

INFORMATION NOTE

LITERACY AND NUMERACY FOR LEARNING AND LIFE:

The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young people

8 July 2011

1. LAUNCH OF STRATEGY

The Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn, TD, will launch *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life*, the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People on Friday, 8 July 2011 at 11.00 am in the Department's offices at Marlborough Street.

The Strategy will be available on the website of the Department (www.education.ie). The submissions made to the Department during the public consultation on the strategy and the records of consultation meetings will also be made available on the website.

2. TARGETS IN THE STRATEGY

The Strategy sets a series of qualitative and quantitative targets for improving literacy and numeracy standards for the period 2011 to 2020. These are:

Improve our attitudes to literacy and numeracy

- Raise public awareness of the importance of oral and written language in all its forms (including print, writing and digital media)
- Foster an enjoyment of reading among children and young people
- Create greater awareness of, and more positive attitudes towards, Mathematics among the public
- Promote better attitudes to Mathematics among children and young people

Improve outcomes at early childhood level

- Improve the oral-language competence of very young children in early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings and their readiness to develop early mathematical language and ideas

Improve outcomes at primary school level

- Ensure that each primary school sets goals and monitors progress in achieving demanding but realistic targets for the improvement of the literacy and numeracy skills of its students in a school improvement plan
- 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 percentage point 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 percentage points at both second class and sixth class by 2020
- Increase awareness of the importance of digital literacy and include assessments of primary students' ability to read digital material as part of the national assessments of English reading

Improve outcomes at post-primary level

- Ensure that each post-primary school sets and monitors progress in achieving demanding but realistic targets for the improvement of the literacy and numeracy skills of its students in a school improvement plan
- Extend the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading to assess the performance of students at the end of second year in post-primary education; use data from these assessments to establish the existing levels of achievement and to set realistic targets for improvement, similar to those adopted at the primary level
- Increase awareness of the importance of digital literacy and include assessments of post-primary students' ability to read digital material as part of the national assessments of English reading
- Increase the percentage of 15-year old students performing at or above Level 4 and Level 5 (the highest levels) in PISA reading literacy and numeracy tests by at least 5 percentage points by 2020
- Halve the percentage of 15-year old students performing at or below Level 1 (the lowest level) in PISA reading literacy and numeracy tests 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

3. KEY AREAS IN THE STRATEGY

The Strategy addresses six key areas aimed at improving literacy and numeracy outcomes, these are:

- Enabling parents and communities to support children's literacy and numeracy development
- Improving teachers' and early childhood education and care practitioners' professional practice through changes to both pre-service and in-service education
- Building the capacity of school leadership to lead improvements in the teaching and assessment of literacy and numeracy in schools
- Getting the content of the curriculum for literacy and numeracy right at primary and post-primary levels by making sure that the curriculum is clear about what we expect students to learn at each stage
- Targeting available additional resources on learners with additional needs, including students from disadvantaged communities, students learning English as an additional language and students with special educational needs
- Improving how teachers, schools and the educational system use good assessment approaches to plan the next steps for each learner and monitors progress.

Each of the actions in the Strategy has a timeline and clear lead responsibility for delivery is assigned.

Actions in the Strategy to support **parents and communities** include:

- Supporting a national information campaign to build up awareness of the important role that parents and communities can play in supporting literacy and numeracy learning;
- Providing better information to parents to enable them to support their children's language, literacy and numeracy development
- Encouraging schools to work closely with parents and to support parents in helping their children's learning.

Actions in the Strategy to **improve teacher education** for pre-school, primary and post-primary teachers include:

- lengthening the B.Ed. degree programme for primary teachers to four years and the diploma for primary teaching to two years
- replacing the study of humanities (also known as “academic electives”) within the BEd programme with a range of optional courses which are more closely related to education and confine the proportion of programme time devoted to these courses to less than 20% of overall programme time in order to allow more time for the development of the professional knowledge and pedagogical skills of teachers
- lengthening of H Dip Ed course for post-primary teaching to two years
- ensuring that modules on the teaching, learning and assessment in literacy and numeracy is a mandatory requirement for all primary and post-primary teacher education courses
- specific requirements that continuing professional development courses for teachers include mandatory units on literacy, numeracy and assessment
- improvements to education courses for staff working in pre-schools.

