This term’s newsletter is jam-packed with information as we enter what promises to be a particularly significant year for education in Northern Ireland. There’s a ‘Back to School’ message from the Department of Education, an update from the Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team, a round-up of the key issues affecting schools in 2009/10 and a summary of the Partnership Management Board’s training and support programme for primary, post-primary and special schools. This edition of Linked also includes the latest news and updates from a range of partner organisations, as well as articles on School Development Planning and School Development Days, Primary Languages, Literacy interventions and the 2009 Teaching Awards.

As always, we welcome your comments and correspondence. Please contact us at info@pmbni.org.uk. Linked is also available online at www.nicurriculum.org.uk.

Big Training Calendar has gone live!

The Big Training Calendar - an innovative online directory listing details of forthcoming training courses and support events for teaching professionals working in Northern Ireland - was launched on 1st September by the Partnership Management Board.

This new web-based facility allows principals, senior managers and classroom teachers to view forthcoming training and support events being run by CASS, CCEA, C2k, DE, and RTU relating to the revised curriculum, assessment and reporting, leadership and management and professional development.

Users can now access the Big Training Calendar at school via a NI Curriculum icon which has been placed on their C2k desktop. Users can also access the calendar outside school by visiting www.nicurriculum.org.uk and clicking on ‘Big Training Calendar’.

For security reasons all users will need to use their existing C2k username and password to gain access to the calendar.

Users will be able to search the calendar for courses and support events using a combination of drop down menus and a key word search function located on the home page.

Please note that courses cannot be booked using the Big Training Calendar - however full contact details for each training provider will be included at the end of each entry.

The calendar will continue to evolve throughout the year. A feedback button is located on the homepage and users are actively encouraged to submit comments and suggestions as often as they wish, as these will help shape future developments of the calendar.

Information about the Big Training Calendar was emailed to all schools’ and teachers’ C2k email accounts late last month, prior to it being launched.
This new term signals the start of the final year of implementation of the revised curriculum across all grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland. From this month onwards, all pupils of compulsory school age will be taught through a revised common statutory curriculum which will provide them with the education and skills they need to prepare them for life and work in the 21st Century.

The revised curriculum aims to ensure a central focus on raising standards and on promoting literacy and numeracy through the emphasis on Communication and Using Mathematics; to better prepare young people for all aspects of life and work; to provide a greater emphasis on developing the skills they need; and to give schools greater flexibility to determine the delivery of the curriculum in a way that best suits the needs of their pupils.

The Department of Education (DE) knows that time is needed to fully embed progress in planning and teaching practice to deliver the revised curriculum. Therefore, DE and ETI will continue to focus on supporting teachers and principals, as well as on ensuring that every child receives the best possible education.

To help all schools deliver the revised curriculum a wide range of assistance is available, mainly from Education and Library Boards and CCEA through a phased programme of training for teachers, teaching materials and support.

An overview of the range of implementation support available to primary, post-primary and special S schools this academic year can be found on pages 2-3. Details of training and support events relating to the revised curriculum, assessment and reporting, leadership and management and professional development can now be accessed through the Big Training Calendar. This online directory went live on 1st September. For further information please see article opposite.

Primary schools are now receiving additional funding for classroom assistants and materials to help them meet the particular requirements of the curriculum for Years 1 and 2. Continued support will be available as teachers gain experience of implementation. This will focus on dissemination of good practice.

The revised curriculum provides a flexible and broad framework for schools and teachers. At its heart is literacy and numeracy, which should permeate all areas of learning. While many of our young people achieve good outcomes in literacy and numeracy, there are still too many who leave school without the qualifications or literacy and numeracy skills they need in today’s social and economic climate.

The gap in outcomes between the highest and lowest achievers, and between the most and least disadvantaged, is far too wide. Almost 12,000 young people leave school every year without having achieved the equivalent of 5 good GCSE passes (Grades A*-C) including English and Maths. At primary level almost 80% of children reach the expected levels of literacy and numeracy for their ages. But 1 in 5 children move into post-primary with poor standards of literacy and numeracy; that is over 4,500 children every year who move into post-primary education ill-equipped and probably destined to struggle. On average only 26% of pupils entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) will achieve 5 good GCSEs including English and Maths, whereas 58% of those without FSM will achieve at this level; proportionately more than twice as many.

The evidence suggests that children who leave school with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills face a lifetime of difficulty and disadvantage. That is why raising standards in literacy and numeracy, and tackling underachievement, is a key priority.

The Department is developing a revised literacy and numeracy strategy, which will support the emphasis on literacy and numeracy in the revised curriculum. Officials are currently reviewing the draft, issued for consultation from June to November 2008, in light of the feedback received.

The strategy aims to ensure that all young people leaving school having achieved the appropriate standards in literacy and numeracy. It aims to raise standards of achievement for all pupils and narrow the gap between the highest and lowest achievers and the most and least disadvantaged.

The strategy is based on existing good practice within the school system. The starting point is high quality classroom teaching of literacy and numeracy for all pupils. Key elements include: early identification and support if a child is having difficulties with literacy and/or numeracy; encouraging greater parental involvement in a child’s education and a greater emphasis on the effective use of data in supporting teaching and learning.

The Department is also working with the Irish-medium sector to develop a literacy and numeracy strategy that best meets the particular needs of the sector.

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This academic year all educational support bodies will be continuing to work together through the Partnership Management Board (PMB) to ensure that school leaders and teachers have access to appropriate support and development opportunities to fully implement the revised curriculum in their classrooms.

**Primary programme**

September 2009 and beyond will see the continued implementation of the revised curriculum in primary schools across the province. A wide range of support will once again be available to school leaders and teachers with a marked emphasis on meeting the identified needs of individual schools and teachers as they embed revised curriculum practice.

Autumn will see the last phase of centre-based year group training which has been available to all teachers in the early stages of the curriculum development. Year 3/4/7 teachers will have the opportunity to attend Day 4 of their specific programme. Autumn will also see the roll out of the next phase of support for assessment and reporting. This will include a focus on Year 4/7 InCAS and Annual Report Training, subject to legislation, available through face-to-face workshops and online.

The differentiated needs of individual schools and teachers will be supported in a range of ways including; link officer support, cluster groups, tailored school-based support on issues such as Learning and Teaching Policy and Planning for Progression. Foundation Stage teachers will have access to a menu of support aimed at addressing stated needs.

School leaders will continue to be a priority and they will have the opportunity to come together to share practice and discuss ongoing developments through Leading Learning Conferences and issue-based cluster group meetings.

An interesting innovation in 2009/10 will be the advent of online support for teachers new to a Key Stage, whether through first appointment or where they have been deployed to teach a class in a phase for which they have not received training. This resource will be based on the successful work which has been done over the past three years to support those teachers who are not in full-time employment in the primary sector. This will result in the production of sustainable support resources which are always available and accessible.

**Special S programme**

All 22 Special S schools in Northern Ireland have access to the mainstream implementation programme for primary and post-primary schools. However, in recognition of the specific issues arising for the teachers and support staff of pupils with severe learning difficulties, the Special S implementation programme will continue to run in 2009/2010.

It will focus on issues raised in the recent ETI evaluation of the implementation programme, and those raised by the schools themselves through the online survey carried out earlier this year.

In May 2009, the programme began with a regional event for the Special S school leaders. This gave them the opportunity to consider the detail and implications of various key documents issued recently by DE and ETI. The online survey findings highlighted an appreciation of opportunities to share existing practice, and to take forward professional debate within and across their schools. For some, this had been the first opportunity for individual class teachers to meet colleagues from similar schools across Northern Ireland and to compare practice in teaching and supporting pupils with very specific individual needs.

