge variety of children from different backgrounds... the difference in academic ability in my class is remarkable and makes teaching to the different levels a constant challenge. I have children in the 98th percentile in Maths and English right down to the 1st percentile... I feel that more preparation in college for such situations would be hugely beneficial.

There should be a course on providing for pupils who are extremely intelligent, not just those with learning difficulty. There is a need to provide advice on working in educational disadvantaged areas where discipline is a big problem.

3.7 Conclusion

The help provided by the fellow class teachers, the school principal, fellow-teachers and inspectors of the Department of Education and Science was rated by respondents as most helpful. Support provided by mentors appointed by the school was also considered helpful. The support provided by induction courses and Education Centres was rated less highly. Table 3.5 shows a rank ordering of the supports that the newly qualified teachers rated most helpful during their probationary year.

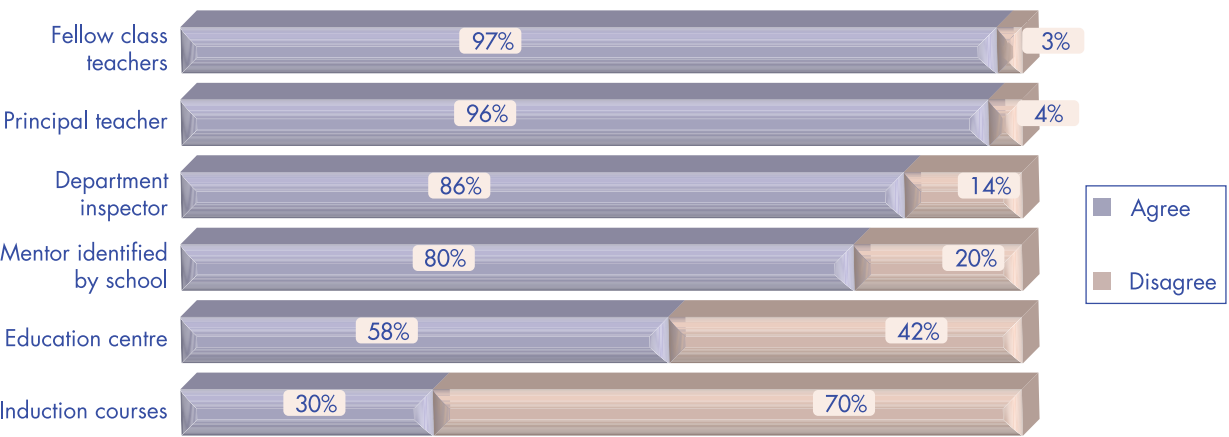


Table 3.5: Supports that newly qualified teachers found most helpful (in descending order)

The Working Group on Primary Pre-Service Teacher Education, in its report *Preparing Teachers for the 21st Century* (2002), acknowledges that the levels of knowledge and skill required to effectively teach the primary curriculum are such that it is impossible to bring all student teachers to high levels of competence within the time limits allocated to pre-service education. The Working Group comments that teachers need to be in the “real-life situation” of a teaching post over a certain period and to have acquired some experience to fully appreciate and comprehend the demands of teaching and to develop the necessary strategies to meet those demands.

The reality of full-time teaching can come as a shock to many teachers who find themselves having to address a range of issues and concerns that may have been less pressing when they were completing shorter periods of teaching under rather artificial conditions in their pre-service programme. For example the responsibilities of student teachers and full-time teachers differ considerably in classroom management and in dealing with other professionals and parents (p.149).

Probationary teachers identified areas where they felt ill-prepared to manage. These included classroom organisation and behaviour management, the management of pupils with a range of learning needs, and the handling of classroom routines such as maintaining roll-books and monitoring copybooks. Teachers identified their own learning needs in respect of planning for multi-grade situations, providing a differentiated curriculum for pupils, and using a broad range of methods in the teaching of some areas in which they perceived they had not received significant guidance during the initial teacher education phase.

The current structures for the induction of probationary teachers are limited to a relatively small number of teachers. Providers of induction courses should be aware of teachers' needs and of the areas of the curriculum, classroom management, discipline and planning that need to be dealt with in greater detail. They should also respond to the particular needs of individual teachers. The provision of supports within schools rather than through courses held at central venues can provide teachers with the direct assistance and guidance which they need. Teachers require peer facilitators who will model teaching in various areas of the curriculum and assist them in planning lessons and in developing teaching strategies that are related to their particular contexts.



Chapter Four

Preparedness for teaching the Primary Curriculum

The newly qualified teachers were asked to indicate the curriculum areas and subjects they felt best prepared to teach on completion of their teacher education course. This chapter presents those findings. It also presents evaluative comments from the interim reports completed by the individual inspectors who evaluated newly qualified teachers' effectiveness in teaching the curriculum.

4.1 Introduction

The primary school curriculum (1999) is presented in six areas of learning, some of which are further subdivided into subjects. These are listed in Table 4.1.

Language		
Gaeilge	English	
Mathematics		
Social, environmental and scientific education (SESE)		
History	Geography	Science
Arts education		
Visual arts	Music	Drama
Physical education (PE)		
Social, personal and health education (SPHE)		
Religious education		

Table 4.1: Structure of the Primary School Curriculum (1999)

4.2 Perceptions regarding preparedness for teaching curriculum areas

In general, newly qualified teachers felt their teacher education course prepared them well for teaching the various areas of the primary school curriculum. Table 4.2 summarises the responses by the teachers in relation to different curriculum areas and subjects.

To what extent do you feel that your teacher education course prepared you for teaching in the following curriculum areas during your probationary year?				
N=192	Very poorly prepared	Poorly prepared	Well prepared	Very well prepared
The teaching of Irish	4%	12%	57%	27%
The teaching of English	2%	10%	58%	30%
The teaching of mathematics	6%	22%	48%	23%
The teaching of SESE				
(a) history	2%	15%	62%	21%
(b) geography	2%	13%	64%	21%
(c) science	2%	12%	61%	25%
The teaching of arts education				
(a) visual arts	6%	21%	47%	26%
(b) music	14%	31%	44%	11%
(c) drama	8%	24%	55%	13%
The teaching of PE	0%	5%	56%	39%
The teaching of SPHE	4%	18%	57%	21%

Table 4.2

Newly qualified teachers felt that their initial education course prepared them well or very well to teach English, SESE, and Irish. Physical education received the most positive rating, at 95 per cent. The new teachers felt less well prepared to teach SPHE, visual arts, mathematics, and drama. Music received the most negative rating, with 45 per cent of newly qualified teachers feeling that they were inadequately prepared to teach the subject. Table 4.3 illustrates the rank order of subjects in which newly qualified teachers felt poorly or very poorly prepared.

Rank order of subjects in which newly qualified teachers felt less well prepared to teach		
	Curriculum areas and subjects	Proportion of respondents who felt poorly prepared
1.	Music	45%
2.	Drama	32%
3.	Mathematics	28%
4.	Visual arts	27%
5.	SPHE	22%
6.	History	17%
7.	Irish	16%
8.	Geography	15%
9.	Science	14%
10.	English	12%
11.	PE	5%

Table 4.3

4.3 Inspectors' evaluation of the teaching of curriculum areas

By the interim report stage, which is generally completed after the second advisory or evaluative visit to the probationary teacher, inspectors had evaluated probationary teachers teaching a range of curriculum subjects. They found that the vast majority of new teachers were teaching successfully, and they stated in the interim reports that the teachers should successfully complete the probationary period within the standard period of one academic year.

In the first half of the probationary year it is common practice for inspectors to concentrate on the teaching of Irish, literacy and numeracy, and they observe these lessons in probationary teachers' classrooms routinely. Therefore, most evaluative comment by inspectors in the interim reports related to the teaching of language (Irish and English) and mathematics. However, the inspectors also observed a range of other curricular areas, both in the first half of the probationary period and during incidental visits before the one-day general inspection visit, which occurred towards the end of the school year. One inspector reported that

The lessons observed in Irish, mathematics, geography and drama would indicate that the teacher is mediating the Primary School Curriculum effectively in the classroom.

In addition to general evaluative comments in the interim report about the new teacher's progress, inspectors also record the advice and recommendations offered to the teacher. The following sections provide an overview of the most frequently reported advice and recommendations in the interim reports of 2003/2004.

4.3.1 Language – Irish

There was general satisfaction with the teaching of Irish in two-thirds of the probationary classrooms. For example, in one report it was stated that:

This teacher works conscientiously. He has a very pleasant relationship with the pupils under his care and he receives very good co-operation from them. He bases his Irish lessons on themes that are of interest to the pupils and he makes good use of language games and of pair work to encourage participation.

[Translated from Irish]

In the one-third of instances where the inspectors found that the new teachers were experiencing difficulty in the teaching of Irish, the most frequent recommendations for improvement were that the teachers should

- use Irish informally and more frequently throughout the school day
- ensure the accuracy of their own spoken and written Irish
- plan according to the strands of the curriculum; in particular, planning should include activities that would develop listening and oral skills (*éisteacht and labhairt*)
- adapt the programme in Irish to the pupils' interests and backgrounds
- allocate the appropriate time to the teaching of Irish on a daily basis.

In relation to the methods employed in the teaching of Irish it was frequently recommended that the probationary teachers should

- structure the Irish lessons appropriately, ensuring that each lesson comprises three stages: *réamhchumarsáid, cumarsáid, and iarchumarsáid*

- base the lessons on the themes identified in the Irish curriculum and identify clearly at the beginning of each week the oral language phrases and structures of the language to be taught during that particular week
- arrange opportunities for pupils to work in pairs and to speak in Irish regularly
- use games, drama, storytelling and poetry more frequently to ensure that the pupils are interested and engaged in the lessons
- avoid teaching Irish through the medium of English; the emphasis of each language lesson should be on developing communication skills in Irish
- provide pictures, toys and other material resources so that the pupils can develop their understanding of the spoken language during the pre-communicative phase
- monitor the pupils' functional and creative writing, and provide frequent opportunities for them to engage in process writing.

4.3.2 English

The teaching of English was good in the majority of classrooms. However, recommendations for improvement were made in approximately one-sixth of instances. The recommendations referred to the strand units of reading, writing, and oral language.

With regard to reading, the most frequent recommendations related to the

- development of a literacy area in the classroom, where pupils' sight words would be displayed and big books and library books would be displayed attractively
- creation of a print-rich environment, with labels and full sentences displayed in the classroom
- teaching strategies for word identification
- differentiation of the reading activities for pupils and the promotion of a language experience approach to reading
- listening to reading and monitoring of the development of reading skills, especially in respect of pupils with learning difficulties
- development of pupils' comprehension skills and the need to emphasise the higher-order thinking skills
- appropriate use of children's literature in the teaching of reading and the development of library and reference skills.

