LITERACY AND NUMERACY
FOR LEARNING AND LIFE

The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People

2011-2020

AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | **EDUCATION**
AGUS SCILEANNA | **AND SKILLS**

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[1] Early childhood care and education

FOREWORD

Ruairí Quinn, TD
Minister for Education and Skills

Literacy and numeracy are among the most important life skills that our schools teach. No child should leave school without having mastered these skills to the best of their abilities. Literacy and numeracy skills are crucial to a person's ability to develop fully as an individual, to live a satisfying and rewarding life and to participate fully in our society. Ensuring that all young people acquire these skills is one of the greatest contributions that we can make to achieving social justice and equity in our country.

However, we know that some children are not developing these skills as they should. Information from national assessments of reading and mathematics, from inspections in schools and from international studies have shown that many students in Irish schools are not developing literacy and numeracy skills to the best of their abilities. We cannot afford to allow this to continue.

The Programme for Government makes clear that the Government is determined that all young people will leave school able to read, communicate orally, in writing and in digital media, and able to understand and use mathematics in their everyday lives and in further learning. *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* sets out how we will work to achieve these crucially important goals over the period to 2020. It sets ambitious targets and describes the actions that we must take to improve the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy.

Realising these actions and achieving the targets in the strategy would be challenging in any circumstances, but will be especially so as we strive to curtail public expenditure in the current climate. This means that we will have to find the resources to implement this strategy by re-prioritising spending and by ensuring that we get the very best outcomes from existing financial and human resources.

Yet, as we face these very difficult challenges, I am heartened by the very large number of people and organisations that have participated in the national consultation process that has informed the writing of this strategy. Their engagement demonstrates how strongly Irish people – both within the education system and beyond – are committed to improving literacy and numeracy standards. This strategy is intended to harness and focus that commitment in a concerted national effort to achieve world-class literacy and numeracy skills among our children and young people. I look forward to working with you in this vital national task.

Ruairí Quinn, TD
Minister for Education and Skills

1. INTRODUCTION

We will improve literacy and numeracy skills

Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life is the national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy standards among children and young people in the education system. This strategy seeks to address significant concerns about how well our young people are developing the literacy and numeracy skills that they will need to participate fully in the education system, to live satisfying and rewarding lives, and to participate as active and informed citizens in our society.

Many people have contributed to this strategy

The strategy has been finalised following intensive consultation

It is very clear that very many people in the education system and beyond care passionately about ensuring that our young people master the skills of literacy and numeracy. *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* has been shaped by an intensive public consultation about how best we can improve the teaching and learning of these skills in the Irish education system.

Hundreds of individuals and organisations contributed written submissions and participated in discussions

The Department of Education and Skills published a draft national plan for improving literacy and numeracy in November 2010 and asked for comments from the education system and the public. The publication sparked an intense debate about literacy and numeracy. Individuals, parents, students, teachers, staff groups in schools, lecturers, researchers and departments in colleges and other third-level institutions, representatives of community organisations and public bodies, as well as parents' associations, trade unions, employers' associations and school management bodies submitted detailed comments and suggestions on how to get the strategy right. Almost 480 written submissions were received as well as a number of comments on a dedicated telephone line; most of those who submitted written comments agreed to their publication and these documents are available on the website of the Department of Education and Skills. Several of the submissions include very valuable reviews and summaries of relevant research and detailed bibliographies regarding the teaching, learning and assessment of literacy and numeracy skills.

In responding to the draft plan, representatives of stakeholders in education and the wider public acknowledged the need to improve standards in literacy and numeracy. They recognised that it is essential that all children develop literacy and numeracy skills to the best of their abilities and acknowledged that

indications of falling standards demanded immediate and decisive action by the Government. Representatives of business, industry and enterprise pointed to the increasing demands for high levels of literacy and numeracy in all sectors of employment. They emphasised the importance of raising standards to the levels achieved in the highest performing countries in order to continue to grow our indigenous knowledge economy and continue to attract high-value jobs through inward investment.

All of the written submissions have been analysed closely in the preparation of this strategy. In addition, officials from the Department met with over sixty organisations to hear more about their suggestions and to examine the key proposals that they had made. Officials in the Department of Education and Skills also worked closely with colleagues in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and consulted with staff with specialist expertise at the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the Educational Research Centre (ERC), Drumcondra and the Teaching Council.

Literacy and numeracy are much more than "reading, writing and arithmetic"

Traditionally we have thought about **literacy** as the skills of reading and writing; but today our understanding of literacy encompasses much more than that. **Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media.** Throughout this document, when we refer to "literacy" we mean this broader understanding of the skill, including speaking and listening, as well as communication using not only traditional writing and print but also digital media.

Literacy includes the ability to use and understand spoken language, print, writing and digital media

Numeracy is not limited to the ability to use numbers, to add, subtract, multiply and divide. **Numeracy encompasses the ability to use mathematical understanding and skills to solve problems and meet the demands of day-to-day living in complex social settings.** To have this ability, a young person needs to be able to think and communicate quantitatively, to make sense of data, to have a spatial awareness, to understand patterns and sequences, and to recognise situations where mathematical reasoning can be applied to solve problems.

Numeracy is the ability to use mathematics to solve problems and meet the demands of day-to-day living

We must develop the literacy and numeracy skills of *all* young people

Every young person needs to be literate and numerate. We use the basic skills of literacy and numeracy in almost every part of our lives when we communicate with each other – in traditional written forms or through the internet and digital media – when we follow signs and instructions, when we are at our work or enjoying leisure time, when we try to make sense of the mass of information and data available through the media, and

when we are managing our lives. In Ireland, we enjoy the benefit of having access to two languages: being able to use both Irish and English orally and in other forms gives us an added advantage in understanding ourselves and in contributing to the enrichment of our culture.

Without the skills of literacy and numeracy, a young person or adult is cut off from full participation in many aspects of life: they cannot perform basic tasks, such as reading or sending an e-mail; advertisements and notices are meaningless to them; they cannot jot down a shopping list or understand a utility bill; and they are cut off from participating in and contributing to many aspects of the society and culture in which they live. Young people and adults who do not have adequate literacy and mathematical skills cannot participate fully in schooling or in further and higher education, and they have fewer opportunities to take up satisfying jobs and careers.

Better literacy and numeracy for individuals contributes to a more just and equitable society

Developing good literacy and numeracy skills among all young people is fundamental to the life chances of each individual and essential to the quality and equity of Irish society

Missing out on the skills of literacy and numeracy or failing to develop these skills to the best of each person's capability is not just a loss for the individual: it is also an enormous loss for all of us in Irish society. Mastering the skills of literacy and numeracy brings with it many social, economic and health benefits for the individual and society as a whole. Having young people who can apply mathematical understanding in a growing range of economic, technical, scientific, social and other contexts is essential if we are to ensure employment and economic prosperity in the future. We know too that children who do not learn to read, write and communicate effectively are more likely to leave school early and in later life to be unemployed or in low skilled jobs, to have poorer emotional and physical health, to have limited earning power, and are more likely to be imprisoned. This strategy is premised on the strong belief that developing good literacy and numeracy skills among all young people is fundamental to the life chances of each individual and essential to the quality and equity of Irish society.

This strategy is about the contribution of the education system to better literacy and numeracy

Students can fail to develop adequate literacy and numeracy skills for many reasons. Some of these lie beyond the school and education system. For example, we know that children from socially and economically disadvantaged communities are significantly more likely to experience difficulties in literacy and numeracy for reasons associated with poverty, poorer health, and a wide range of other factors. Many of the underlying reasons for such failure are not found in the education system and some are not amenable to school-based solutions.

