

# LITERACY AND NUMERACY STRATEGY 2011 – 2020

Interim Review of the Strategy and New Targets (2017-2020)

## Summary Note for the Information of Primary and Post-Primary Schools

*PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES*

*TEACHING*

*LEADERSHIP*

*CURRICULUM*

*TACKLING EDUCATIONAL*

*DISADVANTAGE*

*ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION*



March 2017



This information note provides the key messages from the Report of the Interim Review of the *National Strategy: Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life 2011-2020* for teachers, school leaders and boards of management in primary and post-primary schools. The Report of the Interim Review was published in March 2017 and is available at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

## INTRODUCTION

In July 2011 the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy - *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life 2011-2020* - was published. It set out to raise standards in literacy and numeracy in early years and school settings. It recognised the importance of these key skills for all aspects of day-to-day life and learning. Since 2014, over €50 million has been allocated to schools and teacher education to support the *Strategy*.

Five years on, the mid-term impact of the *Strategy* has been reviewed. It shows that standards in literacy and numeracy have risen. Ireland's students are ranked highly in international surveys, particularly in literacy. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. This leaflet summarises how the review has identified what we need to do next to ensure all of our students achieve their potential, especially in numeracy, and continue to achieve highly in literacy.

Circulars 56/2011 for the primary sector and 25/2012 for the post-primary sector provided information on steps to be taken by schools under the *Strategy*, including the allocation of additional teaching time to both literacy and numeracy.

**Literacy** includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media.

**Numeracy** encompasses the ability to use mathematical understanding and skills to solve problems and to meet the demands of day-to-day living in complex social settings. It means being able to:

- estimate, predict and calculate;
- identify patterns, trends and relationships;

- gather, interpret and represent data;
- express ideas mathematically;
- engage in problem solving, using investigation and reasoning skills;
- use digital technology to develop numeracy skills and understanding.

An Interim Review of the *Strategy* commenced in 2015, in order to take stock of successes and challenges encountered in implementation to date. The Interim Review was informed by consultations with key stakeholders and by evidence from national and international studies.

The actions outlined in the *Strategy* will continue to be implemented to 2020. Arising from the positive findings in the Interim Review, further ambitious targets are set and actions are identified to cover the period 2017-2020.



## WHAT DID THE INTERIM REVIEW FIND?

The Report shows the significant progress that has been made since 2011. These positive results are especially to be welcomed given that the children involved experienced a significant proportion of their education during a period of economic decline.

There is a lot to be proud of in what has been achieved to date. A huge part of this success is due to the commitment of Early Childhood Care and Education practitioners, teachers and school leaders, parents and school managers, staff in support services of various types, teacher educators, and a range of other bodies, agencies and organisations. The efforts students have made to enhance their literacy and numeracy skills are also acknowledged.

The commitment to provide resources to support work on literacy and numeracy has been a top priority for the Department. This commitment will continue, with some €17 million allocated for literacy and numeracy related expenditure in 2017. This funding is supporting Continuing Professional Development (including dedicated literacy and numeracy teams for both the primary and the post-primary sectors); upskilling of out-of-field Mathematics teachers at post-primary; reconfiguration of Initial Teacher Education to support literacy and numeracy; and update of standardised testing instruments. Significant curricular developments which have been supported include the introduction of a new Primary Language Curriculum for the junior classes at primary and new specifications at Junior Cycle, with English the first new specification to be introduced (in 2014) and two new Irish specifications due to be in schools from September 2017. School leadership has been supported through the establishment of the Centre for School Leadership and Chief Inspector's Reports.

The Department is also committed to continue its involvement in national and international tests including: National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics (NAERM), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).



## SNAPSHOT OF FINDINGS FROM NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

### **Much has been achieved**

- The National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics (NAERM) carried out in 2014 have shown the first significant improvements in performance by primary pupils in English reading and Mathematics in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Classes in over 30 years.
- Ireland is in third position for reading out of all 35 OECD countries in the 2015 PISA survey of 15 year old students.
- Fewer of our students are now in the lowest performing category for reading and Mathematics in PISA 2015, compared with previous PISA studies.
- Our targets for participation in Higher Level Mathematics examinations at Junior and Leaving Certificate, set in 2011, have almost been reached. For example, the uptake in Higher Level Mathematics at Leaving Certificate level has increased from 17% (2011) to 28% (2016). The target is to reach an uptake of 30% by 2020.