The CDs and DVDs prepared by the associate teachers have been widely used as a discussion tool within the schools, and it was agreed with the principals that associate teachers would again be recruited and released to work with the implementation group over 2009/2010.

In the autumn, curriculum leaders will have the opportunity to attend a two-day training event in the use of video conferencing, and will then be supported by CASS, Special Education and C2k officers in using this between clusters of Special S teachers to share practice on identified topics. This will be particularly useful for teachers working with pupils with low incident syndromes and conditions, who may have very individual needs. As before, teachers within these clusters will be encouraged to video developing practice in their schools, and in March 2010 there will be a celebratory event to launch these materials, making them available to all Special S schools in Northern Ireland.
Post-primary programme

During the last academic year, the support programme for the implementation of the revised curriculum in post-primary schools focused on the work of the Curriculum Leaders Team - a team composed of a cross-section of teachers with links to the Senior Leadership Team. The focus for the programme was the dissemination of practice as a tool for professional development.

The most recent conferences, which took place late last term, stressed the importance of dissemination and reflection on current practice as a tool to spark professional dialogue and ultimately enhance skills and widen the pedagogical repertoire. The shared experiences ranged from pupils’ peer evaluation, to the use of data to inform classroom practice. Clear connections were made between the quality of teaching and learning, curriculum provision and raising standards for all pupils. Teachers engaged in thorough self-evaluation and identified, without complacency, their areas of strength as well as the gaps in their provision.

Under the impetus of the Curriculum Leader’s Team, schools are now demonstrating their ability to manage change, take responsibility for their own professional development, and review and shape the classroom experiences which they are offering our young people. They are on track to create the thinkers and risk takers needed for the 21st century.

In the coming year the main emphasis of the post-primary programme will be on evaluating the impact of the curriculum, on gathering evidence in relation to pupils’ progress and tracking the development of their skills in the light of changed practices. This was clearly identified in the recent ETI evaluation of the implementation arrangements as a necessary feature of the next phase of professional development.

Over the coming months Curriculum Leaders will engage in school-based action research with the view to gathering the necessary evidence to evaluate the impact of the changes and plan future actions. This will culminate in a dissemination conference in the summer term of next year where participants will share their findings with colleagues.

The programme will also be offered to middle leaders as key players in the monitoring process as well as Curriculum Leaders within each of the Area Learning Communities. The remainder of the programme will be based on a menu reflecting the needs of the schools emanating from the second self-evaluation questionnaire.

CCEA programme

The focus for this school year will be on rolling out the next phase of support for assessment and reporting while continuing to provide a range of resources to support the revised curriculum.

For primary schools, face-to-face training for InCAS and annual reporting will be offered during September and early October 2009 to any new and/or replacement Year 4 and 7 teachers and to teachers who were not able to attend the earlier training sessions. In addition, 400 Year 4 and Year 7 teachers have opted for an online training option via a Virtual Learning Environment which CCEA will provide throughout September 2009 over nine sessions. Information seminars will be held for school principals in October 2009 along with a detailed programme of seminars for CASS Officers, Educational Psychologists and Teacher Training Colleges during autumn and winter.

At Key Stage 3, teachers will have access during the year to a range of optional workshops and online support for the introduction of the cross-curricular skills of Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT.

A new CCEA ICT Accreditation Scheme is being offered from 1st September 2009. This scheme is intended for pupils at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and provides teachers with a framework to develop and enhance pupils’ ICT skills and award them at the end of each Key Stage with a certificate detailing their level of ICT competence.

During 2009/10 there will be a range of curriculum support materials made available to schools. At primary, this includes the continuation of the ‘Wise Up and Think’ storybooks series, to promote Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities for the Foundation Stage, completion of the suite of ‘Living.Learning.Together’ materials for Personal Development and Mutual Understanding, and Thematic Units for Years 3 and 4.

At Key Stage 3, resources and programmes are focused on supporting STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects and Learning for Life and Work. This will include publication of FEST 2010, Euro-zone, guidance for Home Economics, and Thematic Units in Learning for Life and Work for pupils with statements of moderate and severe learning difficulties.

In 2009/10 there will be an increased emphasis on providing support for the Irish Medium (IM) sector. This will include the translation and adaptation of existing curriculum support materials which will be despatched to IM schools over the coming year, as well as the development of a number of bespoke support packages and, at post-primary, provision of translated commercial textbooks for a number of subjects.

The statutory Reading and General Maths InCAS assessments are now available in Irish Medium, as are the optional assessments - Spelling, Mental Arithmetic and Attitudes.
Round-up of the key educational issues affecting schools this academic year

Revised reporting arrangements
Subject to Assembly scrutiny and legislative procedures, regulations setting out revised reporting arrangements will come into operation from 1 October 2009. The Department will advise schools in more detail about the provisions of the regulations at that stage.

The regulations will bring the requirements for reporting to parents into line with the revised curriculum and will set out: the information which is to be provided annually; additional information which is to be provided at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3; and additional information to be provided at the end of Key Stage 2, Key Stage 4 and the end of sixth form, in terms of a summative record of achievement.

As the consultation on the draft regulations highlighted the need for further work to be done on the scope of the formative record of progress and achievement for reporting purposes, the new regulations do not include any reporting requirements in relation to this. Further work will be undertaken to make sure that a statutory requirement on this reflects a shared understanding of what constitutes a formative record and that this is workable for schools.

This work will include direct feedback from principals. When it is complete, the Department of Education plans to make further regulations to provide for reporting in relation to the formative record of progress and achievement, and the maintenance of pupil records on this basis. Until then the provisions of the Education (Pupil Records and Reporting) (Transitional) Regulations (NI) 2007 will continue to apply in relation to the formative record of progress and achievement, including the provisions relating to the maintenance of pupil records and their transmission between schools.

Every School a Good School
The Education Minister launched Every School a Good School - a policy for school improvement on 30 April 2009. Every School a Good School (ESaGS) is a pupil-centred policy, with equality and improvement at its heart, and is based on the premise that every school is capable of improvement. This reflects the belief that schools, through honest and open engagement in self-evaluation, using effectively the wide range of data and information available to them, are best placed to identify areas for improvement and to implement changes that can bring about better outcomes for pupils. Good schools, indeed most schools, are already doing the things advocated in the policy. The aim is to build on, and disseminate, this good practice, so that every young person has the same opportunity to succeed.

The policy focuses on the following key areas:
• effective leadership and an ethos of aspiration and high achievement;
• high quality teaching and learning;
• tackling the barriers to learning that many young people face;
• embedding a culture of self-evaluation and self-assessment and of using performance and other information to effect improvement;
• focusing clearly on support to help schools improve - with clarity too about the place of more formal interventions where there is a risk that the quality of education offered in a school is not as high as it should be; and
• increasing engagement between schools, parents and families, recognising the powerful influence they and local communities exercise on educational outcomes.

There will be a clear emphasis on high-quality support (through ESA) to help schools improve. In cases where there is evidence that pupils are not receiving a high-quality education there will be a need for more formal intervention. This is expected to be rare, but is an important aspect of the School Improvement Policy.

The School Improvement Policy will be complemented and supported by the wider educational policies, particularly those relating to curriculum and assessment; literacy and numeracy; and support for children and young people with additional educational needs.