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However, we also know that effective schools and educational interventions *can* improve learning outcomes substantially for all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This strategy is focussed on the actions that the education system can take to ensure that early childhood care and education (ECCE) and primary and second-level schools provide the best possible opportunities for young people to acquire good literacy and numeracy skills. The strategy aims to ensure that every child leaving our school system understands mathematics and is able to speak, read, write and spell at a level that enables them to participate fully in education and in the local, national and global communities in which they live.

We need to foster literacy and numeracy from early childhood to adulthood

Children will develop good literacy and numeracy skills if those abilities are fostered in a consistent way from early childhood to the end of second-level education.

Early childhood, the period from birth to six years of age, is a time of significant opportunity for learning. During these early years, children take their first steps along their journey of lifelong learning. They have an inherent capacity to learn from birth and the experiences they have in their homes and wider environment impact significantly on their development and future learning. Early experiences that support the development of children's communication skills (such as their awareness of verbal and non-verbal communication; their knowledge of sound, pattern, rhythm and repetition; their awareness of symbols such as print and pictures; the opportunities that they have to become familiar with and enjoy print in a meaningful way; and the opportunities that they have to use mark-making materials) play a key role in the development of their literacy skills. Their awareness of materials, shape, space, pattern and difference, classifying, matching, comparing and ordering are important for the development of numeracy. The knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions developed in these early years impact significantly upon their later learning experiences.

Children's development of language and mathematical understanding takes place from the earliest years

This learning progresses in the primary school. Vital aspects of the child's skillsets in literacy (in both English and Irish) and numeracy skills continue to develop during the entire period of second-level education but especially during the junior cycle, when students encounter texts in new subjects for the first time. During the primary school years, critical early skills need to be developed within a broad, balanced and enjoyable curricular experience. These literacy and numeracy skills have to be carefully consolidated and developed throughout the junior and senior cycles in post-primary schools and in centres for education.

Both primary and post-primary schools have key roles in teaching essential literacy and numeracy skills

There may be a mistaken belief that the development of young people's literacy and numeracy skills should be completed by the end of primary school: this is not the case. We know, in fact, that there will be considerable variation in the level of skills acquired by twelve-year-olds. Some children *will* have mastered

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basic literacy skills by the age of twelve years, but many will still be developing these skills. *All* children of this age will require well-thought-out teaching and purposeful learning experiences in the post-primary school to enable them to acquire the skills they have yet to grasp, to consolidate the skills they have already learned, and to equip them for work, further learning and leisure.

Just as children develop literacy skills at different rates, their development of mathematical understanding also varies. We need to ensure that the teaching of numeracy in the post-primary school builds upon the learning that children have acquired in the primary school years, so that over the course of compulsory education, they master the essential ability to understand and use mathematics in every-day life and in further learning.

We have to ensure continuity for the learner across all stages of education

It is also important for us to remember that the development of children's literacy and numeracy skills in post-primary schools is not just the responsibility of teachers of languages and mathematics. Teachers of all post-primary subjects have an important role to play in developing and consolidating students' ability to use literacy and numeracy.

Continuity in the learning experience is of critical importance in the child's development from early childhood through to the completion of post-primary education. This can only happen for learners if we ensure that there is a seamless transition for them at each point of change in the education system. Procedures between the various education providers should ensure that relevant information transfers at each juncture to facilitate continuity and progression for the child.

The various linguistic settings in our schools bring different challenges for literacy

Learners in Irish schools experience language learning in both English and Irish throughout their primary and post-primary education. We also have a range of linguistic settings in our schools – English-medium schools, *gaelscoileanna, gaelcholáistí* and Gaeltacht schools. ECCE is provided in both Irish-medium and English-medium settings. This range of schools and settings and the opportunity to acquire literacy in both languages are part of the richness and strength of the Irish education system. It is also important to recognise that this diversity brings particular challenges for the teaching and learning of literacy.

Literacy in Irish-medium schools
Schools where the medium of instruction is mainly Irish include Gaeltacht schools as well as *gaelscoileanna* and *gaelcholáistí* established in areas outside the Gaeltacht. Irish is also the medium of instruction in certain streams or units in some second-level schools and in a number of ECCE settings both within and outside the Gaeltacht. Learners attending these schools and settings may come from homes in which the first language is

Irish or from homes where English (or another language) is the first language. **This literacy and numeracy strategy recognises that the learners in Irish-medium schools and settings have very varied learning needs and that they need to develop literacy skills in both Irish (as their first language or as the first language of the school) and in English**. These learners will be developing their ability to speak, read and write in Irish and English, their ability to move fluently between languages and their ability to transfer their literacy learning from one language to the other.

Literacy in English-medium schools
The majority of learners attend settings and schools where the main medium of instruction is English. **For the purposes of this strategy document, references to literacy for learners in English-medium schools and settings should be understood primarily as literacy in English.**

Most learners in English-medium schools come from homes where English is the first language though a significant number will speak a language other than English or Irish as their mother tongue. All learners in English-medium schools will, of course, be developing literacy skills in Irish which they will learn as a second (or additional) language. This learning should give them an ability to speak, read and write in both English and Irish and nurture their ability to transfer their language learning from one language to the other. Considerable weaknesses have been evident for some time in the teaching of Irish as a second language in schools. However, a comprehensive discussion of the steps that need to be taken to address the learning of Irish as a second language are addressed in the 20-year strategy for Irish rather than in this strategy document.

Young Irish people need to develop better literacy and numeracy skills

We know that while many students in our education system achieve very good standards of literacy and numeracy, a significant minority do not. In addition, many students acquire adequate skills but could do even better. The evidence for this is clear.

Literacy
- One in ten children In Irish schools has serious difficulty with reading or writing; in some disadvantaged schools this is as high as almost one in three students

- The literacy skills of students in Irish primary schools, measured by the National Assessments of English Reading, have not improved in over thirty years, despite considerable investments in reducing pupil-teacher ratios, the introduction of learning support (formerly remedial) and resource teachers, the provision of better teaching materials and considerable curricular reform

- Second-level teachers and principals have identified poor literacy levels as a barrier to accessing the post-primary curriculum and making a smooth transition into post-primary school

- Employers and third-level institutions have been consistently critical of the standards of literacy of students leaving post-primary education

- There has been a decline in the performance of post-primary students In Ireland in international literacy tests. In 2006, Irish fifteen-year-old students performed at the "above average" level in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) but in the 2009 round of the assessment, Irish students performed at the "average" level, ranking 17th out of 34 OECD countries

- The PISA 2009 tests showed that 17 per cent of all Irish fifteen year olds and almost one in four teenage boys lack the literacy skills to function effectively in today's society

Numeracy
- Repeated assessments of mathematics at primary level have revealed weak performance in important areas of the mathematics curriculum such as problem solving and measures

- The proportion of students who are studying mathematics at Higher Level in post-primary schools is disappointing. The proportion taking Higher Level in the Leaving Certificate examination has been in the region of 16 per cent for a number of years, despite an aspiration in the design of the Leaving Certificate mathematics syllabus to have 30 per cent of the cohort taking the Higher-Level examination

- The performance of students in Irish schools in international assessments of mathematics has been disappointing and has declined in recent years. In the most recent PISA tests, the performance of Irish fifteen-year-olds was at "below average" standard, ranking 26th out of 34 OECD countries

- About one-fifth of Irish students in the PISA 2009 tests did not have sufficient mathematical skills to cope with every-day life and Ireland also had significantly fewer high performing students than other countries.