The recommendations made about the teaching of writing highlighted the need for beginning teachers to encourage junior pupils to write creatively, to promote the process approach to writing, to provide opportunities for pupils to write in a variety of genres, and to display their pupils' work appropriately. The teachers were advised to develop the pupils' higher-order thinking skills through writing. In particular, their emotional and imaginative responses to a variety of stimuli, such as poetry, music, novels, and drama should be encouraged.

The inspectors suggested that the teaching of oral language would be enhanced through identifying specific objectives for oral language lessons. Teachers were advised to provide opportunities and settings in which pupils could practise their oral language skills, articulate their personal views and argue a viewpoint, and develop their receptive and expressive language skills.

4.3.3 Mathematics

The inspectors regularly reported on the teaching of mathematics, and new teachers were primarily advised to develop their methods and to concentrate on pupils' learning in this area. The most frequently reported recommendations in the interim reports referred to the

- use of a range of concrete materials in mathematics lessons
- differentiation in the teaching of mathematical concepts, in the pace of the lessons, and in the activities provided for the pupils
- provision of challenging activities for the more able pupils
- use of real-life problem-solving situations in the lessons and a reduced emphasis on the role of the textbook
- inclusion of more oral mathematics in the lessons
- concentration on and consolidation of number facts
- systematic teaching of the language of mathematics
- appropriate balance of teacher-talk with an emphasis on the pupils' engagement with, and discussion of, concepts.

4.3.4 Social, environmental and scientific education – History

In the interim reports of 2003/2004, inspectors commented on the teaching of history in only five instances. In general these comments were positive, and it was reported that probationary teachers plan a broad and interesting programme of work for their pupils. The inspectors recommended that newly qualified teachers should

- provide opportunities for the pupils to work as historians, facilitating them in developing their skills of analysis, using evidence, and working in the local environment
- avoid over-reliance on a textbook as the sole source of learning for pupils
- integrate the work in history with other subjects in the curriculum, so that pupils can link knowledge between curricular areas, for example creative writing, drama, and Irish.

4.3.5 Social, environmental and scientific education – Science

Inspectors commented on the teaching of science in five interim reports. The comments were varied and related to the planning provided for science, the necessity of including the local environment in the programme, and the more extensive use of concrete materials to enrich the learning experience. Inspectors' recommendations related to the assessment of project work in science and the facilitation of peer assessment. One inspector recommended that additional emphasis should be placed on the development of specific science skills.

He attempts to develop the pupils' scientific skills but there is a need for the lessons to have a specific objective. There is currently a lack of structure to his teaching. He needs to set clear problems to be solved and provide the pupils opportunities to actively participate in the investigations.

[Translated from Irish]

4.3.6 Physical education

At the interim report stage, inspectors had reported on the teaching of physical education in a small number of instances. Where inspectors evaluated physical education lessons their advice emphasised the

- provision of long-term and short-term planning for physical education
- appropriate timetabling of physical education each week
- careful organisation of pupils and their general engagement in the physical education lesson.

It was also noted that in a small number of schools external tutors were employed by the board of management to teach physical education. In such instances, it was found that some probationary teachers were not aware of the requirement that they should teach each area of the curriculum each week. Inspectors reported that a number of probationary teachers had not taught physical education during the first term, had no planning or preparation completed for the subject, and consequently experienced difficulties in organising pupils.

4.3.7 Arts education – Music

The inspectors reported on the teaching of music in seventeen classrooms. Many of the comments were positive. For example:

Music is capably taught. The pupils sing in a lively manner and activities from the various strands of the curriculum are well handled.

[Translated from Irish]

The most frequent recommendations made by inspectors referred to allocating the appropriate time for the subject, providing long-term and short-term planning for music, and the importance of teaching all the strands of the curriculum. Teachers were advised to use a musical instrument to provide a starting note for singing and to attend to appropriate pitch when teaching singing. The inspectors also recommended that the new teachers ensure that there is continuity in the teaching of music, and that learning tasks grow incrementally more complex as the year progresses. For example, an inspector reported:

While initial steps have been taken to introduce the pupils to singing and percussion, there is need to ensure progress and continuity in music across all of the strands.

4.4 Conclusion

The report, *Preparing Teachers for the 21st Century* states that the amount of time devoted to developing teachers' skills and understanding of different curricular areas, to developing pedagogical skills and an understanding of general teaching methods varies from one teacher training provider to another. The Working Group's report makes a series of recommendations regarding the redesign of initial teacher education courses to meet the demands of a changing curriculum and to provide all teaching graduates with the types of competence that characterise a "mature teacher" (p. 155).

Evidence from newly qualified teachers and from the inspectors who evaluated their work suggests that teacher education courses need to be designed so that teachers develop the competences required for contemporary primary teaching. These include familiarisation with the principles of the curriculum, facility with a range of teaching approaches, and the ability to manage the range of individual differences and to provide individual programmes for pupils with special educational needs.

Teachers' perceptions of their ability and confidence to teach various aspects of the curriculum do not fully coincide with the evidence garnered from inspectors' reports. For example, new teachers felt well prepared to teach Irish and English, but the frequency of inspectors' advice and recommendations in these areas suggests that there is scope for development there. Evidence from inspectors' interim reports suggests that there may be a need for inspectors to observe a wider range of curriculum areas during initial visits. There is also scope for school principals and teacher colleagues to provide more in-school support to help new teachers develop their competence and skills in teaching the full curriculum.



Chapter Five

Classroom planning, management and organisation

5.1 Introduction

The newly qualified teachers rated the extent to which their teacher education courses prepared them for five aspects of teaching. These were:

- planning and preparation;
- differentiation for pupils with additional needs in planning and preparation;
- recording of monthly progress;
- classroom management and discipline; and
- classroom layout and organisation.

This chapter presents the findings of the questionnaire completed by newly qualified teachers and provides an analysis of the comments and evaluative ratings from the reports of inspectors involved in the probationary process in relation to each of these aspects.

5.2 Focusing on classroom planning, management and organisation

5.2.1 Planning, preparation and recording of progress

The rationale for providing written planning is to ensure that teaching is purposeful and is based on the learning needs of the pupils. Under rule 126 of the Rules for National Schools (see appendix 6), all teachers are required to undertake long-term and short-term planning. It is intended that teachers base their written planning on the Primary School Curriculum (1999). At the end of each month teachers are required to record the portion of the curriculum dealt with during the month in a monthly progress record, or *cúntas míosúil*.

One of the most challenging tasks faced by newly qualified teachers is the planning of learning activities to ensure that pupils obtain access to the strands and strand units of the curriculum. Focused planning assists teachers in providing pupils with learning experiences that are

- broad and balanced and relevant to their experiences,
- differentiated, in that learning activities are correctly matched with the pupils' ability to undertake the task and learn the concept or skills,
- progressive, so that the pupils will develop knowledge and skills at a pace that reflects their learning style and ability, and
- based on specific learning objectives in each curriculum area, so ensuring that teaching and learning are focused and purposeful.

At the start of each term, newly qualified teachers are required to outline a long-term plan for their pupils in each curricular area that is based on the pupils' diverse learning needs. This planning is supplemented by short-term weekly plans, which outline specific learning experiences in each curricular area. Short-term planning should specify the learning objectives and the teaching methods and resources employed. The delineation of specific objectives for weekly plans enables the teacher to identify the learning outcomes that can be assessed through teacher observation at the end of each unit of work or using teacher-devised tests and tasks at different stages throughout each term. During visits, inspectors discuss the newly qualified teacher's planning as one component of the teaching and learning cycle.

As well as providing written planning for their teaching, newly qualified teachers are also required to plan for the provision of resources: concrete materials, use of the environment, use of information and communication technologies, and written resources such as workbooks, worksheets, and textbooks.

Planning for the learning needs of all pupils is a complex and challenging teaching skill; it is a central feature of the professional role of the teacher. Planning for differentiation requires the teacher to devise and organise learning activities that will meet the range of learning needs of the pupils in their class. Differentiating the curriculum involves the teacher in selecting content, activities, methods and resources that reflect the range of learning needs, experiences and interests of the pupils. It involves the teacher in establishing the prior learning of the pupil in the area, assessing the present level of pupils' knowledge, skills, and understanding, and determining the most effective way in which the pupil will learn.

5.2.2 Classroom organisation and layout

The Primary School Curriculum (1999) provides substantial guidance on classroom organisation. A bright, celebratory and purposeful classroom environment is an important factor in stimulating pupils' learning. In evaluating classroom organisation and layout the inspectors considered the extent to which newly qualified teachers had

- provided a clear, well-organised and clutter-free working space for themselves and their pupils,
- considered the placing of the pupils' desks and chairs so as to facilitate group learning and purposeful pupil interaction,
- arranged that all pupils have a clear view of blackboards, charts, and displays,
- planned for access to equipment and storage areas, and
- organised learning and discovery areas, such as a library corner, investigation table, costume box, sand-box, and wet area.

The inspectors also reported that some newly qualified teachers needed to plan for and use learning resources carefully. They recommended that the teachers provide a print-rich environment, appropriate visual stimuli, and ready access to information and communication technology and to concrete materials.

5.2.3 Classroom management and discipline

In the complexity of school and classroom life, the smooth running of the work and play of large numbers of pupils entails constant vigilance and particular care. If teachers are to help their pupils to grow as individual persons, self-controlled and responsible in their behaviour, then effective classroom management and appropriate discipline are vital. The effective teacher assists pupils in developing their skills in being a member of a group, in sharing the common purpose of their classmates, and in understanding the nature and conditions of school and the organisation of time, work and materials.

Each school is obliged to prepare a code of behaviour under section 23 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, while Circular 20/90 (DES) gives guidance to schools in drawing up their code of behaviour and discipline. It is the role of teachers to implement the code of behaviour in their classrooms and in the environs of the school in a fair, efficient and consistent way. It is the role of the principal to ensure that all teachers understand their responsibility in relation to school discipline. In this regard it is especially important that, in the implementation of the school's code of discipline, the principal and other members of the staff support newly qualified teachers.

5.3 Perceptions regarding classroom planning, management and organisation

Table 5.1 shows how newly qualified teachers rated their preparedness for each of the five aspects of teaching under discussion in this chapter.

To what extent do you feel that your teacher education course prepared you for the following aspects of teaching?				
	Very poorly prepared	Poorly prepared	Well prepared	Very well prepared
Planning and preparation	2%	9%	53%	36%
Differentiation for pupils with additional needs in planning and preparation	3%	43%	48%	6%
Recording of monthly progress	11%	45%	35%	9%
Classroom layout and organisation	5%	24%	52%	19%
Classroom management and discipline	2%	19%	61%	18%

Table 5.1

The majority of newly qualified teachers felt that their initial teacher education course prepared them well or very well to plan and prepare for their teaching, to manage pupil behaviour and to structure and organise their classroom as a teaching and learning environment. Table 5.2 presents the aspects of teaching for which the new teachers felt least well prepared. The findings are presented in descending order.

