



Better Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People

A Draft National Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Schools

NOVEMBER 2010



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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS



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A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

AN INVITATION FROM THE TÁNAISTE

I want to invite you to contribute to improving the teaching of literacy and numeracy for our young people. Every young person needs to be literate and numerate. The skills of literacy and numeracy equip young people to make the most of learning opportunities, to take up satisfying careers and to contribute to and participate fully in all aspects of our culture and society. To ensure their well-being and fulfilment as young people and adults, we must ensure that all of our children develop these core skills to as high a standard as possible.

In Ireland, we have a long and proud tradition of valuing literacy and numeracy skills in our education system and more generally in our culture and society. Some of our greatest contributions to world culture have been in written literature, and we have produced some innovative, world-famous mathematicians. More impressive still has been the importance that all Irish people have placed on learning. Generations of Irish people have made extraordinary sacrifices, sometimes against overwhelming odds, to ensure that their children achieved high standards of literacy and numeracy in our schools. This commitment to learning has continued in more recent times and has helped to ensure that our well-educated workforce has been one of our greatest strengths.

But, we cannot be complacent about the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy in our schools. Our children live in a rapidly changing world, and our schools, families and communities face new challenges. We know that in the future better literacy and numeracy skills will be required to enable today's students to meet tomorrow's challenges. And there is evidence that some children in our schools are not acquiring adequate literacy and numeracy skills. Literacy and numeracy are so important that I believe that we need to reappraise all aspects of our educational system to make sure that every child acquires these skills.

Improving the teaching of literacy and numeracy for our young people needs a concerted national effort in which all of us are involved. This draft plan sets out what I believe are some of the main steps that we need to take to make sure that our young people acquire world-class literacy and numeracy skills.

This draft plan is only a beginning: I need your contribution to getting our plan and our actions right. That is why I am inviting your ideas and suggestions about how we can plan and work to improve the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy for our young people. Full details of how you can make your suggestions are at the end of this document. All the ideas and suggestions received will help to finalise a national plan for improving literacy and numeracy in schools.

Implementing the plan and achieving better outcomes for our children and young people will not be easy and will require a relentless focus on literacy and numeracy. It will mean concentrating our work and resources on the teaching of literacy and numeracy and, at times, giving priority to these skills above other goals.

I look forward to receiving your inputs to this plan and to working with you as we join in this concerted national effort to equip our young people with the literacy and numeracy skills that they deserve.

Mary Coughlan, TD
Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Literacy and numeracy skills are essential

Every young person needs to be literate and numerate. We use the basic skills of literacy and numeracy in almost every part of our lives, every day: when we communicate with each other – in traditional written forms or through the web – when we follow signs and instructions, when we are at our work or enjoying leisure time, when we try to make sense of the mass of information and data available through the media, and when we are managing our lives.

Traditionally we have thought about literacy as the skills of reading and writing; but today our understanding of literacy encompasses much more than that. Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, print, broadcast media, and digital media. In the same way we now think of numeracy as not just the ability to use numbers but the wider ability to use mathematics to solve problems and meet the demands of day-to-day living in complex social settings.

Without the skills of literacy and numeracy¹, a young person or adult is cut off from full participation in many aspects of life: they cannot perform basic tasks, such as reading or sending an email; advertisements and notices are meaningless to them; they cannot jot down a shopping list or understand a bill that comes in the post; and they are cut off from participating in and contributing to many aspects of the society and culture in which they live. And of course young people and adults who do not have adequate literacy and mathematical skills cannot participate fully in schooling, further and higher education, nor can they take up satisfying jobs and careers.

Missing out on the skills of literacy and numeracy is not just a tragedy for the individual: that personal tragedy is also an enormous loss for all of us in Irish society. Research has shown clearly that mastering the skills of literacy and numeracy brings with it many social, economic and health benefits for the individual and society as a whole. Having young people who can apply mathematical understanding in a growing range of economic, technical, scientific, social and other contexts is essential if we are to provide employment and economic prosperity in the future. We know too that children who do not learn to read, write and communicate effectively are more likely to leave school early, be unemployed or in low skilled jobs, to have poorer emotional and physical health, to have limited earning power, and to be more likely to be imprisoned.

For all these reasons it is essential that every child leaving our school system is numerate and is able to speak, read, write and spell at a level that enables them to participate fully in education and in Irish life and society. Much of this learning takes place in the primary school, but critical aspects of the child's development of literacy and numeracy skills continue to develop during the compulsory period of second-level education.

¹ Literacy conventionally refers to reading, writing, speaking, viewing, and listening effectively in a range of contexts. In the 21st century, the definition of literacy has expanded to refer to a flexible, sustainable mastery of a set of capabilities in the use and production of traditional texts and new communications technologies using spoken language, print and multimedia. In this plan, literacy refers to the development of these capabilities in the first language of the school (L1).

Numeracy is the capacity, confidence and disposition to use mathematics to meet the demands of learning, school, home, work, community and civic life. This perspective on numeracy emphasises the key role of applications and utility in learning the discipline of mathematics, and illustrates the way that mathematics contributes to the study of other disciplines.

During the primary school years, critical early skills need to be developed, and these skills have to be carefully consolidated and developed throughout the junior-cycle years in post-primary school or in centres for education. Indeed there may be a mistaken sense that the development of young people's literacy and numeracy skills should be completed by the end of primary school. In post-primary schools, the development of literacy and numeracy skills is not just the responsibility of teachers of English, Irish and mathematics: teachers of all post-primary subjects have an important role to play in developing and consolidating the student's ability to use literacy and numeracy.

1.2 Good is no longer good enough

Irish people have always placed a high value on both literacy and numeracy skills. Successive generations made great efforts to ensure that young people were given opportunities to learn to read, write and understand mathematics. Our successes in educating our young people have been admired and have played a key role in economic growth and progress in the past.

However, our past successes for the majority of students should not allow us to be complacent about the challenges that we face now and in the future. We need to re-examine how well our educational system is preparing young people for the challenges that they will face as Irish, European and global citizens in the future. If we fail to raise literacy and numeracy levels in line with their ever-growing social importance we run the risk that our young people will not have sufficient literacy and numeracy skills to function effectively in society and to meet future work-place requirements. **This document sets out a strategic approach to progressively improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for young people.**

1.3 We face a considerable challenge

Ireland's young people need to have literacy and mathematical skills as good as those of young people in the best-performing educational systems in the world.

At present Finland sets the benchmark for literacy performance, in that it consistently achieves the highest standard in international assessments. Canada, Australia and New Zealand also feature consistently among the highest-performing education systems. Ireland's students have also fared well in past international comparisons but there is also evidence of room for further improvement in the literacy skills of Irish students.

The literacy skills of Irish students in primary schools, measured by the National Assessments of English Reading, have not improved in over thirty years. Poor achievement in literacy among students in disadvantaged communities has been a particular concern for some time. Enabling schools to target improvements in the literacy achievements of these students has been one of the key aims in the Department's DEIS² initiative. Early evidence from evaluations of DEIS are showing that some DEIS schools have made great strides in supporting the development of literacy. However, others have been less successful.

² DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools – is the Department's action plan for educational inclusion.

Evidence from inspections of primary schools has revealed that a significant proportion of lessons in English are not satisfactory. Second-level teachers and principals have identified poor literacy levels as a barrier to accessing the post-primary curriculum and making a smooth transition into post-primary school. Employers and third-level institutions have been critical of the standards of literacy of students leaving post-primary education.

All these Irish developments are occurring at a time when our understanding of literacy is evolving to include new forms of technology and when literacy skills are probably more essential than ever before. Many countries are taking targeted steps to improve the literacy outcomes for their young people, and the European Union has set targets for increased levels of literacy and numeracy for all EU citizens by 2020. It is clear that we must take every possible initiative to improve literacy outcomes for young people in Ireland so that students in Irish schools perform at least as well as the highest-performing students in other developed countries.

Numeracy is developed mainly, but by no means exclusively, through the teaching of mathematics in primary and post-primary schools. The teaching and learning of mathematics in Ireland requires even greater attention than literacy. Surveys of mathematics achievement at the primary level, and patterns of participation and achievement in the State examinations and in international surveys, indicate that there are systemic issues in mathematics education that require attention. Repeated assessments at the primary level have revealed weak performance on problem solving and measures. At the Leaving Certificate level the proportion of students opting for Higher Level has been in the region of 16 per cent for a number of years, despite an aspiration in the design of the Leaving Certificate mathematics syllabus to have 30 per cent of the cohort taking the Higher-Level examination. Already radical changes are being made to the curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning of mathematics through the *Project Maths* initiative, but other system-wide measures are needed to improve the way students engage with mathematics and develop numeracy skills.

The education system needs to refocus on the development of the concepts and skills needed to establish sound foundations for literacy and numeracy development. This means committing time and resources to ensuring that all young people master the essential concepts and skills for reading and mathematics. In the present economic climate, this will mean re-prioritising spending and ensuring that we get the very best outcomes from existing financial and human resources. It will also mean that we will have to make hard choices: we will have to give priority to the improvement of literacy and numeracy over other desirable, important but ultimately less vital issues.

1.4 Setting targets for what we want to achieve

International experience teaches us very clearly that changing any educational system is extremely difficult and a very slow process. It also teaches us that we need:

- to set realistic but ambitious targets
- to identify the steps needed to reach the targets
- to put in place the necessary support measures to assist in reaching the targets

- to monitor carefully how these targets are being achieved
- to alter the targets in the light of experience, and
- to maintain a relentless focus on achieving the targets.

We need to adopt this approach not only at national level but at the level of each school and classroom. Experience in implementing the DEIS strategy over the past three years has demonstrated clearly that whole-school commitment is essential to achieving change and improvement, and that every teacher is a key agent of change. Setting realistic targets at the school level, systematically monitoring progress at the school level and making adjustments in the light of evidence gathered are important elements of an improvement process.

