

Messages from research

Looking inside our schools

Research can tell us much that is interesting about the experiences of teachers and pupils or about the ways in which schools relate to parents. It can confirm for us what we have long suspected is the case but can't quite prove, or it can tell us that things are not necessarily the way we see them and challenge us by throwing new light on the familiar. Two recent pieces of NCCA-funded research provided just such confirmations and/or challenges (depending on your perspective) along with a great deal of interesting reading. The first piece, on science in primary schools, was conducted by St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, and the second, on reporting to parents in primary schools, was conducted by University College Cork. Read on to find out whether your own views have been either confirmed or confounded.

Science in primary schools... What the kids think!



Do the pupils in your class love going on field trips? Do all the magnets in the school go missing when you begin planning for a lesson on forces? You are not alone!

The research project on science in primary schools was recently carried out by Dr. Janet Varley, Dr. Clíona Murphy and Órlaith Veale at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. Findings in the report, *Science in Primary Schools, Phase 1*, are based on data gathered from a case study involving 11 primary schools, and on a survey sent to 70 schools. Between October 2007 and February 2008, pupils from third to sixth class were observed during science lessons, many were interviewed and 1,030 pupils completed questionnaires. The findings and recommendations of the report give a fascinating insight into what our pupils think of the *Science Curriculum* and of the teaching and learning methods used.

'... it's very fun working in groups, because we can all help each other if we're stuck'.

(2ND CLASS PUPIL)



'We don't want to be sitting there being bored listening to a teacher going on about what science is. We just want to be doing it'.

(4TH CLASS PUPIL)

'I'd like to do more of going outside to learn science'.

(3RD CLASS PUPIL)

Findings

The good news contained in the report is that pupils are:

- generally enthusiastic about primary school science.
- very positive about hands-on science and particularly enjoy working in small groups.
- extremely enthusiastic about working on science outside the classroom.
- positive about visitors who have engaged them in scientific work at school and about going on science-related trips.
- positively disposed to the use of ICT in science.

Alongside the 'good news' some challenges were identified.

- Some pupils do not get regular opportunities to engage in hands-on science, and child-led investigations and design-and-make activities appear to be used infrequently.
- Pupils seem to have relatively few opportunities to develop scientific skills as teacher demonstration and explanation are dominant features of science lessons.
- Pupils rarely encounter field trips or engage with visitors/experts on scientific matters.
- Pupils' chances of using ICT in science lessons appear to be extremely limited.
- In general, pupils in primary schools do not get opportunities to relate their experiences in science in school to the wider world or to their own place in it.

Recommendations

The report makes a number of interesting recommendations about additional professional development, including science in pre-service education, and about that 'R' word – RESOURCES.

And the next steps...?

A second part of the research focuses on the pupils' perception of how their learning of science at primary level has prepared them for work in the subject at post-primary level. Stay tuned!

Want to read more?

info@ncca is an NCCA publication designed to keep teachers in primary and post primary schools up to date about developments in curriculum and assessment.

All back issues are available on our website to download and read, or to save on your hard drive to read later.

You can access the magazine at www.ncca.ie/news/newsletter or if you are reading online, just click on the link above.

Subscribe to info@ncca

Since April 2009 **info@ncca** is published electronically. To subscribe for your very own copy, simply visit our website www.ncca.ie, and click on the banner titled 'Subscribe to Newsletter'. Fill in your details on the form and click on the subscribe button.

Or if you are reading online just click on this link: www.ncca.ie/en/Subscribe_to_the_Newsletter