Actions in the Strategy to build the capacity of **school leadership** include:

- Improving principals’ and deputy principals’ understanding of the most effective approaches to improve the teaching of literacy and numeracy and the use of assessment
- Supporting principals and deputy principals in implementing robust school self-evaluation, focussing in particular on improvements in literacy and numeracy.

Actions in the Strategy on the **content of the curriculum** include:

- Revising the English (for all schools) and Irish curricula (for Irish-medium schools) in primary schools to show clearly what skills children are expected to learn at each stage; subsequently to revise the Irish curriculum for English-medium schools
- Revising the elements of the primary curriculum in infant classes to ensure consistency with the *Aistear* curriculum framework for pre-schools announced in 2009 and putting a greater emphasis on early language and numeracy development
- Increasing the amount of time spent on the teaching of literacy and numeracy in primary schools
- Prioritising the reform of the English and Irish curricula in the review of junior cycle to make sure literacy skills are prioritised
- Continuing the roll-out of Project Maths in post-primary schools
- Increasing the time available for the development of students’ literacy and numeracy skills by capping the number of subjects a student may sit in junior certificate at eight and requiring that mathematics be taught for a minimum of five periods per week.

Actions in the Strategy to assist **learners with additional needs** include:

- Continuing to support enhanced literacy and numeracy provision for students from socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds
- Rebalancing the supports made available to support the literacy and numeracy learning needs of EAL students by increasing spending on continuing professional development for all staff and reducing teachers allocated to schools for EAL
- Continuing to support enhanced literacy and numeracy provision for students with special educational needs, including students of high ability.

Actions in the Strategy to improve the way in which schools **assess and report on students' progress** in literacy and numeracy include:

- Ensuring that the curriculum is presented in clear learning outcomes and supported by examples of students' learning so as to enable teachers to use assessment to inform their teaching, i.e. use of assessment for learning (AfL)
- Requiring the use of standardised assessments in literacy and numeracy at end of second, fourth and sixth classes in primary schools and at the end of second year in post-primary schools
- Requiring all schools to use this and other assessment data as part of the self-evaluation process to inform the development of a school improvement plan (as required in the Programme for Government)
- Requiring teachers to report to parents and the board of management on the achievement of pupils
- Putting in place better arrangements for the transfer of pupil achievement data from pre-schools to primary schools and from primary to post-primary schools
- Collecting the aggregated outcomes of standardised tests nationally and using this information to monitor standards
- Improving the evaluation of schools regarding literacy and numeracy (using both school self-evaluation and external inspection)
- Participating in international assessments that facilitate the benchmarking of Irish students' achievement with that of students in other countries.

4. CONSULTATION

The development of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* has been informed by an extensive consultation process. Following the publication of the Department's Draft Plan to improve literacy and numeracy in schools in November 2010, a public consultation process was launched. Almost 480 submissions were received and a series of face-to-face consultative meetings were held with key organisations. The organisations who participated in these meetings are listed in the Appendix. All of the written submissions and a brief listing of any additional points raised at the face-to-face meetings are available on the website of the Department of Education and Skills.

Department officials also consulted with officials and experts in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Educational Research Centre, Drumcondra, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the Teaching Council.

5. EARLY IMPLEMENTATION OF SOME ACTIONS IN THE STRATEGY

Many of the actions in the Strategy are long-term initiatives, the effect of which will not be seen for a good number of years, while others are more immediate. The Minister has stated that all the actions need to be tackled with a sense of urgency and commitment.

The Minister will announce the following priority items for immediate action at the launch of the Strategy:

Primary school curriculum

The Minister will announce that he is asking the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to give immediate priority to revision of the curricula for English and Irish at primary level. The **immediate priority** will be to re-cast the curricula in English, and Irish for Irish medium primary schools, to be written in a learning outcomes approach, specifying clearly the objectives that children will be expected to achieve at each stage of the primary cycle. Revision of the curriculum for Irish in English-medium schools (Irish as L2) will follow.

Time for literacy and numeracy in primary schools

The Minister will announce that he is asking the NCCA to provide revised recommended time allocations for subjects in the primary school with a view to ensuring adequate time for literacy and numeracy development.

Pending the provision of this advice by the NCCA, Minister will announce that he intends to issue a circular to all primary schools asking them to:

- increase the time available for literacy to 90 minutes per day
- and to increase the time available for Mathematics to 50 minutes per day (up from 36 minutes per day currently);

these changes to be implemented with immediate effect.