1.5 Targets for improving literacy and numeracy

We must aim to improve the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy among Irish students in the period 2011-2020. We will aim to:

- improve the oral-language competence of children in early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings, using baseline data from assessments to inform the planning of learning goals
- ensure that each school sets and monitors progress in achieving demanding but realistic targets for the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills of its students
- increase the percentage of primary children performing at Level 3 and Level 4 (the highest levels) in the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading by at least 5 per cent at both second class and sixth class by 2020
- reduce the percentage of children performing at or below Level 1 (minimum) in the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading by at least 5 per cent at both second class and sixth class by 2020
- increase the percentage of students achieving the equivalent of Grade C or above in the Mathematics Ordinary Level examination at the end of junior cycle (i.e. Junior Certificate examination or its equivalent) from 77 per cent to 85 per cent by 2020
- increase the percentage of students taking the Higher Level mathematics examination at the end of junior cycle (i.e. Junior Certificate examination or its equivalent) to 60 per cent by 2020
- increase the percentage of students taking the Higher Level mathematics examination in Leaving Certificate to 30 per cent by 2020
- extend the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading to assess the performance of students at fourth class in primary school and at the end of second year in post-primary education

- Use data from the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading at post-primary level to establish the existing levels of achievement and to set realistic targets for improvement, similar to those adopted at the primary level
- Foster a better culture of reading among children and young people
- Promote better attitudes to mathematics among children and young people.

We will conduct an interim review of progress towards these targets by 2016 and publish the outcome of that interim review.

1.6 What we have to do to achieve these targets

The experience that we have in our own school system and the lessons that we can learn from other countries show that to achieve the challenging targets we have set will require a comprehensive, integrated effort.

We will need to **place a relentless focus on the progress of every child and on improving the core skills of language and numeracy** in all stages of the educational system.

We have to ensure that **all teachers give priority to language skills, literacy and numeracy in the subjects and programmes that they teach** and to integrate the teaching of literacy and numeracy across all aspects of the curriculum.

We will need to

- **improve teachers' and early childhood care and education (ECCE) practitioners' professional practice** in the teaching of literacy and numeracy, in setting targets, in assessing and monitoring progress, and in using assessment information to inform the next steps for learners at early the childhood, primary and secondary levels
- **build the capacity of school leadership** to lead improvement in literacy and numeracy and to support teachers in their efforts to improve standards of literacy and numeracy
- **give priority to the development of language skills, literacy and numeracy in early childhood, primary and post-primary education**
- **continue to target available additional resources** to improving the learning opportunities and achievement of children who come from the most disadvantaged communities
- **promote a culture of continuous improvement in schools** by improving radically the assessment and reporting of progress at student, school and national level and by focussing school self-evaluation and school inspection on literacy and numeracy

- **enable parents and communities to support their children’s literacy and numeracy development** through involving parents in their children’s learning, through supporting parents in understanding the progress that their children are making, and through raising awareness throughout the community of the role that community, family and school can play in promoting successful learning
- **ensure a consistent focus at system level on the prioritisation of literacy and numeracy in the educational system and beyond** by establishing a high-level implementation group to drive the implementation of this plan and a consultative forum to advise on the development and implementation of the measures.

2. IMPROVING TEACHERS' AND ECCE PRACTITIONERS' PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

2.1 Improve education and learning through improving the professional practice of teachers and early childhood care and education (ECCE) practitioners

There is strong evidence that a focus on developing a high-quality teaching workforce within a framework of strong school leadership will have a positive impact on student achievement in literacy and numeracy. International research shows that a number of factors make a critically important contribution to the excellence of the teaching profession:

- recruiting the best students to enter initial teacher education (ITE) courses and courses for the education of childcare practitioners
- ensuring that initial teacher education courses develop the teachers' knowledge, understanding and ability to apply educational theory and practice effectively
- rigorously assessing young teachers during and at the end of the ITE phase in both examinations and in professional practice
- providing robust systems to support the further development of the newly qualified teacher as they embark on their teaching career
- providing high-quality continuing professional development opportunities for teachers so as to enable them to maintain and enhance their pedagogical understanding and skills, and requiring teachers to undertake professional development courses during their teaching careers.

2.2 Teachers' professional development in literacy and numeracy

We have been fortunate in Ireland in attracting some of the most highly qualified young people to the teaching profession. The work of Irish teachers has attracted considerable praise and Irish teachers' salaries are high by international standards. The establishment of the Teaching Council in recent years and the work that it has begun on the review and accreditation of initial teacher education programmes are very worthwhile developments with potential to bring about significant improvement in the profession.

However, we cannot assume that all Irish primary teachers are proficient in the teaching of literacy and numeracy, or that they continue to upskill themselves in this regard. During the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading survey in 2009, 60 per cent of students in second class were taught by teachers who reported themselves as *somewhat confident* or *not very confident* in teaching mathematics to lower-achieving students.

There are considerable differences between ITE providers in Ireland concerning the development of young teachers' skills in the teaching of literacy and numeracy and especially with regard to the amount of time devoted to this aspect of teachers' development. It is possible, for example, to obtain a B Ed qualification (for primary teaching) in some colleges without completing intensive modules in the teaching of literacy and numeracy. Recent

research has also demonstrated low mathematical ability among a significant number of students entering under-graduate ITE courses at primary level.

The establishment of specialised courses in mathematics education for post-primary teachers at university level is a very positive development. However, most post-primary teachers complete a nine-month university-based post-graduate ITE course as their initial teaching qualification. This course cannot adequately prepare the great majority of post-primary teachers for developing the skills required to teach or progress their students' literacy and numeracy skills or to integrate the teaching of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

We also face considerable challenges in upskilling of the staff who work with our young children in the early childhood care and education (ECCE) sector. Research has consistently shown that three and four-year-olds who attend a high-quality preschool are more successful in primary school and beyond—both academically and socially. Children who are at risk of school failure are strongly influenced by the quality of ECCE education. Early childhood care and education is now supported by two frameworks: *Síolta*, the quality framework, and *Aistear*, the curriculum framework. In recent years the introduction of these frameworks, together with the increased focus on training and qualifications within the early childhood care and education (ECCE) sector and provision for one year of free pre-school education, has resulted in new opportunities to focus on supporting early literacy and numeracy in the full range of ECCE settings.

Not surprisingly, ECCE programmes with better-trained childcare practitioners appear to be more effective. The upskilling of the workforce is a key commitment of the Government, and the introduction of universal pre-school provision has a mandatory qualification requirement that all pre-school leaders have to have a minimum of an NFQ Level 5 qualification in childcare and education by 2012. The provision of flexible learning that meets the needs of the work force will be a challenge for both State-funded and private education and training providers.

A further challenge will arise as *Aistear* is introduced in infant classes and, over time, replaces the present infant curriculum. This change in the curriculum is discussed further in chapter 4; however, it is important to note that the introduction of *Aistear* will give rise to significant professional development needs among teachers of children in the first two years of primary school. The focus in *Aistear* on communicating, on exploring and thinking and on the role of play as one of the foundations for literacy and numeracy will be new to many teachers working with infant classes.

Improvements are also required in the provision and uptake of continuing professional development courses for teachers regarding literacy and numeracy. The survey of teachers conducted as part of the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading in 2009 found that up a third of students were taught by primary teachers who had not participated in any form of continuing professional development for either English or mathematics in the three years prior to the study. In this context, it is worrying that in recent years, only a small minority of the summer courses geared specifically towards primary teachers have related to teaching reading or English or numeracy.

All this evidence suggests that there is considerable scope for improving the recruitment, education and continuing professional development of teachers in the areas of literacy and numeracy education.

2.3 Key topics for teachers' professional development

International experience can be useful in identifying what aspects of professional development are most useful in supporting improvements in literacy and numeracy teaching. A review of strategies in literacy from other countries suggests that, while teachers must be familiar with the many characteristic variations in literacy teaching and learning practice, there are particular items that are regarded as core.

Policies and interventions in other countries place considerable emphasis on ensuring that teachers understand the process by which early reading is acquired and reading skills are subsequently developed and consolidated. The approaches used focus on the explicit teaching of the structure and function of written and oral language, and they emphasise the teaching of the basic building blocks of reading: letter-symbol recognition, letter-sound rules (phonemic awareness and phonological knowledge), whole-word recognition and the ability to derive meaning from text.

Interventions in both literacy and numeracy encourage teachers to align their classroom practice with curricula rather than with textbooks or reading schemes. They seek to familiarise teachers with the various interventions that can be used to support learners who are struggling and they focus on the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. Enabling teachers to give children feedback on their progress and clear suggestions for the next steps that they should take to improve their learning is also important. Successful strategies also emphasise the importance of differentiation in planning for literacy and numeracy and in designing and evaluating the learning experiences of students.

Policies in many countries emphasise that attention needs to be given in initial and subsequent teacher education to the effective use of assessment data to identify priorities and actions in respect of the provision and outcomes in literacy and numeracy, and to track and improve the achievement of individual students and under-performing groups. Effective initial and continuing professional development needs to ensure that teachers acquire a sound understanding of all of this knowledge and develop teachers' skills to apply this understanding as they teach.

2.4 The key role of the Teaching Council

The Council is the professional body for teaching in Ireland and was established to promote teaching as a profession at primary and post-primary levels, to promote the professional development of teachers and to regulate standards in the profession. The Teaching Council has a major role to play in fostering and improving the quality of teaching. The Council operates within a broader policy framework set out by the Minister for Education and Skills.

At present, a major part of the work of the Council is on the development of a draft policy on the teacher education continuum. This valuable work, which is being informed by research, best practice in other countries and the Council's experience to date arising from its review and accreditation of teacher education courses in Ireland, will be published shortly. The Council's policy will set out how all aspects of the teacher education continuum – initial teacher education, induction and continuing professional development – will be integrated, developed and improved in the years ahead. The Department of Education and Skills has had

ongoing contact with the Council in relation to this important task and this document has been informed by these discussions. The proposals that are emerging in the deliberations of the Council are very welcome and will provide a sound basis for the developments that are needed to build upon and enhance the skills of teachers in literacy and numeracy teaching.

The period of development and change in teacher education and professional development that lies ahead presents an excellent opportunity to ensure that we provide teachers with the skills and knowledge that they need to teach the fundamental skills of literacy and numeracy in the best ways possible. The Department of Education and Skills will cooperate closely with the Teaching Council to support the implementation of the Council's policy and improved professional skills among teachers.