The Department is working with the education support bodies as they support schools to implement Every School a Good School from September 2009. An implementation plan, setting out key actions, targets and timescales, has been published as part of the revised policy and updates on progress will be available on the Department’s website www.deni.gov.uk. Schools are encouraged to reflect on the policy, and consider how, with support from the education support bodies, they might give effect to its vision as they plan for improvement.

Entitlement Framework and Area Learning Communities
The Entitlement Framework (EF) is an integral part of young people’s education within the revised curriculum at Key Stage 4 and post-16. The target date for the full implementation of the EF is September 2013. From that date, schools will be required to provide pupils with access to a minimum number of courses at Key Stage 4 (current target 24) and minimum number of courses at post-16 (current target 27). In both cases at least one-third of the courses must be general (academic) and at least one-third applied (vocational/professional/technical). The remaining one-third of courses is at the discretion of each school and provides schools with an opportunity to develop a unique and distinctive curricular offer. Of equal importance to the range of courses is the coherence of the offer which should enable young people to choose from a package of courses that leads to progression to further education, higher education, training and employment.
The EF will guarantee all post-primary pupils, age 14 and above, greater choice and flexibility by providing them with access to a wide range of learning opportunities best suited to their needs, aptitudes and interests, irrespective of where they live or the school they attend and will help them fulfil their potential and become active contributors to society and the economy.

There are currently 29 Area Learning Communities (ALCs) comprising of schools from all management types working together collaboratively to deliver access to the Entitlement Framework. All ALCs have action plans in place and the targets outlined in these should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-Bound (SMART) and should be reflected in individual School Development Plans.

**Extended Schools**

The Extended Schools programme is focused on reducing differentials and improving the life chances of those children and young people who have limited access to current services, particularly from deprived and disadvantaged areas. Launched in May 2006, over £30 million of funding has been provided through the Extended Schools programme over the last three years allowing schools serving areas of the highest social deprivation to provide for a wide range of services and activities outside of the traditional school day.

The Minister has made available the necessary funding to allow the 2009/10 programme to continue at the same level as in previous years. This has provided the certainty that schools need to continue the development and maintain momentum of this important programme in 2009/10 with 480 schools currently benefiting from a further £10 million of Extended Schools funding this financial year.

A recent Education and Training Inspectorate evaluation update, following on from an initial evaluation in November 2006, records considerable progress in schools in delivering the aims of the programme.

**Transfer 2010**

Following the Minister’s 2 February 2009 statement to the Assembly, guidance on arrangements for Transfer 2010 was published under Article 30 of the Education Order 2006.

This guidance included recommendations on admissions criteria that were subject to consultation until 27 April 2009. An Equality Impact Assessment of the Transfer 2010 guidance was also subject to consultation, ending on 4 June 2009. Summary reports of the responses received to both consultations can be viewed on the Department of Education’s website.

The final Transfer 2010 guidance was issued on 25 June 2009, with the publication of final guidance announced to the Assembly on 30 June 2009. The guidance is available at [www.deni.gov.uk](http://www.deni.gov.uk).

This guidance enables school Boards of Governors to set admissions criteria for publication around December 2009/January 2010. Although academic admissions criteria are not explicitly prohibited, it is the Department of Education’s policy not to include such criteria in its menu of recommended admissions criteria, which are set out in the document. The Department will prepare further information about Transfer 2010, including material aimed at helping parents and their children understand how Transfer 2010 will operate from their perspective. The Department will also be issuing a circular for schools in the new school year, and this will add to the information contained in the final Transfer 2010 Guidance.
The wisdom, ingenuity and passion of Northern Ireland’s teachers, heads, teaching assistants, governors and sustainable schools were recognised at the 2009 Teaching Awards ceremony, hosted by BBC TV presenter Donna Traynor, at Belfast’s Waterfront Hall. The winners from Northern Ireland will join the champions from England and Wales at the star-studded Teaching Awards national final in London on Sunday 25 October 2009. The celebration will be televised later that day on BBC2. Nominations for the Teaching Awards 2010 are now open. For further information or to nominate please go online at www.teachingawards.com.

Meet Northern Ireland’s Award Winners...

**Terry Rodgers**
*St. Colmcille’s Primary School, Ballymena*
*Teacher of the Year (Primary)*

Terry Rodgers’ reputation precedes him. Parents move their children to St Colmcille’s from other schools, in the hope he will end up teaching them. The school opened just three years ago, but already is renowned - due in no small part to Terry’s outstanding contribution.

Pupils look forward to Terry’s lessons because they are never boring and no two days are the same. It is not unknown to find him wearing an apron and knee-deep in cooking activities, or dressed in a costume to make learning real. One year he secured funding for a project with Bombardier, the aircraft manufacturers, which resulted in the whole class experiencing air travel on a free flight. The former pupil who nominated him said: “We had great respect for him and would have done anything for him. Learning was fun and interactive!”

Colleagues say that Terry was “born to teach”, though he considers himself more as a “facilitator to learning”. His classes always have a “buzz of excitement” about them, and his pupils are keen to learn. They leave school for the day and take their enthusiasm home, wanting to watch factual television programmes with their parents or to do some research on the internet.

Before receiving new pupils into his class, Terry always tries to find out everything about them, both academically and socially. He is completely inclusive in his approach, ensuring that children with special needs or a medical condition receive the appropriate support.

Beyond normal lessons, Terry organises activities for pupils, including tennis, basketball, African drumming, football, cooking, art, and French. He also leads workshops for parents to encourage their involvement in children’s education.

His teaching is held up as a model of good practice by his local Education and Library Board and by school inspectors, who said the quality of his work was “outstanding” and “very impressive.” Colleagues say his impact on the school is “immeasurable.” Judges described Terry as “exceptional.” “He enjoys an excellent reputation and deservedly so,” they said.
Deirdre Scarlett
Priory Integrated College, Holywood
Teacher of the Year (Post-Primary)

Deirdre has worked at Priory College for nearly 20 years, and has risen to be a member of the senior leadership team. She demonstrates excellence in all aspects of her work and regularly goes well beyond the call of duty.

She makes use of a wide range of teaching strategies, ranging from the use of ICT, to group investigations, role play and guest speakers.

Pupils understand her commitment to their learning. One said: “She is a wonderful teacher as well as a wonderful person. She will do anything for her pupils. There is no other teacher quite like her.”

Deirdre has led a team of staff designing and rolling out individual learning programmes for pupils, initially in Year 8. The aim was to ensure that all pupils at Key Stage 3 were exposed to a wide range of learning experiences.

As head of sixth form she regularly meets students and parents, to advise on course options, and runs extra business classes offering students additional qualifications. Deirdre also helps students set up mini-companies and organises trips to local businesses so they can gain valuable experience.

She constantly looks for relevant and stimulating programmes of study for her students, and introduced Applied Business and Applied ICT, rather than Business Studies and ICT, because she believed these subjects were more suited to her students, and offered better pathways to further education and the world of work.

A colleague said: “Deirdre is the most dedicated teacher I have come across in my 32 years in the teaching profession. She is an expert teacher, a supportive colleague, a leader and mentor and completely committed, reliable and dependable.”

Elaine Loughran
St Joseph's Primary School, Antrim
Special Needs Teacher of the Year

When Elaine Loughran's head teacher expressed concerns about the cost of specialist training for dyslexia, she invited teachers from other schools to the sessions, and generated enough income to reduce the outlay by half.

Elaine’s commitment to special needs education and the children in her care is exemplary. Her caring manner engages even the most withdrawn child and her innovative teaching strategies enable all children to make progress and experience success. She is completely focussed on the needs of every child.

