

PRESENTATION ARMAGH

Good Morning

You have heard directly from the Minister in respect of the revised NI Curriculum. You have heard also from the Chief Inspector how ETI will be responding to its introduction. My task is to provide further explanation of some of the matters raised by the Minister and to set out the expectations of the Department.

Can I begin by reflecting on some perspectives on the revised curriculum which have been told to me by teachers and which took me by surprise.

- (i) it is an entirely new and radical curriculum – this a revised curriculum, slimmed down in content, re-stating, at primary level, the importance of basic skills and suggesting that appropriate judgements should be made as to the introduction of formal learning for children who enter our schools at the age of 4.**

- (ii) no child should be doing formal reading until the age of 7 – this is not, in any way, a part of the revised NI Curriculum; it is for the classroom teacher to judge, as it always has been, when the time is right for children to move from more informal to formal learning.**

- (iii) the Programmes of Study cannot be used after September 2007 – it is entirely a matter for the school, within the 3 year phasing, as to how they move from the previously statutory Programmes of Study to cover the revised statutory minimum content.**

I raise these because some of the correspondence and reports received by the Department suggest things that you will not find in the legislation for the introduction of the Curriculum.

From the Department's perspective there are two broad issues in respect of the Primary Sector:

- (i) the funding of the sector and all the issues around that regarding support for principals, preparation time etc.**

- (ii) the implementation of the revised curriculum and the issues around that about assessment, change of content etc.**

The Minister has addressed both of these today and let me explain further.

On the quantum of funding, there have been, year on year, very sizeable extra allocations provided for schools in a context where pupil numbers have been falling. However, we would be the first to admit that we need and would welcome more resources and that the billion plus budget that goes directly to schools could deliver so much more were it not so thinly stretched. (Sir George Bain's argument)

Turning to the issue of funding differentials, we acknowledge that the gap between primary and post

primary is too large and we are committed to reducing that differential. However, we need to do so in a way that does not ease problems at primary school level by creating problems in the post-primary sector. We are therefore committed to adopting a managed approach to rebalancing the primary/post-primary weightings.

I know you will be frustrated by the speed of change – but without significant injections of additional funding over and above that needed to keep pace with inflation we cannot make immediate dramatic change and it would be wrong of me to suggest otherwise. Hence the Minister’s emphasis on CSR.

We do, however, need your support when we take the steps we can. Last year, for example, we consulted with schools on a change to the primary weighting that meant some additional money going into the primary sector. The results of that consultation were disappointing – with only 6% of primary schools responding. In subsequent consultations we need to see the views of the primary sector conveyed more forcefully.

With the Minister I also want to highlight the fact that the Executive will shortly have to take decisions, in the context of the Comprehensive Spending Review on the relative shares of the overall NI budget for health, education and other priorities. There will inevitably be more calls on the Northern Ireland budget than can be met, but we need to make sure that the case for extra spending for education is clearly, coherently and consistently communicated. Our chances of success are greatest when we are supporting one another in making that case, and are ensuring that the resources which are available to us are used most efficiently and effectively.

The Implementation of the Revised Curriculum

The main issue raised in respect of the curriculum is the lack of readiness for implementation. In support of this the training is criticised as poor or insufficient; the awareness of the changes is characterised as poor; other issues such as Bain and the transfer debate are said to

cloud the horizon and the wider resource issue is interlinked with curriculum implementation.

Negative comments about implementation are always set within a context where unreserved support is offered to the revised curriculum.

It is worth re-stating the principles:

- (i) handing back control over content to the practitioners – a crucial point long argued for by teachers and educationalists;**
- (ii) re-stating the importance of basic skills, now including ICT – central to raising overall standards;**
- (iii) encouraging the use of the Foundation Stage to introduce children steadily to formal learning – this has actually been DE policy since a Circular of 1994;**

(iv) building on good practice – the Chief Inspector made clear that there is an abundance of good practice in the primary sector.

Marion, indeed, has emphasised the strength of the primary sector and its capacity to adapt to the new circumstance.