2.5 Actions on teacher education and continuing professional development

We will ensure that the development and improvement of teachers' skills in the teaching, learning and assessment of literacy and numeracy are prioritised.

The Minister will cooperate with the Teaching Council to set new, higher standards in entry requirements for initial teacher education (ITE), including higher standards in literacy and numeracy	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify changes to the entry requirements for ITE that will underpin a renewed emphasis on literacy and numeracy, including in the case of primary teaching the potential raising of the minimum grades obtained in the mathematics 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES and Teaching Council in conjunction with ITE providers</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2012-13 academic year</p>

The Minister will cooperate with the Teaching Council to re-configure the content and duration of initial teacher education (ITE) courses for primary teachers to ensure the development of teachers' skills in literacy and numeracy teaching	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the aim of ITE courses is to produce reflective practitioners capable of ongoing engagement with research and emerging practice in the fields of literacy and numeracy acquisition Increase the duration of the BEd programme for primary teaching to become a four-year programme, at least an aggregate of one year of which is a school-based professional development experience Ensure that ITE programmes for primary teachers provide adequate time for developing student teachers' understanding and ability to apply current knowledge regarding such areas as children's learning, language acquisition, the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy, and assessment Ensure that all teachers successfully complete mandatory units in the development of literacy, the teaching of numeracy and in related assessment and reporting strategies Increase the time spent in school-based teaching practice in the classrooms of high-quality, experienced teachers of literacy and numeracy 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES, Teaching Council and Higher Education Authority in conjunction with ITE providers</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2012-13 academic year</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discontinue the study of academic subjects currently included within the BEd programme in favour of academic subjects more closely related to education in order to allow more time for the development of the professional skills and knowledge of teachers described above • Ensure that teachers are required to demonstrate satisfactory skills in the teaching of literacy and numeracy during the teaching practice component of their initial teacher education course 	
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The Minister will cooperate with the Teaching Council to reconfigure the content and duration of initial teacher education (ITE) courses for post-primary teachers to ensure the development of teachers' skills in literacy and numeracy teaching

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the duration of the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programme (for those following a consecutive model of teacher education) to a minimum of two years • Extend the four-year concurrent model for initial teacher education for post-primary teachers to a range of academic subjects (for example, by enabling students to study one/two academic subjects in conjunction with education subjects and pedagogy as elements of a degree award) • Ensure that ITE programmes for post-primary teachers provide adequate time to develop student teachers' understanding and ability to apply current knowledge regarding such areas as children's learning, language acquisition, the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy, and assessment • Ensure that all teachers, irrespective of their subject specialism, complete mandatory units in the development of literacy across the curriculum and in related assessment procedures • Increase the time spent in school-based teaching practice in the classrooms of high-quality, experienced teachers of literacy and numeracy • Ensure that teachers are required to demonstrate satisfactory skills in the teaching of literacy and numeracy as relevant within their subject specialisms during the teaching practice component of their initial teacher education course 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES, Teaching Council and the Higher Education Authority in conjunction with ITE providers</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2014-15 academic year</p>
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Provide continued support to newly qualified teachers generally and especially in the teaching of literacy and numeracy

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide intensive units within the national teacher induction programme on the teaching of literacy and numeracy and on the use of assessment • Make participation in the national teacher induction programme mandatory by 2012 • Ensure that the evaluation of the professional competence of the teacher that is necessary for full registration with the Teaching Council includes evaluation of the teacher's ability to teach literacy and numeracy 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES initially (in conjunction with education centres and ITE providers). Responsibility for overseeing induction and probationary requirements of teachers will transfer to the Teaching Council in 2012</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2011-12</p>
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Focus the provision of Department-supported continuing professional development for teachers on the teaching of literacy and numeracy and the use of assessment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide access to approved professional development courses of at least twenty hours' duration in literacy, numeracy and assessment every five years for primary teachers and teachers of L1 (English/Irish) at second level (as an element of the continuing professional development that teachers require to maintain their professional skills) 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES in consultation with the Teaching Council, education centres and other CPD providers</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> From the school year 2011-12</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide access to approved professional development units on literacy and numeracy across the curriculum for second-level teachers (as an element of the continuing professional development that teachers require to maintain their professional skills) 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES in consultation with the Teaching Council, education centres and other CPD providers</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> From the school year 2011-12</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue with the professional development support provided as part of the roll-out of Project Maths at second level 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> Ongoing</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide detailed guidance and resources to teachers and ECCE practitioners on best practice in the teaching and assessment of literacy and numeracy through handbooks, online courses, video and other resources 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> NCCA with DES</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> First materials and resources to be available by summer 2011</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require all providers seeking recognition of continuing professional development summer courses to include units on the teaching of literacy (or teaching of literacy and numeracy, as appropriate) across the curriculum 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES in conjunction with education centres and CPD providers</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2012</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target the development of the teaching of literacy and numeracy in DEIS schools: re-focus the work of existing DEIS <i>cuiditheoirí</i> (support personnel) and redeploy other posts to create a team of twenty advisors to work with DEIS primary and post-primary schools and Youthreach staff on the teaching and assessment of literacy and numeracy 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES and Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) in conjunction with NCCA, drawing on expertise in such bodies as the Centre for Literacy Studies at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> Initial team members to be in place for 2011-12; expanded in 2013 and beyond</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a generic skills-based programme adapted for all schools (DEIS and non-DEIS) that adopts the principles and practices of approaches such as Reading and Maths Recovery to empower teachers to deal with a range of literacy and numeracy issues in the classroom 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> NCCA in cooperation with bodies such as the Centre for Literacy at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2012-13</p>

Encourage the upskilling of early childhood care and education (ECCE) practitioners	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the training and education courses completed by those entering the ECCE work force include units on the development of language, early literacy and early mathematical skills (by working with relevant accreditation bodies to ensure that formal skills in language, literacy and numeracy development will be a requirement for their qualifications which provide for entry into the ECCE work force) 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES in conjunction with providers of education programmes for ECCE practitioners</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2012</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to provide incentives to ECCE providers to upskill the personnel in ECCE settings by continuing to link higher capitation rates for pre-school services with higher qualification rates 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> Ongoing</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with relevant bodies to ensure that from a fixed date formal skills in oral language, early literacy and numeracy development are a requirement for all ECCE practitioners 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES in conjunction with providers of education programmes for ECCE practitioners</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> To be determined</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapt the ECCE programme in the light of higher qualification requirements of ECCE practitioners evolve over time 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> To be determined</p>

Ensure that adequate quality assurance mechanisms are in place for CPD courses for teachers as provided for in the Teaching Council Act	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that continuing professional development courses for teachers are adequately assessed and evaluated 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> Initially DES, subsequently the Teaching Council</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2012</p>

3. BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

3.1 Principals play a key role

Principals have a critical role in creating a school climate that supports effective teaching and learning. Principals need to have a thorough understanding of how learners learn as well as the way in which the school should be organised and teachers supported to achieve the best results possible. The leadership of principals is essential if schools are to look critically at their own work, identify how improvements can be made, implement actions that can make a difference for learners, and monitor student outcomes effectively.

3.2 Actions to support principals in leading improvement in literacy and numeracy

In addition to the continuing professional development for all teachers that is outlined in chapter 2, principals will be supported in the following ways. We will:

Support principals in implementing robust school self-evaluation, focussing in particular on improvements in literacy and numeracy	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide comprehensive materials, (augmented and developed further over time) to support the implementation of robust self-evaluation in schools • Provide guidance and training to principals on effective school self-evaluation in conjunction with principals' professional organisations (IPPN and NAPD), focussing on improvements in the teaching and assessment of literacy and numeracy • Provide on-line advice and support on the implementation of school self-evaluation • Include a review of the school's self-evaluation process in all whole-school evaluations of schools 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES in conjunction with Support Services and principals professional organisations</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> First materials to be available in September 2011; inputs to IPPN and NAPD conferences and seminars to commence in school year 2011-12</p>
Provide leadership development programmes for aspiring principals	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that all leadership development programmes for aspiring principals include mandatory units on the teaching and assessment of literacy and numeracy and on school self-evaluation • Encourage the provision and uptake of leadership development programmes for aspiring principals by signalling that the successful completion of such courses will be a mandatory requirement for applicants for principalship from a fixed date 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES and continuing professional development providers</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> Ensure literacy and numeracy content in existing leadership courses by 2011</p> <p>Introduction of mandatory requirement for leadership courses by a fixed date</p>

4. GIVING PRIORITY TO LANGUAGE SKILLS, LITERACY AND NUMERACY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD, PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION

4.1 Getting the learning experience right

We have to ensure that all teachers prioritise the development of language, literacy and numeracy skills in all the work they do with children and young people. Getting the curriculum right at each stage of the child's development and ensuring that the curriculum is implemented as effectively as possible are essential if we are to ensure that children and young people acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need as students and adults. So, in addition to improving teachers' skills (as discussed in the previous chapter) we have to get the literacy and numeracy content of the curricula right.

We have to be very clear about the priorities that guide our decisions about the content of curricula. The issues and concerns that we consider to be important or relevant change over time and it is natural for curricula to evolve to reflect changing circumstances. In recent years there have been demands from organisations, interest groups and various educators that additional emphasis should be placed in school curricula on such areas as social and life skills, environmental issues, arts and music education, scientific understanding, and numeracy among others. While curricula have been adjusted in the light of some of these concerns, we have to recognise that the curricula cannot mediate all issues that are of relevance to young people. Including a broader range of issues, topics and subjects in school curricula inevitably has meant that the time available for the acquisition and consolidation of critical core skills has been eroded. *We have to acknowledge that understanding and using literacy and numeracy are such core skills that time for their development must be safeguarded, sometimes by delaying the introduction of some curriculum areas and always by ensuring that teaching literacy and numeracy is integrated across the curriculum. We have to say clearly to teachers that we want them to emphasise the development of literacy and numeracy above all other aspects of the curriculum.*

We have to ensure that school curricula define unambiguously what children should learn at each stage of their development. Curricula also need to provide clear and readily implementable guidance to teachers on the best ways to support students' learning and on how students' achievement can be assessed. One of the design principles in the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) was that its content objectives were intended to describe not only what the child was to learn but how that learning should occur. While this may have helped teachers to understand how the recommended methodologies were to be used, it also meant that the learning outcomes that should be achieved and assessed at each stage were somewhat obscured. For example, evaluations by the Inspectorate have demonstrated that teachers did not find the content of the English curriculum in the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) sufficiently clear; and it is interesting to note that a recent report on assessment from the NCCA's Primary School Network stated that teachers "queried the level of support that the curriculum offered to them in planning a lesson" and that "using the curriculum to support the assessment for learning process is more challenging than it needs to be." More recent curricular development at the post-primary level has adopted a "learning outcomes" design in which the expected learning outcomes to be achieved are clearly stated, but this approach needs to be incorporated into all curriculum statements at primary and post-primary levels. *Curricula should state clearly the skills and competence that ought to be expected of learners at five points in their development (end of early years/infants, end of second class, end of*

fourth class, end of primary stage, end of junior cycle) and should give teachers advice on assessing the degree to which each student has achieved the intended learning outcomes).