In doing so, schools will have discretion as to how to achieve this focus on literacy and numeracy, taking account of:

- the potential to integrate the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills into subjects other than L1 and mathematics
- the use of some or all discretionary time for literacy and numeracy
- the possibility of reducing the minimum time for Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (including history, geography and science) and Arts Education (including visual arts, music and drama) to a total of five hours per week (down from six hours currently)
- the scope for deferring some aspects of subjects other than L1 and mathematics to a later stage in the primary cycle to allow for core skills in literacy and numeracy to be strongly developed in infant, first and second classes

Standardised tests at primary level

The Minister will announce that he will issue a circular to primary schools to improve assessment arrangements with immediate effect. The circular will provide:

- that standardised tests in English reading, Irish and mathematics must be administered to all eligible students in second, fourth and sixth classes in the final term of the academic school year (i.e. May/June 2012)
- that schools must report to the parents of each child the outcomes of these standardised tests and provide meaningful information to assist parents to understand the outcomes (using advice already available from the NCCA)
- that schools should provide teachers' judgements of students' progress in literacy and numeracy on annual reports in addition to the outcomes of standardised tests; the first reports to be issued to parents no later than June 2012
- that boards of management will receive and review at least once annually aggregated data on the outcomes of the standardised tests in literacy and numeracy (stating the number and proportion of students achieving in the following bands: well above average, high average, average, low average, well below average)
- that aggregated data from the standardised tests will be collected electronically by the Department in 2012.

Standardised tests at post-primary level

The Minister will announce the commissioning of standardised tests for English and mathematics (and Irish in Irish-medium schools) for use at the end of second year in junior cycle. (The Education Research Centre [ERC], Drumcondra is developing such standardised tests for English and Mathematics. If asked to prioritise this work, the tests could be available by 2014, but a commissioning/tendering process may be required. This matter is being checked by QCAP with the Legal Affairs Section of the Department at present.)

Curriculum reform at post-primary level

The NCCA is expected to provide advice to the Minister on fundamental reforms in junior cycle in the autumn. An important objective in that approach will be to begin the implementation of change as soon as possible.

The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy makes clear that the Minister will ask the NCCA to prioritise the revision of the syllabus for English and the syllabus for Irish in Irish-medium schools as part of the junior cycle reforms. This revision should also adopt a “learning outcomes” approach and be supported by the provision of guidance and exemplar materials to support Assessment for Learning.

Interim measure of reform: limit number of subjects in JC examination

The literacy and numeracy Strategy envisages that, as an interim measure of curricular reform, the Minister will seek the advice of the NCCA on the advisability of limiting the maximum number of subjects that a student may take in the Junior Certificate examination with effect for the cohort entering junior cycle in 2012 or 2013.

This will allow schools to prioritise the implementation of the Project Maths Implementation Support Group recommendations to ensure that every student in junior cycle gets a mathematics class each day. Schools will also be asked to review their provision for mathematics in Transition Year to ensure that the continuity of students' learning in this subject is maintained.

Professional development for teachers

At the launch, the Minister will note that additional in-service courses for teachers in the areas of literacy and numeracy are being provided in summer 2011.

The Minister will also announce that he has asked the Professional Development Service for Teachers to design and deliver a programme of training to create a nationwide team of literacy and numeracy associate trainers to deliver CPD for principals and teachers; the training of the team to take place in the school year 2011-2012 and the training of teachers and principals to be available generally from September 2012 (with some courses available in 2011-2012 school year).

Evaluation

The Inspectorate is developing resources to support principals and staff in implementing self-evaluation in schools. The Minister will note that the Inspectorate will be consulting with the IPPN, NAPD and others on the contents of the materials; and that a small number of schools will be invited to participate with the Inspectorate to pilot the materials in the school year 2011-2012. The materials will be revised in the light of this experience.

