

Rannóg Pholasai,
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta,
An Roinn Oideachais agus
Scileanna,
Sráid Mhaoilbhríde
Baile Atha Cliath 1



Curriculum and Assessment
Policy Unit,
Department of Education and
Skills
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1

To: Boards of Management, Principal Teachers and Teaching Staff of Primary Schools and Special Schools and Chief Executives of ETBs

Information in relation to Standardised Testing and Other Matters

Academic Year 2015/16 and Subsequent Years

Circular 0034/2016

1. Standardised Testing in Primary Schools – Returns for 2015/2016

Thank you all for your continued co-operation in providing the results of your standardised testing via the Esinet online system. Standardised testing is one means of assessing the levels of attainment of pupils to inform teaching and learning. We fully acknowledge the work of school staff in this regard.

You will have received or will shortly receive funding for 2015/2016 standardised testing. These funds may be used to purchase test instruments and materials such as teachers' manuals, test scoring services or test-related software offered by test providers. Any funds remaining after the standardised testing costs have been met may be spent on diagnostic tests, in accordance with a school's needs.

During May and early June 2016, you should carry out the tests in accordance with circulars 0056/2011 and 0018/2012 available at www.education.ie. The results of these tests must be uploaded onto the Esinet portal on or before **17th June 2016**.

A **Step by Step** guide to uploading the returns is outlined below. **It is particularly important that all schools, including special or infant schools without a second class, read and follow the directions below, where applicable.**

Schools are reminded of their reporting obligations in Part 7 of Circular 0056/2011: Reporting and Using the Results of Assessments to Improve Pupil Learning. These include:

- Reporting to parents: Schools are reminded that they should issue a written report to their parents in sufficient time, before the closure of the school for the summer vacation, to allow parents a reasonable opportunity to seek meetings with the principal and/or teacher(s) to discuss the written report, if necessary.
- Using report card templates: All primary schools must use the standard report card template (available at www.ncca.ie) for reporting to parents on pupils' progress and achievement at school
- Reporting, analysing and using assessment information at school level
- Reporting information from standardised tests to their board of management
- Transferring assessment data in instances when pupils move to a different school
- Reporting standardised test results to the Department of Education and Skills – www.education.ie

Note that the administration of standardised tests to whole classes is inappropriate at infant class level. Standardised tests, if used before the end of first class, should be administered in small groups only. See www.ncca.ie for more information. Standardised Tests are one of a number of assessment tools that can be used to inform teaching and learning in primary schools.

STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO UPLOADING STANDARDISED TESTING RETURNS (Special and Infant Schools – See below)

In order to upload the returns, please **fully complete** the following steps:

DATA ENTRY

1. The designated **data entry** person in your school should log onto the Esinet portal, click on ‘Literacy and Numeracy Returns’, and then ‘CAP Application’, before entering the results of the tests on the form on screen, and clicking ‘**Submit**’.
2. Once the scores are submitted, the data entry person should log out.

APPROVER

3. The designated **approver** in your school should then log onto the Esinet portal, click on ‘Literacy and Numeracy Returns’, and then ‘CAP Application’.
4. If the approver is satisfied that the correct scores have been entered, he/she should click ‘**Approve**’.
5. A message will appear to say ‘Thank you. Your records have been successfully approved’.
6. The approver should then click ‘**Finish**’.

Please note the following points in relation to the uploading of returns on the Esinet portal:

- All returns must be submitted **online**. Postal returns will **not** be processed
- Returns should be submitted by the designated data entry person in your school and then approved by the designated approver
- Submitted returns will **not** show up in the **OLCS** approval list. The approver must log into the application and approve the data
- Queries should be directed to literacynumeracy1516@education.gov.ie

IMPORTANT NOTE FOR SPECIAL SCHOOLS:

In the case of special schools if, in the view of the school principal, all relevant pupils have a learning or physical disability which would prevent them from attempting the tests, no action is required. **If a special school has pupils who are eligible to be tested in 2nd, 4th or 6th class, you are required to submit a return on Esinet.**

IMPORTANT NOTE FOR INFANT SCHOOLS:

As infant schools have no pupils in second, fourth or sixth class, no return is required. If an infant school logs on to the system, the school will not be recognised by the system. If such a school is in doubt, please contact literacynumeracy1516@education.gov.ie.

2. Resource Teaching and Learning Support

Schools will be aware that the Department of Education and Skills is considering potential revisions to the existing system of allocating Resource Teaching/Learning Support resources to schools, and that a pilot of a new model is currently taking place.