Aspects of teaching for which newly qualified teachers felt least well prepared	
	Negative rating
1. Recording monthly progress	56%
2. Differentiation for pupils with additional needs in planning and preparation	46%
3. Classroom layout and organisation	29%
4. Classroom management and discipline	21%
5. Planning and preparation	11%

Table 5.2

5.4 Inspectors' evaluation of classroom planning, management and organisation

5.4.1 Evaluation of planning, preparation, and recording of progress

The general ratings for planning, preparation and recording of progress were positive. Inspectors found that 70 per cent of newly qualified teachers displayed competent practice in this regard, with almost nine per cent of that number doing so at an optimal level of practice.

Evaluation of teachers' work Planning, preparation and recording of progress	
Experiencing significant difficulty	1%
Scope for development	29%
Competent practice	61%
Optimal level of practice	9%

Table 5.3

Thirty per cent of teachers experienced significant difficulty or had scope for development in planning and preparing for teaching. In these cases, the inspectors provided more detailed information in respect of these difficulties under six headings which are listed below in descending order.

- Clarity of teaching objectives, both long-term and short-term
- Suitability of objectives: extent of reference to primary school curriculum (with due regard for its underlying principles) and the school plan
- Range and appropriateness of resources
- Provision for differences in pupils' abilities
- Quality and effectiveness of progress records
- Adequacy of class timetable, referenced to the specified minimum weekly allocation of time to curriculum areas

Most newly qualified teachers had difficulties in two or more of these aspects of planning and preparation. A lack of clarity with regard to teaching objectives was by far the most prevalent problem found.

5.4.2 Analysis of inspectors' evaluative comments for planning, preparation and recording of progress

Classroom planning – clarity of teaching objectives

It was found that 70 per cent of new teachers were preparing and planning for their work in a competent manner. In fact nine per cent of these were doing so at an optimal level. The inspectors' comments were very positive about the classroom planning of these teachers. For example:

This teacher provides excellent long and short term planning, complemented by detailed progress reports. Her structure for planning is highly commendable and she demonstrates an admirable understanding of the principles and the structure of the curriculum.

Long and short-term planning is very good. The teacher uses the curriculum as the primary planning source and plans for a wide range of appropriate resources effectively. She delineates the appropriate content objectives to be achieved and the time-scale for their attainment in her planning documents. She clearly indicates assessment procedures in her long and short-term planning.

The newly qualified teachers who were experiencing difficulties in providing preparation for their teaching were advised to include specific objectives from the curriculum in their short-term planning. In many such instances the teachers' planning was based on the pupils' textbooks. Where this occurred, the inspectors frequently found that there was little emphasis on the development of concepts and skills in a structured manner and that little provision was made for continuity and progression. For example:

The teacher is advised to plan and implement her work according to the content objectives for fourth class and to place an emphasis on the development of the appropriate skills and concepts.

[Translated from Irish]

In some instances teachers prepared long-term and short-term plans that were not related to the curriculum for the various subject areas. In other instances the inspectors found that specific objectives were repeated in short-term planning from week to week and that there was no evidence of pupils developing a wide range of skills or of due emphasis being given to progression and continuity. A few teachers drew up weekly plans in which the objectives were not directly related to the content taught. The inspectors found that some teachers had planned for certain subjects each week but that the provision of plans for each area of the curriculum, such as oral language or music, had not been provided consistently. The following comment exemplifies this type of inconsistent planning:

While the teacher presents weekly plans in respect of his work, a number of areas of the curriculum are not in evidence in his long-term plan. Some objectives are outlined in the teacher's short-term plans but these are not explicitly linked to the curriculum, leading to unfocused teaching and learning. Much of the teaching and learning is textbook based and the pupils are engaged in paper-based activities for significant amounts of time.

A few inspectors found that a small number of teachers had a poor grasp of the content of the lessons being taught. In one classroom the teacher's subject knowledge in different areas of the curriculum was insecure:

During the inspection visit, substantial evidence emerged that the teacher did not have sufficient understanding and knowledge of the content that she was attempting to teach in the areas of Irish, English, mathematics, geography and music.

Range and appropriateness of resources

Most newly qualified teachers were successful in providing a range of materials to support the lessons planned. In many classrooms the teachers had provided charts or teacher-devised work cards and had organised the classroom so that pupils could have access to the materials required for lessons.

The teacher has created a very stimulating learning environment. Specific areas of the classroom have been allocated to curriculum areas, photographic evidence of work covered in certain subjects is displayed and the work areas are neat and orderly.

However, a small minority of new teachers (fewer than 10 per cent) had not prepared adequately for the lessons taught. They did not use visual or concrete materials appropriately to support or consolidate teaching or learning. It was frequently reported that these teachers adhered to textbooks as the only supports for their teaching. The following comment exemplifies a situation where the range of resources used was limited:

The teacher has made little attempt to provide an appropriate level of quality illustrative materials to support the teaching and learning. The teacher should use the textbook only as a resource and support rather than as the basis for the lesson.

Provision for differences in pupils' abilities

Inspectors found that most newly qualified teachers made provision for the different levels of pupils' abilities in their classrooms. One inspector reported as follows:

This teacher makes excellent practical preparation for her work. She employs a wide range of interesting teaching approaches and uses an array of resources in her teaching. Her classroom is busy with learning activities differentiated according to the ability levels of the pupils. She manages the various learning groups effectively and ensures that the curriculum content taught is appropriate for the age and ability levels of the pupils in her class.

A small minority of teachers (fewer than 10 per cent) were found to be experiencing difficulties in this area. The inspectors found that English reading lessons in particular were not appropriately differentiated. In several classrooms, all the pupils were found to be reading the same text, irrespective of their reading and comprehension abilities. In a number of classrooms the teachers assigned reading material to pupils that was far too difficult for them, while in some instances the more able reader was not challenged sufficiently by the content of the reading material. The inspectors' comments in relation to differentiation were broad and generic, as exemplified in the following:

Much of the teaching and learning is workbook based and the pupils are engaged in paper-and-pen activities for significant amounts of time. The teacher is experiencing significant difficulty in differentiating the curriculum for the pupils in his class. In fact the pupils in third class are often left without any work to do for long periods of time and tasks assigned to them are not sufficiently challenging. There is little evidence of hands-on learning with concrete materials used primarily for illustrative purposes rather than manipulation.

Quality and effectiveness of progress records

The majority of new teachers maintained monthly progress records of the work they had completed with their class. However, the effectiveness of these records varied. At the competent level, some teachers outlined the specific objectives taught during the month and included the results of assessments linking the teaching to learning outcomes. Some teachers also incorporated a reflective comment on the progress of the pupils and on the developments in their teaching style. Where recommendations for improvement were made, they focused on the need for some new teachers to:

- provide monthly progress records,
- include specific learning objectives taught during the month in the progress records, and
- review pupils' learning outcomes.

Adequacy of class timetable

A small proportion of new teachers (fewer than 5 per cent) experienced difficulties in preparing and adhering to a class timetable. The inspectors recommended that newly qualified teachers should familiarise themselves with the specified weekly time allocation for each curriculum area, and adhere to these guidelines. Specifically, teachers who had responsibility for composite classes were found to experience the greatest challenge in planning for each class level.

The teacher is advised to re-draft the timetable so as to arrange a definite time for the development of reading and writing in Irish and English and to put DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) at a later time in the day.

5.4.3 Evaluation of classroom management and organisation

Close to one-third (29 per cent) of the newly qualified teachers felt that their teacher education course did not prepare them adequately for classroom management and organisation. However, the inspectors' reports show that 86 per cent of the teachers displayed competent practice or better in this regard. The inspectors found that the great majority of teachers were successful in building and sustaining a positive classroom climate.

Many of the pupils in this class come from economically and educationally disadvantaged homes. The teacher is calm and supportive and has succeeded in promoting a high level of mutual respect and self-discipline, which was not evident at the start of the year. She is deeply committed to her work and to making a difference to this group of children.

Almost all the new teachers were found to interact with pupils in a caring and supporting manner and to have established purposeful learning environments in which pupils were secure and confident. It was reported in one instance that

the teacher has developed an excellent rapport with the pupils in her class. She expects the very best from them and they respond to her expectations. The classroom is well organised and there is a positive and consistent behaviour programme in place.

Most new teachers created well-organised classrooms, monitored classroom interactions capably, paced their lessons appropriately, and used praise and constructive feedback.

This is a very effective teacher who provides excellent preparation. She has a very pleasant relationship with the pupils and they co-operate willingly with her. Good questioning techniques are practised and there is careful monitoring of the work and conduct of the pupils.

[Translated from Irish]

Table 5.4 displays an analysis of the evaluative ratings given in the inspectors' reports in relation to classroom management and organisation. Fourteen per cent of the newly qualified teachers were evaluated as experiencing some level of difficulty in the management and organisation of their classrooms.

Evaluation of teachers' work Classroom management and organisation	
Experiencing significant difficulty	1%
Scope for development	13%
Competent practice	79%
Optimal level of practice	7%

Table 5.4

Inspectors provided additional detail on the specific difficulties that these teachers were experiencing under four headings:

- Promotion of good discipline and behaviour
- Overall attractiveness of environment (layout, quality of display, including pupils' work and interest centres)
- Accessibility and use of resources
- Caring relationship with pupils; use of praise and positive feedback.

Promotion of good discipline and behaviour

Approximately five per cent of new teachers were experiencing difficulty in the promotion of good discipline and behaviour at the interim stage of the probation period. A number had difficulties in establishing a 'presence' in the classroom, in maintaining the pupils' interest in the lesson, in employing interactive teaching methods and collaborative group work, or in organising the teaching and learning time effectively. The following comment from an inspector elucidates this point:

The teacher is developing a good presence in the classroom, but needs to be more definite in her strategies for gaining and maintaining pupil interest. She should reduce the amount of time she spends in introducing a lesson and should ensure that the various stages of the lesson are managed appropriately. Time dedicated to short term planning will help this process.

Overall attractiveness of environment

In general, new teachers were effective in organising and managing the physical teaching environment. They organised materials, texts and other resources safely and efficiently and provided bright, attractive classrooms. Difficulties were reported in fewer than five per cent of instances. Inspectors advised teachers to

- provide a print-rich environment,
- rearrange the furniture to create more useful learning and teaching areas,
- provide investigation tables and nature tables,
- organise distinct learning areas in the classroom, for example reading corner, writing corner, maths table, play area,
- create more attractive, tidy environments through the display of pupils' work and the provision of concrete and interactive materials for pupils,
- structure the classroom so that the teacher can move easily among the different groups of pupils and the pupils can see the blackboard and the teacher easily, or
- use ICT regularly and effectively in their teaching.

