Response to the Draft Strategy on Literacy and Numeracy

Submitted by

Froebel College of Education
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Section 1

Introduction
Response to the Draft Strategy on Literacy and Numeracy
Submitted by Froebel College of Education

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Preamble

Froebel College of Education welcomes the opportunity to respond to the recently published “Better Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People-a Draft National Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Schools”. The Department of Education and Skills presented this plan in response to the publication of “The 2009 National Assessments of Mathematic and English Reading”, (Educational Research Centre, 2010) and the report on the Incidental Inspection Findings 2010 (DES, 2010). The presentation of the plan was also pre-emptive of the subsequent publication of the PISA results and the Draft Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education by the Teaching Council. Collectively, the reports present an interesting snapshot of the state of play with regard to the teaching of literacy and numeracy in Irish schools at a specific moment in time.

The following response to this strategy has been drafted in consultation and collaboration with staff members of Froebel College of Education. This introductory section serves to contextualise the findings in an attempt to put perspective on how this response might be handled. Section two of this response deals with matters pertaining to teacher education. The third section points to issues related to curriculum and assessment and section four places literacy and numeracy in the context of schools and the wider community. The conclusion in section five briefly draws together some of the key points which appear in the document.

1.2 Contextual considerations

An understanding of the broader educational context is significant in the interpretation of such reports as it provides perspective and insight into the possible causes of such findings. While some of the findings may be disappointing, they are not entirely surprising considering the multiplicity of factors that have impacted on schools in recent years. The last ten years or more have seen significant change in society and in the education system. The societal changes pose considerable challenges in our schools. The increasing use and influence of media in the home and the subsequent lessening in the value attributed to reading in homes is one challenge. Also, the considerable change in demographics is reflected in schools with the addition of newcomers to Ireland. DEIS schools and other schools where there are numerous children for whom English is their second language have been struggling to address social and learning difficulties.

There has been a proliferation of initiatives that principals and staff in schools have had to manage while simultaneously dealing with the day-to-day routine of teaching and managing a school. Curriculum change, professional development, the expectations of School Development Planning and the
introduction of Whole-School Evaluation are examples of such initiatives. In the past ten years, the
initiation of these enterprises has been relentless and continuous and while they were necessary,
valuable and exciting in their own right, they also brought additional pressures to bear on schools. The
profile of schools changed rapidly in many cases due to greater mobility within and between schools with
the additional staff dedicated to Special Educational Needs and English language teaching. In all, it must
be said therefore, the changes to which schools have been subjected, while worthwhile in many ways,
have been challenging too.

While an understanding of the broader educational context is important, so too is an appreciation for each
school’s unique context, culture and traditions all of which can influence standards and practices. The
disaggregated data clearly reflects indications of specific challenges but equally there are signs of good
practice and a national response should be commensurate with this balance of data. Therefore, an
element of differentiation should be a feature of the plan for schools so as to allow those with specific
challenges to avail of particular supports and others to develop existing good practices. A one-size-fits-all
while easier to manage and co-ordinate may not be the best approach.

1.3 Change management in the current context
The scale and pace of change in the past stretched the capacity of some schools to cope. Another
decade of relentless change will have to be managed with care and sensitivity particularly at a time when
anxiety levels are high following a period of plenty. The country is in deep economic recession and
teachers amongst others have experienced the brunt of cutbacks, employment embargoes and pay cuts.
Young teachers are facing the prospect of unemployment and emigration and consequently, there is an
air of disillusionment, anger and low morale. Heightened media attention and hype of the wrong type will
not support our credibility and competitiveness in international quarters nor will it render the desired
outcomes at home. Therefore a measured approach with all the hallmarks of effective educational change
management should be taken in redressing the issues in the reports. Rather than a knee-jerk reaction, a
co-ordinated response based on international research and best practice and involving all stakeholders
should be constructed and a clear implementation strategy devised.
Section 2

Teacher Education
2.0 Teacher Education

2.1 Duration of initial teacher education

This strategy proposes to extend the B. Ed and the Higher Diploma in Education (Primary) for primary teachers to four years and two years respectively. There are many advantages associated with this development. For the first time ever, the duration of a Level 8 B Ed honours degree will be standardised across all five colleges of education. This brings all providers onto an even playing pitch and it brings equity to the students in terms of the requirements for registration with the Teaching Council. Secondly, moving to a four-year degree gives greater international recognition to our graduates and more esteem to teacher education in Ireland. Thirdly, an extended programme affords Colleges of Education with an exciting opportunity to reconceptualise both programmes as they currently stand to incorporate contemporary thinking on teacher education and to re-imagine the school-based experience component of initial teacher education.