This comes on foot of recommendations made by the National Council for Special Education that allocations should be based on a school's educational profile, which includes consideration of the percentage of students performing below a certain threshold on standardised test results.

On issuing a social context survey to schools in 2014, all primary schools were advised that the standardised test data which have been returned, or were being returned by schools for 2013/14 and for subsequent years (as set out in DES Circular 0045/2014) have been identified as the best source of data for this element of a school's educational profile and may be used to inform the development of a revised model to allocate Resource Teaching/Learning Support teachers for schools. All schools were therefore so informed.

The position remains that standardised test data being returned may be used in the future to inform the development of a proposed revised model to allocate Resource Teaching/Learning Support teachers for schools.

3. Education Passport – Transferring pupil information from primary to post primary schools

As indicated in Circular 45/2014, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has developed a suite of materials to support the reporting and transfer of pupil information from primary to post-primary schools. An Education Passport, for each pupil, should be sent to the relevant post-primary school following confirmation of enrolment and, ideally, by the end of June. Since 2014/15, schools are required to use the NCCA Education Passport materials to support the reporting and transfer of pupil information at the end of sixth class. The materials are presented under the umbrella title of “Education Passport” and are available at www.ncca.ie/transfer.

Education Passport Materials include

- The standard *6th Class Report Card Template* for completion by schools.
- The *My Profile* sheet for completion by pupils in primary schools before being shared with their parents/guardians.
- The *My Child's Profile* sheet for completion by parents/guardians. This should be sent with the *My Profile* sheet to parents/guardians by the end of the second week of June at the latest. Parents may complete the *My Child's Profile* should they wish to do so. The primary school should forward *My Child's Profile*, if completed, along with the pupil's *My Profile* sheet and the 6th Class Report Card to the post-primary school.

The Education Passport materials have been developed by the NCCA, following an extensive period of engagement with stakeholders, to support the dual purpose of reporting to parents and of transferring pupil information to post-primary schools once enrolment has been confirmed.

For more information about the administration of the Education Passport, schools should refer to the FAQs at www.ncca.ie/transfer.

4. Primary Language Curriculum

The new Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile for English and Irish has been developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). This curriculum is for teachers of pupils of all abilities in the junior primary years, i.e. from junior infants to second class inclusive. It is for pupils in English-medium schools, Gaeltacht schools, Irish-medium schools and special schools.

The new curriculum will be implemented on a phased basis from September 2016.

School Year 2016/17

There will be an initial emphasis on the Oral Language/Teanga ó Bhéal strand. From September 2016, this strand will begin to be implemented for infants to second class.

School Year 2017/18

From September 2017 the Reading/Léitheoireacht and Writing/Scribhneoiracht strands will begin to be implemented for infants to second class alongside the oral language strand.

School Year 2018/19

From September 2018, there will be full implementation of all strands for infants to second class.

School Year 2019/20

From September 2019, implementation of Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile for third to sixth class will begin.

An interactive version of the Primary Language Curriculum/ Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile for infants to second class is available online for teachers and schools to access at www.curriculumonline.ie/primary. A hard copy of the curriculum for each teacher has already been sent to schools.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to familiarise teachers with the new Primary Language Curriculum has commenced. This CPD is designed and delivered by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) in collaboration with the Special Education Support Service (SESS). Information seminars for principals took place in the autumn of 2015. Follow up introductory seminars are taking place currently for school principals and one other member of staff. An information webinar, along with on-line support materials and a ‘Questions and Answers’ document responding to questions raised during the implementation phase, are also available at www.pdst.ie.

During the school years 2016/17 and 2017/18, PDST and SESS will facilitate whole school CPD which will involve one full-day school closure each year. A range of other supports, including elective workshops, will also be available to schools.

5. Support for Parents

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has developed two information leaflets for parents on the new Primary Language Curriculum:

- A one-page leaflet answers key questions from parents about the curriculum.
- A two-page leaflet gives more detail on these key questions parents have about the curriculum.

The leaflets are available in English and Irish at www.curriculumonline.ie. The shorter leaflet might be more helpful for parents for whom neither English nor Irish is their first language.

The leaflets explain why there is a new language curriculum and how it is different to the current curriculum for English and Irish, and they inform parents of their important role in supporting and encouraging their children's language learning at home. In addition to the leaflets, the new Language Curriculum online includes a section called **Support Material**. While much of this looks at classroom work, parents might find some of it helpful in supporting their children at home. The material includes lots of advice, photos and videos about children learning to talk, read and write. Over time, more materials on how parents can support their children's language and literacy development through conversations and everyday activities and routines, will be added to the website.