Accessibility and use of resources

In most classrooms there was an adequate supply of materials and teaching resources. However, in a small number of classrooms these resources were not used appropriately. The inspectors advised teachers to use more concrete materials during mathematics, science, geography and music lessons. They recommended that teachers model the reading process and facilitate pupils' engagement with books. Teachers were advised that shared resources need to be carefully managed and that materials should be available in the classroom before the lesson begins.

5.5 Conclusion

Newly qualified teachers were found to be competent in a broad range of areas. More than two-thirds planned and prepared for their teaching in an effective manner. However, almost one-third had difficulties in providing consistent long-term and short-term planning, and in reflecting the principles of the curriculum in the work planned. A small number experienced difficulty in structuring a timetable, in providing for individual differences, or in maintaining progress records.

Newly qualified teachers had identified weaknesses in their own abilities to differentiate for pupils with varying abilities. More than half the teachers surveyed felt they were inadequately prepared for maintaining monthly progress records. One-tenth stated that they were ill-equipped to plan and prepare for their teaching.

More than four-fifths of the teachers displayed competent practice in classroom management and organisation, and the inspectors commended the work of teachers in this area. A small proportion of teachers (14 per cent) had difficulty promoting good discipline, organising an attractive classroom environment, managing the use of resources, or using praise and constructive feedback. It is interesting to note that almost one-third of newly qualified teachers rated negatively their preparedness for organising a learning environment in their classrooms. Approximately one-fifth expressed concerns about their ability to manage pupils' behaviour and to deal with discipline issues.



Chapter Six

Quality of teaching and learning throughout the curriculum

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the newly qualified teachers' rating of the extent to which their teacher education courses prepared them for three further aspects of teaching:

- knowledge and implementation of the curriculum,
- pupils' engagement and achievement, and
- monitoring pupils' progress and assessment.

The chapter also provides an analysis of inspectors' interim reports written in the first half of the probationary year in respect of these three aspects. While inspectors in this survey commented to some extent on pupils' learning in the interim reports, the main focus of comments was on the evaluation of new teachers' pedagogical skills. The inspectors' recommendations and advice related to the teachers' competence to teach rather than to the quality of pupils' learning.

6.2 Focusing on teaching and learning throughout the curriculum

Teaching is a complex activity that demands a high level of knowledge and a wide range of pedagogical skills and personal attributes. Good-quality teaching requires that teachers understand how children learn and develop. Successful teachers can plan a broad range of teaching activities that will contribute to the holistic development of each child. Teachers are required to have a sound conceptual and practical understanding of the subject areas they are teaching. Effective teachers are able to present learning activities in a structured way. They motivate pupils and sustain their engagement in learning by designing lessons that are varied, interesting, and challenging. Competent teachers evaluate pupils' progress towards intended learning outcomes and are able to adjust their teaching to the needs of individual pupils. Reflective teachers analyse their practice: they review the quality of their planning, they consider the quality of the pupils' learning, and they use this information to influence their future teaching activities.

The quality of teaching is the central professional indicator that is evaluated by inspectors. It is a highly influential contributor to the quality of pupils' learning and to the general effectiveness of the school as a teaching and learning organisation.

6.3 Perceptions regarding the quality of teaching and learning

Table 6.1 shows the ratings given by the newly qualified teachers in respect of the three aspects of teaching discussed in this chapter.

To what extent do you feel that your teacher education course prepared you for the following aspects of teaching during this probationary year?				
N=192	Very poorly prepared	Poorly prepared	Well prepared	Very well prepared
Knowledge and implementation of the curriculum	0%	6%	47%	47%
Pupils' engagement and achievement	0 %	13%	65%	22%
Monitoring pupils' progress and assessment	3%	20%	58%	19%

Table 6.1

Table 6.2 presents the findings in descending order, beginning with those aspects for which the respondents felt least well prepared.

Aspects of teaching for which newly qualified teachers felt least well prepared		
		Negative rating
1	Monitoring pupils' progress and assessment	23%
2	Pupils' engagement and achievement	13%
3	Knowledge and implementation of the curriculum	6%

Table 6.2

6.4 Inspectors' evaluation of the quality of teaching

A review of inspectors' reports shows that almost two-thirds (65 per cent) of teachers are teaching competently throughout the curriculum areas. However, more than a third (35 per cent) manifest scope for development in their teaching.

Evaluation of teachers' work: Quality of teaching in curriculum areas	
Experiencing significant difficulty	1%
Scope for development	34%
Competent practice	62%
Optimal level of practice	3%

Table 6.3

Where the inspectors found that teachers were experiencing difficulties in the teaching of certain subjects, they made specific recommendations and provided teachers with advice in six areas. These areas are listed below in the order of the frequency in which they were commented on by inspectors and are discussed more fully in succeeding paragraphs.

- Variety and suitability of teaching methods: whole-class, group or individual learning
- Structure and pace of lessons
- Assessment procedures, and monitoring and recording of learning
- Matching of work to pupils' ability, with particular reference to attention levels and receptiveness of pupils
- Communication skills, e.g. questioning, explaining, responding, and quality of relations and interactions between teacher and pupils and of pupils with each other
- Regard for continuity and progression.

6.4.1 Analysis of inspectors' evaluative comments on the quality of teaching

Inspectors' interim reports also provided evaluative comment where teachers were experiencing difficulties with a particular aspect of teaching. In addition, the inspector listed any recommendations for improvement made to the new teacher. An analysis of these comments and recommendations provides further information on the areas of weakness that were most common in the classrooms of newly qualified teachers.

Variety and suitability of teaching methods: whole-class, group or individual learning

In those classrooms where good practice was reported, the newly qualified teachers used a variety of teaching methods, such as group work, activity and discovery methods, pair work, experimentation, use of the local environment, and use of concrete materials.

Where difficulties were found, the inspectors gave advice to new teachers to enhance the quality of their teaching and to ensure that appropriate lessons were presented effectively to the pupils. The inspectors encouraged teachers to explore and adopt a variety of teaching methods and to involve pupils more actively in their learning through group work. The need for some teachers to avoid excessive teacher-talk was highlighted in several reports and the importance of fostering listening skills among pupils was emphasised.

The inspectors made several recommendations to the new teachers to improve the quality of their teaching in the area of language (Irish and English). They recommended that pupils should have ample opportunities to develop communication skills. They advised the new teachers to facilitate pupils in taking turns and engaging in discussions and structured oral language activities. The teachers were advised to organise group learning activities and to employ methods that would stimulate and engage the pupils in learning activities, such as circle time, project work, focused discussion, and drama.

Structure and pace of lessons

A small proportion of teachers (fewer than 10 per cent) experienced difficulties in maintaining an appropriate pace and structure in lessons. Some lessons were slow in pace, and the inspectors recommended that the use of a more effective questioning style, the provision of feedback and the assignment of pupils to interesting tasks would enhance the structure and pace of lessons. They also recommended that teachers engage with pupils who are experiencing difficulties with the lesson content during activities, rather than allowing them to work silently for extended periods. In some instances the teachers organised groups that were too large and did not provide each pupil with opportunities to engage with concrete materials, provide solutions to a problem, or share ideas. As a result some pupils were distracted from the task at hand, and it was difficult for the teacher to re-establish their involvement in the lesson.

In some classrooms the transition from one activity to another was not handled well; for younger pupils this resulted in disruptive behaviour, listlessness, or loss of interest in the lesson. In other classrooms the time spent on different activities was inappropriate, or there was limited content or a lack of direction to the lessons. One inspector remarked that a narrow range of teaching methods and poor lesson structure and pace had a negative effect on pupils' learning:

The level and pace of interaction that takes place in the classroom fails to stimulate the pupils and they are passive in their learning for much of the time. The teacher has made little attempt to provide quality illustrative materials to support teaching and learning. There is little evidence of activity-based learning and concrete materials are used primarily for illustrative purposes rather than for manipulation and investigation.

Assessment procedures, and monitoring and recording of learning

Where good practice was reported, new teachers were found to use a broad range of assessment strategies in order to construct a picture of the achievements and the needs of the pupils. They had built up a clear profile of the pupils' attainment in concepts, knowledge and skills in many curriculum areas. For example, one inspector reported:

The teacher provides excellent planning for both the short and the long term. She sets out the assessment approaches she employs and provides detailed monthly progress records. She has developed a profile for each pupil and it contains assessment records, observation schedules and samples of the pupil's work. She also maintains a reflective journal and records observations on the effectiveness of lessons taught and methodologies employed.

Concerns regarding the assessment procedures and monitoring and recording of pupils' progress were noted in approximately 10 per cent of reports. Effective assessment is a challenging task for the newly qualified teacher. In this context, one inspector recommended that the new teacher approach the task in an incremental fashion, by first addressing a single curriculum area and monitoring and recording pupils' progress in that area.

The inspectors also recommended that attention be given to different methods of assessment when long-term and short-term plans were being drafted. The teachers of infant and junior classes were advised to use observation check-lists and to record pupils' progress when listening to reading, identifying sight words, and completing writing tasks. The inspectors recommended that teachers monitor pupils' copybooks more consistently and provide constructive written and oral feedback to pupils, as appropriate. It was also recommended that profiles of pupils' progress be maintained. In the senior classes the inspectors recommended that newly qualified teachers encourage pupils to undertake self-assessment and review and reflect on their achievements in various areas of the curriculum. For example, one inspector commented:

The teacher employs collaborative group-work in the teaching of SESE, but was advised to communicate specific assessment criteria to the pupils with regard to their project work. This should clarify expectations for pupils and also facilitate peer-assessment.

Matching of work to pupils' abilities, attention levels and receptiveness

In most classrooms the work undertaken by the pupils was well matched to their needs, and the newly qualified teachers' instructions and explanations were clear and appropriate. Fewer than 10 per cent of teachers experienced difficulties in matching lesson content to the ability level and receptiveness of the pupils. Where teachers experienced difficulties in selecting appropriate topics for their lessons, or where there were difficulties in matching activities to the pupils' stage of development, the inspectors drew attention to the need for teachers to employ a greater variety of methods and to add pace and structure to their lessons. The following inspector's comment exemplifies these interconnected challenges:

To date, the teacher has been advised to facilitate increased pupil participation in the learning activities, to choose a theme in which the pupils are interested for each week, and to monitor the pace of her lessons so that all pupils are engaged and not just the more able.