An extension to both programmes will indeed provide increased opportunities to develop expertise in literacy and numeracy amongst student teachers. Such opportunities for the development of the professional in these areas can and should be implemented at programme level in both a discrete and integrated manner. Froebel College of Education has been pioneering in this regard as it offers a combined course in Mathematics competency and Mathematics methodologies. Language is also taught in a cross-curricular manner, instilling in students the message that language is central and opportunities for language development should be maximised at every opportunity.

Lengthening the duration of the programme also provides Colleges of Education with the opportunity to re-envision a programme which will develop more independent and reflective learners. In the formation of a life-long learning professional, producing critical thinkers and solution-focussed teachers who possess the confidence to make informed evidence-based decisions may also now be possible. It is envisaged that student teachers will spend more time in school, not just on traditional teaching practice placements but engaging with the teaching/learning community in the school in a number of different ways. Innovative methods of interweaving theory and practice are currently being developed in the College. However, to assist in this approach, more radical changes in the curriculum and assessment at post-primary level to prepare students for a very different approach to learning at third level are required.

Froebel College of Education is currently engaging staff and stakeholders in a process of review towards the re-envisioning of the B Ed and H Dip and we would welcome meeting with representatives from the DES to discuss plans in light of this strategy and other developments.
2.2 Attracting and retaining high calibre teachers

It is widely acknowledged and further validated in the OECD publication, *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* (2005), that the best education systems in the world have succeeded in attracting and retaining the highest calibre of student into teacher education programmes. To date, Ireland has enjoyed success in this regard. Controlling the number of students who can obtain a place on an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) course has the advantage of ensuring that there are high entry standards. Student intake into state-funded ITE courses in Ireland has always been and still is subjected to regulation by the Department of Education and Skills and as a consequence, the job market remained stable. However, the same rigour in regulating student intake for private providers is not applied and as a result the market has become flooded. There is a risk that Ireland could see a decrease in regard for the status of the profession and subsequent to that a decrease in the calibre of entrant to the profession if regulation of private providers is not managed in a more stringent manner.

Similarly, allowing unqualified personnel to remain as teachers in classrooms should not be tolerated by the profession or the powers that be. Attracting and retaining the highest calibre of candidate into teacher education programmes should support high quality education for our children across the board including excellence in the teaching of literacy and numeracy. This should be addressed in the National Plan.

2.3 Entry requirements

The strategy alludes to the need to address the entry requirement for mathematics. At present, the entry requirement is very low for both mathematics and English. Perhaps it is time to examine the need to have an entry examination which tests levels in literacy and numeracy before securing a place in Initial Teacher Education. The notion of insisting on an exit level should also be considered.

2.4 School-based experience

The strategy proposes an increase in the duration of the B Ed and the H Dip with more time for school-based professional development and this is welcomed by Froebel College of Education. A developmental approach over a period of time, whereby a student is afforded the opportunity to experience the school as a community, engage in school-related activities beyond the classroom, familiarise themselves with some of the additional supports in schools and develop a deeper relationship with the teacher and children is what is required. An extended B Ed and H Dip programme will support some of these requirements.

There will be a need for dialogue between various stakeholders and partners in education to secure support for more meaningful school experiences for student teachers during ITE. At present, the placement of students is complex and challenging for many reasons. Finding suitable placements where students will observe high-quality teaching and experience the broader context of the school is part of the challenge. Re-defining the role of the school and in particular the role of the class teacher in student
teachers’ school experience needs considerable discussion. The concept of class teachers acting as mentors is one that is referred to in much of the literature on ITE and is one that could be introduced into teacher formation prior to induction. Not only would this benefit the student teacher, but evidence has shown that the teacher-mentor also develops as a professional in this role. Increased contact between teachers, schools and teacher educators would strengthen the overall system.

The concept of identifying and building sites of good practice towards fostering stronger relationships between schools and ITE providers is one that should be considered. DES support combined with stakeholder commitment to build closer relationships with schools will be necessary.