### **But challenges have also been identified**

- Ireland is in 13<sup>th</sup> position in Mathematics in PISA 2015. While this is above the OECD average, it still lags behind our performance in reading, compared with other countries.
- The gap in literacy and numeracy achievement between schools with the highest concentration of disadvantage and other schools remains significant.
- Our higher-achieving students perform less well than their international peers, according to international studies such as PISA 2015 and TIMSS 2015.
- Some less than satisfactory teaching in Irish, in a minority of schools, was noted in the Chief Inspector's Report 2010-2012.
- Further embedding of ICT in teaching and learning, to support the development of digital skills, is still needed.



# PRIORITIES 2017 – 2020 FOR LITERACY AND NUMERACY

The central vision of our Statement of Strategy and Action Plan for Education is that the Irish Education and Training System should become the best in Europe over the next decade. (Action Plan for Education 2016-2019)

For the next four years, our key priorities for attention under the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy are:

- Improving numeracy outcomes for all students
- Tackling educational disadvantage
- Enabling higher-achieving students to reach their full potential
- Embedding achievements gained in literacy, with a particular focus on:
  - literacy for and through the Irish language
  - digital literacy.



## HOW WILL WE BECOME THE BEST IN EUROPE – WHAT ARE OUR TARGETS?

National targets for literacy and numeracy have been in place since the introduction of the *Strategy*. It is very encouraging to know that many of the targets, set in 2011, have already been met. In order to maintain focus to 2020, the 2011 targets have been revisited, in particular where targets have already been achieved. In addition, to close the gap identified between schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage and other schools, discrete new targets have been set. These are linked directly to the *DEIS Plan 2017*. New targets are also identified for higher-achieving learners.

At school level, these national targets should serve as a tool to assist with school planning. They will provide a reference point as to what the current national performance is with regard to target proficiency levels and what is expected, into the future. The proficiency levels used to set the targets are linked to the key skills of learners. More information on proficiency levels in these studies is available at [www.erc.ie/proficiency](http://www.erc.ie/proficiency). (Individual schools are not identified through these studies.)

Tables 1 – 5 below set out our targets for literacy and numeracy in the primary and post-primary sectors up to 2020.

**Table 1.** Build on improvements in reading and Mathematics for all pupils in primary schools

National Assessments of English reading and Mathematics (NAERM) – All Primary Schools				
		Target for 2020 set in the 2011 Strategy <sup>1</sup>	Current Position (NAERM 2014)	New Target to 2020
<b>Reading: At or above Level 3</b>	<b>Second class</b>	40%	46%	50%
	<b>Sixth class</b>	40%	44%	50%
<b>Reading: At or below Level 1</b>	<b>Second class</b>	30%	22%	20%
	<b>Sixth class</b>	30%	25%	20%
<b>Mathematics: At or above Level 3</b>	<b>Second class</b>	40%	47%	53%
	<b>Sixth class</b>	40%	42%	50%
<b>Mathematics: At or below Level 1</b>	<b>Second class</b>	30%	26%	20%
	<b>Sixth class</b>	30%	27%	20%

<sup>1</sup> The most recent results at that point were from NAERM 2009

**Table 2.** Focus on reducing the gap between achievement in reading and Mathematics for pupils in DEIS Band 1 schools and pupils in all primary schools

<b>National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics – DEIS Band 1 Primary Schools</b>				
		<b>Target for 2020 set in the 2011 Strategy</b>	<b>Current Position (NAERM 2014)</b>	<b>New Target to 2020</b>
<b>Reading: At or above Level 3</b>	<b>Second class</b>	No corresponding target in 2011 <i>Strategy</i>	18%	25%
	<b>Sixth class</b>		21%	27%
<b>Reading: At or below Level 1</b>	<b>Second class</b>		44%	40%
	<b>Sixth class</b>		47%	40%
<b>Mathematics: At or above Level 3</b>	<b>Second class</b>	No corresponding target in 2011 <i>Strategy</i>	21%	30%
	<b>Sixth class</b>		19%	27%
<b>Mathematics: At or below Level 1</b>	<b>Second class</b>		52%	45%
	<b>Sixth class</b>		50%	42%

**Table 3.** Build on improvements in reading and Mathematics for all post-primary schools. There will also be a specific focus on the needs of the highest achieving students.