Literacy and numeracy are urgent national priorities for our education system

Improving literacy and numeracy standards is an urgent national priority for the Minister for Education and Skills and the Government. The Government will:

▪ Set challenging targets for improvement that will require a comprehensive, national effort focussed on the progress of every child and on improving the core skills of literacy and numeracy during all stages of the education system

▪ Clarify what we expect children to learn and develop in early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings, primary schools and post-primary schools in order to prioritise the learning of literacy and numeracy

▪ Create a culture of continuous improvement in ECCE settings and schools and in the education system by improving radically the assessment and reporting of progress at student, school and national level and by focussing school self-evaluation and inspection on literacy and numeracy

▪ Improve the professional skills of those who teach in our ECCE settings and schools in the teaching of literacy and numeracy, in planning and delivering rich learning activities, in assessing and monitoring progress, and in using assessment information to inform the next steps for learners

• Build the capacity of school leadership to lead improvement in literacy and numeracy and to support teachers in their efforts to improve standards of literacy and numeracy

• Continue to target available resources on enhancing provisions designed to improve the learning opportunities and achievement of children who come from the most disadvantaged communities and those with additional learning needs

• Help parents and communities to support their children's literacy and numeracy development

• Raise public awareness of the role that the family, community, the education system, libraries and other bodies can play together in promoting successful literacy and numeracy learning

- Monitor progress towards achieving the demanding targets that have been set and adjust our actions as necessary to ensure that literacy and numeracy targets are realised.

We have to bring about change within available resources

World-class literacy and numeracy skills will be essential for the rebuilding of our economic prosperity and ensuring the well-being of our society.

To implement this plan we will have to make difficult choices

We are embarking on this literacy and numeracy strategy at a time when our economic circumstances are extremely difficult. We know that additional resources will simply not be available to us as we seek to bring about very significant change. However, making sure that every child and young person gets the opportunity to acquire literacy and numeracy skills is simply too important for us not to act now. In fact, making sure that our children and young people have world-class literacy and numeracy skills will be essential for the rebuilding of our economic prosperity and ensuring the well-being of our society.

This means that difficult choices have to be made. We will have to ensure the most efficient use possible of available resources and in many instances re-prioritise spending away from desirable but ultimately less important activities to enable us to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of the children and young people in our care.

We need a sustained national effort to implement this strategy

In the chapters that follow, we have set out ambitious targets to improve standards in literacy and numeracy among our children and young people. We also set out in broad terms the actions that we believe will be necessary to achieve the improvements that we seek. Achieving these targets will require sustained effort and focus across each part of the education system at early childhood, primary and post-primary levels; in teacher education and professional development; in work-skill development for adults working in the early childhood sector; in curriculum and assessment; and in evaluation and quality assurance systems. It will also require the commitment of other government departments and bodies supporting families and communities. The Department of Education and Skills will lead this national effort and will work closely with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and with relevant national agencies in this task. The next steps in implementing the strategy will be the development of detailed implementation plans and timelines for each sector in the education system and for the different elements in the strategy.

In implementing the strategy, the Department of Education and Skills will draw on specialist advice from national and international experts on literacy, numeracy, assessment and school improvement and consult regularly with the education partners and other relevant interests regarding the implementation and development of the strategy through meetings, conferences and other means.

2. WHAT OUR YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD ACHIEVE

National improvement targets for literacy and numeracy

Being clear about what we want to achieve is essential if we are to succeed in tackling the problems that we face in literacy and numeracy. During the period from 2011 to 2020 we will aim to:

Improve our attitudes to literacy and numeracy
- Promote better understanding of the critical importance of supporting the development of children's ability to become effective communicators from their earliest years and the key role played by parents, families and communities in this regard

- Raise public awareness of the importance of oral and written language in all its forms (including print, writing and digital media)

- Foster an enjoyment of reading among children and young people

- Create greater awareness of, and more positive attitudes towards, mathematics among the public

- Promote better attitudes to mathematics among children and young people

Improve outcomes at early childhood level
- Improve the communication and oral-language competence of young children in early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings and their readiness to develop early mathematical language and ideas

Improve outcomes at primary school level
- Ensure that each primary school sets goals and monitors progress in achieving demanding but realistic targets for the improvement of the literacy and numeracy skills of its students in a school improvement plan

- Increase the percentages of primary children performing at Level 3 or higher (i.e. at the highest levels) in the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading by at least 5 percentage points at both second class and sixth class by 2020

- Reduce the percentage of children performing at or below Level 1 (i.e. minimum level) in the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading by at least 5 percentage points at both second class and sixth class by 2020

- Increase awareness of the importance of digital literacy and include assessments of primary students' ability to read digital material as part of the national assessments of English reading

Improve outcomes at post-primary level
- Ensure that each post-primary school sets goals and monitors progress in achieving demanding but realistic targets for the improvement of the literacy and numeracy skills of its students in a school improvement plan

- Extend the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading to assess the performance of students at the end of second year in post-primary education; use data from these assessments to establish the existing levels of achievement and to set realistic targets for improvement, similar to those adopted at the primary level

- Increase awareness of the importance of digital literacy and include assessments of post-primary students' ability to read digital material as part of the national assessments of English reading

- Increase the percentage of 15-year old students performing at or above Level 4 (i.e. at the highest levels) in PISA reading literacy and numeracy tests by at least 5 percentage points by 2020

- Halve the percentage of 15-year old students performing at or below Level 1 (the lowest level) in PISA reading literacy and numeracy tests by 2020

- Increase the percentage of students taking the Higher Level mathematics examination at the end of junior cycle (i.e. Junior Certificate examination or its equivalent) to 60 per cent by 2020

- Increase the percentage of students taking the Higher Level mathematics examination in Leaving Certificate to 30 per cent by 2020.

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

Parents play a vital role in literacy and numeracy

We know that parents make a real difference

The support of parents who are engaged in their child's learning has a significant positive impact on a child's educational achievement, especially in literacy and numeracy. Young people achieve better when their parents take an active interest in their education, supporting and encouraging them and creating high but achievable expectations. Parental support for young children not only makes a real difference to their development but, in some circumstances mitigates the negative effects of low socio-economic status or low parental educational attainment. The outcomes of the National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading in 2009 show that there is a strong link between the home environment and student achievement. For example, high achievement was associated with the amount of books and educational resources in the home, while low achievement was associated with practices such as locating a television in a child's bedroom and spending excessive time on the internet or gaming.

The recognition that the family affords the best environment for children is one of the principles on which the forthcoming National Children's Strategy is based. This means that any external interventions should be designed to support and empower families from within communities. *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* has been drafted to integrate fully with this approach in the National Children's Strategy. Actions under both strategies will strongly support the delivery of better literacy and numeracy outcomes for children.

The period from birth to three years is of crucial importance in the child's physical, social, emotional, cognitive and linguistic development. The role of parents and families is critically important in these years, particularly in the development of children's language and emergent literacy and numeracy skills. Partnership with parents and families plays a central role in nurturing this development and in laying the foundations for further learning in early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings and schools.

Homes and schools can support each other

Home and other educational settings must work together

Schools and ECCE settings play an important role in empowering and informing parents in their efforts to support their children's literacy and numeracy. Parents also have much to offer schools and ECCE settings in supporting teaching and learning. Engagement with parents should be a core part of the literacy and numeracy plans of schools

and ECCE settings. Schools and ECCE settings must be welcoming and accessible places for parents and should make meaningful provision for the involvement of parents in the classroom and beyond in activities that support the development of better literacy and numeracy skills.

Ensuring the message about the importance of parental involvement gets through to parents and the wider community is essential for educational success. All parents need to be aware of the relevance of literacy and numeracy for their children's future and the influence that they have over their children's educational development. Parents, grandparents, extended family and other members of the community need to know how in a practical manner they can work in partnership with staff and teachers in ECCE settings and schools to contribute to children's learning of literacy and numeracy. Parents with literacy difficulties need particular support. The NCCA *Aistear* guidelines on partnerships with parents provide excellent suggestions on how this may be done.