2.5 Cross-sectoral teacher education
The disconnect between primary and post-primary schools and their respective initial and continuing teacher education has always been and continues to be a feature of the Irish education system. This national strategy provides a new impetus for the Department to find mechanisms whereby more meaningful links can be made between both sectors at school and university/college levels. The practice of “subject” teaching at post-primary level has contributed to the teaching of literacy and numeracy in isolation. In most post primary schools, it remains the responsibility of the English, mathematics and Learning Support departments. Cross-sectoral initial teacher education could provide solutions to the challenges that are facing post-primary schools in literacy and numeracy. The mutual sharing could benefit both sectors if closer alliances were made possible between Colleges of Education and other providers of post-primary teacher education. This strategy provides the opportunity for Froebel College of Education to liaise with colleagues in NUI Maynooth to explore the possibilities of sharing resources and expertise in both literacy and numeracy. It also increases the possibility of creating a Bachelor of Education for both primary and secondary teachers together.

Froebel College of Education is already engaging with Project Maths in developing a seamless awareness of primary and post-primary curricula in mathematics amongst our student teachers. Using the problem solving and cooperative learning approach of Project Maths, student teachers have the opportunity to reflect on and reconsider their own understanding of mathematical concepts and in doing so develop deeper understanding.

2.6 Early Childhood Education
The inclusion of Early Childhood Education in this strategy is an essential component of the vision. Froebel College of Education has long been associated with early childhood education due to its grounding in the Froebelian philosophy. A new B A in Early Childhood –Teaching and Learning was launched in the College mid-February. This course is a joint venture in partnership with NUI Maynooth and the Irish Pre-school and Playgroup Association (IPPA) and provides a flexible avenue for
practitioners in pre-school and nursery settings to obtain a Level 8 degree in Early Childhood Education. This course will be of very high quality and will provide ample opportunities for students to develop their teaching skills in literacy and numeracy in accordance with the recommendations and guidance of Aistear, Síolta, and the latest international research that children learn best through play, active learning and engaging with other children and adults and will reflect any changes made by the NCCA to the early primary curriculum. The seamlessness between the early childhood sector and the primary sector will be achieved by offering this course with joint expertise from Froebel College of Education, the IPPA and NUI Maynooth.

2.7 Continuing Professional Development for Teachers
The strategy proposes that approved professional development courses for teachers should be examined and accredited. Continuing Professional Development for primary and post-primary teachers will be an essential ingredient in this strategy. A seismic attitudinal shift will be required before more integration of the teaching of literacy and numeracy is evident across subjects.

Froebel College has considerable expertise in literacy and numeracy and would be interested in the development of accredited courses for teachers at early childhood, primary and post-primary levels. Currently, Froebel College of Education offers a Post Graduate Diploma in Special Education. This course is unique in that it caters for both primary and post primary teachers who teach in mainstream and special education settings. The course is practical in nature and particular focus is given to the teaching and assessment of literacy and numeracy but could be extended and adapted to serve the needs of teachers specifically in these areas. Courses of this nature which are cross-sectoral should be considered for additional remuneration for teachers as is the case in a number of other Colleges.

Continuing Professional Development of Teachers should also become a feature of and a requirement of “Teaching Practice Schools”. In dialogue with the stakeholders and education partners, this could possibly be one of a number of incentives which would encourage and improve school-based placements for student teachers. Offering teachers a qualification in mentoring would expand their professional development portfolio and incentivise this work also. Similarly, the accreditation of courses for literacy and numeracy tutors/trainers or curriculum leaders in schools may act as a catalyst.

The strategy suggests the development of a generic skill-based programme. While a home-grown programme may be a laudable ambition, the cost in time and labour of developing one as comprehensive as those which are currently on offer to DEIS schools might be an inefficient use of resources. Many schools not designated as DEIS schools would welcome the CPD in these programmes. They have been tried and tested in other countries and are accompanied by high quality professional development for teachers. Consideration should be given to extending professional development in these programmes to
mainstream schools as part of a programme of CPD for teachers and newly qualified teachers enrolled on the induction project. This could be a productive use of the extra hours to be worked by teachers under recent productivity agreements.
Section 3
Curriculum and Assessment
3.0 Curriculum and Assessment

3.1 A broad and balanced curriculum – the holistic development of the child

As a guiding principle, we must never forget or lose sight of what is important for the children and young people of this country regardless of our economic circumstances. Each child deserves the best possible education, which encompasses access to a rich and broad curriculum – one that is mediated and facilitated by high-quality, well-qualified and skilled teachers. The richness of the current Primary School Curriculum (1999) lies in its child-centred essence and the varied methodologies espoused across a range of subjects. This serves to celebrate and nurture the holistic development of the child.

