



**Circular 0022/2023**

## **Information in relation to Standardised Testing and Other Matters – Academic Year 2022/23 and Subsequent Years**

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

**Sections 1 and 2 of this circular set out important information for schools regarding Standardised Testing returns in respect of the 2022/2023 academic year. Sections 3 to 13 provide updates on a number of curriculum and other matters which are relevant to primary schools and special schools.**

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## **1. Standardised Testing in Primary Schools – Returns for 2022/23**

Thank you for your continued co-operation in providing the results of your standardised testing to the Department of Education via the Esinet online system. We fully acknowledge the work of school staff in this regard.

During May/early June 2023 the tests should be carried out, in accordance with circulars 0056/2011 and 0018/2012. **The results of these tests must be uploaded onto the Esinet portal on or before Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2023.**

Assessment is an enabler of effective teaching and learning. This includes regularly evaluating pupils' work and periodically reporting results to pupils and parents/guardians. All forms of assessment, including standardised tests, can be used by teachers to inform teaching and learning so as to ensure that programmes of learning in literacy and numeracy are tailored to meet the needs of individual pupils/class groups. The results of standardised testing can help schools to evaluate progress in literacy and numeracy, help to pinpoint areas for improvement and will support teachers in ensuring that literacy and numeracy learning experiences meet pupils' needs.

Results of any one standardised test should not be used in isolation, nor used as baseline data for predicting future achievements for pupils, nor for solely informing decisions regarding the provision of interventions or targets within learning plans. Information from ability tests, teacher observations, parental reports, as well as the views of the pupils are also very important aspects of a thorough assessment. A standardised testing information leaflet, published in 2021 <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/53fd1-returning-to-standardised-testing-in-primary-schools-may-2021/> gives further advice on how standardised tests form part of a broad range of assessment methods to inform the teaching and learning process and how the data can be used and how best to ensure sensitive communication about testing.

**Assessment Guidelines for Schools** <https://ncca.ie/media/1351/assessment-guidelines.pdf> provides schools with information on a variety of assessment methods, advice to schools on developing, implementing and reviewing their policy on assessment and advice on the legislative requirements for schools in communicating information about children's progress and achievement. **Circular 56/2011** (<https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/fb6452652f1d496996393ffef32b0c4c/>) provides information on assessing children's literacy and numeracy achievement.

### **Funding**

Your school will shortly receive funding in respect of 2022/23 standardised testing. These funds should be used to purchase test instruments and materials such as teachers' manuals, test scoring services or test-related software offered by test providers. Tests are available as follows:

- The Educational Research Centre (ERC) provides standardised tests in both paper and online formats, i.e. Drumcondra Primary Reading Test (English) –



revised, Drumcondra Primary Mathematics Test (in English and Irish) – revised and for Irish-medium schools, Irish reading - Triail Ghaeilge Dhroim Conrach do Bhunscoileanna Gaeltachta agus Lán-Ghaeilge. Information on these tests is available at <https://www.tests.erc.ie/>. Both online and paper tests can be ordered on ERC DOTS (*Drumcondra Online Testing System*) <https://www.tests.erc.ie/>. Queries can be addressed regarding the online tests to [dots@erc.ie](mailto:dots@erc.ie), and queries on the ERC’s paper-based tests to [tests@erc.ie](mailto:tests@erc.ie).

- Mary Immaculate College provides paper-based MICRA-T (Mary Immaculate College Reading Attainment Tests) and SIGMA-T (Standardised Irish Graded Mathematics Attainment Tests) tests. These tests are available to purchase from [www.cjfallon.ie](http://www.cjfallon.ie)

Any funds remaining after the standardised testing costs have been met may be spent on diagnostic tests, in accordance with a school’s needs.

### **Exemptions from Standardised Testing**

**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](http://www.ncca.ie) for more information.

As per circular 56/2011 ‘Students may be excluded from standardised testing if in the view of the school principal they have a learning or physical disability which would prevent them from attempting the tests or, in the case of migrant students, where the level of English required in the test would make attempting the test inappropriate’. Information is also available at <https://www.tests.erc.ie/test-administration-faqs>.