<b>Programme for International Student Assessment – All Post-Primary Schools</b>				
		<b>Target for 2020 set in the 2011 Strategy<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Current Position (PISA 2015)</b>	<b>New Target to 2020<sup>3</sup></b>
<b>Reading Literacy: At or above Level 4</b>	<b>15 year olds</b>	34%	37%	40%
<b>Reading Literacy: At or above Level 5 (highest achievers)</b>	<b>15 year olds</b>	No corresponding target in 2011 <i>Strategy</i>	11%	12%
<b>Reading Literacy: At or below Level 1</b>	<b>15 year olds</b>	8.5%	10%	8.5%
<b>Mathematics: At or above Level 4</b>	<b>15 year olds</b>	31%	31%	36%
<b>Mathematics: At or above Level 5 (highest achievers)</b>	<b>15 year olds</b>	No corresponding target in 2011 <i>Strategy</i>	10%	13%
<b>Mathematics: At or below Level 1</b>	<b>15 year olds</b>	10.5%	15%	10.5%

<sup>2</sup> The most recent results at that point were from PISA 2009

<sup>3</sup> New targets have been set in all areas where targets from the 2011 Strategy have already been reached

**Table 4.** Focus on reducing the gap between achievement in reading and Mathematics for students in DEIS post-primary schools and students in all post-primary schools. There will also be a specific focus on the needs of the highest achieving students.

<b>Programme for International Student Assessment – DEIS Post-Primary</b>				
		<b>Target for 2020 set in the 2011 Strategy</b>	<b>Current Position (PISA 2015)</b>	<b>New Target to 2020</b>
<b>Reading Literacy: At or above Level 4</b>	<b>15 year olds</b>	No corresponding target in 2011 Strategy	28%	33%
<b>Reading Literacy: At or above Level 5 (highest achievers)</b>	<b>15 year olds</b>		7%	10%
<b>Reading Literacy: At or below Level 1</b>	<b>15 year olds</b>		16%	12%
<b>Mathematics: At or above Level 4</b>	<b>15 year olds</b>	No corresponding target in 2011 Strategy	23%	29%
<b>Mathematics: At or above Level 5 (highest achievers)</b>	<b>15 year olds</b>		6%	10%
<b>Mathematics: At or below Level 1</b>	<b>15 year olds</b>		22%	16%

**Table 5.** Increase take up of Higher Level Mathematics at Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate

<b>Take up of Higher Level Mathematics at Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate</b>			
	<b>Position in 2011</b>	<b>Current Position (2016)</b>	<b>New Target to 2020</b>
<b>Junior Cycle Mathematics: Higher Level Candidates</b>	45%	55%	60%
<b>Leaving Certificate Mathematics: Higher Level Candidates</b>	17%	28%	30%

# ACHIEVING THESE TARGETS

Actions to assist with improving performance in literacy and numeracy under the *Strategy*, over the next four years, are identified across six Pillars of the education system and described below:

## PILLAR 01

### ENABLING PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LITERACY AND NUMERACY DEVELOPMENT

Support from parents and communities in developing, reinforcing and sharing positive messages about literacy and numeracy, throughout the entire school community, is a vital factor for school and student success. Over the next four years, schools are asked to:

- Share information on supports that are available to help parents with their children's literacy and numeracy — in particular supports that:
  - Assist children to develop their numeracy skills and to enjoy Mathematics;
  - Help children to enjoy learning and using the Irish language;
  - Help children to further develop their digital literacy skills.
- Look at ways to promote parental engagement in children's learning, in line with school self-

evaluation and relevant targets in the school improvement plan.

- Continue to improve reporting and understanding between schools and parents, especially at the important transition points from pre-school to primary and from primary to post-primary.
- Avail of the services of local clubs and libraries.
- Raise awareness of opportunities for parents to continue to develop their own skills in literacy and numeracy.