In endeavouring to ensure that the nation’s children and young people are competent and confident in literacy and numeracy, it is equally important that the children attending our schools receive a well-rounded education advocated in the 1999 curriculum. It would be regrettable if the implementation of this government strategy resulted in there being a narrow definition of education as opposed to maintaining the integrity and progressive ideals of the 1999 curriculum.

3.2 Reverting to outmoded methods of teaching progression reversal

One of the possible dangers of a national strategy of this nature is that it may result in teachers taking refuge in outmoded, conservative and dated methods of teaching. There is a risk also that the teaching of literacy and numeracy will be rendered to discrete time only as opposed to teaching it in an integrated fashion. This could result in schools adopting a very limited approach to the teaching of language as opposed to the richness that a broad language curriculum offers. This breadth brings opportunities for children to be exposed to literature, writing in a variety of genres and the integration of aspects of language across all areas of the curriculum. To avoid this, teachers need specific professional development in the integration of language across the curriculum. This should be paralleled with high-quality professional development for teachers in the most current and up-to-date methods of teaching literacy and numeracy.

The value of digital technology in enabling effective 21st century teaching and learning experiences should be recognised. ICT should be a central tool in the promotion of literacy and numeracy across all curricular areas, motivating and enabling pupils to engage in meaningful problem solving and digital storytelling activities.

3.3 The challenge of time

Time is one of a number of factors associated with influencing literacy and numeracy standards. Teaching literacy and numeracy in an integrated fashion will go some way towards addressing the issue of dedicating time to literacy and numeracy in all subjects in both in primary and post primary schools. The
challenge of finding the time does not necessarily require the dilution of SPHE, Drama, and/or other subjects. The benefits of these subjects in the extension of children’s concept and language development not to mention self esteem cannot be underestimated. All other solutions should be explored to address the issue before drastic measures are taken such as sidelining these subjects and ultimately distorting the broad and balanced nature of this fine curriculum.

3.4 English curriculum

The strategy points to the challenges that the Primary School English language curriculum posed for teachers. The strengths of the English curriculum have been compromised by the difficulties teachers have had in managing planning. The Additional Support document in 2005 provided limited support for teachers with planning. Therefore, a revamped Language curriculum taking into account the different language contexts in schools should be developed. Other challenges presented by this curriculum lie particularly in the areas of writing genres, spelling, phonological awareness and comprehension skills. The curriculum needs to be more explicit and more detailed in these areas and teachers need additional support in how to teach these areas. Froebel College of Education welcomes the proposals for professional development for teachers in literacy and numeracy.

3.5 Mathematics Curriculum

Teachers need to be encouraged to adopt a more flexible approach when choosing learning objectives from the Mathematics curriculum to suit the range of abilities in their classes. As it stands, many teachers confine teaching to the learning objectives as defined by the class level in the curriculum. Selecting objectives beyond the specific class level to cater for the potential of more or less able children should be promoted.

In a similar vein, many children enrol in infant classes having had a rich experience of mathematical concepts at home and in early year’s settings. Other children may have limited opportunities to engage with mathematical concepts at all. The changes to the early Mathematics Curriculum by the NCCA need to give teachers more autonomy to allow for differences at local level and help teachers identify the many opportunities to develop numeracy through play and everyday routines in the infant classroom.

The National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading (NAMER) (2010) found that in Mathematics “textbooks mediate interpretation and implementation of the curriculum” as they are “by far the most common resource used to plan lessons” and that “whole class, textbook-based teaching still predominates in Sixth class maths lessons”. While the textbooks may be aligned with the learning objectives of the curriculum, using them in this way does not promote the principles and teaching methodologies espoused in the mathematics curriculum. Much effort needs to be put into helping teaching implement the curriculum to meet the needs of the children in their school and combat the over
reliance on textbooks, an issue which has been identified by NAMER and the Department's Inspectorate. There is a wealth of resources available to teachers nowadays and schools need to invest in resources other than textbooks. A move in this direction can provide the impetus for teachers to implement methodologies such as talk and discussion, group work, problem-solving, real-life mathematics and the use of ICT.