Principals should use their professional judgement and consider the need for exemption from or inclusion in testing on a case-by-case basis. There will be learners who due to their level of language proficiency will be able to access standardised testing within their first year in Ireland, others will need more time if their progress in English language development is below what would be expected or if their schooling has been interrupted by accommodation issues/lack of school places/other wellbeing factors.

### **Reporting and Using the Results of Assessments to Improve Pupil Learning**

Schools are reminded of their reporting obligations as per Part 7 of Circular 0056/2011. These include:

- **Reporting to parents/guardians:** Schools should issue a written report, explaining the results to parents/guardians in sufficient time, before the closure of the school for the summer vacation, to allow parents/guardians a reasonable opportunity to seek meeting(s) with the teacher(s) and/or principal to discuss the written report, if necessary. Information for parents/guardians on understanding standardised test scores can be found on [ncca.ie](http://ncca.ie), [https://ncca.ie/media/1429/understanding-standardscores\\_eng.pdf](https://ncca.ie/media/1429/understanding-standardscores_eng.pdf). A video for



parents/guardians explaining standardised test results in the context of the broader end-of-year report has been published to share with parents. This can be found at <https://ncca.ie/en/primary/reporting-and-transfer/>.

- **Using report card templates:** All primary schools must use the standard report and template for reporting to parents/guardians on pupils' progress and achievement at school. The number of reporting templates available has been extended. Feedback suggested the need for greater reporting options for children, in particular for those in receipt of additional support in school, such as children in special schools and/or attending special classes in primary schools. The Report Card Creator has also been updated to provide additional functionality for schools. This tool and the suite of 12 reporting templates can be accessed here: <https://ncca.ie/en/primary/reporting-and-transfer/report-card-templatescreator/>
- **Reporting, analysing and using assessment information at school level;** Schools must report information from standardised tests to their board of management.

### **Return of data to the Department of Education**

Reporting standardised test results to the Department of Education should be uploaded onto the Esinet portal at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/af92e8-standardised-testing-in-primary-schools/> **on or before Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2023.**

In order to enter and approve the data please log on to the Esinet portal, click on 'School Data Collection', and then 'Literacy and Numeracy, read the instructions before clicking 'Continue'. It is particularly important that all schools, including special or infant schools without a second class, read and follow the directions in the step-by-step guide to uploading the returns.

## **2. National and International Testing**

As per Circular [0056/2011](#) the Department is requesting that schools do their utmost to participate in large-scale assessments conducted by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) on behalf of the Department of Education. The Department and the ERC greatly appreciate schools' continued participation in these studies.

### **Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2023: Main Study March 20<sup>th</sup> - April 28th 2023**

TIMSS assesses the Mathematics and Science skills of students at fourth class in primary school and in second year at post-primary school level. TIMSS, first conducted in 1995, takes place every four years. Ireland has taken part in 1995, 2011 (at primary level only), 2015 and in 2019. 198 primary schools will participate in TIMSS 2023 from **20<sup>th</sup> March until 28 April 2023**. The 2023 cycle of TIMSS will mark Ireland's transition to computer-based assessment. 5,800 pupils will participate in the main study in digital format with 1,900 undertaking a paper-based test as a bridge sample.



If your school has been selected to take part in the TIMSS 2023, and have any questions or concerns, please contact the TIMSS team at [timss.ireland@erc.ie](mailto:timss.ireland@erc.ie).

### **3. Special Education**

Schools will be aware that the Department of Education has introduced a new system of allocating special education teachers to mainstream schools in 2017. Allocations for schools were updated in 2019 and more recently in 2022 and are designed to be updated in future, at regular intervals, every two to three years.

Allocations are now based on a school's educational profile, which includes consideration of the percentage of students performing below a certain threshold on standardised test results. The position remains that standardised test data being returned will continue to be used in the future to inform the development of school profiles and to allocate special education teachers to schools.