We have to ensure that children and young people experience a seamless development of their literacy and numeracy skills from early childhood to the end of compulsory education. In Ireland we have developed curricula traditionally in four distinct stages: early childhood, primary, post-primary junior cycle and post-primary senior cycle. Relatively little formal curriculum development has taken place for students who leave the school system early and who attend Youthreach services. The effect of this segmented curriculum development is that students experience discontinuities in their learning as they move from stage to stage.

For example, the *Aistear* (2009) curriculum developed for early childhood education has advanced considerably the thinking underpinning the infant stages of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) and it is clear that the latter needs to be amended to reflect the approach that should be used from three to six years.

Similarly, research has shown that students experience significant and unwarranted changes in teaching approaches between primary and lower secondary education. This discontinuity can result in students' achievement failing to advance in their early stages in junior cycle and inevitably their skills in literacy and particularly numeracy can suffer. In addition, we know that children will arrive in first year of post-primary school with a very varied range of ability in literacy and numeracy. Many twelve-year-olds will have very advanced skills in literacy and numeracy, others will require much more consolidation of these skills, and a minority will not have developed their skills sufficiently to access the post-primary curriculum. Despite the existence of these very varied learning needs, there is limited evidence that post-primary teachers pay sufficient regard to the prior learning of individual students in reading and numeracy when they are planning and teaching subject lessons. All teachers should be teachers of literacy and numeracy, and we should avoid the tendency to teach subject content in isolation from the core communication skills that all young people need to interact with all knowledge and life experiences.

We must ensure, therefore, that ensuring the development of the child's literacy and numeracy skills is comprehensively provided for in national curricula. We have to ensure, too, that our aspirations for children's literacy and numeracy development expressed in curricula are reflected in the curriculum as experienced by each child in school. We need to make sure that the learner's progress in literacy and numeracy is carefully monitored at each stage of development, and that teaching maintains a relentless focus on ensuring that all children develop appropriate skills in literacy and numeracy.

4.2 Early childhood education

Early years education spans the first six years of life. It is conceptualised in three phases, birth to eighteen months, eighteen months to three years and three years to six years. In Ireland the last two years of the early education phase are generally provided within the primary education system. Since January 2010 the provision in infant classes has been complemented by the introduction of a free pre-school place for all three to four-year-olds under an initiative funded by the Childcare Directorate of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

These early years should be used to provide children with appropriate developmental experiences that foster a firm foundation in literacy and numeracy skills, most notably in the area of language awareness and language development. This is reflected in *Aistear*, the early years curriculum for children aged 0-6 which spans pre-school and primary school and the *Primary School Curriculum*, both of which place a strong emphasis on the development of foundation skills for literacy and numeracy.

The *Aistear* framework, published in 2009, advances the thinking underpinning the 1999 *Primary School Curriculum* regarding the way in which young children learn. In particular, *Aistear* emphasises a balance between adult-led and child-led activities. *Aistear* regards play as a key process underpinning the learning of young children and as a methodology for facilitating learning and allowing students to choose some of their learning activities. Good-quality learning activities of the sort recommended in *Aistear* can make a very significant contribution to improving children’s acquisition of language, literacy and numeracy.

Of course, we have to be aware that the implementation of the approaches advocated by *Aistear* for all children in the 3-6 years age group presents a considerable challenge. While there is no definitive evidence that lowering class sizes generally in schools improves the quality of teaching or learning, there is data that points to beneficial effects of low adult-child ratios in early years education. Lower adult-child ratios in junior and senior infant classes would help to facilitate the sort of learning that is envisaged in *Aistear*. If this is to be achieved over time then it will be necessary to prioritise infant classes in the allocation of available teachers.

We also need to identify children’s learning needs as early as possible. Evidence-based assessment systems can provide information that gives an important early indicator of development at the individual student level, allowing issues to be addressed early, ensuring that they do not become a barrier to learning as a student progresses. A critical factor in supporting effective assessment in the formal education system is that teachers require secure knowledge and understanding of what it is that, learnt early, makes a difference to children’s continuing progression in learning.

It is also important that when learning needs are identified, that appropriate learning opportunities are provided. At present, DES policy focuses such intervention at the senior infants stage. Research evidence suggests that offering intervention offered only at this stage is too late for many children, particularly when it is shown that problems stem from difficulties associated with oral language development.

4.3 Actions to improve literacy and numeracy in the early years

We need to improve the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy in the early years stage. We will:

Restructure the infant curriculum so that it builds seamlessly on the approaches to teaching and learning advocated in the <i>Aistear</i> framework	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the infant curriculum to bring it into line with the approaches to teaching and learning advocated in the <i>Aistear</i> framework Ensure that teachers are enabled to place 	<i>Responsibility for this action:</i> NCCA, DES and schools

adequate emphasis on listening skills and oral language development, early phonemic awareness and other skills necessary for early literacy development and on early mathematical skills, such as classifying, matching, comparing and ordering	<i>Indicative target date:</i> Revised curriculum to be available from 2012-13
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace the additional subject-specific material included in the infant curriculum in the <i>Primary School Curriculum</i> by using integrated environmental education rather than history, geography and science • Provide for a print saturated environment within the infant classroom 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide continuing professional development for teachers in the roll-out of the revised curriculum (as discussed under teachers' professional development in chapter 2) 	

Ensure that children's development of language and early literacy and numeracy skills are adequately assessed and monitored in early years education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce an early assessment system to allow for the assessment of children's oral language competencies and pre-literacy and numeracy conceptual development through encouraging the use of existing and/or new assessment tools for early years development • Continue to assess a child's strengths and weaknesses in early literacy and numeracy capabilities within the infant classes through encouraging the use of appropriate existing and new assessment tools • Implement intervention strategies in the second term in junior infants for those students identified as having difficulty, especially in the areas of oral language and phonemic awareness, and provide additional support in the form of in-class support by the learning-support teacher in junior infants 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i></p> <p>DES, NCCA, ECCE providers and schools</p> <p>NCCA to issue advice on the use of the assessment tools and to support this with online resources</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2012-13 school year</p>

4.4 Primary education

Reviews of the implementation of the primary curriculum introduced in 1999 have raised concerns about the expanded curriculum that teachers are expected to cover at each class level. One consequence of the introduction of three new subjects (drama, science and SPHE) in the curriculum may have been a reduction in the amount of time devoted to the core areas of literacy and numeracy. This is reflected in considerable variation in the amount of time devoted to literacy and mathematics teaching revealed in the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading in 2009. While the curriculum emphasises the importance of an integrated approach, there is little evidence of a focus on literacy/numeracy development outside of the teaching of English and mathematics.

Evidence that is emerging from inspections in primary schools also shows that there is potential for improvement in the teaching of English. An analysis that has just been conducted

of over 800 English lessons in more than 400 schools in the period October 2009 to October 2010 was generally positive about teaching and learning of the subject, but it also found that in 14 per cent of cases pupils' learning was not satisfactory; assessment practices were found to be unsatisfactory in almost one third of cases; and teachers' preparation for more than a fifth of the English lessons was not satisfactory with almost a third of the teachers having no written plans. Data from over 230 whole-school evaluations conducted in the 2009-10 school year show that the proportion of schools in which weak practice was evident in the teaching of English is significant, at almost 20 per cent, although very few schools (1.1 per cent) fell into the lowest functioning category (significant weaknesses).

Reports by inspectors and researchers have consistently referred to limitations in standards achieved in mathematics at primary level over the past decade. Many of the flaws appear to result from a failure to secure the foundations of numeracy that provide the basis for conceptual development in mathematics. The 2009 National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading revealed weakness in aspects of curriculum implementation in the important areas of *measures* and *estimation*, both of which are fundamental to learning mathematics. Children's ability to apply mathematical concepts to such areas of the curriculum as geography and science is undermined by their limited grasp of the fundamental concepts that should be taught in these aspects of the mathematics curriculum. Research has shown that grouping students for learning where there are goals for the group and each individual member, and rewards based on achieving the goals, produces achievement levels far in excess of traditional whole-class teaching approaches. Contemporary research in mathematics teaching shows the importance of a problem-solving approach based on real-life contexts, where the development of understanding mathematical concepts precedes the development of skills. Much current practice in primary schools does not reflect these principles.

4.5 Actions to improve literacy and numeracy in primary schools

We need to improve the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy in primary schools. We need to:

Review the contents of the L1³ curriculum at primary level to clarify the learning outcomes to be expected of children	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the contents of the L1 curriculum to make clear the learning outcomes to be expected in each of the strands; this review to build upon the alignment of the infant curriculum with the <i>Aistear</i> curricular framework Ensure adequate emphasis and elaboration in the curriculum on the teaching and assessment of key literacy skills (such as phonemic awareness, phonics, sight vocabulary, spelling and the development of fluency and comprehension) and on writing skills Specify the learning outcomes expected at each level of the curriculum and develop and provide guidance to teachers on how literacy and numeracy skills should be developed in curriculum areas 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> NCCA and DES</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2012-13 school year</p>

³ L1 refers to the language of instruction of the school: English in English-medium schools and Irish in Irish-medium schools.