3.6 Drama education
The suggestion that Drama time be subsumed into language time would be regrettable as this entirely compromises the essential artistic nature of this subject, rendering it merely as a language lesson. As the last curricular subject on the programme of in-service for teachers, drama is still finding its feet and forming its identity as a discrete subject at primary level. Let us not forget the many merits of drama as both an arts subject and a learning methodology. Drama for drama’s sake allows the child to express him/herself artistically and to create and engage creatively with others:

‘Arts Education enables the child to explore alternative ways of communicating with others. It encourages ideas that are creative and inventive and makes a vital contribution to a range of intelligences’ (Drama Curriculum, 1999:2)

Drama enhances understanding primarily because it offers context-based learning. Through the use of voice and body, children make meaning, communicate and express using varied modes of communication. Drama presents opportunities to make decisions and solve problems in the as if safe fictional world. Learning in context demands authentic and often higher-order thinking skills and language use from children as they work in-role. In addition children are motivated by their role-playing to communicate in spoken or written forms. Drama’s value as a cross-curricular learning medium is undeniable.

Play and imagination are vital to the holistic development of the child as a learner via multiple intelligences. Drama in Education needs the curricular time it is afforded to offer the spaces for children to create in a manner which deepens learning and allows for a progression and development of skills and capacities. An education without adequate opportunities to access Arts Education is an impoverished one and serious consideration should be given to the suggestion that the time for Drama be merged into language time. Rather, the opportunities for language development in Drama should be maximised without losing the creative process intended in educational drama.
3.7 SPHE Curriculum

The value of SPHE to language development, apart altogether from the essentials interpersonal skills involved cannot be underestimated. In SPHE children explore issues of identity, safety, health, relationships and citizenship. Children are invited into a critical relationship with the media influences in society. They also learn how to share diverse opinions and perspectives in a respectful environment. In the task of articulating their opinions, values, hopes and dilemmas children work hard to articulate significant life experiences and make meaning of them. These conversations are a rich site for language development and because the topics are essential to developing life skills the motivation for children to contribute is high.

3.8 Assessment

Adopting a practical approach and setting reasonable expectations around assessment in literacy and numeracy should be fostered in schools. An overly administrative and burdensome approach to assessment would not be helpful. It is well known that an increase in assessment does not necessarily enhance the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Spelling, for example is currently the most assessed area in the teaching of literacy in Irish schools with the least sign of progress. Teachers are in need of additional professional development in what and how to assess in literacy and numeracy but more importantly how to use the information to progress the child to the next stage of development. Assessment, therefore, should constitute an integral component of any professional development for teachers. Most of the programmes currently in place in DEIS schools offer excellent support for teachers in linking assessment with teaching and learning.

The Schools Like Ours initiative mentioned in the strategy could be counter-productive. Children, regardless of their socio-economic background should be challenged to strive to the same heights as those from other backgrounds. Schools, for example, in areas designated as disadvantaged will be comparing like-with-like. The bench-mark for standards in these schools and the expectations could potentially be diminished as a result. Currently it is difficult to assess children as there is no explicit standards set, apart from those in the standardised tests. Setting high expectations is a feature of good schools and good education systems. An alternative approach would be to gather and publish exemplars which represent standards that would in turn provide teachers with a ‘target’.

3.9 Research to guide practice

While we can learn from international research on the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy, research needs to be undertaken in Ireland to identify whether the findings are applicable in the Irish context. Some examples may include the influence of textbooks; children’s levels of understanding in
Mathematics and comprehension in English; the types and quantity of homework that benefits children at the different levels;
Section 4
Literacy, Numeracy and the Wider Community
4.0 Literacy, Numeracy and the Wider Community

4.1 Targets and teachers

While it is admirable that the Department is going to take responsibility for relentlessly focussing on achieving targets, it is extremely important that all stakeholders are involved in taking charge of driving this initiative. Teachers, above all, are central to the success of this strategy. All too often, national targets are set in the absence of teacher awareness. In order to attain change in the system, there needs to be a grass roots intervention to galvanise the energy and commitment of teachers on the ground and to secure their ownership of this strategy. Therefore, while it is important to have national targets, at school level, teachers need to be able to translate these targets into action within the context of their own school and classrooms and they need ownership of the process.

We would do well to learn from other countries where success has been attributed to the levels of trust afforded to teachers. This manifests itself in the degree of autonomy given over to schools and teachers in developing their own curriculum. In these countries, usually there is a national curriculum framework, but the depth and breadth of the curriculum is detailed and designed by the teachers to suit their particular context. There is no substitute for local initiatives where ownership of the process lies with the school and its community. Top-down prescriptive models have less impact. Therefore, there needs to be a sophisticated balance between high-quality support for teachers that leads to informed decision-making and curriculum planning at whole-school level on the one hand and inspectorate intervention and evaluation on the other.