For the profiled allocations, an aggregate of primary school standardised test results over a number of years will be used to develop the standardised test values for primary schools.

The use of an aggregate of **more than one years' data** is designed to provide the most accurate picture of a school's educational profile over a period of time, and also to ensure that schools are not penalised for improving performances generally, or over a shorter period of time. For future revisions of the special education teacher model an aggregate of the most recent number of years standardised test data will continue to be used to develop school profiles, with the exclusion of the 2019/2020 school year data as a result of the pandemic.

It is important to ensure that the Continuum of Support plans for individual pupils with special educational needs are reviewed by schools as soon as possible to ensure that they are up-to-date. This review should be done in collaboration with the relevant school staff, parents/guardians and the pupils themselves, where appropriate.

### **4. Transitions**

#### **Early learning and care settings to primary school**

The NCCA *Mo Scéal* reporting templates support the transition for young children from an early learning and care setting to primary school. The purpose of these templates is to improve arrangements for the transfer of information about the learning and development of children between all state-funded early learning and care settings<sup>1</sup> and primary schools. The templates and the support materials are a resource which early learning and care settings and schools can use as they work together to make young children's transition into primary school as positive and effective as it can be.

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<sup>1</sup> The early learning and care settings are participating in the state funded Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme providing two years of free preschool.



In the case of Gaeltacht schools, a *Guide for Gaeltacht Primary Schools: Strengthening Links between Primary Schools and Early Learning and Care (ELC) Settings* has been developed to help schools to create collaborative links with their local naíonraí that will support the transition of the children to the primary school and the promotion of the Irish language.

### **Primary school to post-primary school**

The successful transition of sixth class pupils to post-primary education in 2023 will require ongoing collaboration and careful planning between primary schools and post-primary schools. This may happen at a local level through transition programmes, open days/nights, including on-line events, meetings between teachers and families as well as through the transfer of key information to the post-primary schools. The NEPS Continuum of Support and the Home School Liaison Officers in DEIS schools can also be utilised to support the transition of pupils. Communication between the primary and post-primary schools and with the parents/guardians and pupils is of utmost importance in order to ensure progression is as seamless as possible. Sharing information about pupils' learning is a key way of supporting their transition from primary to post-primary school.

Schools are **required** to use the Education Passport materials to support the reporting and transfer of pupil information at the end of sixth class. Schools should ensure that an Education Passport for each pupil is sent to the relevant post-primary school following confirmation of enrolment and ideally, by the end of June. For children in receipt or need of additional supports, the process for the transfer of information may need to commence at an earlier stage. An outline of the transfer process as well the full suite of Education Passport materials can be accessed at:

<https://ncca.ie/en/primary/reporting-and-transfer/education-passport/>

The transfer of children in need of additional support can be facilitated through the NEPS Student Transfer Form which should be completed and signed by parents/guardians before sending to the relevant post-primary school. To ensure the allocation of specialised resources, such as special needs assistants, assistive technology or school transport in a timely manner, NCSE application deadlines should be considered. All materials supporting this process are available at:

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/NEPS-Guides/Transfer-from-Primary-to-Post-primary/>

## **5. Primary Curriculum Developments**

### **Launch of the Primary Curriculum Framework for Primary and Special Schools**

On the 9 March 2023 the Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD, launched the *Primary Curriculum Framework* for all primary and special schools. The publication of the framework marks a significant milestone in the redevelopment of the primary school curriculum.



The framework is for all primary and special schools and provides the blueprint for guiding the enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment for all children. This is the first time primary and special schools will have a curriculum framework underpinning their practice.

The *Primary Curriculum Framework* was developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) through a collaborative approach, informed by research, sustained work with school communities, wide consultation, and extensive deliberation.

The framework:

- is for all primary and special schools
- sets the vision and principles for a redeveloped curriculum
- introduces key competencies for children's learning
- sets out the main features and components for the full redevelopment of the Primary School Curriculum, detailing curriculum areas and subjects; and time allocations
- introduces and expands aspects of learning including STEM Education, Modern Foreign Languages, Technology, and a broader Arts Education
- holds increased emphasis on existing areas such as Physical Education and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), and digital learning
- provides greater agency and flexibility for teachers and children.