<p>other than L1 and mathematics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide guidance to teachers on assessing the oral language, literacy and numeracy skills of students at each stage of the primary cycle • Ensure that the reading tastes of boys are catered for in curricula at primary level 	
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Increase the recommended amount of time to be devoted to the teaching of literacy and numeracy	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue guidance to schools to use all discretionary curriculum time for the teaching of literacy and numeracy and to incorporate Drama activities and the time for this subject within time for L1 to ensure that the specific total time for L1 and mathematics rises from seven hours per week to ten hours per week in first to sixth classes • Over time, revise the required learning outcomes in subjects other than L1, mathematics and science to take account of the reduced time available for these subjects and provide guidance on the possibilities for cross-curricular teaching and learning in areas such as drama, music and visual arts 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES and NCCA</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> Reallocation of discretionary time could be in place as early as 2011-12 school year</p> <p>Subsequent revisions of other subjects in the primary school curriculum to be implemented in the medium term</p>

4.6 Post-primary education

Because of long-standing concerns regarding the teaching of mathematics, considerable change is already underway in the teaching of this subject at post-primary level and a bridging framework has been designed to join the mathematics of fifth and sixth class to the mathematics of the junior cycle. Project Maths, which is being rolled out on a phased basis beginning in September 2010, is designed to revolutionise how mathematics is taught at the post-primary level by restructuring the syllabuses and the assessment of mathematics in the examinations. Project Maths aims to place greater emphasis on student understanding of mathematical concepts, increase the use of contexts and applications, and thereby enable students to relate mathematics to everyday experience. As a consequence, there will be a greater emphasis in the teaching of mathematics to the application of mathematics to problem solving in real-life contexts.

Literacy teaching at post-primary level is addressed in the English syllabus in broad outline and is elaborated in the accompanying teacher guidelines. However, the current English syllabus, introduced over twenty years ago (1989), does not adequately address the social and cultural applications of literacy skills in the modern age, such as in electronic communications. While the objectives of the syllabus refer to reading skills to cope with factual prose in diverse forms, the content of the current syllabus is heavily weighted in favour of literary texts and genres such as poetry, novels, short stories and plays. This may explain, at least in part, why boys achieve less well than girls in assessments of literacy at the Junior Certificate stage, as recent research has shown that boys have a preference for expository (factual) texts over narrative or literary texts. Recent evidence suggests that the gap in achievement between boys and girls is considerably smaller at the end of primary education.

4.7 Actions to improve literacy and numeracy in post-primary schools

We need to improve the teaching of literacy and numeracy in post-primary schools. We need to:

Continue the development and roll-out of Project Maths	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to implement Project Maths and monitor the effect of implementation on standards achieved in mathematics using a range of indicators, including commissioned research, thematic evaluation by the Inspectorate and national sample testing in first and second year • Increase the time devoted to the teaching of mathematics to a minimum of five periods per week • Require that mathematics be taught for a minimum of three periods per week during Transition Year • Work towards implementing the recommendations of the Report of the Project Maths Implementation Support Group 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> NCCA, DES and schools</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> Ongoing</p>

Prioritise the revision of the English syllabus and the Junior Certificate English examination	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise the revision of the English syllabus as part of the reform of junior-cycle education • Revise the current syllabus for English for junior cycle to connect more effectively with the learning outcomes articulated for the subject in the primary curriculum (the lack of a bridge between the sixth-class and first-year experiences of English at present means that first-year English is often a missed opportunity for raising students' literacy levels) • Ensure that the reading tastes of boys are catered for in curricula at post-primary level • Provide necessary online and other supports to support teachers' practice in the teaching of English • Revise the Junior Certificate English examination paper to encompass a greater emphasis on literacy skills; a greater range of non-fiction and graphical sources; and greater emphasis on skills such as grammar, editing and functional writing 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> NCCA, State Examinations Commission and DES</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> New syllabus by 2013 for examination by 2016</p>

Prioritise the development of literacy and numeracy across all subject areas and areas of learning in the revised junior cycle curriculum	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that all revised curricula/syllabuses provide objectives for the integrated development of literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum, and include learning outcomes supporting these objectives • Reduce the numbers of areas studied within the junior cycle to ensure that adequate time is devoted to the development of literacy and numeracy • Pending the introduction of the revised junior cycle curricula/syllabuses, place an upper limit on the numbers of subjects that students may take in the 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> NCCA, DES and schools</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> With introduction of revised Junior Cycle curricula/syllabuses</p>

5. TARGETING AVAILABLE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON LEARNERS AT RISK OF FAILURE TO ACHIEVE ADEQUATE LEVELS OF LITERACY AND NUMERACY

5.1 Introduction

Research in Ireland and elsewhere has identified categories of children who are at risk of failing to achieve the levels of literacy and numeracy required to progress in the education system and to function effectively in society. Children of immigrants whose first language is not the language of the school, children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, children from the Traveller community and children who become disaffected with school are among those most likely to fail. It is important, therefore, that preventive measures are put in place to enable children in vulnerable groups to derive maximum benefit from education.

5.2 Supporting literacy and numeracy improvement in DEIS schools

Evidence strongly suggests that children from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds are significantly more likely to experience difficulties in literacy and numeracy achievement. Schools in which there are concentrations of these students are supported by the Department's Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative, which provides enhanced staffing, additional financial resources, access to specialised initiatives in literacy and numeracy development, and targeted continuing professional development opportunities for teachers.⁴

⁴ The major initiatives available to schools under DEIS include the following:

Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery is a school-based intervention designed to reduce literacy problems within an education system. It is an early intervention, giving children who have particular difficulties in reading and writing after one year in primary school, a period of intensive, individual teaching. The programme improves the reading and writing skills of the lowest achieving children in the age band around six years. International research findings show that up to 70 per cent of the children who are hardest to teach require no further support after a period of Reading Recovery that lasts on average eighteen weeks. The programme is primarily delivered to DEIS Urban banded schools.

First Steps

The First Steps programme affords schools the opportunity to address literacy levels in a structured and planned way. The objective of the First Steps initiative is to target the whole school or a specific school group on a particular strand/unit of the curriculum, with the emphasis on a holistic approach to the teaching of literacy. *First Steps* offers teachers an accurate means of assessing and monitoring children's competencies and progress in reading, writing, spelling and oral language. Teachers are then able to match children's performance in oral language, reading and writing with appropriate and relevant activities and strategies for development.

Maths Recovery

The Maths Recovery Programme has been developed as a systemic response to the problem of chronic failure in school mathematics. Maths Recovery students (typically six or seven) undergo a teaching cycle of ten to fifteen weeks duration. In these teaching cycles students are taught for thirty minutes daily, for four or five days per week. This early intervention is important because it provides an opportunity for educationally disadvantaged students before the gap between their knowledge and that of average and high-attaining students is too wide and before they experience too much failure.

Ready Set Go Maths

Ready, Set, Go Maths is an intervention programme which contains a practical handbook of guidance for teachers in the use of a wide range of activities and materials to enable them to improve the quality and effectiveness of early learning in numeracy for children who find mathematics difficult. The programme and a resource handbook for teachers were developed in Northern Ireland in the late 1990s. The handbook has been distributed to all schools using the programme by the Department. All DEIS urban band schools have received training in Ready Set Go Maths.

DEIS seeks to bring together a number of separate initiatives in a coherent way to improve learning outcomes for students. DEIS acknowledges that the circumstances of different schools vary, and that schools have to use varied responses to the needs of their students and communities.

At the heart of the DEIS initiative is the opportunity and requirement on schools to determine their own needs, set their own targets, and use resources as they think best. The improvement of literacy and numeracy outcomes are among the key areas in which schools are expected to improve while supported by the DEIS initiative. A strong emphasis is placed on schools establishing their baseline data, on setting attainment targets and actions, and on monitoring the outcomes.

5.3 Lessons from the DEIS experience

Following the launch of DEIS the Department commissioned the Educational Research Centre to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of measures and supports provided to schools under DEIS. While the first full report of the evaluation is awaited, some evidence has emerged that the range of supports provided to schools is having a positive effect. For example, the early indications are that schools are managing to show significant gains in improving the learning of the children who are performing least well in literacy (those who are at or below the 10th percentile in literacy). The report is also expected to point to positive engagement by school personnel with the range of supports provided under the school support programme.

Evidence from Inspectorate evaluations of DEIS schools also shows that some schools are managing to set realistic targets for improvement and to use the resources to deliver the planned improvements. However, schools are not universally successful, despite facing similar challenges and receiving similar supports. This makes it all the more important that best practice in the use of DEIS resources is disseminated and all schools are challenged to deliver the best outcomes for learners.

5.4 Actions to improve literacy and numeracy achievement in schools serving disadvantaged communities

DEIS will continue to support children and school communities that are operating in challenging social and economic contexts. The improvement of literacy and numeracy will continue to be a priority in these schools. We will:

Continue to support enhanced literacy, numeracy and language development in DEIS schools	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to support enhanced literacy, numeracy and language development of children in DEIS urban Band 1 and 2 primary schools • In the light of recent evaluations in DEIS schools pointing to the value of early intervention, focus the provision of DEIS interventions on early junior cycle in post-primary schools • Strengthen the provision of literacy and numeracy 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> Ongoing</p>

professional development for teachers in DEIS schools through the work of the team of twenty literacy development advisors referred to in section 2.4.	
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Improve target setting, assessment and self-evaluation in DEIS schools and for students from disadvantaged backgrounds in other schools	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the light of recent evaluations in DEIS schools, supports for target setting will be reviewed and strengthened to identify and enhance best practice in planning and target setting to ensure that schools derive maximum benefit from the process. The review will focus on planning, measuring, delivering, and evaluation and review Ensure that schools prioritise the tracking, assessment and analysis of the achievement of students from disadvantaged backgrounds for both formative and summative purposes 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES and schools</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> Ongoing</p>

Develop and implement an oral language development programme in pre-schools that are linked to DEIS primary schools	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritise the implementation of an oral language development programme within pre-schools (including Early Start units) that act as feeder pre-schools for DEIS Urban Band 1 schools. This programme would consist of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A train-the-trainer programme in a proven oral language development programme. Continuing professional development for pre-school staff to acquire the necessary skills in assessment techniques and in a proven oral language development programme Ensure continuity between oral language development programmes in pre-schools and in Junior Infant classrooms 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES and NCCA</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2012-13</p>

5.5 Supporting improved levels of achievement for students for whom English is an additional language

Some 10 per cent of primary students and approximately 12 per cent of post-primary students came from a migrant background (2009/10). The numbers have been increasing over the last decade. Research shows that almost all post-primary schools have migrant students and some 60 per cent of primary schools have migrant students. Immigrant students come from over 160 countries and speak up to 200 languages. An estimated 70 to 75 per cent of these students do not speak English as a first language.