A number of websites containing helpful information for parents are listed at the end of this document. For example, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has prepared material to inform parents about the Primary Language Curriculum.

## PILLAR 02

### IMPROVING TEACHERS' AND EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION (ECCE) PRACTITIONERS' PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

A lot has been achieved under this pillar since 2011, with extensive developments to support literacy and numeracy across Initial Teacher Education, teacher induction and Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Over the next four years, teachers are encouraged to:

- Seek to embed Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, in learning in the infant classes at primary level, availing of supports provided through the Education Centre network.
- Access supports from the National Induction Programme for Teachers, *Droichead*, at the start of their careers, and through *Cosán*, during their teaching careers.
- Take advantage of opportunities for CPD, especially CPD that addresses numeracy, Irish and digital literacy including:
  - CPD supporting the introduction of the Primary Language Curriculum;

- Support for inquiry-based learning and problem solving;
- Training using new models, such as cluster meetings for schools and team teaching for numeracy;
- Support for providing differentiated learning in inclusive and creative ways that address the needs of high achievers.
- Embed ICT in teaching and learning, in accordance with the *Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020*. The *Digital Strategy* provides additional support to schools to upgrade their ICT facilities and will offer guidance on how ICT can best be integrated into teaching and learning through the Digital Learning Framework that will be available to all schools from September 2017. The implementation of the *Digital Strategy* is being supported by a fund of €210 million, over the five years.



The establishment of the Centre for School Leadership, in 2015, along with the Education Centre network and the work of the Irish Primary Principals' Network and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals will enhance the capacity of all school leaders to prioritise high-quality teaching and learning experiences in schools. The quality framework for schools published in *Looking at Our School 2016* should guide school leaders as they lead improvements in teaching and learning.

■ Over the next four years school leaders will have opportunities to engage in CPD in the key areas of:

- Numeracy;
- Irish;
- Digital literacy;
- Use of assessment data to improve the quality of learners' educational experiences.
- School leaders are encouraged to ensure that the focus on both literacy and numeracy in school self-evaluation is maintained and strengthened.

Developments related to the curriculum, since 2011, include:

- Increased time for literacy and numeracy.
- Full implementation of revised post-primary Mathematics curricula.
- Introduction of the Primary Language Curriculum in the junior classes from September 2016.
- Roll out of the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015).
- Roll out of new subject specifications at Junior Cycle – English was introduced in 2014; two new Irish specifications will be in schools from September 2017; and a revised Mathematics specification will be introduced from September 2018.

Over the next four years schools are asked to:

- Prioritise and promote literacy and numeracy.
- Engage with curriculum developments at primary level, including the Primary Language Curriculum and a new Mathematics Curriculum.

- Prioritise the key skills of “Being Literate” and “Being Numerate” at post-primary level, as part of junior cycle reform.
- Continue to encourage students to sit examinations at higher level in Mathematics, see Table 5 above.
- Assist students and their parents further in deciding on the examination level most appropriate to their ability.
- Exploit opportunities to enhance pupils' digital literacy skills across the curriculum.
- Engage with curriculum developments at post-primary level, including:
  - The introduction of two new subject specifications for Irish at Junior Cycle and the support made available for teachers by Junior Cycle for Teachers and on implementing the L1 (language 1) and / or L2 (language 2) specification, as appropriate.
  - Introduction of a new subject specification for Leaving Certificate Computer Science.



## HELPING STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS TO ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL

This Pillar focuses on students experiencing educational disadvantage in its many forms. Important developments, in the context of Pillar 5, include the recent publication of the *DEIS Plan 2017* and the introduction of a new special education teacher allocation model, supported by additional resources.

Over the next four years:

- School self-evaluation should be informed by the improvement targets that have been set specifically for the primary and post-primary sectors: Tables 1 and 3 above.
- School self-evaluation in DEIS Band 1 primary schools and DEIS post-primary schools should be informed by the improvement targets that have been set specifically for those schools: Tables 2 and 4.
- Assessment and evaluation of students' needs will assist schools in seeking additional supports, where necessary. For example, schools with high

concentrations of EAL students can seek additional resources to help their students through the Department's Primary Staffing Appeals Board or the Independent Post Primary Appeals Board ([www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Teacher-Allocations/](http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Teacher-Allocations/)).