Several teachers were advised to devote more time to the weaker pupils when they were engaged in an activity, and to provide a greater variety of activities to challenge the different age groups in multi-class situations. Teachers were also advised to use group work to provide for the different levels of pupils' abilities. For example, one inspector wrote that

The teacher needs to encourage more involvement and complexity from the pupils in their answering of questions. Often, the activities assigned to the pupils are not challenging enough for the more able pupils. She should provide varied learning tasks for the different age groups in her classroom.

Communication skills and quality of relations and interactions

The inspectors commented on positive interactions between teacher and pupils in the majority of instances. The teachers generally treated pupils with great respect and consideration. The majority of teachers provided their pupils with positive feedback, and this fostered the pupils' self-confidence. Some inspectors commented favourably on how newly qualified teachers communicated with the special-needs assistants who worked under their guidance in the classroom. An example of the positive comment written by inspectors is as follows:

This teacher treats her pupils with kindness and has established a positive relationship with them. Under her direction and encouragement the pupils are developing good relationships with one another and satisfactory levels of attentiveness, work habits and discipline are fostered.

The newly qualified teachers were commended on their efforts to maintain pupils on task during group work and while undertaking written activities. The inspectors found that there was a positive learning climate in most classrooms where there was a sense of order, good communication between teacher and pupils, and positive expectation with regard to pupils' behaviour and learning capability. The following comment illustrates how one teacher's skill in this area had improved and developed:

This teacher's work has improved since the beginning of the year. There is a pleasant relationship between himself and the children; he attempts to employ various teaching methods; and on the whole, he motivates the children to learn.

[Translated from Irish]

Fewer than five per cent of the newly qualified teachers displayed difficulties in communicating with their pupils. Where poor communication skills were reported, teachers were advised to use more structured approaches to questioning, to vary the questions asked, and to distribute their questions to all groups of pupils. The inspectors recommended that teachers ensure that all pupils are engaged and focused during teacher-pupil interactions.

In a minority of classes the inspectors recommended that the teacher interact more with the pupils. They suggested that the use of a greater range of teaching methods would engage the pupils in the lessons and would stimulate their interest in the topic. They recommended that the use of textbooks as the sole basis for the teaching approach and activities of the lesson be avoided.

The teacher should have more interaction with the pupils during the lessons and motivate them through the use of various teaching methods during teaching. Varied teaching methods should be used to make the teaching more interesting. It is recommended that an emphasis on the textbook in teaching the lessons should be avoided.

[Translated from Irish]

6.5 Inspectors' evaluation of the quality of learning

A review of the inspectors' reports shows that in 78 per cent of the newly qualified teachers' classrooms the pupils were learning and achieving appropriately. In 22 per cent of classrooms there was scope for development or significant difficulty in this fundamental area. Table 6.4 illustrates these findings.

Evaluation of teachers' work: Quality of teaching in curriculum areas	
Experiencing significant difficulty	1%
Scope for development	21%
Competent practice	75%
Optimal level of practice	3%

Table 6.4

Where the new teacher was experiencing difficulty, or where there was particular scope for development in respect of their pupils' learning, the inspectors' reports provided further detail on the specific areas where the teacher's practice was weak under four headings. The four principal areas of weakness, in descending order, with the weakest listed first, are the

- extent to which pupils are on task and working purposefully
- quality of learning outcomes, including written work
- pupils' knowledge of subject matter, skills, and attitudes
- range and suitability of material covered

6.5.1 Analysis of inspectors' evaluative comments on the quality of learning

The inspectors reported that most pupils were engaged in the lessons and in meaningful age-appropriate activities. Most pupils displayed a commitment to the completion of tasks. They worked actively and co-operated with their peers while undertaking problem-solving activities, oral language activities, and group tasks. During lessons in various curricular areas most pupils displayed a mastery of knowledge and skills, and this was reflected in their responses to questions, their ability to discuss and analyse the quality of their oral and written responses.

In classes where purposeful learning was given priority, new teachers had used the results of assessments to inform their short-term planning, and differentiated learning experiences were provided for the pupils. In the middle and senior classes those pupils who were progressing well were able to work independently at different stages during lessons and displayed perseverance in the completion of tasks.

The inspectors commented on ineffective learning in fewer than 10 per cent of class settings. In these classes the inspectors commented that

- the pupils were not involved sufficiently in the lessons,
- a large number of pupils were not challenged by the activities,
- the lessons were not structured clearly enough,
- a limited range of teaching methods was employed,
- there was little evidence of active participation by the pupils, and activity-based learning was not promoted, and
- the quality of pupils' responses was not appropriate to their age or class level, either in oral questioning or in written work.

The new teachers were advised to

- establish clear learning objectives for the pupils and provide learning opportunities that would place the emphasis on realisable outcomes,
- communicate the learning objectives of the lessons clearly to the pupils so that they are aware of the purpose of the lesson and can self-monitor their own progress,
- increase pupils' participation through the provision of more activity-based learning experiences, and
- provide regular opportunities for the pupils to consolidate prior learning and to reinforce concepts and skills.

6.5.2 Class allocation and probationary teachers

In the school year 2003/2004, 83 per cent of the newly qualified teachers were allocated single classes; the remaining 17 per cent were assigned either dual or multi-grade classes. Dual-class and multi-grade situations are the norm in many Irish primary schools. Several newly qualified teachers commented on the difficulties they experienced in dual and multi-grade classes. One teacher wrote:

I was poorly prepared to teach the multi-grade class that I have. I felt that I was in the deep end and my training seemed to be forgotten as I tried to organise this class setting.

Almost one-fifth (19 per cent) of the teachers were allocated a junior infant class within their schools. Several newly qualified teachers stated that they felt ill-prepared to teach the infant classes. For example:

Starting my first teaching year I did not have any idea of what was required or expected of me until half way through the first term.

6.6 Conclusion

The majority of newly qualified teachers were confident in their teaching skills. They felt that their initial teacher education course had prepared them well for teaching the full range of subjects on the curriculum. They were assured in their ability to engage pupils and to ensure that pupils were progressing at levels appropriate to their age and stage of development. However, almost one-quarter felt ill-equipped to monitor pupils' progress and achievement.

Teaching in multi-grade classes requires good organisational and pedagogical skills, and where possible such assignments should be allocated to experienced teachers. The teaching of pupils in infant classes is also best allocated to more experienced teachers, as initial teaching in literacy and numeracy is fundamentally important to pupils' success. This is particularly pertinent in those schools that serve areas of disadvantage. The recent composite report *Literacy and Numeracy in Disadvantaged Schools: Challenges for Teachers and Learners* (DES Inspectorate, 2005) states:

The learning contexts involved require a very high level of teaching expertise and an effective framework for teaching that embraces excellence in preparation, high levels of teaching expertise in lesson presentation, highly developed practice in engaging children in learning activities and in consolidating children's learning, and assessment approaches that are integrated systematically with teaching and learning (p. 63).

The inspectors' interim reports indicated that one-third of teachers experienced some difficulties in teaching a number of curricular areas. The use of a variety of teaching methods, the structuring and pacing of lessons and monitoring pupils' progress are among the most common difficulties experienced by newly qualified teachers.



Chapter Seven

Professional standards for probationary teachers

7.1 Extensions of the probationary process recommended in 2003/2004

Where the work practice of the newly qualified teacher fails to reach an appropriate standard within the normal probationary period of one year, the inspector recommends to the Department of Education and Science that the period be extended, usually for another school year. The inspector provides an interim report (*beagthuaire*) on the work and progress of the newly qualified teacher and gives the reasons for the recommendation. The reasons are also discussed in detail with the teacher. The extension is intended to provide the newly qualified teacher with a further opportunity to gain experience and to improve teaching practice.

Most teachers whose probationary period is extended complete the probationary period successfully by the end of their second year. In 2005, for example, reports by inspectors on the progress of teachers whose probation had been extended in 2003/2004 contain comments such as the following:

(There is) evidence of an improvement in confidence, maturity and general enthusiasm for teaching. She received much help and support from her principal and from the deputy principal with regard to her planning and preparation. The principal signed off on her plans and monthly progress reports and this made a big difference.

Her management skills have improved enormously. She received a lot of support from her principal who modelled good practice with regard to classroom management skills for her and who also regularly observed her teaching and gave her constructive feedback.

Table 7.1 provides details of the number of new teachers who did not complete their probation period successfully in the school year 2003/2004.

Newly qualified teachers who did not successfully complete their probation year, 2003/2004	
Probation period extended until 2004/2005 due to lack of progress in developing teaching skills	71
General inspection deferred until 2004/2005 for other reasons	9
Rating of “not satisfactory” in a general inspection report	3

Table 7.1

Of the eighty newly qualified teachers whose probation period was extended, nine had their general inspection deferred for a variety of reasons unrelated to their teaching ability. In five of these cases this was because the inspectors were unable to assess all the teachers allocated to them. Other reasons included the teacher's illness for an extended period and the fact that some teachers had been in their school for only a short period and, therefore, had their general inspection deferred until the following year. The remaining seventy-one newly qualified teachers did not complete their probation period successfully because the quality of their teaching did not reach an acceptable standard, for a variety of reasons.

7.1.1 Difficulties in maintaining discipline

Although, inspectors gave more than one reason why the probation period was extended for seventy-one teachers at the end of the school year 2003/2004, the most frequently mentioned of these was the standard of discipline in the classroom. The inspectors found repeated instances of teachers' poor awareness of the extent of their pupils' involvement, attention, or difficulties. There were also concerns about the inability of some newly qualified teachers to cope with simultaneous demands on their time and attention and their inability to maintain the pupils' attention. Some teachers had difficulty in maintaining their pupils' interest and involvement in lessons. An example of what inspectors reported in such cases is as follows:

[The] teacher was unable to gain and maintain pupils' attention for any length of time (and) continued to "teach" through the consequential and unacceptable noise level. The teacher's attention was frequently drawn to individual children who are disruptive and she had not yet developed the ability to scan the entire room, to include all children in questioning, or to assess work on an ongoing basis. All these areas need urgent attention.

In other cases, inspectors reported difficulties related to organisation and management of learning activities:

A lot of time is lost in changing from one curricular area to the next, in settling pupils to work and in admonishing those who approach the tasks in a disinterested manner. Consequently, noise and disruptive behaviour are often at an unacceptable level.

Considerable time was wasted on arranging pupils into random groups after various whole class-teaching settings. Many pupils did not know what the focus of the group activities was meant to be and the teacher repeatedly failed to clarify the nature of these group activities. She did not intervene to get the pupils back on task. She demonstrated very poor time management and this led to further pupil behaviour management issues.