The Department currently spends up to €100m per annum on providing supports for English as an additional language through the provision of some 1,500 EAL teachers in the primary and post-primary sectors. Continuing professional development has been provided to schools through the Professional Development Service for Teachers. Significant resources are available for schools and parents which can be accessed on the NCCA web site and through AIM – an information repository on the DES web site.

In Ireland, immigrant students have performed well when compared with migrant students in other countries. However, drawing on the experiences of many countries, the OECD has highlighted the need to target resources at non-English speaking migrant students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. It also points out that experience in other countries shows that second-generation immigrant students may not perform as well as their parents or their peers.

The acquisition of communicative language may mask a deficit in academic language skills that are needed to succeed at school. This is particularly relevant for non-native-English-speaking students and also Irish students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. A further barrier for immigrant students is their parents' lack of knowledge of the Irish education system.

The key to the acquisition of language is the role that *all* teachers play in supporting language development within their subject, particularly at the post-primary level for subject-specialist teachers.

5.6 Actions to improve levels of achievement for students for whom English is an additional language

We will adjust the focus of the allocation of, and encourage more targeted use of, existing resources for students for whom English is an additional language. We will:

Improve the targeting of EAL resources	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build on the findings of the VFM study on EAL provision and re-prioritise spending for supports for EAL students to allow for the building of teacher skills and whole-school capacity on EAL and integration; this will involve allocating a higher proportion of available funding and personnel to CPD on EAL and integration issues (not just for EAL teachers, but for all teachers, including guidance counsellors, and principals) and a reduction in teachers allocated to schools for EAL support 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2012</p>

Improve guidance to schools on best practice in teaching students for whom English (or Irish) is a second language	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the use of the available guidelines and other online resources for schools on best practice in supporting EAL students Encourage teachers (of EAL, in particular) to give due cognisance to the importance of mother tongue. Migrant students should be encouraged to maintain a connection with their mother culture and language as enhancing their mother tongue proficiency also enhances their competence in English 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES in conjunction with NCCA and schools</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> Ongoing</p>

Enable schools to analyse achievement data for EAL students as part of their overall analysis of student achievement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that schools prioritise the tracking, assessment and analysis of the achievement of EAL students for both formative and summative purposes (the use of the <i>Assessment Toolkit</i> will provide information on whether EAL students are acquiring the knowledge, skills, understanding, attitude and confidence to become proficient in communicative and academic language) • Encourage boards of management and school communities to adopt and monitor a whole-school approach to creating a positive school environment in which all students, including migrants, can participate fully in their educational experience (both social and academic). 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> Schools will lead the implementation of this measure as part of improved arrangements for the assessment of all students as discussed in chapter 6. One of the key strategies for schools in using assessment data is to track and plan provision for vulnerable groups such as EAL students, as part of the schools ongoing self-evaluation process</p> <p><i>Supported by</i> DES-assisted supports for improved student assessment and school self-evaluation</p>

Ensure that the literacy and numeracy needs of EAL students are addressed in initial teacher education and teachers' continuing professional development	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that initial teacher education courses prepare teachers for working with a diverse student population, not all of whom will speak English (or Irish) as a mother tongue • Encourage colleges and other teacher educators to provide post-graduate qualifications for EAL teaching 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> Teaching Council and ITE providers</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> Revisions of ITE content should take place in parallel with other reforms of ITE courses</p>

5.7 Supporting literacy and numeracy development in Youthreach

Since its establishment in the 1980s, Youthreach has been a very important element of the education system, catering for students who leave school early, and it now caters for close to 6,000 learners in VEC Youthreach and FÁS Community Training Centres (CTCs) nationally. A considerable proportion of the learners in Youthreach have significant literacy and numeracy difficulties. A recent evaluation by the Inspectorate of education provision in Youthreach centres found that one of the greatest challenges facing Youthreach was the development of the learners' literacy and numeracy skills, and that provision for literacy and numeracy required a higher level of professional underpinning and greater targeting of the needs of individual learners.

In Youthreach, the curriculum is a flexible framework on which learning activities are built; but in particular the curriculum should be relevant, challenging and imaginative. Best practice involves the development of an overall, individual action plan that builds on interests and abilities and affirms and attaches the learner. Multiple methodologies and integrated actions, such as team and interdisciplinary projects, are used. Elements such as personal development, guidance, basic skills and health promotion are integrated into the general

curriculum and innovation and creativity are encouraged throughout. In particular, integrated whole-centre approaches to literacy and numeracy and to personal development are crucial.

Literacy and numeracy development is a core element of the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) which has proven to be successful in flexibly catering for individual learners' needs within mainstream education. In addition, expertise and support are readily available. In that context, it would be appropriate to enable Youthreach centres to offer the JCSP programme as a part of a flexible curriculum and an integrated whole-centre approach. This would also give focus to the training of Youthreach staff in teaching and assessing progress in literacy and numeracy.

5.8 Actions to improve literacy and numeracy achievement in Youthreach centres

We need to improve the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy in Youthreach centres. We will:

Improve provision for literacy and numeracy teaching in Youthreach centres	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide training and online support for Youthreach and CTC staff in the development of whole-centre approaches to planning and target setting • Provide training and online support for Youthreach and CTC staff to improve the teaching and assessment of literacy and numeracy for learners • Enable the implementation of JCSP in Youthreach centres • Increase the number of Youthreach and CTC learners who achieve certification in courses of which literacy and numeracy are major components 	<p><i>Responsibility for this action:</i> DES, FAS, VECs, Youthreach centres and CTCs</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2011-2012</p>

6. FOSTERING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN LITERACY AND NUMERACY IN SCHOOLS

6.1 Knowing how well students are learning can help us to improve their achievement

Gathering evidence about how well students are learning, and using this information to improve the learning opportunities we provide for them are essential elements in ensuring that each student makes good progress in acquiring literacy and numeracy. This process of gathering and using assessment data should begin at the level of the individual student to enable the teacher to adjust instruction to suit the needs of individual learners and to inform them and their parents about the progress that they are making.

Gathering and using assessment data also needs to take place at the level of the school, where principals, teachers and boards of management can use this information to identify how well they are providing for the literacy and numeracy needs of individual students and groups of students in the school and how best they can improve the learning in the school.

We also need to have assessment data to inform national educational policy for literacy and numeracy and identify ways of improving the performance of the school system. Our collection and analysis of information about students' learning in literacy and numeracy need to be improved significantly.

6.2 Current approaches to assessment in primary schools

The *Primary School Curriculum* provides for the use of a range of assessment approaches in classrooms, which can help teachers gather evidence on how well students are learning. Good practice in assessment means using a variety of assessment methods in order to provide a full picture of a learner's achievement. In the course of teaching and learning activities teachers set tests or devise tasks to assess the progress students have made and to inform planning for how the next stage of learning should be structured and organised. Teachers use this informal evidence to give feedback to students on their learning and to give them a sense that they are making progress and an awareness of their strengths as a learner.

Primary schools are required by DES Circular 138/2006 to assess achievement in English reading and mathematics at the end of first class *or* the beginning of second class, *and* at the end of fourth class *or* the beginning of fifth class using standardised tests. Many schools use such tests at other stages in primary school, but a minimum of twice is specified, along with a requirement that the results of these tests are reported to parents. The NCCA has published information notes for parents on how to understand the results of these tests.

Schools also have access to the reports published by the Education Research Centre on national assessments of reading and mathematics, which recently have focused on achievement in second and sixth class and which give schools a snapshot of achievement at the national level.

6.3 How is assessment evidence used at primary level?

Using formal and informal evidence of achievement well is one of the most challenging tasks in teaching. While teachers have a great interest in the evidence of achievement, and will discuss it at the school level, they are less likely to make use of it in class to plan for students' learning.

The 2009 report on the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading told us that, while the results of standardised tests are widely discussed at staff meetings, the evidence from the tests was rarely used to set goals for classes or for the school. Nor was it used to guide what approaches to teaching and learning might be used. The Inspectorate's WSE reports also indicate that at the classroom level there is limited use of the outcomes of standardised tests to identify strengths and weaknesses and to connect the teaching approaches with the learning needs identified in the tests.

Reporting to parents seems to be another weak point. A survey carried out by researchers from UCC on behalf of the NCCA in 2008 found that just over one in four schools have a written policy on school reports and that one in six schools do not provide parents with a written report. A report on a survey carried out by the INTO in 2010 found that in 21 per cent of schools the results of standardised tests were not reported to parents, while in 56 per cent only verbal feedback was given. This is counter to the direction of DES Circular 138/06 (requiring schools to provide standardised test scores at two specified points and other related assessment outcomes to parents) and to the right of parents (under the Education Act, 1998) to access to information relating to the progress of their child.

It is not surprising to learn that parents sometimes lack an accurate sense of how well their child is progressing at school. The 2009 report on the National Assessments found that more than half of sixth-class pupils rated as *good at reading* by their parents could display only the most basic reading skills.

6.4 Making better use of assessment evidence at primary level

It is clear that better use can be made of the evidence of students' achievement that is gathered at present by teachers and by schools. One of the complex challenges is to support teachers in using the evidence they gather in their classrooms and schools to inform the next steps in learning for students and to set goals for that learning.

The 1999 *Primary School Curriculum* includes several thousand content objectives but does not include any information about what a student should know or be able to do at the end of each level of primary education. Feedback from teachers has shown that this uncertainty makes it difficult to judge students' achievement and to plan for students' progress.