Parents need to know how best to help their children

We have to help families and communities to foster children's learning in literacy and numeracy

The communities in which children and young people live and grow also have a major role to play in fostering and supporting literacy and numeracy. Where schools are connected with each other and forge strong links with the wider community, there are better opportunities to share good practice and build supportive networks. Harnessing the collective effort of the wider community and other agencies has the potential to bring greater coherence and an integrated approach to the national effort to improve learning experiences and outcomes in literacy and numeracy. Schools and ECCE settings are at the heart of communities of learning where children and young people's learning should be supported through empowering and assisting families and engaging with supports such as libraries, health services, family resource centres and adult and family literacy services. This is reinforced through the establishment of good networks of communication across schools and ECCE settings.

Building learning communities will help children's learning

In many communities, projects have been developed and initiatives have been undertaken to link schools and communities more closely and to enable people in the community to support children's learning and participation in school and education. Some of these projects and initiatives are supported through voluntary, charitable and state funding, and the projects have adopted a number of different approaches. Recent evaluation of these projects by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) has shown that, "while there is excellence in community provision [for literacy], there is also variability," and that "greater leadership, quality assurance and support" are needed for this sector.

Many community projects and family literacy initiatives work to support learning

A broad range of family literacy initiatives have been established. These are managed through a variety of agencies such as the Vocational Education Committees (VEC) and community and voluntary organisations, such as Barnardos. Activities span the entire spectrum from early childhood to adulthood and are a rich source of materials

and information for parents and families on practical and effective approaches to supporting and developing their own and their children's literacy and numeracy.

Libraries are a valuable resource for families and communities

Libraries and librarians are an important resource in supporting children's literacy. Through the expert selection and provision of a wide range of books and other materials, libraries can both support the acquisition of literacy skills and help foster children's love of reading amongst children. Some schools benefit from in-house library facilities but the forging of strong links with local public library services will be an important facet of the literacy and numeracy plans of schools. Public libraries enable families to support their children's literacy development through the range of resources and information they make available in a free, open and informal setting. While libraries are an excellent resource for all families, they can be of particular assistance to families who find it difficult to meet the cost of providing a rich range of books and educational resources in the home.

We need to target support for family and community initiatives that are proven to work

Although a wide range of community and family initiatives is active and helping to support better engagement with schools and better learning outcomes for young people, the work and funding of these various bodies could be more effectively coordinated. In some areas, excellent work is underway, yet this is not readily recognised or replicated elsewhere. In other cases, projects may be duplicating effort and not enabling us to get the best outcomes for the resources that we have, while other areas and needs are neglected. A key part of the work of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs will be to collect information about the broad range of initiatives and projects that support families in various ways, to identify the approaches that have the most beneficial effects on the lives of families, children and young people, and to seek to coordinate and improve the services that are provided. We have to ensure that the interventions we prioritise make a real, measurable and positive difference to the lives and learning successes of children and young people.

Actions to enable parents and communities to support children's literacy and numeracy development

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date

Support a national information campaign to build up awareness of the important role that parents and communities can play in supporting literacy and numeracy learning	• Support a national public information campaign highlighting the role that all parents and communities can play in improving children's literacy and numeracy, using:
	  o local and national media
	  o on-line/digital resources and tools linked to existing websites
	  o endorsement by individuals well known to the public
	  o co-ordination of the information campaign with adult literacy provision by VECs
		Department of Education and Skills In conjunction with National Adult Literacy Agency and adult literacy providers	2012-13

	• Investigate possible approaches to public information campaigns on practical steps for parents to support their children's literacy and numeracy	Department of Education and Skills	2012-13

Provide advice and information to parents to enable them to support their children's language, literacy and numeracy development	• Provide all parents with information and on-line resources about activities that they can use to support their child's oral language development, literacy and numeracy from birth	Department of Children and Youth Affairs *in cooperation with* National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and Library Service	2014
	• Target tailored information on supporting children's literacy and numeracy to parents with literacy difficulties through adult and family literacy provision by VECs	Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with National Adult Literacy Agency and adult literacy providers	2016

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date

Ensure that parental engagement in children's learning is integrated into each school's *School Improvement Plan*	• Enable schools (through advice and guidance) to build effective working relationships with parents and communities to support learning; for example, schools should:
	   ○ value parents' engagement in their children's learning
	   ○ take active steps to welcome, communicate and engage all parents e.g., identify ways to support and encourage parents to be actively involved in their children's learning
	   ○ take active steps to heighten parental expectations and help them to take an increased interest in the standards their children achieve or need to achieve
	   ○ provide or host sensitively designed opportunities for parents to develop their confidence and their capacity to help their children at home in relation to literacy and numeracy
	   ○ encourage parents to avail of opportunities to participate in family literacy programmes organised in local libraries or provided by VECs or community groups
	   ○ provide spaces, where possible, which can be used by parents to assist their children's literacy and numeracy development
	   ○ use Home-School-Community liaison teachers, where available, to support this work in DEIS schools
	   ○ encourage parents to ensure that their child attends school every day
		Department of Education and Skills *and* School staffs, boards of management and parents' associations	From 2012

	• Ensure that the school improvement/literacy and numeracy plan required in all schools includes specific actions to inform parents about ways to support their children's learning and how to understand reports about their child's progress in school	Department of Education and Skills	2015
	• Encourage schools to involve parents in the classroom to support appropriate literacy and numeracy activities	School staffs, boards of management and parents' associations	2012

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Identify and learn from effective initiatives that enable parents, families and communities to support children's well-being and learning and that strengthen links between home, ECCE settings and schools	• Learn from ways that the existing early intervention pilot programmes supported by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs are successful in overcoming barriers to literacy and numeracy development in disadvantaged communities • Building on evaluation and development work being undertaken by the Centre for Effective Services on behalf of the Department Children and Youth Affairs, work through Children's Services Committees to secure better literacy and numeracy outcomes by integrating services and interventions effectively at local level • Involve schools and ECCE settings in parental and wider community initiatives that promote and support the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills (e.g., Shared reading, Maths for Fun, library services, etc.)	Department of Children and Youth Affairs	Ongoing

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Seek to target and coordinate support for initiatives that enable parents, families and communities to support children's well-being and learning and that strengthen links between home, ECCE settings and schools	• Continue to support family literacy initiatives in socially and economically disadvantaged communities (such as those served by DEIS schools); in allocating support, priority will be given to projects (at early years and school level) that have been evaluated and proven to be effective through evaluations	Department of Children and Youth Affairs	Ongoing
	• Over time, seek to coordinate expenditure by state agencies and bodies to prioritise initiatives that enable parents, families and communities to support children's well-being and learning and that strengthen links between home, ECCE settings and schools	Department of Children and Youth Affairs	2016 and following
	• Ensure that relevant information on the child's learning and development is transferred from the home to the pre-school, to the primary school and to the post-primary school to promote smooth transitions	Department of Education and Skills	2012-2014

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Develop and promote models of good practice that enable parents, families, communities, ECCE settings and schools to work together to support literacy and numeracy acquisition	• Engage with a wide range of child and family support agencies to disseminate information to parents and families on promoting the development of literacy and numeracy skills	Department of Children and Youth Affairs	
	• Develop, in co-operation with the public library service, models of engagement between schools, ECCE settings and libraries, to include areas such as selection and provision of materials, library membership schemes and planned library visits	Department of Education and Skills and Department of Children and Youth Affairs	
	• Use existing networks to encourage sharing of best practice in literacy and numeracy development between groups of schools and ECCE settings in local areas	Department of Education and Skills and Department of Children and Youth Affairs	

4. IMPROVING TEACHERS' AND ECCE PRACTITIONERS' PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Teachers and ECCE practitioners are the most powerful resource that we have

We continue to be fortunate in Ireland in attracting some of the most able and talented people to the teaching profession. Teachers play a key role in providing a quality education. We cannot underestimate the vital contribution that teachers can make towards helping young people acquire the knowledge, skills and values they need to engage fully and effectively in life, society and the workplace. A quality teacher workforce must be cultivated and sustained within a framework of strong school leadership. This is essential in order to achieve improved student learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy.

