

**Interim Review of the National Literacy and Numeracy  
Strategy 2011-20**

**Speaking Notes**

**for**

**Opening of Literacy and Numeracy Forum**

**Clock Tower, DES Marlborough Street**

**Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2016 at 9.40am**

A dhaoine uaisle, a chairde, is mian liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil libh as bheith in ár dteannta inniu. Táimid anseo chun athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an *Straitéis Náisiúnta chun an Litearthacht agus an Uimhearthacht a Fheabhsú i measc Leanaí agus Daoine Óga*. Tá obair an-thábhachtach le deanamh againn inniu, cinnte.

I am delighted to welcome you all here today to the Clock Tower. It is hard to believe that it is coming up to five years since the Department launched the *National Strategy: Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life*.

The Strategy was, of course, focussed on literacy (in its broadest sense) and on numeracy, but went beyond the bounds of what traditionally might have been expected in a literacy and numeracy strategy. It recognised that the skills of literacy and numeracy were fostered most effectively, when a comprehensive approach to improvement was adopted.

So, it set out to support better provision for children from primary years to young adulthood. It acknowledged and sought to support parents as *they* supported *their* children's learning. It set out how we would improve *what* children would learn in the curriculum right across the early years, primary and junior cycle levels. It recognised the key role of teachers, and set out to re-structure and improve their initial and continuing professional development. It acknowledged the roles to be

played by the integration of assessment fully within teaching and learning, and set out how we would improve both school inspection and school self-evaluation. And the Strategy included ambitious but clearly defined targets to be achieved.

I am very proud of the success that we have achieved in the implementation of the Strategy. A huge part of that success is down to the work done by the deeply committed teachers and school leaders, parents and school managers, staff in support services of various types, teacher educators and a host of other bodies represented by many of you here. I want to thank you for that commitment and effort and to praise the success that your work on implementing the Strategy has achieved.

Many of you will recall that the 2011 launch of the *National Strategy* came in the wake of ongoing concerns about standards of literacy and numeracy among our student population including those raised by the poor outcomes for Ireland in the 2009 PISA tests.

Although the work on developing the strategy actually pre-dated these results by some considerable time, there is no doubt that PISA 2009 gave an added impetus to the finalisation and launch of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life*. While I am well aware of the dangers of putting too much store on an isolated set of test results, it is

reassuring that the findings of PISA 2012 have placed us back in line with former results.

Following the launch of the *National Strategy*, you all set to work on its implementation, with great commitment and rigour. In the interim, Ireland has participated in PISA 2012 and in a range of other national and international tests. We have had:

- National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics (NAERM) carried out by the ERC in 2014

And internationally, we have participated in

- The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS);
- Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)
- and the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)

There have also been a number of very important focused studies, on areas like post-primary mathematics, particularly the impact of the Project Maths curriculum initiative and the performance of DEIS schools. The Chief Inspector's Report along with some important comparative studies in partnership with the Department of Education in Northern Ireland have also provided valuable insights into the quality of teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy and highlighted areas for improvement.

By and large, as many of you will know, the evidence from tests and reports since 2011 has been very encouraging. The results overall show that our primary and post-primary students are doing very well by most international benchmarks. We are not in the exceptional category, yet, but we have made great progress.

The NAERM results at primary level from 2014 show that performance on English reading and Mathematics has improved significantly at Second and Sixth classes since the last National Assessments in 2009. The results show, in fact, that the targets for literacy and numeracy set out in the *National Strategy* for the primary sector have already been achieved.

The news is good at post-primary level too. In PISA 2012, for example, students in Irish post-primary schools in Ireland achieved scores on reading literacy, mathematics and science that were significantly above the corresponding OECD average scores, with particularly strong performance on reading literacy. Many of the targets set in the 2011 *Strategy*, such as those seeking greater uptake levels at higher level in State Maths examinations, are also well on the way to being met. Nonetheless, there is still considerable scope for improvement, particularly in relation to numeracy.

In view of the outcomes achieved under the *National Strategy* to date, I decided last year to bring forward a planned review, originally

scheduled for 2016, to the latter half of 2015. While of course I am pleased with the progress to date, I am equally anxious to ensure that the momentum and support for improvement in literacy, BUT particularly in numeracy, is maintained.

That is why this Review and today's work are so important.

The strategy was originally compiled with considerable help from bodies like those you represent here today. In fact there were almost 480 written submissions received to inform the drafting of the original strategy in 2010. For this interim review, your opinions were sought and have very much informed our thinking, as have the significant research findings which are also available. It's is wholly appropriate that we have asked you here again to consider what our consultation for this interim review of the strategy has been telling us, so far. Following this Forum, my Department will finalise an interim report and with your help identify and plan for areas requiring greater prioritisation for the remainder of the Strategy's lifespan.

You have already contributed hugely to the review work undertaken by the Department's Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit and the Inspectorate in recent months. Many of you completed very comprehensive questionnaires relating in particular to the aspects of the Strategy which pertained to your areas of responsibility. Your responses have been very informative and helpful and have greatly

supported us in identifying draft priorities for the remainder of the implementation of the Strategy. Very detailed discussions between relevant sections within the Department have also fed into the process.

The Department also had a further thirty questionnaires returned by numerous implementers of the Strategy beyond the Department. We sought the views of every named organisation in the 2011 Strategy, and as many identifiable bodies as possible under umbrella terms such as ‘teacher education providers’. We also sought and received inputs from bodies which had not even been established at that time but which now have key roles in promoting literacy and numeracy

Officials have had follow-up meetings with representatives of most of these bodies. In addition, three focused meetings were organised with groups of teachers working at the chalk-face.

It is important that in the second half of the lifespan of the strategy, we focus and prioritise our efforts in a way that will embed the success of the first five years and drive improvement in those areas that need special attention. This Department will continue to prioritise improvements in Literacy and Numeracy for our students to 2020 and beyond.

You will shortly hear some of the emerging findings of the review to date. Then you will get an opportunity later this morning to discuss and

help us highlight areas that need to be prioritised for the second five years of the Strategy up until 2020. Our work today is not necessarily about setting new and higher targets, but rather about refocusing and reemphasising key aspects of the Strategy. It is about improving and making the Strategy even more effective through our teachers, parents and communities in general so that our students in early years, primary, post-primary and Youthreach settings all gain from the implementation of this Strategy.

It is also important to stress that this Literacy and Numeracy strategy complements the Literacy and Numeracy for adults as set out in the FET strategy. It can only benefit the school-going population, as well as the population beyond the age of compulsory schooling, if there are greater synergies between the further and adult education sector and the sector representing pre-school, primary and post-primary in these vital areas of Literacy and Numeracy.

Being literate and being numerate are vital skills to enable young people to learn, to enjoy and participate in the arts, sciences and every aspect of day-to-day life as young people and active, fulfilled citizen of tomorrow. Today, the Department wants to listen to your views on how we can consolidate and build on the excellent success to date so that all our children will develop these vital skills of literacy and numeracy. I want to thank you for your participation here today and in your daily work that serves young people so well. Tá súil agam go mbeidh deis



fhóna agaibh plé a dheanamh agus bhúr dtuairimí a nochtadh rith an lae. Go raibh maith agaibh.