As part of your work with the new Primary Language Curriculum, your school might like to share some of these materials with parents and/or draw their attention to them on the NCCA website at www.curriculumonline.ie.

As part of the Department's strategy to improve children's literacy and numeracy skills, the National Adult Literacy Agency developed the website www.helpmykidlearn.ie. This provides some suggestions for enjoyable activities in which parents and their children can engage. Information for parents about resources to support literacy and numeracy in Irish is available from COGG, www.cogg.ie.

We would encourage schools to:

- add a link from the school website to www.helpmykidlearn.ie (a great many of you have done this already) and www.cogg.ie particularly in Gaeltacht schools and in Gaelscoileanna
- mention the websites to new parents visiting the school in May/June.
- recommend them to parents as a source of suggestions for enjoyable activities in which parents and their children can engage.
- encourage staff to access the websites and mention them in parent/teacher meetings.

In addition, the National Adult Literacy Agency has promotional posters and bookmarks with information about the website *Help My Kid Learn*, and how parents can support their children's learning over the summer. If you would like to order a free promotional pack for your school, email mmurray@nala.ie.

6. Public Libraries Support for Schools

The establishment of a collaborative approach for the provision of educational support and leisure reading materials between schools and public libraries is an objective of the Public Library Strategy 2013-2017 *Opportunities for All*. A number of standard services which all public libraries will make available to primary schools have been identified and agreed nationally. These services are outlined below.

Membership of the public library is free and provides access to a wide range of resources and activities that aim to support primary schools in developing children's literacy, numeracy, creativity and communication skills. Building upon existing partnerships between schools and libraries have many potential benefits for both the public libraries and primary schools.

A catchment of primary schools has been identified for each library branch. This information is available on the public libraries' website at www.librariesireland.ie/services-to-schools.

Each partner library branch will provide the services outlined below and will liaise directly with each primary school during the school year. In the case of certain schools, some of the services will be provided by the mobile library, school library van or through the library headquarters, to be determined at local discretion. Under the collaborative approach, each library service will make contact with the school principal a few times a year. Such contact will provide information in relation to the library services and resources available to each school.

The range of library services offered to primary schools includes the following:

- Facilitating class visits from primary schools, arranged locally in advance
- Providing a dedicated teacher's card on request to every teacher in every primary school to enable each teacher to borrow items for his/her class
- Making presentations on the library services for each school, as requested by the school, at a time agreed with the principal, or as part of in-service training. The presentation may be facilitated at the school and can be made to teachers, pupils and/or parents. Schools may cluster together for this presentation, if desired.
- Providing:
 - Reading and curriculum support materials
 - Online learning resources, including over 300 Irish and international newspapers, 190 different magazine titles, comprehensive collections of e-books and e-audio books, over 500 online learning courses and 80 language courses
 - Resources and reference materials to support school projects
- Providing a reading space for children and access to electronic resources in each partnered library service
- Providing reference resources and research assistance to pupils and teachers for school project work
- Providing information for parents about the range of library resources and the activities available to support the development of their children's literacy and numeracy skills

- Providing ongoing library programmes and initiatives throughout the year, including a new national Summer Stars reading programme, to support the continuing development of children's literacy and numeracy skills (www.librariesireland.ie). The Summer Stars reading programme will run throughout the summer and is a fun reading programme, open to all children who register for it at their local library.
- Providing access to a wide range of historical material about the local area, including maps, photographs, documents and information and collections relating to 1916 and subsequent commemorations.

7. Review of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

The publication in January 2015 of the positive results of the National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics indicate that the overall targets at primary level, which were set out in the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy published in 2011, have been met. In this context, an interim review of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy planned for 2016, commenced in 2015. The review of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, to be published later this year, will provide an opportunity to identify priorities and actions related to the literacy and numeracy learning of all of our young people between now and 2020.

8. Review Of Education – Gaeltacht Areas

The Department of Education and Skills has carried out a comprehensive review of educational provision in the Gaeltacht. The review included national and international research, case studies on Gaeltacht schools, consultation and debate with stakeholders.

The review has informed the development of a Gaeltacht policy to strengthen Irish-medium education in Gaeltacht school communities, as part of the Government's 20-year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010 – 2030. It is also hoped to strengthen Irish language usage not only in schools, but also amongst Gaeltacht families and communities. The policy is currently being finalised and will be published in due course.

Schools are encouraged to consult www.education.ie regularly for news of further developments.

Breda Naughton
 Principal Officer
 Curriculum & Assessment Policy Unit
 May 2016