Whilst the ECCE workforce has not been required to meet qualifications requirements similar to those required of teachers in schools, the role of the adult working in ECCE settings is no less critical to ensuring positive experiences and outcomes for children's learning well-being and development. Since the establishment of the universal free pre-school year in 2010, minimum qualifications have been required of Preschool Leaders in ECCE settings and higher level qualifications are being incentivised though a higher capitation payment where settings are led by graduates with a bachelor degree in a relevant discipline. It is essential that the ECCE workforce continues to become more skilled and qualified if the challenging targets associated with supporting the development of early literacy and numeracy are to be achieved.

We need to improve the practice of ECCE leaders and teachers in infant classrooms

We have improved the availability and access to ECCE – now we need to upskill the leaders and teachers who are responsible for this provision

We know that three- and four-year-olds who attend a high-quality pre-school are likely to be more successful, both academically and socially, in primary school and beyond. Children who are at risk of school failure are strongly influenced by the quality of ECCE education. Not surprisingly, ECCE programmes with better-trained practitioners are more effective. The quality of interactions between the adult and the child is central to the learning experience.

The introduction in 2010 of the Free Pre-school Year in Early Childhood Care and Education Programme, administered by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, has been a major achievement with the potential to make a considerable difference to the learning of our children. Almost every ECCE setting in the state is participating in the programme and 95 per cent of children are benefiting from the pre-school year. However, we face considerable challenges in upskilling the staff who work with our young children in the ECCE sector. The

implementation of the Workforce Development Plan for the ECCE Sector from 2011 should assist in the concerted effort to enhance further the training and qualifications of ECCE practitioners. The ongoing provision of flexible learning that meets the needs of the work force will be a challenge for both state-funded and private education and training providers.

Early childhood care and education is now supported by two frameworks: *Síolta*, the quality framework, and *Aistear*, the curriculum framework. These frameworks have been developed based on best national and international policy and practice and have involved extensive consultation with ECCE practitioners and infant teachers. The introduction of these frameworks in recent years, together with the higher qualifications being demanded within state-supported provision, has resulted in new opportunities to focus on supporting early literacy and numeracy in the full range of ECCE settings.

After their pre-school year, most children between the ages of four and six years will continue their early childhood care and education within infant classes in primary schools. The principles that inform the *Aistear* curriculum framework and the *Síolta* quality framework will help shape the curriculum for these classes, as will be discussed in Chapter 6. As the curriculum for infant classes is revised to reflect the emphasis in *Aistear* on the child's well-being, ability to communicate, explore and think, the changes will give rise to professional development needs among teachers working with this age-group.

Actions to improve the skills of ECCE practitioners outside school settings

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Encourage and support the upskilling of early childhood care and education (ECCE) practitioners	• Ensure that the training and education courses completed by those entering the ECCE workforce include units on both content and pedagogical knowledge in literacy (including oral language and a focus on additional language learning) and numeracy by working with relevant accreditation bodies	Department of Education and Skills, Department of Children and Youth Affairs and accreditation bodies (e.g., FETAC, HETAC and the universities) in conjunction with providers of education programmes for ECCE practitioners	2012-13
	• Continue to provide incentives for the continuing professional development of ECCE practitioners in state-funded ECCE settings by continuing to link higher capitation rates for pre-school services with higher qualification rates	Department of Children and Youth Affairs	Continue existing incentive and adjust incrementally
	• Work with relevant bodies to ensure that there is sufficient training provision to enable formal qualifications in early literacy and numeracy development be made a requirement for all ECCE leaders in state-funded ECCE settings	Department of Education and Skills, Department of Children and Youth Affairs in conjunction with providers of education programmes for ECCE pre-school leaders	2015
	• Increase the minimum qualification requirements for ECCE practitioners involved in the delivery of state funded ECCE programmes.	Department of Children and Youth Affairs	Incremental over period of Strategy

Better teaching will support better learning

A number of factors make a critically important contribution to the excellence of the teaching profession. These include:

- recruiting the best students to enter initial teacher education (ITE) courses
- ensuring that initial teacher education courses develop the teachers' knowledge, understanding and ability to apply educational theory and research effectively in practice, especially in the areas of literacy and numeracy
- developing a professional commitment among teachers to reflect, improve and upskill throughout their careers
- assessing student teachers' knowledge, skills and behaviours both formatively and summatively during and at the end of the ITE phase and in professional practice
- providing robust induction systems to support the further development of newly qualified teachers as they embark on their teaching career
- providing high-quality continuing professional development opportunities for teachers in order to enable them to maintain and enhance their pedagogical understanding and skills, and requiring teachers to undertake professional development courses throughout their teaching careers
- ensuring greater coherence and linkages between all stages of the continuum of teacher education.

We need to improve education and learning through enhancing the professional practice of teachers

Improving teachers' professional development can improve the teaching of literacy and numeracy

Recruiting the most able students to become teachers and providing high-quality initial and continuing professional development for teachers throughout their careers make a very substantial difference to the quality of students' learning. We must ensure, therefore, that teachers develop and maintain the ability to teach literacy and numeracy effectively. International experience informs us that, while teachers must be familiar with the many characteristic variations in literacy and numeracy teaching and learning, there are particular elements that are regarded as core.

We need to equip teachers to develop students' literacy skills

We know that successful literacy policies and interventions in other countries place considerable emphasis on:

- ensuring that teachers understand the process by which early reading is acquired and how reading skills are subsequently developed and consolidated in first and second language acquisition
- the explicit teaching of the structure and function of written and oral language

- teaching the basic building blocks of reading: awareness of words and word parts (phonological and phonemic awareness), letter-symbol recognition, phonics (letter-sound rules) (word identification, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (the ability to derive meaning from text)
- the explicit development of higher-order skills and strategies for reading comprehension (e.g. retrieving, questioning, inferring, synthesising, critically evaluating)
- the development of lower-order (handwriting, spelling, punctuation) and higher-order skills and strategies (choosing topics, generating and crafting ideas, revising, editing) to support writing development
- encouraging young people to read for enjoyment, and to write and communicate in a range of authentic contexts for different purposes with a variety of audiences
- developing teachers' enjoyment and capacity in literacy.

We need to equip teachers to develop students' numeracy skills

Teachers' initial and continuing professional development needs to enable them to help young people develop a deeper conceptual understanding in mathematics and the ability to apply mathematical concepts in real-life scenarios. This will mean equipping teachers:

- to develop their own understanding of how mathematical concepts may be used in a range of every-day applications; their ability to understand and communicate information presented in mathematical terms; their ability to explore, hypothesise and reason logically; and their ability to use a variety of methods to solve problems
- to ensure the development of young people's skills in carrying out procedures flexibly and accurately
- to infuse language, thought and meaning into mathematics teaching
- to use open-ended challenging tasks that motivate young people to engage with problem-solving in a meaningful way
- to enable young people to understand, appreciate and enjoy mathematics.