The Department of Education is working closely with the education stakeholders to identify practical ways in which schools can be supported as they become familiar with and begin to use the framework.

The first step for teachers and school leaders is to familiarise themselves with the *Primary Curriculum Framework*. To enable schools to do this, the Department of Education have issued [Circular 0017/2023](#) stating that all schools can avail of a half-day closure during the remainder of this school year (2022/2023). A number of resources to assist schools in becoming familiar with the document during this closure have been published on [The Primary Curriculum Framework \(curriculumonline.ie\)](#). As developments progress, new curriculum specifications for the five curriculum areas and their associated subjects will be developed. The first specification that will be published will be the *Primary Mathematics Curriculum* in 2023. The remaining specifications will be completed in 2025.

### **Introducing the *Primary Mathematics Curriculum***

The NCCA published the Draft Primary Mathematics Curriculum for consultation in March 2022. The report on that consultation has now been published and it can be accessed here: [https://ncca.ie/media/5936/consultation\\_report\\_pmc.pdf](https://ncca.ie/media/5936/consultation_report_pmc.pdf).

The report is based on questionnaires for educators and parents; on feedback from a network of schools, reflective of all school types; and on written submissions which has also been published. In addition, a consultation with children was carried out on



NCCA's behalf by a team from Mary Immaculate College and the report on the consultation with children can be accessed here:

[https://ncca.ie/media/5938/consultation\\_with\\_children\\_pmc.pdf](https://ncca.ie/media/5938/consultation_with_children_pmc.pdf).

Findings from the consultation include suggestions for greater clarity on the core changes arising from the new curriculum; further review and refinement of the language register, messages about inclusion and opportunities for linkage; as well as consistency with other curriculum publications and developments. Findings from teachers indicate a lack of confidence among a significant percentage of respondents in teaching Mathematics, and the prevalent use of textbooks and Maths programmes. Findings from children indicate that variety in Maths experiences is important, as well as opportunities to collaborate, hands-on learning experiences, opportunities to share their ideas about Maths, and being appropriately challenged especially through collaborative problem-solving.

The findings from the consultations have informed the finalisation of the *Primary Mathematics Curriculum*, which will be published in the coming months. Oide, the amalgamated Department of Education Support Service, will be providing a suite of supports to principals and teachers from Term 1 2022/23 to introduce the Primary Mathematics Curriculum within their settings.

**To note:** from September 2023 the PDST, Centre for Schools Leadership (CSL), National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) and Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) will merge into one service called Oide.

### Primary Language Supports

The *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* for stages 1 – 4 (junior infants to sixth class) was published in September 2019.

The curriculum is supported by an online *Primary Language Toolkit/Uirlisí Úsáide Teanga na Bunscoile*. The toolkit includes:

- *Examples of Children's Learning/Samplaí d'Fhoghlaim Teanga na bPáistí* - developed with teachers, these examples give insights into how teachers work with learning outcomes to make decisions about what they teach, the types of activities, experiences and pedagogies they use, and the information they gather on how well children are doing in their language learning.
- *Support Materials for teachers/Ábhar Tacaíochta do Mhúinteoirí* – developed with language experts these provide a range of research-based teaching strategies and methodologies to help children's language development in both English and Irish.
- *Progression Continua/Contanaim Dul chun Cinn* - the continua provide practical support to teachers in building rich pictures of children's language learning and in using these pictures to support children's progression towards the Learning Outcomes in English and Irish.





You can access the online curriculum and toolkit by visiting [www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Primary-Language/](http://www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Primary-Language/).

To support teachers with their preparation and with working with the *Primary Language Curriculum/ Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile*, and the curriculum more widely, a selection of short videos presenting how teachers use Learning Outcomes have been developed as part of the suite of resources that accompanies the *Guidance on Preparation for Teaching and Learning*. These can be accessed here: <https://ncca.ie/en/primary/preparation>.