7.1.2 Poor engagement with pupils

Inspectors reported on the difficulties experienced by some newly qualified teachers in stimulating the pupils and in maintaining their attention during the teaching and learning activity. In many instances this was due to poor pacing of lessons, particularly where the lesson taught had a predominance of teacher-talk, or where there was a mismatching of lesson content to pupils' ability or a lack of engagement by the pupils in the assigned task.

The use of inappropriate teaching methods was frequently cited by inspectors as a significant reason for recommending the extension of the probation period. The inspectors referred repeatedly to the use of limited and non-stimulating teaching methods, the assignment of unchallenging and repetitive tasks to pupils, and the underemployment of manipulatives and illustrative materials.

There were also a few instances where empathy with pupils and communication skills were reported to be unsatisfactory. It was reported, for example, that

The teacher did not manage her class in a competent manner and did not promote a caring relationship with the pupils. There was very limited use of praise or positive feedback.

Her teaching failed to stimulate the pupils, her classroom management style was sharp, she failed to manage her time successfully and did not make sufficient use of a variety of teaching methodologies.

7.1.3 Insufficient planning and preparation

In some instances the probation period was extended where newly qualified teachers did not prepare and plan adequately for teaching and learning. Inspectors reported that a lack of planning had a detrimental effect on the clarity and focus of teaching, on the range of methods employed, on programme content and the implementation of the curriculum, on lesson pace and structure. For example, one inspector commented:

There were ongoing problems with regard to planning and preparation over the initial probationary period. This teacher experienced difficulty in organising a structured learning environment for her pupils. There was a marked misuse and over-reliance of textbooks in her teaching. The teacher and pupils merely read large tracts from the books aloud without appropriate preparatory discussion, investigation, or ample clarification.

7.1.4 The quality of pupils' learning

The quality of pupils' learning posed difficulties for some newly qualified teachers. Some subjects were not timetabled weekly and did not receive adequate attention. As a result, pupils' learning in these areas was negatively affected. Additionally, in some instances the programme provided for pupils was disjointed and based primarily on poorly selected pupil workbooks and textbooks rather than on the curriculum documents. In some instances inadequate monitoring of pupils' work and limited use of assessment approaches meant that the progress of pupils in several areas of learning had not been ascertained appropriately. In such cases, assigned learning tasks did not reflect the needs of the pupils and were often mismatched to the pupils' ability. For example:

The teacher needs to ensure continuity and progression; children need to be challenged at suitable levels; content must be appropriate in order to retain the children's interest in tasks; written objectives need to be achieved.

7.2 “Not satisfactory” ratings of teachers’ work in 2003/2004

In a small number of cases each year the work standards of newly qualified teachers result in a rating of “not satisfactory” in a general inspection report. The rating is given in instances where there are fundamental weaknesses in the quality of teaching. In many instances an extension of the probationary period will already have been given to the teacher in a previous year and the quality of teaching will not have reached an appropriate standard. Where this occurs, the teacher is required to undertake a further probationary period of not less than 183 school days (excluding school closings), with effect from the date of that general inspection. In general, a teacher has five years in which to acquire full teaching status. Thereafter, a teacher whose work continues to be unsatisfactory may have recognition to teach withdrawn.

In the school year 2003/2004 there were three instances where a rating of “not satisfactory” was given to a newly qualified teacher in a general inspection report. All three had been teaching for at least a year and their probation period had been extended from the previous year. In all cases the inspectors’ reports provided detailed explanation for the “not satisfactory” ratings. The three reports highlighted many areas of common weakness in the teachers’ practice. These included difficulties with regard to

- discipline and classroom management,
- the range of teaching methods employed,
- curriculum content,
- matching lesson content to pupils’ ability,
- pace and structure of the lessons,
- learning outcomes for pupils and monitoring of their work,
- communication skills and questioning techniques,
- preparation and planning for teaching and learning, and
- the use of illustrative and manipulative resources to enhance teaching and learning.

7.3 Number of extensions recommended by individual inspectors

There were 64 inspectors directly involved with the probation of newly qualified teachers in the school year 2003/2004. Of these, 33 made no recommendation for an extension of the probationary period, 12 made one such recommendation, and 19 made two or more such recommendations.

Extension of the probationary period, 2003/2004: number of extensions per inspector	
Number who did not recommend any extensions	33
Number who recommended one extension	12
Number who recommended two or more extensions	19

Table 7.2

The number of newly qualified teachers assigned annually to individual inspectors varies according to the inspector's district. Invariably, the largest numbers of beginning teachers are in cities and larger towns. As a result, inspectors with responsibility for schools in such areas tend to have larger numbers of newly qualified teachers in their jurisdiction. In such cases probationary work becomes the inspector's principal assignment for the year. In 2003/2004 the number of newly qualified teachers assigned to each inspector ranged from 60 in urban areas to 14 in rural districts.



Chapter Eight

Findings and recommendations

8.1 Findings

In the school year 2004/2005 there were 1,566 probationary teachers in primary schools, of whom almost 13 per cent provided questionnaire responses for this survey. This report presents newly qualified teachers' views on the effectiveness of the various supports available to them during their first year as classroom teachers and reflects on their perceptions of their preparedness for teaching. It also considers the inspectors' evaluation of newly qualified teachers' practice. Inspectors, on average, advised and evaluated each beginning teacher for a period of 2.5 days during the school year. Their reports (beagthuiriscí) on the work of newly qualified teachers in the first half of the probationary year provide the data for the evaluative comments presented in this report.

Almost all newly qualified teachers found the supports provided to them by their school principal and fellow teachers beneficial and encouraging. Most respondents (86 per cent) also gave a positive rating to the inspector of the Department of Education and Science as a source of support. In particular, there was a positive reaction to the professional advice and guidance provided by the inspector during the probationary period. There was less positive response in respect of the availability of support from Education Centres or from induction courses (58 per cent and 30 per cent respectively).

The majority of teachers expressed a high level of satisfaction with their initial teacher education course in having prepared them well for teaching such areas as English, SESE (social, environmental and scientific education), and physical education. A significant minority felt less well prepared to teach the arts and mathematics. Evidence from newly qualified teachers and inspectors suggests that some aspects of teacher education courses need to be given greater prominence so that teachers develop the competences required for contemporary primary teaching. These include familiarisation with the principles of the curriculum, facility with a range of teaching approaches, and the ability to manage the learning needs of pupils with special educational needs.

Some of the newly qualified teachers felt that their initial teacher education course was too theoretical and neglected guidance in practical matters, such as the completion of roll books and monthly progress records. Some also considered that they were ill-prepared for classroom management issues such as organising their classrooms as learning environments, maintaining discipline, and motivating pupils.

Some of the teachers' perceptions of their preparedness for teaching various aspects of the curriculum do not appear to fully accord with the evaluative judgements of the inspectors. While teachers felt well prepared for teaching English and Irish, most inspectors' advice and recommendations dealt with language and numeracy. However, it is possible that the inspectors observed more language and numeracy lessons than other subjects. There is a need for newly qualified teachers to be provided with in-school support in the areas of language and numeracy: specifically, more experienced teachers should avail of opportunities to provide in-class support, advice and models of good practice for new teachers. These findings also suggest a need for inspectors to observe a wider range of curriculum areas during initial visits so as to advise and support probationary teachers in the teaching of these areas.

While the majority of newly qualified teachers felt confident in their teaching skills, reports by inspectors suggest that one-third of beginning teachers were experiencing some difficulty. The inspectors found that some new teachers needed additional help and guidance in planning their lessons based on the primary school curriculum. They also required further direction in using a variety of teaching methods, in structuring and pacing of lessons, and in monitoring pupils' progress.

Almost all probationary teachers (95 per cent) successfully completed the probationary process in one year. Inspectors recommended the further extension of the probationary period for five per cent of teachers.

8.2 Recommendations

8.2.1 In-school supports

The board of management

The board of management is the newly qualified teacher's employer. In this capacity, the board should

- ensure that the necessary supports are established to assist newly qualified teachers in becoming acquainted with their new role,
- take appropriate steps to ensure that the newly qualified teacher is clear about the school's discipline, health, safety and welfare, equality and complaints policies and procedures,
- make known the terms of employment and the professional standards expected of the beginning teacher, and
- discuss with the newly qualified teacher an induction and early professional development plan to extend teachers' professional knowledge and skills.

The principal and teachers

Newly qualified teachers found that principals and fellow-teachers provided the most helpful form of assistance during their probationary year. In the questionnaire, 96 per cent of the beginning teachers rated the principal as supportive and 97 per cent rated fellow teachers similarly. Their comments referred repeatedly to the guidance and advice provided to them by the principal and other teachers.

A small number of newly qualified teachers stated that they required more guidance and support from the teaching staff. In this context, the principal might beneficially ensure that

- the newly qualified teacher fully implements the school's code of behaviour and receives the support and advice necessary to ensure that discipline is established in the classroom;
- regular visits are made to the new teacher's classroom in order to become familiar with the quality of the teacher's work and that encouragement, advice and teaching demonstrations or arrangements for teaching demonstrations are provided;
- where possible, newly qualified teachers are not allocated infant classes during their first year;
- long-term and short-term written planning is completed and monitored and that teachers present monthly progress records;
- the newly qualified teacher is familiar with completing the roll-book and any other relevant school forms and documents;
- the newly qualified teacher is familiar with the school plan for administrative and curricular areas;
- assessment procedures and the monitoring of pupils' work align with the schools' assessment approach;
- where possible, an experienced teacher is assigned as a mentor to the newly qualified teacher; the mentor should support the progress of the new teacher, demonstrate good classroom practice and review the newly qualified teacher's teaching approaches, offering advice and support as necessary. The mentor should provide guidance the new teacher in relation to parent-teacher meetings and school and community events during the initial year.

8.2.2 Continuing professional development

Some newly qualified teachers experienced significant difficulties in devising written planning, especially in multi-grade situations. They also expressed a need for continuing professional supports in implementing the curriculum. It is recommended that:

- an integrated web site specifically for newly qualified teachers should be provided by the professional development support services for primary teachers, offering advice and guidance in relation to planning and preparation and other pertinent matters.
- curriculum and planning advisers should provide supports for newly qualified teachers. These supports should take particular account of the need to familiarise teachers who complete their initial teacher education outside the State with the Primary School Curriculum (1999).

8.2.3 Support by the Inspectorate for newly qualified teachers

The majority of new teachers rated positively the support provided by their assigned inspector and there was general satisfaction with the advice and guidance provided. However, consideration of the comments by the new teachers suggest that there are areas in which the requirements for probation by the Inspectorate should be clarified further.

- The Inspectorate should publish its evaluation criteria for probation and its templates for interim and general inspection reports, so that newly qualified teachers are aware of how evaluative judgements of their teaching are formed. Requirements in relation to written preparation and record keeping should be clarified.