Elaine’s classroom is calm but has a healthy noise level with happy and expressive children keen to share their ideas and make contributions. Elaine uses music effectively to encourage concentration, to motivate, and to bring humour and laughter to the classroom. As a result, her pupils are highly motivated and supportive of each other.

She is also tuned in to pupils’ social and emotional difficulties, and has worked with children who have suffered trauma. Many children have escaped exclusion because of Elaine's exceptional ability to calm difficult situations and integrate them. Her Super Learning Days engage parents, with whom she enjoys good relationships.

Elaine also has the respect of her colleagues, who feel supported by her. One said: “Elaine carries everyone, not just the children but also the staff.” Judges said: “Elaine's drive and commitment in working with children with special educational needs are quite amazing.”
Dr Michael Dobbins  
Foyle View School, Londonderry  
Head Teacher of the Year (Post-Primary)

For the past nine years, Michael has been head of Foyle View School, for children with severe learning difficulties, ranging from complex medical conditions and challenging behaviour, to those on the autistic spectrum. His motto is: “The best for all, from each the best” and it is a philosophy he expects everyone at the school to follow.

In the past six years, Michael’s main project has been setting up the Pennyburn Inclusive Play trail on the school’s site, obtaining funding from the Lottery, banks and local organisations to realise his dream. He wanted pupils with special needs to be able to access a wide range of equipment and to be able to play with others. He has also set up a garden for growing vegetables and flowers, a valuable teaching and learning activity, as well as a possible source of income.

Michael leads by example, going into classrooms regularly, and has an open door policy for pupils, staff and parents. Colleagues say there is a ‘very positive buzz’ around the school because of his approachability. He sees Foyle View as a learning school, where trainee teachers and learning assistants receive the opportunity to learn from experienced staff; trainees from Europe and the United States have been admitted.

A colleague said: “Michael has a big heart, a willing spirit and a creative mind. He is an ambassador for education.” Under his leadership, pupils have been rewarded for art, cookery, recycling and sporting achievement. Meanwhile, the school’s accolades include the UNICEF Rights Respecting School Award 2008 and the Silver Health Promotion Award 2008.

Judges said: “Michael clearly illustrates his great depth of passion and knowledge in the whole area of special needs and inclusion.”

Fiona Martin  
Hamiltonsbawn Primary School, Armagh  
Head Teacher of the Year (Primary)

Fiona Martin is very aware that not all children are academic, but she encourages each one to participate and make the most of their school experience. She believes that lots of music and drama in a school promotes self-esteem and confidence in children.

Pupils, parents and staff alike love Fiona for the care and kindness she shows to each of them. They say that nothing is too much trouble for her and she is always on hand if people need her.

The school is an amalgamation of three schools in South Armagh. After 12 years working in the area, Fiona has gained the confidence and respect of all who work with her. The school motto now is “small enough to care, large enough to matter.”

Judges found a caring and happy environment which promotes a Christian ethos, where every child is valued and encouraged to work hard to reach their full potential. Fiona is fully committed to the children’s development and leads by example, ensuring that there is a high level of teaching and learning taking place in the school.

As a leader, Fiona is supportive of her staff. She keeps them fully involved in the implementation of policies, and encourages them to attend relevant courses to promote their professional development. Fiona is responsible for the school development plan, where she sets out priorities for development, sets targets and allocates funding appropriately.

She believes in rewarding good work, and monthly awards are presented to the pupils for endeavour, handwriting, ICT, good behaviour, numeracy and independent writing. The results for P4 and P7 are consistently above the Northern Ireland average every year. Fiona has promoted a number of initiatives, including the Partnership Scheme and Catch-up Maths programme.

A colleague said that Fiona "leads by example, is assertive but approachable and is always open to discussion.” Judges said Fiona was a “highly committed and very energetic leader.” “She is a person who remains calm and who asks herself each day ‘has every child in my school done well?’” they said.
Among Joanne Murray’s many accolades are several awards for her work using technology in the classroom and her methods are to be featured in a new book about ICT in learning by an American educationalist.

No-one who has worked with Joanne can be surprised by her success. She is described as a “wonderful” classroom teacher, who knows how to bring the best out of her pupils. Joanne is constantly seeking ways in which ICT can be used in the curriculum, and as a result of her efforts the school is seen as a leader in the use of ICT in Northern Ireland.

She was one of the first teachers in the school to use an interactive whiteboard and quickly realised its potential. She uses techniques such as ‘Creativity through Digital Video’, mediascapes, Wiki, MP3 players and GPS technology daily with pupils and has just begun to explore how learning and teaching can be enhanced through the use of web2 technology. She inspires the whole school staff by demonstrating how effectively technology can be used to motivate pupils.

A colleague said: “When Joanne attends a course, I always wonder what new ideas she will come back with and look forward to being able to discuss how we can take advantage of the opportunities that exist for our pupils and staff.”

Joanne’s enthusiasm is legendary. She is regularly invited to speak at educational conferences and has trained Cookstown Primary’s staff to have the same confidence in applying ICT as she has.

One teacher said: “There can be little doubt that Joanne Murray’s work is ground breaking. Her preferred learning and teaching pedagogy is well ahead of time.”

When Patricia McManus retired in June, it signalled the end of a wonderful chapter in the life of Rathmore Primary school. Mrs McManus has taught at the school - on and off - for 38 years, taking on a variety of roles, ranging from maths coordinator, year group and key stage coordinator. She has spearheaded initiatives, and led the school through various changes in the curriculum, developing resources for the teaching of numeracy.

Mrs McManus also saw early on the potential of ICT in primary teaching. Colleagues describe her as “passionate about learning”; making every lesson, in whatever subject, fun and engaging.

But it is not just the pupils in her own school who have benefited from her expertise. Mrs McManus has been involved in disseminating good practice in other primaries in her local Education and Library Board. She helped to shape the Northern Ireland Numeracy Strategy which was published in 1999, and has since informed the classroom methods and approaches of hundreds of teachers.

She has mentored and trained teachers, and has never been afraid of questioning her own teaching style, by asking herself and others “why did we do it like that?” or “how could we do it better?”

Thanks to her influence, parents too have increased their understanding of how they can nurture their children academically, and the importance of the ‘home, school, child triangle’. One parent said: “I could not have wished my child to have a better teacher than Mrs McManus.” Several told judges how delighted they were to discover their child would be taught by such an experienced and admirable practitioner.

Judges noted that while she may have been in the job almost four decades, she has a significant “interest in and enthusiasm for new ways of teaching and, more important, new ways of enabling children to learn more effectively.”

Northern Ireland’s Teaching Awards winners also included: Outstanding New Teacher of the Year - Clare Campbell, St Patrick’s College, Maghera; Teaching Assistant of the Year - Linda Black, Cookstown Primary; Governor of the Year - Rosie Mulholland, Gaelscoil Gheann Darach, Crumlin; and The DCSF Award for Sustainable Schools - Gracehill Primary, Ballymena.
Effective school development planning and the good use of school development days are central to school improvement.

Two recent Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) evaluation reports\(^1\) show that where effective school development and staff development are integral parts of the school culture they contribute positively to staff motivation, the quality of learning and teaching and the standards which the learners attain. In these cases, there is good integration between the priorities identified in the School Development Plan (SDP) and the allocation of School Development Days (SDDs).

Both reports indicate that in almost all of the schools surveyed school development and staff development have adopted similar priorities; planning for and improving educational provision through the revised curriculum and linking the use of SDDs to the role of PRSD (professional review and staff development) in supporting and enhancing the professional development of the staff to meet the priorities.