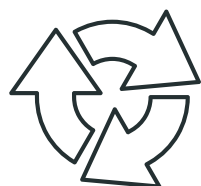
- In implementing the new model for allocating additional teaching resources to learners with special educational needs, schools will be assisted in meeting the educational needs of all students. Encouraging good collaboration between classroom teachers, special education teachers, parents / guardians and the learners will be important in meeting individual needs.
- The Priority Learning Units for Communication, Language and Literacy should assist primary and junior cycle teachers to cater for the educational needs of learners with moderate, severe and profound general learning disabilities.
- The learning outcomes of exceptionally able students should also be a focus for improvement.

## IMPROVING ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION TO SUPPORT BETTER LEARNING IN LITERACY AND NUMERACY

The appropriate use of assessment data for a variety of purposes, especially early interventions, is an important aspect of teaching and learning practice in primary and post-primary schools. Over the next four years, schools are asked to:

- Share assessment data regularly with parents.
- Ensure the appropriate transfer of assessment data within and between educational settings.
- Prioritise CPD for principals and teachers to support them with the administration and use of test data.
- Use assessment data to focus on:
  - Implementing effective early intervention programmes;

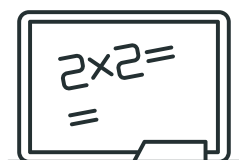
- Improving numeracy outcomes for all students;
- Tackling educational disadvantage;
- Enabling higher-achieving students to reach their full potential;
- Embedding achievements gained in literacy but with a particular focus on:
  - the Irish language
  - digital literacy.
- Continue to carry out standardised testing in primary schools, in accordance with Circular 56/2011. Standardised testing will not be mandatory in post-primary schools, but can be used by schools to contribute to assessment information.



## HOW IS THE LITERACY AND NUMERACY STRATEGY RELATED TO OTHER EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS?

There are many developments being advanced by the Department of Education and Skills that will contribute to and complement the achievement of literacy and numeracy objectives. These are referred to in the Report of the Interim Review and they include: the *DEIS Plan 2017*, the *Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020*, the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022* and the *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015*.

School self-evaluation will help schools to deliver on these policy initiatives in a coherent and constructive way.



## WHEN WILL THE NEXT REVIEW HAPPEN?

The findings from further national and international studies, up to PISA 2021, will act as indicators of the progress we will make over the remaining four-year lifetime of the *Strategy*. The Department is committed to supporting schools in their work on improving literacy and numeracy skills of learners through the development of revised curricula, dedicated CPD and enhanced ICT facilities.

### Sources of useful information that can be shared by schools with parents:

An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)	<a href="http://www.cogg.ie">www.cogg.ie</a> <a href="http://www.cogg.ie/en">www.cogg.ie/en</a>
Aontas – The Irish National Adult Learning Organisation	<a href="http://www.aontas.com">www.aontas.com</a>
Educational Research Centre	<a href="http://www.erc.ie">www.erc.ie</a>
Libraries Ireland	<a href="http://www.librariesireland.ie">www.librariesireland.ie</a>
National Adult Literacy Association	<a href="http://www.nala.ie">www.nala.ie</a> <a href="http://www.helpmykidlearn.ie">www.helpmykidlearn.ie</a> <a href="http://www.takethefirststep.ie">www.takethefirststep.ie</a>
National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS)	<a href="http://www.nbss.ie">www.nbss.ie</a>
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)	<a href="http://www.ncca.ie">www.ncca.ie</a> <a href="http://www.aistearsiolta.ie">www.aistearsiolta.ie</a> <a href="http://www.curriculumonline.ie">www.curriculumonline.ie</a>
National Council for Special Education (NCSE)	<a href="http://www.ncse.ie">www.ncse.ie</a>
National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)	<a href="http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS/">www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS/</a>
National Parents Council – Post-Primary (NPC-PP)	<a href="http://www.npcpp.ie">www.npcpp.ie</a>
National Parents Council – Primary (NPC-P)	<a href="http://www.npc.ie">www.npc.ie</a>
Professional Development Support for Teachers – Technology in Education	<a href="http://www.scoilnet.ie">www.scoilnet.ie</a>