We need to ensure that teachers have access to real examples of student achievement at each level of the curriculum so that they can make informed judgements about the learning successes and needs of their students. Therefore, we need to provide teachers with examples of what students should know or be able to do at each level of the curriculum. A curriculum written using clear learning outcomes, exemplified by samples of student achievement at each level, will provide robust national standards against which teachers will be able to judge and report on the progress of their students. And these national standards

will provide teachers with guidance on planning the next steps for each learner and lead to better achievement by students. Some preliminary work on the revision of the English curriculum at primary level and the development of such standards has begun at the NCCA, and the completion of the standards for language and mathematics should be prioritised.

6.5 Generating better evidence to support teaching and learning at primary level

The national standards stated in clear learning outcomes in the revised curriculum and in the examples of student achievement will enable teachers to reflect on how well their students are doing relative to what is expected at each level of the primary school. However, at present, a vital piece of evidence is not available to teachers, nor is it available to the system in general: we do not have any evidence about how other students *like ours* are doing in other schools *like ours*.

Standardised test scores in literacy and numeracy are connected to the expected achievement for all students of a particular age or class but do not take account of school context factors. *Like ours* evidence is different. *Like ours* evidence would give schools access to information about the achievement levels of students in “matching” schools. For example, a school of 250 students with DEIS band 2 status in an urban area and where English is not the first language of 25 per cent of the students would be given access to the evidence of achievement gathered in other schools of this type.

That evidence would be generated by means of standardised achievement tests administered in schools towards the end of a phase of the curriculum or at important points of transfer of students. Initially, these tests could be based on a large sample of schools, but as the *Schools Like Ours* initiative is rolled out they would be extended to every school, so that each school would have access to its own data as well as the data from the “matched” schools. The tests would connect to the *Primary School Curriculum*, and their development would be informed by the standards associated with the curriculum. Each school would then have its own assessment data and aggregated data from similar schools. This could be used by principals, teachers and boards of management to inform the judgements they make when evaluating their work and to set challenging targets for improvement. Each school should aim to have its students achieving in literacy and numeracy at the level of those in the best performing schools operating in similar contexts. Every school should set ambitious but realistic targets to improve its overall achievement in literacy and numeracy.

Schools Like Ours is about collecting better evidence about how students are doing, for use by schools and teachers to help their students to do better. It is certainly not about publishing “league tables” or rank-ordering schools. Neither is it about more work for teachers. All teachers and schools would need to do is administer the tests. A central unit, operating on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills, would look after everything else.

The *Schools Like Ours* data, even if only collected from a wide sample of schools each year, will eventually give a national picture of each year of primary education in different kinds of schools. Data for individual schools could help to inform a school’s self-evaluation and external evaluation, and aggregated national data could be published periodically. This data will not tell the whole story of what is happening in primary schools. It will be based on the results of tests that can capture only some of what children learn, but it will help us to have a

better understanding of what is working and what needs improving in our children's literacy and numeracy learning.

6.6 Current approaches to assessment in post-primary schools

There are considerable gaps and weaknesses in the assessment of literacy and numeracy at post-primary level. Some post-primary schools administer standardised or school-devised tests in literacy and numeracy to students coming into the school, either before the student begins first year or in the first weeks of post-primary school. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) reported 24 different tests in use in the sample of schools in its study of the junior cycle.

In general, the evidence of learning gathered from the tests used at the beginning of post-primary education is mainly for the guidance or learning support department and is not widely shared among the teachers in a school. The transfer of information from primary school about what children have learnt in general, and about their learning in literacy and numeracy, is patchy at best and sometimes anecdotal only. It is not surprising then, that when the ESRI tested the students in their study in literacy and numeracy at the beginning and at the end of first year, they found that the vast majority had made no progress, and some had even disimproved.

While students need to have literacy and numeracy skills to access the curriculum and the examinations in the junior cycle, there is no *examination* of literacy and numeracy *per se* in the Junior Certificate examination. While the Junior Certificate School Programme has placed great emphasis on all teachers seeing themselves as teachers of literacy and numeracy, in general, post-primary teachers regard literacy as the business of the English or learning-support department, and numeracy as the domain of mathematics teachers.

Ironically, as students move through the system and towards examinations, less evidence is available about their progress in literacy and numeracy. There are three possible reasons why this may be the case. Firstly, there may be an over-reliance in the post-primary system on examinations to generate any relevant evidence of learning. Secondly, the system division between primary and post-primary education acts as a disincentive to sharing evidence between primary and post-primary schools on what and how students are learning. Finally, there may be a mistaken sense that literacy and numeracy should be "finished" by the end of primary school.

6.7 Transferring evidence of assessment from primary to post-primary levels

Students' learning in literacy and numeracy at junior cycle needs to build on what and how they have learnt in primary school. The standardised test scores already reported to parents towards the end of primary education, a written report on achievement in a number of areas, including literacy and numeracy, and possibly a student-developed portfolio of examples of work from fifth and sixth class should be transferred to the relevant post-primary school. This is particularly important if first year is to become a year for consolidating literacy, numeracy and learning skills as part of the junior-cycle reforms.

The timing of this transfer is important in ensuring that there are no 'stakes' attached. It should happen soon after enrolment and when first year is under way, so that post-primary teachers can take due account of three sources of evidence – the test scores, teachers' comments, and possibly the examples of students' work – in planning the programme for junior cycle and in keeping track of students' progress across the three years.

While the format of reporting to parents in the junior cycle has yet to be determined, it would be helpful if some form of Report Card Template was developed for this stage of education. Such a reporting format would be useful in ensuring consistency of reporting among schools. Literacy and numeracy should be included as areas for reporting.

6.8 Generating better assessment evidence at post-primary level

Clearly, we need to place a new emphasis on literacy and numeracy in post-primary schools. Teachers, schools, students and their parents, as well as the education system, will need evidence that this new emphasis is making a difference.

The *Schools Like Ours* initiative will not end in primary school but continue to the end of compulsory education. At the end of second year in post-primary education tests in literacy and numeracy will be taken initially by a sample of students and schools, but over time, this should be extended to all students. These tests will be standardised but connected to the learning outcomes for the junior-cycle curriculum. Schools will get access to their own results, and to the results for schools with a similar enrolment, as in primary schools. This evidence should help the school to evaluate its junior-cycle programme and the progress students are making in literacy and numeracy. It should also help schools to design a first-year and second-year programme that supports students in making progress at a time when, research tells us, they can easily drift and lose focus.

As at the primary level, aggregated post-primary data could be used to form a national picture of how well students are acquiring literacy and numeracy, and this could be reported periodically. The data, collected on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills, will not give us the complete picture about the work of schools but it can inform external evaluation of schools and policy initiatives by helping us to have a better understanding of what is working and what needs improving in our children's literacy and numeracy learning.

The revision of the junior-cycle curriculum and the Junior Certificate examination is currently the subject of consultation. This is an opportunity to ensure that the new curricula and examinations that we put in place will provide the best possible opportunities for young people to develop and consolidate literacy and numeracy skills. Project Maths is already introducing very significant changes to the mathematics curriculum – changes that are designed to ensure that students have a much more successful engagement with all aspects of mathematics. However, as discussed earlier, the curriculum and examination for English are in need of substantial reform. There is also a significant challenge in making sure that teachers of all subjects at the post-primary level recognise the absolute need for them to contribute to improving the students' literacy and numeracy skills. This needs to be reflected not only in syllabus documents but, more importantly, in the teaching and learning activities in classrooms, and also in the assessment processes used in the junior cycle.

There should be no reason why, over time, schools should not have access to *Schools Like Us* examination data for the revised Junior Certificate examination, where most students are entered by school. Most schools already reflect on their own examination results relative to the national pattern. It would be even more useful if schools had access to the patterns for similar schools, so that they could get a sense of how well they are doing relative to schools serving the same kinds of communities in similar circumstances. As with the other *Schools Like Us* data, analysis of this information on a national basis will help to inform policy and provide important public information on literacy and numeracy learning.

6.9 Actions to support teachers, schools and the school system to make sure that students make progress in learning literacy and numeracy skills

We will work to improve the information that students, teachers, schools and the educational system have about the progress that young people are making in literacy and numeracy. We will:

Develop national standards of student achievement for literacy and numeracy to support teachers in generating and using assessment data on students' learning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop national standards of student achievement for literacy and numeracy at five stages (infant classes, junior primary, middle primary, senior primary, lower secondary) and at various proficiency levels by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensuring that the curricula for L1 and mathematics are stated in clear learning outcomes ○ Providing examples of student achievement to inform teachers' judgements regarding the achievement of individual students • Develop tasks and tests against which teachers can readily, validly and reliably interpret and communicate their students' progress in achieving the national standards 	<p><i>Responsible for this action:</i> This is a considerable research task which may have to be commissioned from a research institution working in conjunction with the NCCA and DES</p> <p><i>Target dates:</i> English standards and supports (primary) by end 2012 Maths standards and supports (primary) by end 2013 English standards and supports (post-primary) by end 2014 Maths standards and supports (post-primary) by end 2015</p>

Support teachers and schools to use the national standards to assess and report on the literacy and numeracy achievements of students to parents and boards of management	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the national standards and suitable assessment instruments available in online format to schools • Ensure that schools assess the literacy and numeracy achievement of students at fixed points (infant classes, junior primary, middle primary, senior primary, lower secondary) for formative purposes and report individual student outcomes to parents • Ensure that the principal reports aggregated data on student achievement in the school to the board of management • Provide continuing professional development opportunities and information to teachers, 	<p><i>Responsible for this action:</i> DES working with NCCA, schools and others</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> English primary: 2013-14 Maths primary: 2014-15 English post-primary: 2015-16 Maths post-primary: 2016-17</p>

<p>principals and boards of management on the interpretation and use of achievement data to inform teaching and learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide on-line and other information to parents about the national standards and how to understand their child's progress and learning needs 	
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Require all schools to implement standardised tests of reading and mathematics at fixed points, to report outcomes to parents and boards of management, and to use the outcomes to inform school self-evaluation and improvement

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that students are assessed at the end of second, fourth and sixth class in primary school and at the end of second year in post-primary school, using standardised achievement tests of literacy and numeracy • Require schools to report to parents (through written school reports and parent-teacher interviews) in clear terms about how their child is doing compared to the norm for children of their age • Require principals to report aggregated assessment data from the standardised tests on literacy and numeracy to boards of management annually • Provide advice and guidance to schools on how standardised assessment data can be analysed to support school self-evaluation and target setting 	<p><i>Responsible for this action:</i> DES and schools</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2011-12</p>
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Collect national data on student achievement using standardised tests, and provide data to schools to enable them to evaluate the comparative performance of their students against national trends and standards