4.2 The role of the principal

The strategy places an emphasis on target setting by principals. This can become burdensome, time-consuming and a distraction from teaching duties. It can easily become a meaningless tick-box exercise as has been the case in the UK and with little by way of outcome. The role of principals as curriculum leaders is one that needs to be reinforced through Leadership Development programmes. Curriculum Leadership should be considered core to their role and support for principals should reinforce this as a key tenet.

4.3 Stakeholders and partners in education

The stakeholders and partners in education will have to assume joint responsibility and work in collaboration towards ensuring that the current and next generation of teachers is confident and competent in helping pupils strive to reach their full potential as human beings and as learners, given the complex social context that we live in. The support of the unions and principals’ networks in promoting the strategy and encouraging their constituent members to rise to this challenge will be essential. As mentioned previously, the co-operation of the stakeholders will be a determining factor in the success of effective school-based experiences for student teachers.
4.4 Parents
The involvement of parents is essential and cannot be understated. However, the issue of parental engagement is deep and complex and therefore requires a complex solution. Parental engagement, parental involvement and most importantly, renewed parental belief in the power of education and in the importance of literacy and numeracy must be addressed. Enabling schools to garner parental support for improving literacy and numeracy through inventive and innovative means should be ensured.

Given the immense changes in the ways literacy and numeracy are now taught compared to when many parents were at school, it is necessary to engage in an awareness campaign to inform parents and families of these changes. Publications, online supports and face-to-face encounters focussed on educating parents and families of the “new” way need to be further developed. Schools would do well to host Parent Workshops and Family Literacy and Numeracy Evenings on an annual basis to help parents and families to engage with these changes and to illustrate how best to help their children develop numeracy and a positive attitude to mathematics. There are exemplars of such practice in many schools throughout the country. Site visits to such schools where practice can be shared should be encouraged.

4.5 Literacy and numeracy as part of a broader agenda
Perhaps the affluence of the last number of years has led the nation to become somewhat cavalier, complacent and nonchalant about the value of education in general and literacy and numeracy specifically. The generation of a renewed love of and a revived culture of reading amongst the nation are necessary. An original national campaign conjuring up an attractive and modern association with the enjoyment of reading and mathematics could be invented and broadcast to invoke an imaginative, contagious and lasting response amongst communities. We need to capture the public’s imagination and invite them to embrace this strategy with national pride, commitment and conviction.
Section 5
Conclusion
5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, Froebel College of Education would like to commend the authors of this strategy. In summary, we would like to reinforce the recommendations pertaining to teacher education, in particular the extension of the initial teacher education programmes.

The interconnected, strategic and cross-sectoral nature of the plan is to be commended also. The strategic approach proposed in this initiative is a welcome development as opposed to a mono-dimensional approach or one that is solely associated with one category of school or societal stratum. It is comprehensive, in that it represents the entire continuum of teacher education - initial, induction and in-service teacher education while simultaneously a cross-sectoral approach has been taken by including provision for Early Childhood, Primary and Post-Primary Educators. We hope that it will be implemented with rigour and with a strong government commitment in terms of the investment in personnel, time and finance.

While high standards in literacy and numeracy are of course of crucial importance, care and caution should be taken when considering the shift in emphasis in terms of the curriculum. Literacy and numeracy can and should be taught in both a discrete and integrated manner. Sacrificing what is considered to be a broad, balanced and highly regarded curriculum should be avoided.

Gaining the commitment of teachers and other relevant stakeholders will be critical if this is to be successful. The inclusion of not just parents but the general public in the process will provide additional momentum for change. We need to incite in our people a profound, reinvigorated conviction and respect for the influence of education in general and an insatiable appetite to engage with it. Therefore, one vital component that should constitute part of the solution could be the development and implementation of a strong national campaign that touches the hearts and minds of not just parents but other organisations, national institutions and communities.

Froebel College of Education is pleased to offer its support for this strategy and would welcome the opportunity to nominate individuals with particular expertise to become members of the Steering or Implementation Committees. Furthermore, Froebel College of Education is willing to lend its expertise to the design of training and the actual training of trainers. Finally, as outlined in the strategy, if a generic skills-based programme is being developed, the College would be eager to lend support and expertise to the development of such a programme.