While all schools visited have an SDP in place, there is still variation, four years after it became a statutory requirement\(^2\), in the level of compliance. Many schools are struggling with aspects of the development planning process relating to monitoring and evaluating and the engagement of the school's governors.

The main aspects which the Inspectorate identified for improvement in the SDP process, common in both primary and post-primary sectors, are the need for:

- a more proactive role for governors;
- improved monitoring and evaluation, by the principal, leadership team and staff;
- better consultation arrangements with pupils and parents;
- a stronger focus on teaching and learning outcomes and pupils' attainment;
- improved target-setting in literacy and numeracy; and
- better prioritisation of areas for improvement over the three-year period of the plan.

In more than three quarters of the schools evaluated, where SDDs are used effectively, the priorities include revised curriculum training, the review of performance data and training in the use of educational technologies; all of which are well linked with the school's PRSD objectives.

There is an emerging trend of collaborative work with other schools to share good practice and enhance the teachers' professional development. Not only are priorities identified effectively through inclusive consultation with staff; there is emerging evidence that the views of the pupils are also considered.

While a minority of the schools use external support, such as CASS and other agencies and consultants, to support their programme, effective use is also made of in-house expertise, thus enhancing the sense of collegiality and accountability within these schools.

In the less effective sessions, comprising almost a quarter of those schools evaluated, there are significant shortcomings. Little or no reference is made to staff development in the SDP, nor is the staff development programme strategically linked to the priorities identified in the SDP. In these schools, there is limited consultation with staff regarding the identification of priorities and modes of delivery for staff development and little or no reporting to staff of any evaluations of the effectiveness of staff development, particularly its impact on the pupils' learning.

Furthermore, a number of significant weaknesses have been identified in almost all of the schools including: insufficient strategies in place for the medium to long-term evaluation of staff development; the lack of available specialist advisory support; the perceived lack of strategic coordination between the support agencies; little or no reference to staff development in the Governors’ Annual reports and the failure by many schools to report their planned SD programme to their respective employing authority.
The Inspectorate’s recommendations for improvement in school development and staff development include:

The need for school leaders to:
• develop further the processes of self-evaluation;
• keep the changing context of the school under review in order to manage change such as staffing, budgets, targets and to allocate resources to ensure equality for the pupils;
• improve consultation with parents and pupils to encourage active partnerships;
• strategically link SDDs to the main priorities identified in the SDP;
• regularly monitor and evaluate staff development sessions to ascertain their effectiveness in school improvement;
• report staff development in the Governors’ Annual Report, including a summary of the outcomes of the sessions;
• refer their SDD plans to the ELB, and subsequently ESA, to ensure that necessary appropriate support can be arranged.

At the same time, employing authorities (and subsequently ESA) need to:
• provide additional support for school governors to assist them in their role in monitoring and evaluating progress through the SDP;
• provide feedback to all schools on the quality of their SDPs and support schools experiencing difficulty;
• improve co-ordination to ensure consistent delivery of key educational messages.

The Department of Education (DE) needs to:
• provide guidance, to those who support schools, on their role of providing feedback to individual schools on the quality of their SDP, including the use of financial resources to support the plan;
• develop a common, phase-related, reporting format in relation to base-lining and the identification of targets to improve overall standards;
• ensure that the guidance provided is flexible to allow schools to use a range of processes and planning approaches in formulating their plans.

In view of DE’s recent commitment, in Every School a Good School, to retaining five additional school development days for at least the next five years, DE needs to ensure that an evaluative overview is taken at system-wide level about their use for self-evaluation and continued professional development in the pursuit of improvement and raising standards.

http://www.etini.gov.uk/school_development_days_survey.pdf
2 The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005
3 School leaders refers to the governors and the principal
The Northern Ireland Literacy Steering Group has drafted a policy on the role of phonics in the teaching of reading and writing which outlines the characteristics of best practice.

Traditionally in Northern Ireland, schools have favoured an analytic approach. In analytic phonics the sounds associated with letters are not pronounced in isolation. Children are first taught words as ‘visual wholes’, and are then helped to see similarities and differences e.g. words beginning with the same letter, or words with similar patterns such as bat, cat, and fat. Children are encouraged to work words out through analogy - using what they already know about one word to help them work out another e.g. from ‘in’ to ‘win’.

In recent years other approaches have been developing which take account of current research into the importance of children recognising individual phonemes [sounds in words] and how these are represented in print.

Literacy teams in Northern Ireland began to explore the impact of phonics back in 2002, in an attempt to reduce the number of children leaving primary school with low reading ages and limited writing skills.

In 2006 The Rose Report emphasised that: “It is generally accepted that English is harder to learn than many other languages, because the relationship between sounds and letters is more complex than in languages such as Finnish, Greek or German. It is therefore even more crucial to teach phonic work systematically, because children are highly unlikely to work out this relationship for themselves. In other words, it cannot be left to chance, or for children to ferret out on their own, how the alphabetic code works.”

Synthetic phonics involves the teaching of letter-sound correspondences rapidly and systematically and models how the code works by sounding out and blending all through the word for reading and segmenting the individual sounds all through the word for spelling. Letters are converted into sounds; for example, a single syllable word such as ‘sat’ is segmented...
into three parts: /s/ /a/ /t/ and then the sounds are blended to form a recognisable word.

In 2005 the NEELB piloted Jolly Phonics - a commercial programme using a synthetic approach. The pilot was evaluated by Stranmillis University College in 2007 and findings are available on the NEELB website.

The NEELB subsequently developed a systematic framework for phonics teaching to complement Jolly Phonics, which emphasises the skills of hearing sounds in words, blending, segmenting, decoding and sound manipulation. Children read print which corresponds with the level of knowledge and skills taught to date. This means they rehearse what they have been specifically taught and do not need to guess. The programme emphasises that discrete phonics sessions must form part of daily literacy teaching; that this is modeled by the teacher; that the teaching must be interactive and enjoyable and that the pupils should be given opportunities to apply their skills in their reading and writing.

In BELB a Linguistic Phonics approach was developed in line with the principles of the revised curriculum, acknowledging that reading and spelling are problem-solving activities and that phonics knowledge and skills should be developed through investigation and problem-solving in context.

The development of phonological awareness is an essential prerequisite to reading and writing. The starting point is oral language. Developing young children’s awareness of words, syllables, rhymes and phonemes significantly increases their later success in learning to read and write. Initial emphasis is on the development of attention and listening skills to provide the foundation for phonological awareness.

In a linguistic approach the sounds of words are identified orally first and then linked to the letters represented by those sounds. The learner listens to a word such as dog, identifies the three sounds and then links the sounds to the appropriate letters. Sounds are always taught in the context of words. Children are then taught synthetic techniques of segmenting, blending and phoneme manipulation to enable them to apply this knowledge within the context of a text. Linguistic phonics sets out to use the code in an integrated way that is not simply about acquiring code knowledge.

Children are encouraged to ‘work out the code’ through a series of structured investigations that help them discover the complex principles of English. They learn that sounds can be represented in different ways e.g. sea, me, happy and that the same symbol can represent different sounds e.g. cow and grow. The emphasis is on using code knowledge to help them make sense of what they read and to spell with increasing independence.

Linguistic Phonics was evaluated by Stranmillis University College in 2006 and findings are available on the BELB website.

The 2009/10 Regional Action Plan for Literacy identifies the need for training and support for teachers to help them incorporate phonics into their teaching. The Department of Education is currently funding a rolling programme of training and support for teachers through the 2009/10 Regional Action Plan.