PDST is continuing to support schools in implementing the Primary Languages Curriculum Applications for Cohort 4 schools will open in term 3 of the 2022/2023 school year and PDST will issue details of how schools can apply in April 2023.

Support materials for all schools including webinars are available at <https://www.pdst.ie/primary/literacy/plc-webinars>.

To help parents/guardians support their children as they learn Irish as part of the *Primary Language Curriculum/ Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile*, a suite of tipsheets, *Gaeilge sa Bhaile*, have been published. These include:

- An Ghaeilge Mórthimpeall Orm / Irish All Around Me
- Mol an Óige agus Tíocfaidh Sí! / Praise, Praise, Praise!
- Ag Labhairt is ag Léamh as Gaeilge / Speaking and Reading in Irish
- Spreagadh agus Spraoi sa Bhaile / Fun at Home.

Each tipsheet describes a range of fun and engaging activities that parents can do with their children ‘as Gaeilge’ at home. All activities are described in English and Irish and audio clips are also included. These can be shared with parents/guardians at different times of the year, for instance at the start of the school year, during reporting, and throughout Seachtain na Gaeilge. You can access these at <https://ncca.ie/en/primary/resources-for-parents/>.

### **Guidance on Preparation for Teaching and Learning**

To support all primary and special school teachers in their preparation for teaching and learning, guidance has been developed through a collaboration led by the Department of Education and involving the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).

This guidance, launched in 2021, describes a renewed understanding of ‘preparation for teaching and learning’. It presents preparation as a process involving three aspects – invisible, visible, and recorded preparation. It also provides details on ‘key pillars’ that support preparation including; knowledge of the children, knowledge of the curriculum, and knowledge of pedagogy. Importantly, it provides clarity on how to demonstrate



preparation to school leaders and during inspections. Crucially the guidance attempts to provide clarity on the nature and volume of paperwork required when planning.

The guidance is supported by an extensive set of support materials including:

- a 'Getting Started' booklet that supports schools leaders and teachers engaging with the guidance
- recordings of teachers sharing their views on the guidance
- a Frequently Asked Questions document
- an inter-agency video supporting the key messages of the guidance
- a suite of videos presenting 'preparation in action' from a range of contexts.

All materials related to the guidance can be accessed on the NCCA website here <https://ncca.ie/en/primary/preparation/>.

## **6. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Supports**

During the *Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) across Primary and Post-primary Schools* teachers requested greater guidance on the teaching of RSE across the primary years. In response, the NCCA has developed a resource toolkit to support teachers in RSE within *Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)*.

The toolkit provides a single access point for freely available materials developed by Irish state agencies and organisations with expertise in SPHE/RSE. The toolkit is organised by class level and linked directly to the SPHE Curriculum ensuring age-appropriate material is available for all primary schools.

The toolkit also hosts a range of support materials that offer guidance on preparing to teach and teaching SPHE/RSE. Examples include:

- Creating the conditions for positive classroom discussions
- Fostering partnerships with parents/guardians
- Fostering relationships, expectations, and boundaries
- Ongoing reflection to develop your professional practice
- Reflecting on my practice and exploring my experiences, attitudes, values and beliefs
- Responding to challenging discussions, topics and questions
- Using a wide variety of active methodologies to meet the needs of the children in your class
- Considering the use and role of guest speakers
- Choosing, creating and working with resources to teach SPHE/RSE
- Using inclusive and respectful language.

The SPHE/RSE resource portal and toolkit will continue to be added to over time and can be accessed here: [www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Social,-Personal-and-Health-Education/SPHE-RSE-Toolkit/](http://www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Social,-Personal-and-Health-Education/SPHE-RSE-Toolkit/).



In tandem with the development of the online Toolkit, preparation for redeveloping and updating the SPHE curriculum has begun. Updated curricula will be developed for Primary, Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle. A revised Junior Cycle specification, following a period of public consultation has been approved by NCCA Council ahead of being submitted for Ministerial approval. It is intended to implement the updated Junior Cycle SPHE specification in schools from September 2023. Work on Senior Cycle specifications has begun and it is expected to be available for public consultation in Q3 2023. A background paper was already published for consultation in October last year.

