Key points made to the Department in addition to those in the written submissions:

➤ The plan needs greater contextualisation:

  o It should be identified as a “Plan for a decade”
  o The improvement of literacy and numeracy need to be set within the wider socio-economic context and must be mindful of the factors that impact on student progress and achievement
  o The strategy must have regard to the cutbacks that have taken place in schools already and that have impacted negatively on the work of schools and teachers
  o Class size has a significant impact on developing and improving standards, especially in mixed ability classes and when working with those with special needs.

➤ Definitions of literacy and numeracy used in the opening of the document are very good but in the remainder of the document a narrower interpretation of literacy and numeracy seems to be implied. Greater cognisance need to be taken of ICT literacy and second languages.

➤ Regarding teacher education it was acknowledged that the proposals to extend the teacher education programmes may have some merit. However, much more discussion on how this could best be achieved required before final decisions are made. In addition it will be important to include high quality induction in the continuum of teacher education so as to support teachers as they enter the profession and promote reflective practice.

➤ The proposals for early childhood are very ambitious given the mix of skills in the sector; there is a need for high levels of skills among ECCE workforce and critical effort needs to be made to support this. ECCE workers with
responsibility for promoting language and numeracy development should be required or enabled to obtain appropriate qualifications at Level 6 and 7.

- Effective reporting and bridging between primary and post-primary schools are vital.

- In relation to management the following elements are missing:
  - CPD for Boards of Management is important; and
  - The role of distributed leadership should be acknowledged and promoted.

- Current examinations are driving the taught curriculum: curricular changes proposed for Junior Cycle need to happen in the context of recast Junior Certificate Examinations; unions supportive of a reduction in the number of subjects taken in the junior certificate examination.

- Supportive of the idea of integrated teaching incorporating attention to the development of literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum; however this will require high CPD support (external and internal) and planning time.

- With regard to the use of standardised tests to identify general achievement levels it is important that these are not linked to the formal curriculum and should not be used to make comparisons between schools; concerns expressed regarding the current proposals for Schools Like Ours Data, the emergence of league tables and the possibility of them becoming just another driver of the curriculum and teaching and learning.

- The Inspectorate’s guide to school self-evaluation, Looking at Our School, requires updating.

- Any plan will require the trust of teachers to make it effective and significant investment in continuous professional development (CPD).

- Equity issues are not adequately addressed in the Plan; no attempt to level the playing pitch; additional interventions for the marginalised not properly addressed.