Schools can access training and support for Synthetic Phonics within NEELB and Linguistic Phonics within BELB, SEELB, SELB and WELB. Each board has seconded a practitioner to support teachers in the classroom through observation and demonstration lessons to help embed practice.

The Northern Ireland Policy on phonics emphasises that: “The development of phonological awareness is an essential prerequisite to reading and writing. The starting point is oral language. Developing young children’s awareness of words, syllables, rhymes and phonemes significantly increases their later success in learning to read and write. Initial emphasis is on the development of attention and listening skills to provide the foundation for phonological awareness.”

This element is clearly evident in the guidance for the revised curriculum and should be a major focus in any foundation stage classroom.

The policy also outlines the criteria schools should apply when deciding on an approach to teaching phonics:

• that the approach is consistent with the principles of the revised curriculum;
• that they be explicit and structured in approach;
• that the phonics knowledge and understanding be applied in meaningful contexts;
• that the learning is well paced, interactive and engaging for learners;
• that the approach is suitably differentiated to meet the differing needs of learners;
• that the programme is systematic and developmental in nature to enable the children to acquire the basic skills in Years 1 to 3 ensuring that they are ready to move on to explore more complex spelling and language structures.

It further emphasises that: “Effective phonics teaching is not an end in itself but rather a means to opening the world of print to every child.”
Reading Partners is an individualised literacy intervention programme which is highly structured, supplementary to classroom reading, and uses a wide range of reading materials. The programme aims to target underachieving Year 3 and 4 pupils in primary school and Year 8 and 9 in post-primary school and forms part of a school’s literacy provision.

Reading Partners has been in operation in schools across all five Education and Library Boards for a number of years and is in great demand by all those who recognise the benefits that a trained assistant can bring to supporting the learning needs of pupils who require additional one-to-one support to consolidate their reading abilities.

Each school involved in the programme will have a Coordinator and Reading Partner(s). The Coordinator (usually the school’s Literacy Coordinator) will attend some of the training to prepare them to work with teachers to identify the children who will be given a place on the programme, to liaise with parents, and to support the Reading Partner(s).

Reading Partners - normally classroom assistants, parents or other volunteers from the community - receive a three-day training course from CASS literacy officers. This prepares them to work with identified children in a supportive partnership approach. During the programme, each partner works with three children for a ten-week period, with each child receiving three fifteen-minute sessions each week. The partner’s role is to identify reading behaviours that each child demonstrates and, ultimately, to support them in becoming independent readers. Partners have the option of submitting their work for Open College Network accreditation at NVQ Level 3.

Positive relationships are formed between child and partner and schools report that pupils’ self esteem is improved with the individual attention received.

“I found it very satisfying to see the children’s reading skills improve and their confidence grow.” (Forth River PS)
Quantitative and qualitative outcomes for pupils are impressive. Pupils are tested at the start and end of the programme using the Salford Standardised test. The gains made by pupils are significant, ranging from six months gain in reading age up to 18 months. All scores are recorded and data on individual pupil’s pre-and post-testing is available at individual board level. A class teacher or English teacher also records improvements in each pupil’s reading behaviours.

Funding is accessed through the annual literacy action plan for substitute cover for the Coordinator, supplementary reading resources to support the programme and for travel and subsistence for the INSET.

Evaluation plays a key part in the entire process with parents, partners, teachers and pupils being asked to provide feedback.

Michael Donaghy from Corpus Christi College explained:

“I started the Reading Club in Corpus Christi College after attending the Reading Partnership course. The Club has a laid back atmosphere and there are comics as well as books to read. Following the Reading Partnership session the children can either read alone, in groups or aloud depending on what they want to do. As each session passed I could see each boy improving and gaining confidence, and that transferred into their class work also. I found it rewarding to see the enthusiasm the boys brought to the club and to see their love for books develop.”

Other comments included:

“I now realise that if you have a specific focus for the Partner session you can make such a difference to the children.” (Mallusk PS)

“I found it very satisfying to see the children’s reading skills improve and their confidence grow.” (Forth River PS)

“My son’s confidence has grown. He now sees himself a good reader and will volunteer to read in front of others.” (Victoria Park PS)

“After the training I felt daunted by what was going to be involved. But now, having seen the excellent results achieved by the children - which exceeded my expectations - I feel it has been worth all the effort involved.” (Glengormley Integrated PS)

“I see it as a privilege to be able to help make a difference to the children who come to me as their partner. I hope to be able to continue doing this for many more years.” (St Columcille’s PS)

“I loved going to my reading partner. I miss it now.” (Pupil)

“I didn’t want the reading club to end.” (Pupil)
Online Training
for InCAS and Annual Report

Technology enhances and enriches our lives every day and in many ways. This month, more than 380 primary school teachers will be using technology to access a diverse and engaging range of training experiences. These teachers will be the first to receive their InCAS and Annual Report training from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) online.

Promoting flexible, varied learning
One of the great things about learning online is that the courses are broken down into bite-sized chunks, so teachers can learn at their own pace.

This is an exciting development which allows teachers to:
• match the method of learning to their individual needs;
• revisit elements of their learning as necessary to inform their teaching;
• focus on their specific role within school;
• manage their own time and learning;
• pursue their particular professional interests; and
• try new types of learning in a supportive environment.

Online learning also allows us to incorporate a variety of media, including video clips, podcasts, animations and text.

Recognising different training needs
CCEA offered school principals the opportunity to select online training or a traditional training method for staff members - whichever best met their needs as individual learners. This means that in some schools one member of staff is receiving online training while another has opted for a face-to-face approach.

Fulfilling potential online
CCEA’s mission is ‘To enable the full potential of all learners to be achieved and recognised.’ To do this as effectively as possible for those teachers who were to receive the new online training, we needed to find out more about their ICT skills and expectations. Between 20 April and 8 May 2009, CCEA’s Research and Statistics Team conducted a pre-course survey with this group.

More than 50% of respondents had selected online training because they believed it to be a more convenient method. One teacher commented: “I look forward to this training and feel it is an ideal way to train people in an ICT-focused workplace.”

Connecting colleagues
One aspect of the education system which stakeholders are particularly keen to improve is the channels of communication. Working online opens up new avenues for participants to connect with colleagues in other schools who hold the same roles and responsibilities. Within the InCAS and Annual Report virtual learning environment, this includes principals and vice-principals; assessment, subject and special needs coordinators; and Year 4 and 7 teachers. This will extend to connect colleagues across Education and Library Boards - an excellent preparation for working together in the Education and Skills Authority (ESA).

In addition, the October 2008 report by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), entitled ‘An Evaluation of the Use and Impact of Learning Environments in Schools and in the Wider Education Service’ stated that:

‘Where the primary schools were engaged in the use of a learning environment, the teachers reported … on the professional side… that it was a useful tool to combat isolation for those teachers in smaller or more rural schools.’

Supporting the education community
Since 2007, CCEA has operated a dedicated InCAS and Annual Report Helpdesk on (028) 9026 1274 to answer any questions and to offer encouragement to schools. This facility is available Monday to Friday from 9 am to 5 pm (except bank holidays).

Now, anyone accessing the training online will also be able to use emails and an online support forum to communicate directly with CCEA officers.

Shaping future developments
CCEA is committed to continuous improvement, and the feedback we gather through evaluation is invaluable. It will inform the ongoing development of the InCAS assessment tool and the future support that we provide to schools. The monitoring and tracking facilities, that the use of a virtual learning environment offers, will enhance this process by enabling us to more accurately reflect the learning needs of teachers.

