Draft National Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Schools

Consultation with INTO

Monday 21 March 2011 – 2.00 pm

Attendees

Harold Hislop  Chair, DES
Alan Wall      DES
Eamonn Murtagh DES
Phil O’Flaherty DES
Anne O’Mahony  DES
Anne English   INTO
Anne Fay       INTO – Incoming Vice-President
Deirbhile Nic Craith INTO

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

➢ The INTO is disappointed with the impression that poor literacy and numeracy standards are being attributed to poor teaching: the broader socio-economic context, must be taken into account and its impact on literacy and numeracy.

➢ The question of literacy is about language – not exclusively first language (L1) or second language L2. The implications of learning literacy in two languages has not been recognised in the document.

➢ There is concern about capacity to improve literacy and numeracy given resource constraints and the erosion of existing supports for schools and students. INTO welcomes the focus on DEIS but is concerned at cutbacks such as those on rural DEIS coordinators, EAL teachers, visiting teachers and resource teachers for travellers and library grants.

➢ Welcome suggestions that curriculum content could be made more explicit and agree that work needs to be done on reducing the number of content objectives in the curriculum.

➢ Need for greater emphasis on CDP that is not necessarily ‘a course’ (e.g. on site learning, self directed research in the classroom etc.) is important. The INTO was disappointed with the narrow interpretation of CPD. The importance and value of personal reading, professional conversations, conference attendance, and engagement with other stakeholders in education should also be acknowledged. CPD should also refer to issues of relevance to primary education that go beyond curricular issues. Teachers invest heavily in terms of time, money and energy in the own professional development.

➢ Accepts and stresses the importance of the need for high quality assessment tools though has concerns regarding time spent on testing rather than on teaching.
Assessment of the most vulnerable children should not be overlooked. Overall, assessment appears to be over-emphasised in document and assessment is given too much credence. Need for CPD for teachers on how assessment should be used. Assessment must be seen as a process to enhance the teaching / learning process and not as an end in itself. The importance of teacher observation should not be underestimated. Standardised tests must also be user-friendly, so that it’s a straightforward process to glean the necessary information from them on different facets of children’s progress. Many of the precursors to literacy and numeracy-related skills take huge amount of time, energy and inventiveness to develop in children, which is not always reflected in formal assessment procedures.

- Welcomes emphasis on early years and on revision of infant curriculum in light of Aistear. Need to examine class size if this approach is to be successful.

- There were concerns about diminution of discretionary time – some discretionary time must remain. Discretionary time is spent on activities such as organising swimming, school plays, projects, sporting events in addition to literacy and numeracy.

- The impact of the loss of posts of responsibility in schools must be borne in mind, especially on the workload of principals. The draft plan further augments the workload of principal teachers, therefore, the loss of posts of responsibility cannot be ignored.

- INTO has some reservation regarding targets: the focus ought to be on the learning achieved by students rather than the targets.

- Much of what teachers do is a long term project. The results may not be immediately evident or even measurable. It is important that the many and varied needs of pupils are not sidelined in favour of continuously seeking to address that which is measured in formal or standardised tests while they are at school.