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect aggregated data on student achievement on standardised tests (for end of second class, end of fourth class, end of sixth class, end of second year in post-primary) from all schools • Analyse national data and provide on-line mechanism to enable individual schools to obtain feedback that would allow them to benchmark their standards against a norm for similar schools and to set targets for improvement (i.e. assessment evidence from <i>Schools Like Ours</i>) • Require principals to report to the board of management on the comparative performance of the school's students against national trends as well as standards in schools in similar contexts using <i>Schools Like Ours</i> data 	<p><i>Responsible for this action:</i> Selected institution on behalf of DES; schools</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> English primary: 2014 Maths primary: 2015 English post-primary: 2016 Maths post-primary: 2017</p>
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Use aggregated national data on student achievement in literacy and numeracy to support school self-evaluation, school inspection and school improvement

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide continuing professional development opportunities and information to teachers and boards of management on the use of aggregated data from standardised tests (<i>Schools Like Ours</i> data) in school self-evaluation: enable teachers to reflect on the impact of their teaching and learning strategies and interventions on the development of 	<p><i>Responsible for this action:</i> DES (in conjunction with institution above) and schools</p> <p>Regulations/advice re compliance with national and international assessments to be progressed</p>
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<p>students' literacy and numeracy skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require schools to put in place a three-year plan for the promotion and improvement of literacy and numeracy standards, in which specific targets are set and specific actions defined • Use aggregated data from standardised tests as <i>one element</i> of the evidence used to support the inspection process (for example, in inspection planning; during the inspection process; in the identification of good practice; and in the targeting of under-performing schools) • Ensure that all whole-school type inspections evaluate and report on literacy and numeracy standards in schools, including an evaluation of the school's target-setting and improvement in these areas, and in post-primary schools on the promotion of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum • Report on the national achievement trends in literacy and numeracy at each of four stages using <i>Schools Like Ours</i> data • Participate in international surveys such as PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS to enable the achievement of students to be benchmarked against international standards at primary and post-primary levels • Continue to conduct and publish the <i>National Assessments of Mathematics and Reading</i> (based on a scientific sample of schools) on a four-yearly basis • Require all schools to cooperate when requested with all international survey approved or commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills 	<p>DES</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> From 2012</p>
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<p>Quality assure the child's learning experience within the free pre-school year</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop pilot evaluations of pre-school provision 	<p><i>Responsible for this action:</i> Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and DES</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> Initial pilot evaluations to be conducted in 2012</p>

7. ENABLING PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LITERACY AND NUMERACY DEVELOPMENT

7.1 Parents and communities play a vital role in literacy and numeracy

There is clear evidence that parental support and engagement has a significant impact on children's educational achievement, especially in literacy and numeracy development. Given that students spend only 15 per cent of their time at school, the impact of the home on students' development and attainment cannot be underestimated.

Students achieve more when their parents take an active interest in their education, supporting and encouraging them and setting high but achievable expectations. Parental engagement is critically important in the early years, particularly in the development of children's language skills and emergent literacy and numeracy skills. Parental support for young children not only makes a real difference to their development, but also can outweigh the impact of other factors, such as socio-economic status or parental educational attainment. The outcomes of the National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading in 2009 show that there is a strong link between the home environment and student achievement. For example, high achievement was associated with the amount of books and educational resources in the home, while low achievement was associated with practices such as television in the children's bedroom and excessive time on the internet or gaming.

Ensuring the message about the importance of parental involvement gets through to parents and the wider community is essential for educational success. All parents need to be aware of the relevance of literacy and numeracy for their children's future and the influence that they have over their children's educational development. Parents, grandparents and other members of the community need to know how in a practical manner they can contribute to children's learning of literacy and numeracy in the pre-school and early school years and support the work of the pre-school and the school in this regard. There is also a need to increase awareness among young people of the importance of competence in literacy and numeracy skills for their future employment prospects in an increasingly technological and diverse society.

The communities in which young people live and grow up have also a major role to play in fostering and supporting literacy and numeracy. In many communities, projects and initiatives have been taken to link schools and communities more closely together and to enable people in the community to support children's learning and participation in school and education. Some of these projects and initiatives are supported through voluntary, charitable and State funding, and the projects have adopted a number of different approaches. Recent evaluation of these projects by the NESF has shown that, "while there is excellence in community provision [for literacy], there is also variability," and that "greater leadership, quality assurance and support" are needed for this sector.

7.2 Actions to support parents and communities

We will support parents and communities to help their children to develop good literacy and numeracy skills. We will:

Launch a national information campaign to build up awareness of the important role that parents and communities can play in supporting literacy and numeracy learning

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on existing national public information campaigns on the importance of adult literacy and numeracy funded by the Department and public/private sector sponsors to create a targeted campaign highlighting the role of parents and communities in improving children’s literacy and numeracy, using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ local and national media ○ on-line/digital resources and tools linked to existing websites, e.g. www.writeon.ie; ○ endorsement of individuals well known to the public ○ Co-ordination of the information campaign with adult literacy provision by VECs 	<p><i>Responsible for this action:</i> DES</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2012-13</p>
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Provide direct supports to parents to encourage them to support their children’s language, literacy and numeracy development

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using <i>Aistear</i> as the curriculum framework, develop resources to expand the knowledge of parents in the techniques they can use to support the oral language development of children aged 0-6. (<i>Aistear</i> is for children aged 0-6; it can be used by parents and the NCCA have already developed tip-sheets for parents on how to play with children) • Provide parents with information leaflet/pack on literacy and numeracy activities that they can use to support their child’s reading at each stage • Co-ordinate the distribution and provision of these resources with adult literacy provision by VECs and targeted to those in most need; for example, the disadvantaged and hard-to-reach 	<p><i>Responsible for this action:</i> DES and Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in conjunction with NCCA</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2012</p>
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Ensure that parental engagement in children’s learning is integrated into each school’s teaching and learning strategy and development plan

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable schools and ECCE settings (through advice and guidance) to build effective working relationships with parents and communities to support learning; for example, schools and early childhood care and education settings should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ value parents’ engagement in their children’s learning, and take active steps to welcome, communicate and engage all parents e.g., identify ways to support and encourage parents to be actively involved in their children’s learning ○ take active steps to heighten parental expectations and help them to take an increased interest in the standards their children achieve or need to achieve ○ provide or host sensitively-designed opportunities for parents to develop their confidence and their capacity to help their 	<p><i>Responsible for this action:</i> DES and schools</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2011-12</p>
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<p>children at home in relation to literacy and numeracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ inform parents of opportunities to participate in home literacy programmes as organised in local libraries or provided by VECs or community groups • Ensure that the literacy and numeracy plan required in all schools includes specific actions to inform parents about ways to support their children's learning and how to understand reports about their child's progress in school 	
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<p>Support existing initiatives to link home, school and community literacy and numeracy initiatives</p>	
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn from ways that the existing early intervention pilot programmes supported by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs are successful in overcoming barriers to literacy and numeracy development in disadvantaged communities • Continue to support family literacy initiatives in communities served by DEIS schools; in allocating support, priority will be given to projects (at early years and school level) that have been evaluated and proved to be effective through evaluations 	<p><i>Responsible for this action:</i> DES and Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs</p> <p><i>Indicative target date:</i> 2012-16</p>
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8. A CONSISTENT NATIONAL FOCUS ON THE PRIORITISATION OF LITERACY AND NUMERACY IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND BEYOND

8.1 We have to be relentless in our focus on literacy and numeracy

This document sets out ambitious targets and a range of initiatives to improve national standards in literacy and numeracy. Realising the aims set out here will be a very considerable challenge, especially in a time of limited public resources. Achieving these aims will require significant coordination and a shared effort between many different groups and bodies: teachers, school leaders and management, parents and school communities, the Department of Education and Skills and its agencies, the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and other State bodies as well as voluntary groups. Improving national standards in this way will require a relentless focus on literacy and numeracy in the educational system and beyond.

8.2 Overseeing the plan

The Minister will appoint two bodies to support the implementation of the actions in this plan; the National Literacy and Numeracy Implementation Group and the National Literacy and Numeracy Forum.

The National Literacy and Numeracy Implementation Group will be chaired by the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills and will include national and international experts on literacy and numeracy acquisition and assessment from research, teaching and teacher educator backgrounds, and senior officials from the Department of Education and Skills, the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and relevant statutory bodies.

The National Literacy and Numeracy Implementation Group will:

- oversee a national consultation process on the Literacy and Numeracy Plan and develop a final Plan
- oversee the implementation of the initiatives in the Plan
- oversee the commissioning of research and the development of national standards for literacy and numeracy, associated assessments and reporting mechanisms
- monitor the effectiveness of the initiatives and adjust as necessary and in the light of resources to ensure maximum improvement
- report regularly to the Minister for Education and Skills
- consult on a regular basis with stakeholders through the National Literacy and Numeracy Forum.

The National Literacy and Numeracy Forum, chaired by the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills, will provide a forum for the National Literacy and Numeracy Implementation Group to meet and obtain input from representatives of national associations of students, parents, teachers, teacher educators and school management, higher education bodies, business and civil society organisations, and community and family education initiatives.

9. HOW YOU CAN MAKE AN INPUT TO THIS PLAN

9.1 We need your suggestions

We need your suggestions and comments for improving this draft plan. Your suggestions will be examined carefully by the National Implementation Group that will be set up to oversee the development of the plan and its implementation.

9.2 Making your suggestions

We want to receive your comments on the draft plan by 31 January 2011. You can send your comments and suggestions:

by email to :

literacynumeracy@education.gov.ie

in writing to:

Secretary
National Literacy and Numeracy Implementation Group
Department of Education and Skills
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1

by leaving a comment on our dedicated comment line:

01-889 6768

9.3 Stakeholder consultation meetings

It is planned to hold consultative meetings about the plan for literacy and numeracy with stakeholder groups in the early spring of 2011 so that the plan can be finalised as soon as possible.