The PDST is facilitating seminars in term 3 of the 2022/2023 school year in teaching RSE in the context and structure of a whole-school approach to SPHE.

Work on primary specifications has commenced. This framework will be the foundation for all curriculum specifications including those for SPHE and RSE.

## **7. Continuing Professional Development on Assessment**

At present, the PDST incorporates assessment, both summative and formative, in all aspects of continuous professional development (CPD), given that assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning. Assessment as a central component of circular and pedagogical practice, features in PDST CPD provision during seminars, workshops, webinars and in particular within the context of school-based support, where the PDST can work with teachers in exploring how standardised test results, along with other sources of assessment data, can meaningfully inform future teaching and learning in classrooms. With regard to the particular school context, the School Self Evaluation (SSE) process/DEIS action planning, where relevant, is central to PDST's facilitation of professional reflection and dialogue in this regard given the inextricable link between school improvement and assessment. More information on the CPD available can be found at: <https://pdst.ie/primary>.

## **8. Supporting Literacy and Numeracy**

The Department of Education is committed to raising standards in literacy and numeracy in early years, primary and post-primary settings. In 2011 the Department published the *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020*. The Interim review of the strategy was published in 2017 with updated and new targets for literacy and numeracy, identifying the priority areas such as numeracy and DEIS.

Work has commenced on the development of a follow-on Literacy and Numeracy and Digital Literacy strategy. The strategy will be informed by robust research to include consideration of national and international practice, by stakeholder engagement and public consultation. It is intended that the new strategy would be published in 2023.



## Resources

To support the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, the following resources have been developed by the Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS):

- **The Balanced Approach to Literacy Development in the Early Years (English & Gaeilge)**  
The Balanced Approach to Literacy Development in the Early Years draws on international research, evidence based practice and samples of that practice in Irish primary schools to give a coherent and comprehensive guide to teachers. This is a resource that can be used by class teachers working with children from Junior Infants to First Class. It may also be helpful to schools who have identified the need to improve reading standards as part of the school-self-evaluation process.  
<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/97aa18-national-educational-psychological-service-neps-resources-and-public/>
- **Cur Chuige Cothromaithe i leith Fhorbairt na Litearthachta i mBunranganna na Bunscoile** is the product of a collaborative project undertaken by NEPS along with An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta (COGG). This resource is wholly tailored to the teaching of literacy in the Irish language, with a focus of those children who receive their education through the medium of Irish. It includes 16 short video clips of good practice in action. It is available at <https://www.gov.ie/ga/bailiuchan/8290e7-none/>
- **Effective Interventions for Struggling Readers**  
This online resource is now in its second edition (2019). It is a guide for teachers, particularly special education teachers, which outlines evidence-based approaches to teaching reading to struggling readers. The guide covers the age range 6 to 18 years. It encompasses all students with reading difficulties. It includes:
  - How best to organise learning support for struggling readers
  - Information about interventions that have been found to be effective in Irish schools
  - A range of resources to support literacy teaching<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/0053fd-effective-interventions-for-struggling-readers-a-good-practice-guide/>

## 9. Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017–2022 – Gaeltacht Areas

The Department of Education published the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017–2022 (the policy) in October 2016. The overarching goal of the policy is to ensure the availability of high quality Irish-medium education in Gaeltacht schools and in this way to support and encourage the use of Irish in Gaeltacht communities



A key action in the policy is the implementation of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme (the scheme), which was launched in April 2017. Under the terms of the scheme, schools in Gaeltacht language-planning areas are being provided with the opportunity to seek recognition as Gaeltacht Schools and have been provided with a range of resources to support their implementation of specified language-based criteria aimed at strengthening Irish-medium educational provision.

A validation process commenced in October 2022 to ensure that the language-based criteria for recognition as a Gaeltacht school are being fulfilled by schools participating in the scheme. This validation process takes the form of an evaluation visit to the school from the Inspectorate.