- A thematic report on the probation of newly qualified teachers should be produced every four to five years. This report should contain information about the number of newly qualified teachers whose probation is deferred or extended or who are given a “not satisfactory” rating. The standards of practice should be outlined in this report, and the general findings on teachers’ competence should be communicated to the providers of initial teacher education and continuing professional development, together with the reasons where appropriate, why probation was not completed successfully. The publication of these reports would also provide regular information at system level about the teaching standards of newly qualified teachers.
- Some teachers who successfully complete their probationary process still have areas of their teaching that require development and improvement. The Inspectorate should consider undertaking a thematic evaluation of the standards of teachers in their second and third years of teaching. This evaluation would provide comparative information about the extent to which teachers’ work practice continues to improve.

8.2.4 System support for newly qualified teachers

In general, the availability of supports from outside the school such as Education Centres and induction courses was not rated highly by a significant number of new teachers. The development of a national induction programme is only at the initial stage. As only a small number of the teachers could have had access to a formal induction course, it is likely that the questionnaire respondents were expressing dissatisfaction at not having access to induction courses rather than rating the induction courses that they were attending. At this early phase in their teaching career, it is possible that some of the new teachers had not engaged in the programmes provided by Education Centres or, perhaps, they found that programmes offered were not pertinent to them in their initial year. The following is recommended:

- the development of a national system of induction to meet the professional needs of newly qualified teachers during their initial years of teaching;
- the support of newly qualified teachers who are experiencing difficulty or are lacking in confidence in the initial years; induction courses should attend to matters such as planning and preparation, pedagogical skills, knowledge of the curricular areas, parent and teacher interaction, stress and time management, and teachers’ health and voice care;
- the facilitation of regular, focused workshops and support groups for new teachers in Education Centres; the clustering of teachers, geographically or by class level, should be facilitated, thus providing opportunities for beginning teachers to work under the guidance of experienced teachers and providing a forum in which teachers would share and reflect on their experiences;
- the provision of more intensive supports for those teachers whose probation has been extended; specifically, these teachers should have opportunities to observe effective teachers in their own or other schools. They should be provided with opportunities to plan collaboratively with other teachers and receive in-school coaching from them.

8.2.5 Additional supports: initial teacher educators

The majority of new teachers were satisfied with their level of preparedness for teaching following their initial teacher education course. Newly qualified teachers felt that their initial education course prepared them well or very well to teach physical education, English, SESE, and Irish. However, they considered themselves less well prepared to teach music, drama, visual arts and mathematics. It is recommended that initial teacher educators consider further the development of student teachers' competence in the areas in which they consider themselves ill-prepared.

In addition, initial teacher educators should ensure that new teachers have a comprehensive understanding of the teaching of literacy and numeracy and that they are thoroughly familiar with appropriate teaching methods in both. Inspectors were concerned about the teaching of literacy in one-sixth of beginning teachers' classrooms. In particular, inspectors reported weakness in relation to the teaching of reading. This finding indicates that many beginning teachers need to

- employ more successful strategies for word identification,
- differentiate reading activities,
- promote a language experience approach to reading,
- monitor reading skills, and
- develop pupils' comprehension skills and higher-order thinking skills.

Inspectors reported difficulties in respect of the teaching of writing in many classrooms also. They found that new teachers needed to promote a process approach to writing and to encourage junior pupils to write creatively. Inspectors reported that pupils were not provided with sufficient opportunities to write in a variety of genres and in particular, they found that pupils' emotional and imaginative response in writing to a variety of stimuli, such as poetry, music, novels, and drama needed encouragement. Inspectors also reported weakness in the teaching of oral language recommending that it could be enhanced through identifying specific objectives for oral language lessons. Many beginning teachers were found not to provide sufficient opportunities and settings in which the pupils could practise their oral language skills, articulate and argue a viewpoint, and develop their receptive and expressive language skills.

With regard to the teaching of numeracy, inspectors found that there was scope for development in a significant minority of instances regarding

- the use of concrete materials in mathematics lessons,
- differentiation in the teaching of mathematical concepts,
- the pace of lessons and the scope of activities provided for pupils,
- the use of real-life problem-solving situations,
- the balance of teacher and pupil input during lessons, and
- oral mathematics and the systematic teaching of the language of mathematics.

Inspectors considered that the teaching of Irish as a communicative language, and the accuracy of newly qualified teachers' spoken Irish, were also matters requiring further attention. These are matters that warrant further consideration at the initial teacher education stage. In the one-third of instances where inspectors found that new teachers were experiencing difficulty in the teaching of Irish, the most frequent recommendations for improvement were that the teachers should

- ensure the accuracy of their own written and spoken Irish,
- use Irish informally and more frequently throughout the school day,
- plan according to the strands of the curriculum; in particular, planning should include activities that would develop listening and oral skills,
- adapt the programme in Irish to the pupils' interests and backgrounds, and
- allocate the appropriate amount of time to Irish lessons daily.

It is recommended that initial teacher education providers should also take account of the perceptions of newly qualified teachers in relation to the aspects of teaching for which they felt least prepared. In particular they were concerned about

- planning for differentiation for pupils with additional needs,
- classroom layout and organisation,
- classroom management and discipline, and
- the recording of monthly progress.

Recurring recommendations in inspectors' reports suggest that the professional competence of newly qualified teachers requires further development and improvement in the following areas:

- the clarity of teaching objectives, both long-term and short-term;
- the variety and suitability of teaching methods: whole-class, group, and individual learning;
- the structure and pace of lessons;
- assessment procedures, and the monitoring and recording of learning;
- awareness of the extent to which pupils are on task and learning purposefully; and
- the quality of learning outcomes, including written work.

8.3 Conclusion

The most important resources in primary schools are highly qualified and competent teachers. Newly qualified teachers bring energy, enthusiasm and vitality to the teaching profession. The Irish education system has been successful in attracting highly qualified young people to undertake initial teacher education courses. These young teachers are essential to the implementation of educational policy in our schools and in developing our citizens of the future. Initial teacher training provides a basic preparation for a career as a primary teacher. This survey suggests that newly qualified teachers continue their professional development in their probationary year and that experiences during this year are influential in developing professional confidence and competence.

The majority of probationary teachers expressed a sense of personal and professional satisfaction about their teaching experience in the first year. Many teachers' comments suggest that they had matured professionally and were becoming reflective practitioners. As one of the newly qualified teachers wrote,

For me this has been an extremely challenging year. However, having almost finished my probation, I must admit that it has been a wonderful experience and most rewarding. I look forward to many more happy years where I will hopefully make a difference to children's lives.

To date, the Inspectorate's involvement in the probation of newly qualified teachers has served the education system very well. However, the recent establishment of the Teaching Council, under the Teaching Council Act 2001, is likely to alter the Inspectorate's future involvement in the probationary process. The Council is a statutory, self-regulating body with the role of setting and promoting the highest professional standards for primary and post-primary teachers. It is expected that the Council will assume an active role in relation to probation and induction and it is hoped that the findings and recommendations of this report prove informative and helpful as it assumes its function in respect of newly qualified teachers.



Appendices

Appendix 1

1.1 Recognised colleges of education in the State

- St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9
- Mary Immaculate College, Mount Prospect, Limerick
- Coláiste Mhuire, Griffith Avenue, Dublin 9
- Froebel College of Education, Sion Hill, Blackrock, Co. Dublin
- Church of Ireland College of Education, Upper Rathmines Road, Dublin 6

1.2 Other courses in the State recognised for the purposes of employment as a primary teacher

- Higher diploma in arts in primary education (Hibernia College)

1.3 Initial teacher education courses outside the State that are recognised for the purposes of employment as a primary teacher

- Primary teaching degree incorporating a four-year Irish degree (honours) in St Mary's College, Belfast
- Postgraduate certificate in education through the medium of Irish in St Mary's College, Belfast (including Gaeltacht requirements)

1.4 Courses leading to recognised Montessori qualifications in the State

- Full-time three-year academic course in the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) College, Mount St Mary's, Dundrum Road, Dublin 14
- The Bachelor of Arts in Montessori Education and the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Montessori Education from St Niochlas Montessori College, Dún Laoghaire, which are accredited by HETAC

Appendix 2

2.1 Full recognition

A teacher is considered fully recognised if he or she has

- successfully completed a teacher training course in a recognised college of education in the State, or
- otherwise successfully completed in the State a course recognised for the purposes of employment as a primary teacher, or,
- if trained outside the State, has fulfilled all the requisite qualification and Irish-language requirements, and
- fulfilled all appropriate probationary requirements.

2.2 Provisional recognition

A teacher trained outside the State, whether within the European Union or otherwise, whose teaching qualifications have been assessed and accepted by the Department of Education and Science but who does not possess an appropriate Irish-language qualification will be granted, on application, a five-year period of provisional recognition to teach in primary schools. During this period of provisional recognition the teacher will be required to work towards meeting the Irish-language requirements of the Department as set out in Circular 25/00 (parts 2 and 3 and schedule 2). Following a review of the *Scrúdú le haghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge* (SCG), extensions to the five-year limit are now permissible in certain circumstances.

2.3 Restricted recognition

A teacher from another jurisdiction whose teaching qualifications have been assessed and accepted by the Department will be granted restricted recognition giving eligibility to teach in certain categories of special school and in the categories of special classes in mainstream primary schools where Irish is not a curricular requirement. In addition, such teachers are entitled to take up posts in special schools for young offenders and in Youth Encounter projects or special education projects.

Restricted recognition is also available for certain categories of Montessori-trained teachers and for teachers with recognised post-primary teaching qualifications who wish to teach in special schools where a proportion of pupils are of post-primary age and where post-primary programmes are being provided by the school. (See Circular 25/00, parts 4 and 5, for details.)

Appendix 3

3.1 Service as a teacher in a special education setting where Irish is not a curricular requirement

Teachers trained in a recognised college of education in the State, teachers who have otherwise successfully completed a course in the State recognised for the purposes of employment as a primary teacher and certain Montessori-trained teachers may serve their probation in a special school setting or a special class setting within a mainstream school where the full curriculum, with the possible exception of Irish, is taught. The normal service and professional requirements apply.

Subsequently, if a teacher who has served their probationary period in a special education setting wishes to transfer to a mainstream setting where the teaching of Irish is a requirement they must receive a satisfactory additional report from an inspector on their competence in the teaching of Irish. To achieve full recognition this must be completed as soon as possible but at most within two years of taking up such a mainstream position.

