Launch of ‘Positive Classrooms, Positive Children’ the research report on the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme

Tuesday 1st March 2011
10.00am – 12:30pm
The Clock Tower, Dept. Of Education, Marlborough St., Dublin 1

Speech delivered by Noreen Flynn, Vice President, INTO

Colleagues and Friends,

I am delighted to have the opportunity to welcome the publication of this very significant research on the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management programme.

In 2004 and 2005 the INTO published two guidance documents on managing challenging behaviour. This work was done in response to a need for guidance and support which was strongly expressed by teachers on the ground. One of the recommendations of our 2005 publication toward positive behaviour in primary schools was the provision of courses on behaviour management and the provision of resource materials on issues such as classroom management skills.

The Teacher Classroom Management programme clearly responds very effectively to a gaping need for continuous professional development for teachers in the area of teacher classroom management. While this programme currently fulfils a need in some areas of disadvantage, the reality is that this programme of professional development should be extended nationwide.

The proof of the effectiveness of the TCM programme lies with the comments of the teachers who have engaged with the programme. These comments were actually mirrored by teachers from my own school in the South Inner City who have also completed the programme.

All agreed that the course provided them with an invaluable opportunity to reflect on their theoretical knowledge and apply that knowledge in practical situations in the classroom. Teachers, as you know, like practical strategies, strategies that can be proven to work. They were also extremely positive about the mode of programme delivery, which provided an opportunity to implement learned strategies in the classroom over a period of a month and then engage in meaningful group discussion and analysis of how those strategies worked. The very positive comments made by teachers, regarding the group leaders’ ability to build relationships and facilitate learning, is testament to the quality of their skills and expertise in delivering the programme, and in my view that says a lot for the actual programme.

Teaching has often been cited as a lonely profession, and teachers are often very self critical. As a result they do not discuss difficulties that they may be having. This is borne out in the teachers’ comments within this research where they acknowledged that they had struggled alone with classroom management difficulties. The teachers highlighted the fact that this course provided an opportunity to share expertise with other teachers. With that opportunity they were enabled to
value and develop their own expertise. This again reinforces the need for such professional development opportunities to be provided for all teachers.

It’s timely that this research should be published at a time when the need to improve literacy and numeracy scores are top of the agenda. Improved literacy and numeracy will not start with the book or with spending extra hours in the classroom. It will start with catering for children’s basic needs and, very importantly, with creating a classroom environment that is conducive to learning for all within. This TCM programme has the potential to radically change the learning environment in schools, if it is coupled with holistic support for children with severe social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and the provision of adequate speech and language therapy for those who are in need of it.

I would like to take this opportunity to share with you my own personal experience of the TCM programme as it operates in the South Inner City. The positivity around this programme speaks for itself. Seven schools with an approximate total enrolment of 1400 children, which roughly breaks down to 700 families have embraced the programme. In two of these schools all teachers have received the training and a third school will complete its training this year. The other four larger schools have a substantial number of teachers trained, and the training is continuing under the auspices of the School Completion Programme. A whole school approach to meeting the needs of children who display challenging behaviour has proven most effective. However it is not a task that teachers can take on in isolation. The support of the wider community is essential.

As many of you are aware, the Incredible Years has a three pronged approach to behaviour management. It engages with the teacher, parent and children. To date in the South Inner City we have managed to run two parent programmes and two children ‘Dina’ programmes within our cluster of seven schools. With approximately 700 families involved there is a huge need to extend these children and parent programmes. It would make a significant difference if funding was made available to support the work in schools by extending the parent and child benefits of the Incredible Years in the South Inner City. Tony has just outlined to you the number of programmes that are up and running successfully throughout the country, we would certainly like to be part of that, and I know it would have a very positive effect in our area.

Over the past ten years the South Inner City has been slowly recovering from the devastation inflicted upon it by drugs in the 80’s and 90’s. With the current cuts in budgets, these positive efforts to end inter-generational poverty and unemployment may well be hampered and in fact reversed, if we cannot provide broad support within the community.

I think we have heard it several times, that the key to a better future is education. Education can only be effectively delivered in an environment that is safe, secure and free from constant disruption. My experience of the TCM programme is that it has contributed to significant improvements in the learning environment, where it is in use. It is without doubt a very important tool in promoting positive behaviour. As one of its main components, is the development of better relationships within the classroom. The smaller class sizes which were provided under the DEIS programme offer a better opportunity to develop better relationships with the many vulnerable pupils who present in DEIS schools. It is therefore essential that these ratios would at the very least be sustained to allow the full value to be gained from such programmes as TCM.
There is no missing chapter from this research document. The chapter on finance heralds the fact that the TCM programme is run on a shoestring. The value for money is self-evident. The TCM element of Incredible Years could not actually happen in the South Inner City without the total support of the School Completion Programme. That area is desperately in need of further resources and funding if the progress achieved to date is not to going to be lost.

It is uplifting after that sad note, in this time of doom, gloom, and uncertainty to have the opportunity to commend an initiative which is fulfilling a need for professional development in classroom management, which has long been sought by teachers. It does however need to be rolled out to every teacher, in every school as managing challenging behaviour is now an issue in every school. We are facing a changing society, where the issues that manifest themselves through our economic situation will be reflected in schools. We need to be ready for that.

I want to congratulate all who are involved with this excellent project and wish you well extending the work in the future.

Go raibh maith agat.