The Minister has emphasised the phasing in of the curriculum; identified the first year as a transitional year; provided additional resources for the introduction of the Foundation Stage; laid out the intention to give the Primary Sector primacy in the provision of new IT equipment; and extended transition to the assessment arrangements: She does not want to stop the momentum which has been built up for introduction; she sees the value in the revised curriculum; she is confident in the ability of the Sector to respond to the change – indeed, in practice, she feels the Sector will welcome the new freedom; she has listened and responded to the practical concerns.

What does this mean in 2007-08.

- 1. At Foundation Stage you will be getting additional resources to support implementation in Year 1, which you can decide how best to use;**
- 2. As Paddy will indicate there will be ongoing training for principals and teachers to build on what has been delivered already.**
- 3. In terms of the content of the curriculum it is for you to make the choice in the transition year. You can continue with the now non-statutory Programmes of Study, or amend them or begin afresh – the key for the Department is that the curriculum is in place in June 2010. The pace of introduction in the first year in respect of content is a matter of professional judgement.**
- 4. In terms of assessment you will have additional training on INCAS; the new computer equipment should help with the practical issue of administering it**

in the first term; you will run INCAS in the first term (apart from IME schools) but you do not have to report the outcomes formally to parents nor will the centre collect them. So it really is about a year where you have an opportunity to become familiar with the INCAS assessment.

- 5. You will also find a range of support provided via CCEA and C2k during the time you will be running INCAS in your schools. As well as the training there are interactive support materials accessible through the revised curriculum website. A helpdesk will also be operating during this period for any technical or educational queries. C2k and CCEA are working closely on the detail of these support arrangements, including mapping training to Lot 6 roll-out.**

We also encourage you to continue using a range of standardised assessment tools as currently happens to inform teacher judgements. On our behalf C2k are also working with the ALTA system to explore

making it available to schools in support of ongoing numeracy assessment.

- 6. We expect you to continue to offer meetings to parents at which you report progress.**
- 7. You will at the end of the year complete a Pupil profile for Y1 and Y5 pupils with the help of computer comment banks if you wish to use them.**

So lets put things another way – if I came to visit your school in January 2008 what would I expect to see?

- I would expect to see planning getting underway for delivering the curriculum.**
- In most cases I would expect to see schools using the existing programmes of study and lesson plans for teaching, while consideration begins as to how far content needs to be revised.**

- **I would expect to see that INCAS had been run for Year 5 and that teachers were using the data to inform teaching and learning.**
- **I would expect to see additional laptops in your school.**
- **I would expect to see the new resources at Foundation Stage.**
- **I would expect to see confidence levels among principals and teachers rising and to hear that training needs were being met.**
- **I would also expect to see the literacy and numeracy focus of the revised curriculum being built upon in good classroom practice.**

As school leaders you have choices to make. This is a phased implementation, so you choose the pace at which to lead the changes. You have 3 years to reach the end point where by June 2010 we expect the revised curriculum and assessment arrangements to be fully in place. Even at that let's remember we are talking about revised arrangements which build on existing good practice from your schools.

The Minister wishes you to progress the revised curriculum. She has listened to concerns put to her and accepted that in content and assessment the first year will be a transition year. In content, you choose the pace of change. In assessment there will be no requirement to report formally the outcomes of INCAS to parents or to the centre. You will have extra resources made available for the introduction of Foundation Stage at P1 (carved out from other areas) and you will have primacy in the allocation of the new laptops. On the wider funding front there can be no re-allocation of funding in the mid-year. The opportunity to bid for additional resources and to re-visit allocations comes with the Comprehensive Spending Review held from July to December this year. You will have to be patient. However, the Minister was clear – she has heard your views.

In the implementation of the revised NI Curriculum some of you have already started the journey, others may choose to start from this September, and others still may hold back and use the existing programmes of study. You have 5 + 5 professional development days to support your

leadership role within the school and these should make a real difference. It really is a matter for you to determine how you manage the implementation over the next 3 years.

The result is delivering the best outcomes for our young people – including raising achievements across the board in literacy and numeracy. I believe working towards that means getting the revised curriculum and assessment arrangements in place and making sure that support is in place for you as school leaders and for your teachers in delivering in the classroom.