We need to equip teachers to provide effective teaching and learning experiences

Teachers also need initial and continuing professional development opportunities that will enable them:

- to be familiar with the various strategies, approaches, methodologies and interventions that can be used to teach literacy and numeracy as discrete areas and across the curriculum

- to use an effective blend of teaching approaches including direct skill-based differentiated instruction, individualised learning and the use of structured cooperative group work
- to align their classroom practice with curricula rather than with textbooks or reading schemes only
- to break down barriers to literacy and numeracy attainment for young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds
- to support the learning of students with additional support needs, including students whose first language is not English or Irish and students who are experiencing difficulties
- to use a continuum of well-considered assessment approaches to determine the next steps in learning and in planning approaches to teaching
- to give young people feedback on their progress and clear suggestions for the next steps that they should take to improve their learning
- to engage with the parents of their students so as to encourage and enable parents to support their children's learning.

We can provide better initial and continuing professional development for teachers

While we are fortunate in the high ability levels of students entering teacher education courses in Ireland, we know that the development of their skills in the teaching of literacy and numeracy can be improved. For example, we know that there are considerable differences between initial teacher education (ITE) providers concerning the development of young teachers' skills in the teaching of literacy and numeracy and especially with regard to the amount of time devoted to this aspect of teachers' development. It is possible, for example, to obtain a B Ed qualification (for primary teaching) in some colleges without completing intensive modules in the teaching of literacy and numeracy. The low mathematical ability among a number of students entering undergraduate initial teacher education courses at primary level and the more general weaknesses in many students' conceptual understanding in mathematics are also causes of concern.

We have to improve the quality and relevance of initial teacher education

The establishment of specialised courses in mathematics education for post-primary teachers at university level is a very positive development. However, most post-primary teachers complete a nine-month university-based post-graduate course as their initial teaching qualification. This course is of insufficient duration to adequately prepare the great majority of post-primary teachers for developing effectively the skills required to teach or progress their students' literacy and numeracy skills or to support the integration of the teaching of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

Improvements are also required in the provision and uptake of continuing professional development courses for teachers regarding literacy and numeracy. For example, the survey of teachers conducted as part of the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading in 2009 found that up to a third of students were taught by primary teachers who had not participated in any form of continuing professional development for either English or mathematics in the three years prior to the study. In this context, it is notable that in recent years only a small minority of the summer courses, geared specifically towards primary teachers, have focused on the teaching of literacy and/or numeracy. All this evidence suggests that there is considerable scope to set higher standards and improve provision for literacy and numeracy education at entry to and during initial teacher education, and during teachers' induction and continuing professional development.

The key role of the Teaching Council

The Teaching Council is the professional body for teaching in Ireland and was established to promote teaching as a profession at primary and post-primary levels, to promote the professional development of teachers and to regulate standards in the profession. The Teaching Council has a major role to play in fostering and improving the quality of teaching generally and in core areas such as literacy and numeracy. The Council operates within a broader policy framework set out by the Minister for Education and Skills.

The Teaching Council's policy on the teacher education continuum provides a sound basis for the developments that are needed to establish and build upon the skills of teachers in literacy and numeracy teaching

Recently, the Council completed its work on the development of a policy on the teacher education continuum. This valuable work has been informed by research and consultation, best practice in other countries and the Council's experience to date arising from its review and accreditation of teacher education courses in Ireland. The Council's policy sets out the framework within which all aspects of the teacher education continuum – initial teacher education, induction and continuing professional development – will be integrated, developed and improved in the years ahead. The framework provides the basis for the identification of learning outcomes and the development of detailed criteria and guidelines appropriate to teacher education at each stage of the teaching career.. The Department of Education and Skills has had ongoing contact with the Council in relation to this important task and this strategy has been informed by those discussions. The Council's policy is very welcome and provides a sound basis for the developments that are needed to establish and build upon the skills of teachers in literacy and numeracy teaching.

The period of development and change in teacher education and professional development that lies ahead presents an excellent opportunity to ensure that we provide teachers with the skills and knowledge that they need to teach the fundamental skills of literacy and numeracy in the best ways possible. The Department of Education and Skills will cooperate closely with the Teaching Council to support the implementation of the Council's policy.

Actions to improve the development and improvement of teachers' skills in the teaching, learning and assessment of literacy and numeracy

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Cooperate with the Teaching Council to set new, higher standards in entry requirements for initial teacher education (ITE)	• Identify changes to the entry requirements for ITE that will underpin a renewed emphasis on literacy and numeracy, including in the case of primary teaching the potential raising of the minimum grades required in mathematics, English and Irish	DES and Teaching Council in conjunction with ITE providers	For student cohort entering colleges in 2014-15 academic year

Cooperate with the Teaching Council to re-configure the content and duration of initial teacher education (ITE) courses for primary teachers to ensure the development of teachers' skills in literacy and numeracy teaching	• Ensure that ITE courses are designed and developed to produce reflective practitioners capable of enquiry-based learning and ongoing engagement with research and emerging practice in the fields of literacy and numeracy acquisition
	• Increase the duration of the BEd programme for primary teaching to become a four-year programme, at least an aggregate of one year of which is a school-based professional development experience
	• Replace the study of humanities (also known as "academic electives") within the BEd programme with a range of optional courses which are more closely related to education and confine the proportion of programme time devoted to these courses to less than 20% of overall programme time in order to allow more time for the development of the professional knowledge and pedagogical skills of teachers
	• Increase the duration of the Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme for primary teaching to a minimum of two years
	• Ensure that ITE programmes for primary teachers provide adequate time for courses and learning experiences that will develop and assess all student teachers' understanding and ability to apply current knowledge, strategies and methodologies in areas including:
	  o children's language acquisition
	  o the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy
	  o the use of assessment for formative, diagnostic and summative purposes, especially in literacy and numeracy
	  o the teaching of children with special and additional learning needs (e.g. SEN, EAL, etc.)
		Department of Education and Skills, Teaching Council and Higher Education Authority in conjunction with ITE providers	2013-14

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date

	o the development of second language learning
	    o teaching in Irish-medium and immersion settings
	    o digital literacy and how ICT may be used to support and enrich learning in literacy and numeracy
	    o building partnerships with parents to support learning in literacy and numeracy
	• Increase the time spent on school-based teaching practice across a range of classroom contexts and ensure that developmental opportunities in literacy and numeracy feature as a priority
	• Ensure that teachers are required to demonstrate satisfactory skills in the teaching of literacy and numeracy during the teaching practice component of their ITE course		

Cooperate with the Teaching Council to reconfigure the content and duration of initial teacher education (ITE) courses for post-primary teachers to ensure the development of teachers' skills in literacy and numeracy teaching	• Increase the duration of the Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme (for the consecutive model of teacher education) to a minimum of two years
	• Extend the four-year concurrent model for initial teacher education for post-primary teachers to include a broader range of academic subjects (for example, by enabling students to study one/two academic subjects in conjunction with education subjects and pedagogy as elements)
	• Ensure that ITE programmes for post-primary teachers provide adequate time to develop student teachers' understanding and ability to apply current knowledge in areas including:
	    o children's language acquisition
	    o the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy
	    o the use of assessment for formative, diagnostic and summative purposes, especially in literacy and numeracy
	    o the teaching of children with special and additional learning needs (e.g. SEN, EAL)
	    o digital literacy and how ICT may be used to support and enrich learning in literacy and numeracy
	    o building partnerships with parents to support learning in literacy and numeracy
	as appropriate to their subject specialism(s)
		Department of Education and Skills, Teaching Council and the Higher Education Authority in conjunction with ITE providers	2014-15