The pilot materials and the revised materials in due course will be available to all schools online to support them in their self-evaluation processes. The materials will support the development of school's *school improvement plans* as envisaged in the Programme for Government and in the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

Actions with the Teaching Council

The Minister's speech at the launch will refer to the work that the Teaching Council has already progressed regarding the standards and requirements for teacher education courses. Close consultation has taken place between the Department and the Council regarding the standards. The changes to teacher education, first proposed in the draft Literacy and Numeracy Plan, have been incorporated into the teaching Council's requirements. The major changes include:

- The extension of the B Ed programme to four years and the extension of the post-graduate diploma teaching qualification (for primary and post-primary teachers) to two years
- The inclusion of substantial periods of practice in schools (at least one year in total in the case of primary teachers)
- The inclusion of substantial mandatory modules on the teaching of literacy and numeracy, the use of assessment as an integral part of guiding the learning of all students, the teaching of literacy and numeracy to children with special educational needs; the teaching of Irish, differentiation strategies generally, and addressing the needs of EAL students
- The reduction of time afforded to elective academic subjects currently included in the B Ed programme in some colleges of education and an increase in the time devoted to the study of education disciplines as academic subjects, including, for example, courses in language acquisition, literacy acquisition, mathematics, mathematical education, psychology, etc.

Parents

The Strategy acknowledges the important role that parents can play in supporting their children's learning in literacy and numeracy. The Department of Education and Skills has cooperated closely with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs on the design of the Strategy. The latter Department will be continuing its support for the pre-school year and will also be using experience and evaluation evidence concerning family literacy and family support initiatives to improve such provision in the period ahead.

The Minister for Education and Skills has also asked his officials to explore the possibility of commissioning a multi-media campaign to highlight awareness among parents of the role that they can play in literacy and numeracy acquisition.

8. IMPLEMENTATION

The Department of Education and Skills will be responsible for driving and monitoring the Strategy. The Department will establish an implementation group to over see this work. This group will include relevant senior officials from the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, as well as the heads of the major agencies that are responsible for implementation of the key actions in the plan. The implementation group will:

- draw on specialist advice from national and international experts on literacy, numeracy, assessment and school improvement

- draw up and regularly update an implementation plan covering actions contained in the literacy and numeracy strategy
- monitor progress towards achieving the targets in the strategy and the goals set in the implementation plan and report to the Minister at least once annually
- consult regularly with the education partners and other relevant interests regarding the implementation and development of the strategy through meetings, conferences and other means
- advise the Minister on the effectiveness of the actions being taken to achieve the targets and suggest improvements and changes to the actions and the targets as necessary in the light of experience.

APPENDIX

Organisations participating in the oral consultations

Over 480 written submissions were received regarding the draft literacy and numeracy plan. In addition, a number of organisations, listed below, participated in oral discussions with Department officials.

| Representatives of | Associations and organisations |
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| Business and industry associations | Engineers Ireland Forfás IBEC ICT Ireland IDA Ireland Microsoft |
| Early childhood education and care organisations | Irish Preschool Play Association Start Strong Border Counties Childcare Network Early Learning Initiative in the NCI |
| Initial teacher education providers (Post-Primary) and education centres | Conference of Heads of Irish Colleges of Education NCE – MSTL Association of Teacher and Education Centres in Ireland |
| Initial teacher education providers (Primary) | Church of Ireland College of Education Froebel College of Education Marino Institute of Education Mary Immaculate College St Patrick's College Hibernia College Association of Teacher and Education Centres in Ireland |
| Irish language groups | Eagraíocht na Scoileanna Gaeltachta Teo Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Ián-Ghaeilge Gaelscoileanna Teo Coiste Léann na Gaeilge, National Committee for Irish in the Royal Irish Academy Forbairt Naíonraí Teo COGG |
| Libraries and publishers | The Library Association of Ireland School Library Association of Ireland Library Council Children's Books Ireland Foras na Gaeilge Gill & MacMillan The Educational Company of Ireland |
| Literacy associations and organisations | National Adult Literacy Association (NALA) Reading Association of Ireland (RAI) Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) English Language Support Teachers Association (ELSTA) |
| Non-governmental organisations | Barnardos Children's Rights Alliance Young Ballymun |
| Parents of students | National Parents' Council-Primary National Parents' Council-Post-primary |

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| School management organisations (Primary) | Catholic Primary School Managers' Association Church of Ireland Board of Education IVEA |
| School management organisations (Post-primary) | Church of Ireland Board of Education Joint Managerial Body Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools Irish Vocational Educational Association |
| School principals' organisations | Irish Primary Principals Network National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals |
| Special education interest groups | Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists Irish Learning Supports Association (ILSA) Gifted Advocacy and Support Group National Council for Special Education National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education |
| Teacher unions | Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland Irish National Teachers' Organisation Teachers Union of Ireland |