For more information please contact dowens@ccea.org.uk.

The Audit of Teachers’ Online Skills and Expectations for e-training on InCAS and the Annual Report, May 2009 can be read in full at www.nicurriculum.org.uk.
Webwatch

The NI curriculum website ([www.nicurriculum.org.uk](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk)) is getting a fresh look for the new school year. The new site is easier to navigate and highlights resources and guidance to help you deliver the revised curriculum, assessment and reporting arrangements.

As well as providing information on the statutory requirements from Foundation Stage through to Key Stage 4, there will be links to the Big Training Calendar, online teacher support communities and past editions of the L**ink** newsletter. There are also new sections for Irish Medium schools and for Special Educational Needs. The site is updated regularly, so to stay up to date, bookmark [www.nicurriculum.org.uk](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk) and visit every week!

**The Northern Ireland Youth Information website ([www.niyouthinfo.org](http://www.niyouthinfo.org)), funded by the Department of Education and managed by the Youth Service of the Western Education & Library Board, provides a wide range of information and advice for young people aged between 14 and 25 years. This is a safe website, suitable for use in school by Key Stage 3 and 4 teachers and pupils as an interactive resource for topics within PDMU and Learning for Life and Work.**

The website has nine areas of information: Education, Employment, Environment, Health, Housing, Legal Issues, Money, Relationships and Travel. Each area contains a range of articles on important issues such as alcohol and drugs, suicide, mental health, sexual health, bullying, getting a job, volunteering, dating, student finances, and benefits.

The site also offers a Question & Answer service in which young people can pose a question which will be researched and the answer posted online within one working day. There is also a Message Board which asks a question or raises an issue to which young people can give their thoughts and opinions.

**NI Direct ([www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)), launched last term, aims to make surfing the net for details on government services and information more accessible by organising them under core themes such as Education, Learning and Skills, Motoring, Property & Housing, Home & Community, Health & Well-being and many more. Online services available include finding local schools & nurseries, booking your MOT and buying or renewing your TV licence.**

For parents of school age children [www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk) offers a wide range of advice including choosing schools, the revised curriculum, key stage assessments and the choices they face between the ages of 11-19. By making information from government departments and agencies accessible and written in a language that is easy to understand the new website helps parents to make the decisions that are right for them and their child. For further information visit [www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk).

Don’t forget to register now for the CCEA ICT Accreditation Scheme.

Schools choosing to register will be offered professional development through face-to-face workshops and online support. A comprehensive set of interactive support materials has been developed and will be available for use by all schools. To date the scheme has awarded thousands of pupils with certificates, acknowledging their achievement in ICT, and each year sees more and more schools accredited by CCEA to assess their pupils.

Registration for this year’s scheme closes at the end of September - go to [www.ccea.org.uk](http://www.ccea.org.uk) to register now!
Primary sport and language programmes

During her first year in office the Education Minister, Caitríona Ruane, developed new programmes to introduce primary school children to organised sports and to a second language. Due to the popularity of the programmes in schools, both were expanded during their second year (2008/09).

The sports programme is supported by both the GAA and IFA, who have recruited qualified coaches to visit primary schools to help young children develop their interest and skills in Gaelic sports or soccer.

The languages programme offers primary schools the opportunity to work with peripatetic language tutors to deliver Irish and Spanish. The programme will be expanded this term to include Polish, as it is spoken by the largest number of newcomer pupils in our schools.

The main aim of the programme is to offer an enjoyable experience of language learning for our youngest pupils, with a view to encouraging more to continue with languages at post-primary level and beyond.

The Minister said: “These are exciting programmes where primary schools choose to opt in. I am pleased that traditional barriers have been removed to give children the chance to experience a sport or language that would not usually be available to them.

“It is important that we give our children the opportunity to choose a healthy and active lifestyle. By introducing them early on to organised sports there is a greater chance this interest will stay with them throughout their school years and beyond.

“Since the sports programme was introduced in 2007, over £3.7 million has been made available. Every week the 62 GAA and IFA coaches work in 600 schools with more than 32,000 children. I have been impressed with the very positive support from both organisations in getting involved in this programme from the very start. They see the potential to not only nurture our children’s interest in sports but also to identify talent of the future.

“The languages programme gives children the opportunity to learn either Irish or Spanish. Since the programme began we have made around £1.5 million available and during the last school year we had 323 schools and around 13,000 children participating every week. This is a fantastic level of support from schools and children.

“There is clear evidence that the earlier in life children begin to learn a second language the easier it is for them to become fluent.

“I would pay tribute to all involved in making these programmes a success and for making our children’s experiences in schools more rewarding.”

The Department of Education commissioned the joint Queen’s University-University of Ulster Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies to bring forward recommendations on a potential languages strategy.

The Department has received a near final draft of the report and once this is complete the Minister will consider the best way forward to support schools/teachers in the delivery of language learning.
The Primary Languages website - a new online resource created to support primary teachers in developing and integrating language teaching in the classroom as part of the revised curriculum - can now be assessed on the NI Curriculum website www.nicurriculum.org.uk.

Each section of this colourful and interactive site contains animated stories and rhymes in French, German, Irish and Spanish and allows children to listen to them, enhancing their ability to use the language they are learning.

Speaking at the official launch of the website, CCEA’s Director of Education Strategy, Richard Hanna commented: “Learning a second language can provide a meaningful context for learning about other cultures and people. It helps reinforce and enrich the work done in The World Around Us and Personal Development and Mutual Understanding as part of the revised curriculum. Schools can also use language learning to build on international links and to provide opportunities for developing ICT skills through email and video conferencing.”

Ann McQuiston, Languages Advisor with SEELB and guest speaker at the launch added: “Today’s wonderful performances by the children from Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche, Ballymacward, Millisle, Millennium Integrated and Whitehead Primary Schools, have demonstrated the many advantages that language learning has for not only the pupils, but also their teachers and parents. Early language learning enhances the children’s self-esteem and builds new skills that support other aspects of the curriculum.”

Speaking on behalf of one of the pilot schools, Mrs Linda Patterson, Principal of Millisle Primary, added: “As a school we agreed many years ago that we wanted our pupils to learn French or Spanish. We researched what age children should start learning a second language and were happy to discover that the answer was ‘as young as possible, the earlier the better’. Over the years, we have tried all the different ways of teaching French and Spanish, through a peripatetic teacher, our own teachers, by our Classroom Assistants or even employing a native speaker as a teacher.

“At present we teach our classes various topics or ICLs throughout the year so the Class Teacher and Classroom Assistant plan the French content for the 6-8 weeks and then write the evaluations together.

“Resources is an issue which people say to me puts them off the teaching of a second language but that is only an excuse as you do not need to purchase many; due to the increased use of puppets, Bee Bots, Roamers, Big Books etc in our revised curriculum lessons.

“This new website has been developed for primary teachers to integrate the rhymes and stories into their existing Communication Planners and I recommend its use to everyone.

“I would encourage primary schools to take every opportunity to celebrate language teaching through Awards and Open Days, mention it on children’s reports, include it in Book Week themes, in assemblies and on special celebratory days.

“Primary languages offer many opportunities for children to develop an active engagement in their learning. Grasp it!”