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
	• Ensure that all teachers, irrespective of their subject specialism, complete mandatory units in the development of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum Increase the time spent on school-based teaching practice across a range of classroom contexts and ensure that developmental opportunities in literacy and numeracy feature as a priority • Ensure that teachers are required to demonstrate satisfactory skills in the teaching of literacy and numeracy as relevant within their subject specialisms during the teaching practice component of their ITE course		
Provide accredited post-graduate course to equip teachers to teach in Irish-medium settings	• Support the provision of an accredited post-graduate course to equip teachers to teach in Irish-medium settings at primary and/or post-primary level in at least one of the ITE providers	Department of Education and Skills, in conjunction with the Teaching Council and ITE providers	2018
Provide continued support to newly qualified teachers generally and especially in the teaching of literacy and numeracy	• Provide intensive units within the national teacher induction programme on the teaching of literacy (English and Irish) and numeracy and on the use of assessment in a range of school contexts • Make participation in the national teacher induction programme mandatory by 2012	Department of Education and Skills, (in conjunction with education centres and ITE providers). Responsibility for overseeing induction and probationary requirements will transfer to the Teaching Council in 2012	2011-12
Focus the provision of Department-supported continuing professional development for teachers on the teaching of literacy and numeracy and the use of assessment	• Provide access to approved, high-quality professional development courses of at least twenty hours' duration in literacy, numeracy and assessment (as discrete or integrated themes, provided incrementally or in block) every five years for primary teachers (as an element of the continuing professional development that teachers require to maintain their professional skills)	Department of Education and Skills in cooperation with the Teaching Council, education centres and other CPD providers	Commence set-up in 2011-12 Extend provision from 2012-2013
	• Provide access to approved, high quality professional development courses of at least twenty hours' duration in literacy, numeracy and assessment (as discrete or integrated themes, provided incrementally or in block) every five years for teachers of L1 (English/Irish) at second level (as an element of the continuing professional development that teachers require to maintain their professional skills)	Department of Education and Skills in cooperation with the Teaching Council, education centres and other CPD providers	Commence set-up in 2011-12 Extend provision from 2012-2013

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
	• Provide access to approved professional development units on literacy and numeracy across the curriculum for second-level teachers (as an element of the continuing professional development that teachers require to maintain their professional skills)	Department of Education and Skills in cooperation with the Teaching Council, education centres and other CPD providers	Commence in 2011-12 Extend provision from 2012-2013
	• Continue the professional development support provided as part of the roll-out of Project Maths at second level	Department of Education and Skills and CPD providers	From 2011
	• Encourage and continue to increase the number of providers seeking recognition of continuing professional development summer courses on the teaching of literacy (English and Irish) and numeracy, and extend this provision to teachers in the post-primary sector	Department of Education and Skills and CPD providers	From 2011
	• Target the development of the teaching of literacy and numeracy in DEIS schools as part of school development planning and school self-evaluation: re-focus the work of existing DEIS advisors and redeploy other posts to create a team of twenty advisors to work with DEIS primary and post-primary schools and Youthreach staff as required on the teaching and assessment of language, literacy and numeracy	Department of Education and Skills and CPD providers	2011-12
	• As resources permit, extend the availability of support from DEIS advisors to ECCE settings linked to DEIS primary schools	Department of Education and Skills	As resources permit
	• Provide detailed guidance and resources to teachers and ECCE practitioners on best practice in the teaching and assessment of literacy and numeracy through handbooks, online courses, digital and other resources	Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with NCCA, education centres and other CPD providers	2014 and following years
	• Facilitate the provision of CPD at a cross-sectoral level (e.g., ECCE practitioners and primary teachers/ primary and post-primary teachers) where feasible to promote co-operation and shared understanding	Department of Education and Skills and Department of Children and Youth Affairs	As resources permit
Ensure that adequate quality assurance mechanisms are in place for CPD courses for teachers as provided for in the Teaching Council Act	• Ensure that continuing professional development courses for teachers are accredited and adequately assessed and evaluated	Department of Education and Skills; subsequently the Teaching Council	2012-13

5. BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Principals and deputy principals play a key role

Principals should lead, support and monitor improvements in literacy and numeracy throughout their schools

Principals and deputy principals have a pivotal role in creating a school climate that supports effective teaching and learning. Principals and deputy principals need to have a thorough understanding of how learners learn as well as the way in which the school should be organised and teachers supported to achieve the best results possible. The leadership of principals and deputy principals is essential if schools are to look critically at their own work, identify how improvements can be made, implement actions that can make a difference for learners, and monitor student outcomes effectively. It is critically important that principals are engaged continually in leading, supporting and monitoring improvements in literacy and numeracy from junior infants to sixth class in primary schools and from first to sixth year in post-primary schools.

Enabling principals and deputy principals to lead improvement in literacy and numeracy

A detailed discussion of how school principals and deputy principals can best be enabled to develop the broad range of skills and abilities that they need to carry out their role as leaders of learning is beyond the scope of this strategy document. Instead, this chapter focuses on the supports and professional development opportunities that principals and deputy principals will need in order to lead improvement in literacy and numeracy in their schools. Of course, many of the skills that they will need to improve literacy and numeracy will be equally useful as they lead learning generally in schools.

To lead the improvement of literacy and numeracy in their schools, principals and deputy principals need opportunities

- to develop their own understanding of how best literacy and numeracy skills are developed in children and young people

- to develop their understanding of how assessment can be used by teachers to plan students' learning, to diagnose learning difficulties and to provide evidence of students' learning

- to acquire the necessary skills to enable them to lead evidence-based school self-evaluation and school improvement.

Actions to improve the ability of principals and deputy principals to lead improvement in literacy and numeracy

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date

Improve the understanding principals and deputy principals of the most effective approaches to improving the teaching of literacy and numeracy and the use of assessment to support this	• Provide CPD courses for all serving principals and deputy principals on
	   o effective approaches to the teaching of literacy and numeracy (including literacy and numeracy development within disciplines and across the curriculum)
	   o the use of assessment to support the planning of students' learning, to diagnose learning difficulties and to provide evidence of students' learning
		Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with education centres and other CPD providers	From 2012

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Support principals and deputy principals in implementing robust school self-evaluation, focussing in particular on improvements in literacy and numeracy	• Provide guidance and training to principals and deputy principals on effective school self-evaluation in conjunction with principals' professional organisations (IPPN and NAPD) and other CPD providers, focussing on improvements in the teaching and assessment of literacy and numeracy	Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with IPPN/NAPD, education centres and other CPD providers	From 2011-12
	• Provide comprehensive materials (augmented and developed further over time) to support the implementation of robust self-evaluation in schools	Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with IPPN/NAPD, education centres and other CPD providers	First materials developed by 2011; revised and extended in future years
	• Provide on-line advice and support on the implementation of school self-evaluation	Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with IPPN/NAPD, education centres and other CPD providers	From 2011
	• Include a review of the school's self-evaluation process in all whole-school evaluations of schools	Department of Education and Skills	From 2012

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date

Improve leadership development programmes for new and aspiring principals and deputy principals	• Ensure that all leadership development courses for aspiring and newly appointed principals and deputy principals contain mandatory units focussed on
	   o developing an understanding of effective approaches to the teaching of literacy and numeracy (including literacy and numeracy development within disciplines and across the curriculum)
	   o developing an understanding of the use of assessment to support the planning of students' learning, to diagnose learning difficulties and to provide evidence of students' learning
	   o developing the skills needed to lead robust, evidence-based school self-evaluation in schools that focuses on improving teaching and learning
		Department of Education and Skills and CPD providers	2011-12

	• Ensure that all newly appointed principals who have not already completed a relevant course in school leadership have access to such a course during their first two years as principal (courses to be delivered using a mix of face-to-face sessions, workshops and online modules)	Department of Education and Skills	2012
	• Explore with the Teaching Council and other relevant bodies the feasibility of establishing systems for the accreditation of leadership development courses for principals and deputy principals	Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with the Teaching Council, higher education awarding bodies and others	2016
	• Consider, in conjunction with the education partners and other relevant interests, the possibility of making successful completion of an accredited leadership development programme a requirement for future principals (either as a pre-requisite for appointment or as a necessary condition of confirmation as principal within a defined period)	Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with the education partners and CPD providers	2018

6. IMPROVING THE CURRICULUM AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Getting the learning experience right

Literacy and numeracy skills are a fundamental part of the learning outcomes that we seek to achieve for each child

We have to be very clear about what we want children and young people to learn. The curriculum should define the knowledge, skills and attitudes that we expect children to acquire in school and ECCE settings and it should shape the learning experiences that we provide for young people.. The curriculum covers much more than literacy and numeracy of course, but the goals that we set for literacy and numeracy learning are a fundamental part of the range of learning experiences and outcomes that we seek to achieve for each child. Getting the curriculum right at each stage of the learner's development and ensuring that the curriculum is implemented as effectively as possible are essential if we are to ensure that children and young people acquire the literacy and numeracy skills that they need as students and adults.