3.2 Teachers trained outside the State and Montessori teachers trained in Ireland

General conditions and procedures for the recognition of teachers trained outside the State, including those to whom the terms of EU directive 89/48/EEC apply, are set out in Circular 25/00, “Recognition of Teacher Qualifications for the purpose of Teaching in National Schools.”

Restricted or provisional recognition is awarded to applicant teachers trained outside the State who have already satisfied the Irish-language and all other qualification requirements.

In the case of all other teachers trained abroad whose primary teaching qualifications have been accepted by the Department, a limited form of recognition may be granted to teach in specified appropriate settings. If the teacher has not already satisfactorily completed a probationary period of at least one year outside the State they must undergo the probationary process.

A teacher trained outside the State or a Montessori teacher trained in Ireland who is employed in a setting where the teaching of Irish is a requirement must satisfy the Department of Education and Science that they are competent to teach Irish and to teach the full range of primary school subjects through the medium of Irish before being granted full recognition to teach in mainstream classes in primary schools. Such teachers normally have five years in which to pass the qualifying examination in Irish, the *Scrúdú le haghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge*. On passing the qualifying examination, and in cases where the teacher has already served their probationary period in another jurisdiction, the teacher’s ability to teach Irish will be evaluated by the Inspectorate, and a report pertaining to the teaching of Irish will be submitted to the Department. On passing the qualifying examination in Irish, a teacher who has not satisfactorily completed a probationary period of at least one year outside the State is required to undergo a probationary period. The service and professional requirements for such teachers are similar to those applying to teachers trained in the State.

Appendix 4

Interim reporting template – Inspectorate

Background Details					
Purpose of Report (please tick appropriate box or type "X" if completing electronically)					
Probation		Rule 161.6 (a)		Teacher with Provisional Recognition	
County				Roll no.	
School					
Name of Teacher					
Teacher's PPS No.					
Date(s) of visit(s) leading to this report			Class		No. of pupils

Evaluation of Teacher's Work			
A. Planning, Preparation and Recording of Progress <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Adequacy of class timetable referenced to the specified minimum weekly time framework</i> <i>Clarity of teaching objectives, both long-term and short-term</i> <i>Suitability of objectives: extent of reference to the Primary Curriculum (with due regard for its underlying principles) and the school plan</i> <i>Range and appropriateness of resources</i> <i>Provision for differences in pupil abilities</i> <i>Quality and effectiveness of progress records</i> 			
Experiencing significant difficulty	Scope for development	Competent practice	Optimal level of practice

B. Classroom Management and Organisation			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Promotion of good discipline and behaviour</i> <i>Caring relationship with pupils – use of praise and positive feedback</i> <i>Overall attractiveness of environment (layout, quality of display including pupils' work, interest centres etc.)</i> <i>Accessibility and use of resources</i> <i>Management of SNA support (where appropriate)</i> 			
Experiencing significant difficulty	Scope for development	Competent practice	Optimal level of practice

C. Quality of Teaching in Curriculum Areas

1. *Variety and suitability of teaching methods-whole class, group or individual learning*
2. *Match of work to pupil ability with particular reference to attention levels and receptiveness of pupils*
3. *Communication skills e.g. questioning, explaining, responding, and quality of relationships and interactions between teacher and pupils and pupils with each other*
4. *Assessment procedures, monitoring and recording of learning*
5. *Structure and pace of lessons*
6. *Regard for continuity and progression*

Experiencing significant difficulty	Scope for development	Competent practice	Optimal level of practice

D. Quality of Pupils' Learning in Curriculum Areas

1. *Extent to which pupils are on task and working purposefully*
2. *Range and suitability of material covered*
3. *Pupils' knowledge of subject matter, skills and attitudes*
4. *Quality of learning outcomes, including written work*

Experiencing significant difficulty	Scope for development	Competent practice	Optimal level of practice

E. General comments and summary of advice given (this section will expand as necessary)

Signature of Inspector _____ Date _____

Appendix 5

Inspectorate code of practice and procedure for review of inspections

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science is committed to evaluating 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), developed in accordance with the provisions of section 13 (8) of the Education Act 1998, sets out general principles and guidelines under which members of the Inspectorate engage in the process of evaluation and reporting. In essence, the code seeks to make clear the professional standards to which the Inspectorate works.

Among the general principles of the code of practice, the Inspectorate is committed to

- the consistent application of evaluation criteria and objectivity, reliability and reliance on first-hand evidence based on observation,
- courtesy, respect and sensitivity towards both individual teachers and the school, and clarity in the manner in which findings are communicated, and
- acknowledging that the pupils are the ultimate beneficiaries of the evaluation process.

In accordance with section 13 (9) of the Education Act, the Inspectorate published the *Procedure for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers* (2002). Under the review procedure a teacher, or the board of a school, may request the Chief Inspector to review any inspection carried out by an inspector that affects the teacher or the school. The review procedure applies to all inspections affecting schools or teachers, including all evaluations and reports arising from such inspections and evaluations, other than those required under existing procedures for teachers experiencing professional difficulties.

A review of an inspection leads to one of three possible outcomes:

- the inspection or inspection report is upheld.
- an element or elements of the inspection are regarded as not in keeping with the Professional Code of Practice on Evaluation and Reporting for the Inspectorate, or the inspection report is amended and reissued.
- the inspection or inspection report is withdrawn and a further inspection or part inspection, as appropriate, is carried out by an inspector or inspectors other than the inspector or inspectors involved in the original inspection.

Appendix 6

Rule 126 (updated): preparation for school work (Rules for National Schools under the Department of Education, 1965)

Teachers are required to make adequate written preparation for their school work as follows:

- to prepare, at the beginning of each school year or school term, a long-term programme of work in each subject, in accordance with the Primary School Curriculum, the school plan and the learning needs of his/her pupils. The long-term programme of work to include a class timetable, outlining the weekly allotment of time for each subject;
- to prepare in advance a fortnightly short-term plan of work, or in the case of probationary teachers a weekly short-term plan.

In the case of class teachers, the portion of the curriculum dealt with during the month should be noted in a monthly progress record at the close of every month. The format of the monthly progress record will be agreed at school level. The progress record is an important school record, the custody of which is one of the duties of the school principal. It should be available in the school at all times during the school year to which it relates and for at least one complete school year after the end of that year.

Teachers, other than class teachers, are required:

- to plan appropriate learning programmes in respect of their pupils; and
- to maintain group or individual pupil progress records, as appropriate.

Appendix 7

7.1 Full-time Education Centres

Athlone Education Centre, Moydrum Road, Athlone, Co. Westmeath
Blackrock Education Centre, Kill Avenue, Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin
Carrick-on-Shannon Education Centre, Dublin Road, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim
Clare Education Centre, Government Offices, Kilrush Road, Ennis, Co. Clare
Cork Education Centre, The Rectory, Western Road, Cork
Donegal Education Centre, Milltown, Donegal
Drumcondra Education Centre, Upper Drumcondra Road, Dublin 9
Dublin West Education Centre, Old Blessington Road, Tallaght, Dublin 24
Galway Education Centre, Cluain Mhuire, Monivea Road, Galway
Kildare Education Centre, Friary Road, Kildare
Kilkenny Education Centre, Seville Lodge, Callan Road, Kilkenny
Laois Education Centre, Block Road, Port Laoise, Co. Laois
Limerick Education Centre, 1st Floor, Parkway Shopping Centre, Dublin Road, Limerick
Mayo Education Centre, Westport Road, Castlebar, Co. Mayo
Monaghan Education Centre, Knockaconny, Armagh Road, Monaghan
Navan Education Centre, Athlumney, Navan, Co. Meath
Sligo Education Centre, Ballinode, Sligo
Tralee Education Centre, Dromtacker, Tralee, Co. Kerry
Waterford Education Centre, Newtown Road, Waterford
West Cork Education Centre, The Square Shopping Centre, Dunmanway, Co. Cork
Wexford Education Centre, Milehouse Road, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford

7.2 Part-time Education Centres

Carlow Education Centre, Kilkenny Road, Carlow
Cavan Education Centre, Main Street, Cavan
Dingle Education Centre, an Chúilín, an Daingean, Co. Chiarraí
Dundalk Education Centre, 16 Ashgrove, Avenue Road, Dundalk, Co. Louth
Thurles Education Centre, PO Box 67, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary
Tuam Education Centre, Old Junior School, Dublin Road, Tuam, Co. Galway
Tarbert Education Centre, Comprehensive School, Tarbert, Co. Kerry
Ionad Múinteoirí Chonamara agus Árann, f/ch Muintearas, Tír an Fhia, Leitir Móir, Co. na Gaillimhe
Ionad Oideachais Ghort an Choirce, Gort an Choirce, Do. Dhún na nGall

Appendix 8

8.1 National Pilot Project on Induction

The National Pilot Project on Induction for Newly Qualified Teachers (primary pillar) has as its main objective the systematic support of newly qualified teachers in their first year of teaching, thus laying the foundations for subsequent professional growth and development. A central feature of the induction programme is the promotion of a whole-school approach to supporting newly qualified teachers.

The national project is managed by a steering committee consisting of representatives of the Department of Education and Science, teachers' unions, educational institutions (St Patrick's College and the National University of Ireland, Dublin), and the Education Centre network. The co-ordinator of the primary pillar of the project is based at St Patrick's College (Drumcondra), Dublin.

Approximately eighty newly qualified teachers at primary level participated in the first two phases of the pilot project, representing, as far as possible, the geographical spread of various school types and sizes in the greater Dublin area. Newly qualified teachers are offered support at school level by experienced teachers, referred to as mentors. These teachers undertake professional development training for their role as mentors and have been allocated release time to engage in supporting activities for the newly qualified teachers. Release time is also allocated to the school principals involved in the programme.

Release time is provided to the newly qualified teachers involved in the programme for planning, observation of experienced teachers teaching, being observed by mentors, and professional development in the areas of classroom management, differentiation, working with parents, and on-line training.

8.2 The Beginning Teachers Network: a pilot programme of support for beginning teachers

Coláiste Mhuire (Marino), Dublin, runs a pilot induction programme entitled the Beginning Teachers Network (BTN). The programme began in September 2002 and aims to support recently qualified (postgraduate) teachers from Coláiste Mhuire through the first year in their teaching career and to link the postgraduate course directly with the first year in the profession.

Beginning teachers are divided into clusters according to the classes they teach and proximity to their local Education Centre. The cluster groups meet monthly throughout the year and are facilitated by an experienced teacher or teacher educator. Participants are encouraged to work together to share ideas, to plan, to solve problems and to develop skills and competence relevant to the first year in the teaching profession. The role of the facilitator is to enable the members to learn and to develop their skills in a collegial way. Participants are also given an opportunity to attend two half-day workshops on teaching and learning topics, which they identify for further input and analysis.