Schools participating in the scheme must also demonstrate that they are participating in the language-planning processes provided for under the Gaeltacht Act 2012.

### **Schools participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme's (GSRS) Evaluation and Research Study**

The ERC is working with the Department and the Inspectorate in conducting an independent evaluation of the scheme, which involves 103 primary and 29 post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht. Further information on the ERC's evaluation work is available on their [website](#).

Survey activities will be carried out in a number of schools participating in the scheme during the 2023/24 school year as part of their evaluation of the Scheme. The activities include teachers, parents and pupils in all schools in the Scheme asked to complete questionnaires on the impact of the Scheme as it nears completion, and on the challenges that lie ahead. It is also intended to conduct focus-group interviews with teachers and parents in a subset of schools, following up on those conducted in 2019-20. If you are a school taking part in the evaluation of this Scheme and you have questions, please contact the GSRS team at [sceim@erc.ie](mailto:sceim@erc.ie).

Additional information and updates on the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme and on the [Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017–2022](#) are published regularly on gov.ie. Queries in relation to the operation of the Scheme and the Policy should be emailed to [aog@education.gov.ie](mailto:aog@education.gov.ie).

## **10. STEM Education Policy Statement 2017–2026**

The Department's STEM Education Policy Statement 2017–2026, published in November 2017, sets out the ambitious goals and actions required to achieve and improve the STEM education experience and outcomes for all learners. The [STEM Implementation Plan 2017-2019](#) built on a range of reforms and initiatives already underway in STEM, in areas such as curriculum and assessment reform, teacher professional development, embedding digital learning and advances in initial teacher education while providing a roadmap to address the areas for development



The [STEM Education Implementation Plan 2022-2026](#) was published on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2023. It is a joint plan developed by the Department of Education and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Implementation of the programme of work to 2026 spans four pillars of policy development with the actions identified in the implementation plan taking into account the findings of the consultation process. The implementation plan sets out ambitious objectives and actions required to achieve and improve the STEM education experience for all learners from early learning and care to post-primary level.

## **11. Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2025**

The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice was published by the Department in 2018 and refreshed in 2019 and sets out the ambition and vision that the promotion of wellbeing will be at the core of the ethos of every school and centre for education in Ireland. To implement this framework every school is required, by 2025, to use the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process to initiate a wellbeing promotion review and development cycle. The policy can be accessed [here](#). The PDST provides seminars, webinars and sustained support to support schools in implementing this framework.

### **Continuous Professional Development (CPD)**

Following an action research project involving 30 schools and NEPS, PDST and JCT the Department has developed CPD to support schools as they engage in a wellbeing promotion process. The national rollout of the CPD commenced in March 2022. Schools are encouraged to access this CPD delivered by PDST to help them initiate their wellbeing promotion review and development cycle. See here for information [PDST | Professional Development Service for Teachers](#)

### **Wellbeing Resources and Supports**

Advice and resources to support the wellbeing of all in the school community have been developed and are available at [gov.ie - Wellbeing in education \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie). This includes information on:

- advice to support wellbeing, including practical handouts and strategies for classroom practice
- wellbeing and school evaluation
- a catalogue of wellbeing resources
- a directory of CPD outlining supports from the Departments support services and agencies
- supporting wellbeing of children from Ukraine

Webinars developed by the PDST to support this process are available at <https://www.pdst.ie/primary/health-wellbeing/wellbeing-webinars>.

### **Trauma-Informed Approaches**



As part of support and development work NEPS has developed a series of Wellbeing and Resilience in schools eLearning webinars using a new Department Learning Management System. This training explores the use of whole-school, compassionate and trauma-informed approaches to build safe and connected schools. The training supplements the existing good practices already in place in schools in relation to wellbeing promotion. This training is underpinned by the 'Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2019'

The first training 'Introducing a Trauma Informed Approach, The Stress Factor – Getting the Balance Right, is a self-paced course and participants will progress sequentially through a series of modules. This eLearning course is supported by accompanying resources compiled by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). NEPS psychologists will be available to support implementation in schools. NEPS will communicate with all schools on the roll out of this training shortly.