Why not celebrate The Council of Europe’s European Day of Languages on 26th September? It's a time to celebrate the 6,000+ languages spoken in the world; promote understanding, kick-start learning and have multilingual fun! Visit www.cilt.org.uk for further information and resources.
LearningNI is delighted to offer a new pack of Key Stage 2 Newsdesk resources in its Library. The Newshound lessons have been written by the Newsdesk editor to support the teaching of the Ideas for Connected Learning (ICL) pack for Years 6 and 7 entitled 'In the News'. Each of the six new lessons has a starter, main and extension activity, along learning intentions for Key Stage 2 and revised curriculum links.

The lessons are intended to be used in conjunction with the LearningNI Newsdesk and to guide the pupil through a range of PDMU, The World Around Us and Physical Education activities.

Pupils can use these Newsdesk resources to read, compare, discuss and write news stories; express and publish their own opinions on topical issues; to be guided to write reviews, prepare for and carry out interviews; to use fact files for comprehension, research and developing their own interests; to look at how Northern Ireland is reported in the news, with particular reference to children’s issues and rights; to write a sports report with them as the star player, create a fact file about a sporting hero and create an exercise and activity diary.

The activities contain a combination of individual, paired and group work and offer opportunities for developing reading, writing, questioning, debating and research skills. The lessons can be accessed in the Key Stage 2 section of the LearningNI library and can be found by entering Newsdesk in the Keywords search facility. There is also a new introductory Newsdesk worksheet activity in the LearningNI Library, to help pupils familiarise themselves with the activities and resources available on the Newsdesk.

Just click on the new Newsdesk icon on the LearningNI homepage to access this bank of topical and relevant resources. For further information please contact David Huntley at dhuntley@c2kni.org.uk.

LearningNI continues to evolve reflecting requests made by teachers, pupils and staff in partner organisations.

With the success of the recent changes to the Library and Courseroom areas, it is now the turn of the primary and post-primary homepages to undergo major change. These pages have been simplified, making LearningNI even quicker and easier to use. Content is now arranged into modules which can be dragged and dropped on screen and which provide easy access to the Courseroom, My Sites and the Library.

The Newsdesk is positioned within a Links module containing links to interactive educational websites such as NI maps, the British Pathé News Archive, Maths for Schools and Safe Food for Life.

Additional features are displayed on an Other Services tab and two new modules are imminent – the School Timetable and an online Streaming Video Service.

It is still possible to change the colour scheme of LearningNI and to add and remove modules via the Personalise page.

For further information please contact Geraldine Timoney at gtimoney@c2kni.org.uk.

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The Very Hungry Caterpillar

Members of the C2k SEN Team know only too well just how busy teachers are, so they have designed ‘out of the box’ style topics for teachers to lift and use in the classroom.

Each topic has an area on LearningNI which contains a wealth of information. Online content includes a topic web, curriculum links, list of good websites, ready made resources, support materials and guidance on using the Virtual Classroom (VC).

To date most users of the VC have been Key Stages 2/3/4. However, Kerry Teague from Riverside School, and Gillian Cromie from Hillcroft School decided they would like to use the VC with their classes of 4 - 6 year olds and chose The Very Hungry Caterpillar as their topic. These two enthusiastic teachers proved it is possible to use the VC with young children.

C2k provided the support, training and all The Very Hungry Caterpillar ‘out of the box’ materials on LearningNI as a starting point for the two teachers to work from. Over a four week period, the two classes video conferenced on a weekly basis using their C2k machines. The children’s communication and ICT skills benefited from this interactive approach to topic work.

A range of ‘out of the box’ topics are available for schools to use and provide the perfect catalyst for teaching the revised curriculum in an engaging and creative way. Other titles are available for all Key Stages and include the titles ‘Ready, Steady, Cook’, ‘Reduce, Reuse, Recycle’ and ‘My Town’.

For information or support, please contact:
Norma Perceval-Price: nprice@c2kni.org.uk or 07717 21 07 45
Lisa Brown: lbrown@c2kni.org.uk or 07717 22 87 55

Online course for Sencos

Centre-based professional development courses for Sencos have been jointly developed and delivered by SEELB and BELB over the last four years.

Dr Brenda Montgomery, Adviser - Special Education, SEELB, recently developed a course for the RTU Online Learning for Teachers and Educators (OLTE) accreditation. The focus was on Senco Development and was linked to the SEELB SEN Modernisation Project.

The course was delivered through LearningNI to increase the understanding, knowledge and skills of the Sencos to manage their changing role. It also provided opportunities to reflect on their professional and personal perspective to further develop inclusive practice in their own school settings.

Over a ten week period, the Sencos participated in a number of collaborative tasks including discussions and learning activities where they were required to read articles, post ideas and respond to others with a view to sharing and improving policy and practice. This online course included three face-to-face days.

LearningNI proved to be a very suitable virtual learning environment in which Sencos had access to in school and at home.

One Senco commented: “A very enjoyable course which was more than worthwhile! I feel I have developed professionally as well as making good friends with others. Thanks for the experience.”

The Sencos graduated in June 2009. A second cohort of the SEELB SEN Modernisation Project Sencos will go online in October 2009.
Education and Skills Authority - the countdown has started!

On 1 January 2010, the new Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will be established - a single organisation with a clear and unambiguous responsibility to support schools in achieving better outcomes for pupils.

ESA will work to shift the balance of resources from central administration to schools, to bring greater focus on the pupil and provide equality of access to excellent provision.

As the new term begins, Expect ‘business as usual’ in January 2010

Feedback from schools and colleges indicates that it is vitally important that the services they rely on will not suffer during the transition to the new organisation.

The creation of ESA will bring significant changes to the education sector. But those changes will be introduced in a phased manner over a number of years. Service continuity is top of the ESA agenda.

On Day One of ESA schools should expect ‘business as usual’. When changes to the services are being made they will be informed well in advance.

ESAIT is working closely with the Department of Education (DE) and the leaders of the existing organisations to ensure change is carefully managed and that there is a smooth transition to the new organisation.

Transition Coordinator appointed

ESAIT has appointed a Transition Coordinator. Adrian Kennedy, formerly Head of the Administration and Management Division at WELB, will work closely with ESAIT project managers and the existing organisations to ensure a range of key issues are addressed in the lead up to and beyond Day One of ESA.

Appointment of a Chairperson and members

A decision on the appointment of the ESA Chairperson is due early in the new school term.

In August the Department of Education started the process to appoint members to the board of the new Authority. Membership will be drawn from both members of the public and district councillors, with councillors providing a majority. It is expected interviews will be held in October with successful candidates confirmed by the end of the year.

Appointment of ESA Directors

Announcements on the appointment of ESA Directors are also due early in the new school term. The selection process ran over the summer months, with interviews for the seven posts taking place in late August.

Legislation Update

The Education Committee will complete its deliberations on the first Education Bill during September. The Committee will then prepare and submit a report including possible amendments that will be proposed in plenary session when the Bill moves back to the Assembly in early October.

The second Education Bill is scheduled for introduction in the Autumn. Bill 2 will provide the statutory basis for the proposed Education Advisory Forum, area-based planning arrangements and arrangements for ownership of the education estate that is currently controlled by Education and Library Boards. Ownership arrangements are seen as important to underscore the responsibility of the ESA to provide for all schools on the basis of equality.

Setting out future relationships

The Review of Public Administration has provided an excellent opportunity to clarify who makes policy and who supports our teachers in delivering that policy.

In future DE’s focus will be on the development of policy and the performance management of ESA. ESA’s job will be to implement policy in a consistent and equitable manner and to support schools and youth services in delivering better educational outcomes.

It is also important to stress that ESA’s focus is on the provision of an excellent support service to schools, not interfering in the running of them. School leaders are best placed to decide how teaching and learning should take place in their classrooms.