



Submission to Department of Education & Skills

2015 Review of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life*

On behalf of the INTO

14 Meán Fómhair 2015

Review of Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

The INTO welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the review of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. Primary teachers have responded well to the objectives of the strategy to improve achievement levels in literacy and numeracy. Primary teachers remain committed to teaching literacy and numeracy to a high standard. The strategy has been successful in focusing attention on the teaching of literacy and numeracy.

The INTO organises an annual consultative conference on education providing members with an opportunity to discuss and debate current education issues. In 2011, the theme of the consultative conference was literacy in the primary school. In 2013, the theme was numeracy / mathematics in the primary school. The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy was discussed at both conferences. In addition, modules on literacy and numeracy were included in INTO Learning professional development summer courses.

The INTO offers the following initial observations with a view to commencing discussion on reviewing the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

Observations

Teachers generally spend more time on literacy and numeracy than the amount of time suggested in the time allocation guidelines of the Primary School Curriculum 1999. The amount of time varies from school to school. Teachers would appreciate more guidance around the integration of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

At the time the strategy was developed the INTO expressed strong reservations around the practice of sending the results of standardised tests in 2nd, 4th & 6th class to the DES annually. It was unclear at the time what use would be made of this data. It has emerged since that it is proposed to use the data to determine the allocation of additional teachers to schools to support children with special educational needs. Further debate is required on this issue. Standardised tests were not designed for this purpose. Standardised tests have been given a greater status than they deserve and there is a lot of misunderstandings about their purpose and what results mean.

The supports available to DEIS schools are welcomed by DEIS schools. In particular, teachers have commented favourably on the professional development support associated with literacy and numeracy programmes. However, non-DEIS schools have not been given the same level of professional development support or access to literacy and numeracy programmes to support the teaching of literacy and numeracy. Access to training, professional development and support for whole school staff is required.

While support for the project 'helpmykidslearn' is welcome a lot more work is needed to support parents in helping their children's learning. There are many parents who do not engage with their children's learning despite schools reaching out to them.

Curriculum developments proposed in the literacy and numeracy strategy have not yet been concluded. A revised language curriculum for Junior Infants to 2nd class is due to be published this Autumn. The revised language curriculum for 3rd to 6th has yet to be developed as has the revised mathematics curriculum, as recommended in the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. The curriculum for the infants classes has also to be revised, drawing on the principles of Aistear. It is disappointing that the DES did not initiate a comprehensive professional development programme to support the use of Aistear in infant classes. Though the use of Aistear has been very successful in some schools, teachers have

engaged with the framework voluntarily and participated in professional development in their own time. Schools have funded the use of Aistear from their own resources. The lack of resources has inhibited some schools from using Aistear. The proposed revision of the primary school curriculum for infants provides an ideal opportunity to incorporate the principles of Aistear and to provide a comprehensive professional development programme for all teachers. It is also essential to ensure that the NCCA is adequately resourced to progress the developments required in the primary school curriculum.

Teachers have found the process of setting goals and targets in teaching literacy and numeracy useful. However, an overemphasis on targets, particularly in relation to increasing performance on standardised tests, can distort teaching, where the objective becomes the meeting of targets rather than the enhancement of learning. Increasing the percentages of pupils achieving at the different levels may impact on norms, leading to a need to re-standardise tests.

Children's wellbeing is paramount. Children's readiness to learn can be effected due to emotional stress. There is still insufficient support for children with mental health and behavioural issues which impact on their learning. Schools often feel they are letting children down because they are not equipped to support children with emotional stress. The role of NEPS and the proposed Inclusion Support Service need to be considered in this context. Literacy and numeracy achievement is not isolated from children's wellbeing. Primary education is about the holistic development of the child.

Additional support is required to support children with English as an additional language and children with special educational needs. These children need sustained support over time. There has been insufficient professional development for teachers regarding the teaching of children with special educational needs and children with English as an additional language.

Development work on transitions from pre-school to primary school is at an early stage and protocols around the transfer of information have yet to be developed. Reaction of primary teachers to the report card templates has been mixed, and there are some reservations about the inclusion of the child and parent contributions to the transfer process to post-primary particularly in relation to the additional work for 6th class teachers.

Implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy at school has involved additional workload for teachers and principals. This additional workload has occurred at a time when posts of responsibility in schools have been depleted. In order to support schools in implementing the strategy consideration needs to be given to infrastructure and resources available to schools, including additional release time for teaching principals, a restoration of posts of responsibility and professional development for teachers.

The INTO looks forward to participating in the review of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.