## **12. Public Libraries Support for Schools**

Membership of the public library is free, there are no fines for overdue books and there are no replacement charges for children's books which have been lost or damaged.

All public libraries provide standard services to primary schools, as identified and agreed nationally. These services are outlined below. Public libraries are committed to delivering the services under the annual Right to Read Programme to support reading and literacy across local authority areas and may take a hybrid approach to delivering the services in libraries and online depending on local need and capacity. Building on the current provision of library services to primary and post-primary schools and exploring the potential for an expanded programme of library supports which will be delivered in alignment with the Department's forthcoming new national strategy on literacy and numeracy is a key objective of the new public library national strategy to be published in April 2023.

The public library provides access to a wide range of resources, facilities and activities that aim to support primary schools in developing children's literacy, numeracy, creativity and communication skills. The development of existing partnerships between schools and libraries provides many benefits for both the primary schools and for public libraries. A partner library branch has been identified for every primary school based on catchment area. This information is available on the public libraries' website at <https://www.librariesireland.ie/services/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 over the year to 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 to libraries from primary schools, arranged locally in advance
- Providing a dedicated teacher's card with additional borrowing capacity 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 and by prior arrangement, 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/guardians. Schools may cluster together for this presentation, if desired. Online presentations may also be possible.
- Providing :
  - Reading and curriculum support materials including online at <https://www.librariesireland.ie/services/right-to-read/services-to-schools>:
  - A Resource Guide for Schools which provides information for primary and post-primary schools to develop and expand reading and literacy collections within the school setting
  - Videos on Creating a Reading Space and Creating a Reading School with suggestions to support schools and teachers in developing reading spaces and reading cultures in schools
  - Online learning resources, including over 300 Irish and international newspapers, 250 different magazine titles, comprehensive collections of e-books and e-audio books, over 400 online learning courses and 110 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/guardians about the range of library resources and the activities available to support the development of their children's literacy and numeracy skills
- 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.
- Providing ongoing library programmes and initiatives throughout the year, including Ireland Reads, the national day for celebrating reading, the Spring into Storytime initiative, the national Summer Stars reading programme, the Children's Book Festival and Family Time at Your Library, all of which support the continuing development of children's literacy and numeracy skills (see [www.librariesireland.ie](http://www.librariesireland.ie)). Ireland Reads national reading day takes place in February. Spring into Storytime provides story time and reading activities in branches and online during April. The Summer Stars Reading Adventure runs





throughout the summer and is a fun reading programme open to all children who register for it at their local library. The Children's Book Festival takes place in October in libraries and online and celebrates children's books and family reading and Family Time at Your Library offers fun events in local libraries and online in December.

### **13. Literacy Support for Parents/guardians - NALA**

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) offers help and advice for parents/guardians who have difficulty reading, writing, spelling or doing mathematics. NALA has a Freephone number parents/guardians can call **1800 20 20 65** or a website [www.learnwithnala.ie](http://www.learnwithnala.ie) – parents/guardians can learn with their local ETB Adult Education Service or over the phone and online with NALA. All services are free.

NALA also has a website [www.helpmykidlearn.ie](http://www.helpmykidlearn.ie) that provides some suggestions for activities that parents/guardians can do with their children to develop their literacy and numeracy. It includes general information, fun activities and useful tips that can be integrated into any part of their day.

We encourage schools to:

- add a link from the school website to [www.helpmykidlearn.ie](http://www.helpmykidlearn.ie) (many schools have done this already) and [www.cogg.ie](http://www.cogg.ie), particularly in Gaeltacht schools and in Gaelscoileanna;
- mention the NALA Freephone and websites to new parents/guardians visiting the school in May/June;
- recommend them to parents/guardians as a source of suggestions for enjoyable activities in which a parent and child can engage;
- encourage staff to access the websites and mention them in parent/teacher meetings.

*Evelyn O' Connor*

Evelyn O'Connor  
Principal Officer  
Curriculum & Assessment Policy Unit  
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