We must ensure that children and young people have a rounded and fulfilling educational experience

Young people need to engage in a range of areas of learning and the starting point for their learning should reflect their needs and interests

All learners should have an opportunity to engage in a broad, balanced and fulfilling curricular experience that supports all aspects of their development – not just the academic dimension but the social, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, and physical dimensions as well. While maintaining a focus on literacy and numeracy, we must also ensure that learners have regular opportunities to engage in a range of areas of learning and that the starting point for learning reflects the needs and interests of the learner.

Positive attitudes and motivation are vital for progression in literacy and numeracy

The development of positive attitudes and motivation are vital for progression in literacy and numeracy and we have to ensure that the learning experience for all learners in these areas is enjoyable and satisfying. All learners should benefit from the opportunity to experience the joy and excitement of getting 'lost' in a book (in both paper-based and digital formats) and come to appreciate the fun of exploring mathematical problems and the satisfaction of arriving at a solution. All learners should also have regular opportunity to engage with those learning approaches, including cooperative learning, differentiated learning, active learning and problem-solving activity, which we know not only contribute to more effective learning but increase learners' in participation and enjoyment of the learning process.

Literacy and numeracy should permeate all elements of a broad and balanced curriculum

Placing a strong focus in schools on the development and monitoring of students' literacy and numeracy skills is not incompatible with a broad and balanced curriculum, nor should it lead to a narrowly focussed curriculum. On the contrary, ensuring that each child masters the skills of literacy and numeracy in a wide range of contexts is essential if they are to be enabled to access learning in a whole range of areas. At the same time, learning in all areas of the curriculum can greatly enrich students' opportunities to acquire and apply their literacy and numeracy skills.

Defining the curriculum requires us to make choices

However, the curriculum cannot include everything that might be desirable. We have to be realistic in the expectations that we set for students, teachers and schools. We have to acknowledge that defining the curriculum inevitably involves making choices and setting priorities.

The curriculum cannot include everything that might be desirable. We have to be realistic in the expectations we set for students, teachers and schools

The issues and concerns that we consider to be important or relevant change over time and it is natural for the curriculum to evolve to reflect changing circumstances. In recent years, for example, there have been demands from organisations, interest groups and various educators that greater emphasis should be placed in the curriculum on such areas as social and life skills, environmental issues, arts and music education, scientific understanding, and numeracy among others. When social, health, economic or environmental challenges arise in our society and country, it is natural to think that we can seek to find at least some of the solutions through schools and the curriculum.

We have to prioritise literacy and numeracy in our school curriculum

While it is understandable that we tend to look to our schools to lead in responding to many of the challenges that face us, we have to recognise that the curriculum cannot mediate all issues that are of relevance to young people and society in general. Including a broader range of issues, topics and subjects in the curriculum runs the risk that the time available in school for the acquisition and consolidation of critical core skills may be eroded. We have to acknowledge that understanding and using literacy and numeracy are such core skills that time for their development must be safeguarded, sometimes by delaying the introduction of some curriculum areas and always by ensuring that the teaching literacy and numeracy is integrated across the curriculum.

Adequate time for literacy and numeracy must be safeguarded

The curriculum should define clear learning outcomes for literacy and numeracy

The curriculum should state clearly the skills and competences expected of learners

One of the design principles in the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) was that its content objectives would describe not only what the child was to learn but how that learning should occur. While this may have helped teachers to understand how the recommended methodologies were to be used, it also meant that the learning outcomes that should be achieved and assessed at each stage in subjects such as English and Irish were somewhat obscured.

More recent curricular development at the post-primary level has adopted a "learning outcomes" design in which the expected learning outcomes to be achieved are clearly stated. The syllabus that is being developed and implemented in post-primary schools for *Project Maths* has set out clear learning outcomes for students. However, the current junior cycle syllabus for English was developed over twenty years ago and was not written using a learning outcomes approach. Experience has also shown that the design of this syllabus and the related state examinations may have inadvertently led to a significant narrowing of the range and scope of the learning experienced by students.

A "learning outcomes" approach needs to be incorporated into all curriculum statements at primary level and in all new syllabuses at post-primary levels as they come on stream. Curricula should state clearly the skills and competences expected of learners at six points in their development (end of early years/infants, end of second class, end of fourth class, end of primary stage, end of junior cycle and end of senior cycle).

The curriculum should help teachers to understand the learning outcomes for literacy and numeracy

The curriculum must be complemented and made more meaningful for teachers, parents and others through samples that exemplify children's learning at different stages

Defining the goals that learners are to achieve in their literacy and numeracy learning is essential but will not be sufficient. We need to provide clear examples of what students can do when they have mastered the goals or outcomes at each stage of their learning. This means that the curriculum must be complemented and made more meaningful for teachers, parents and others through samples that exemplify children's learning at different stages. These samples can be provided in printed and digital formats, including video samples from classrooms that can be made available online. Having access to these illustrations of students' mastery of learning outcomes will help teachers to recognise successful learning, to plan the next steps in each child's learning and to use better teaching strategies.

The curriculum needs to support literacy and numeracy teaching across all areas of learning

Learning in many curricular areas provides a rich context for the development of literacy and numeracy skills. Literacy and numeracy activity can become contextualised, meaningful and purposeful to the learner through many subjects and areas of learning. We know that the development of literacy and numeracy skills also complements learning in other areas of the curriculum. For example, reading activity gives learners access to a world of knowledge, ideas and situations outside their own experience which can help to consolidate and extend all aspects of their learning. Good numeracy skills are important for learning across the curriculum in terms of equipping learners with contextual and strategic know-how including attributes such as the confidence to have a go, make mistakes and try again that can also benefit learning in other areas.

The curriculum must provide clear advice to support all teachers, not just teachers of language or mathematics, to teach and assess literacy and numeracy

Exploiting fully the opportunities for literacy and numeracy development that can arise in the teaching of all subjects and areas of learning requires considerable levels of teaching skills and very systematic planning of teaching and learning experiences. The curriculum needs to support this sort of planning and preparation by teachers. We have to ensure that the curriculum, at primary and post-primary levels, provides comprehensive guidance for the development of literacy and numeracy across curricular areas. The curriculum must also provide clear advice to support all teachers, not just teachers of language or mathematics, to teach and assess literacy and numeracy.

Learners should experience a seamless development of their literacy and numeracy skills

In Ireland, we have developed curriculum documents in four distinct stages: early childhood, primary, post-primary junior cycle and post-primary senior cycle. One effect of this segmented curriculum development is that students experience discontinuities in their learning as they move from stage to stage. For example, the *Aistear* (2009) curriculum framework developed for early childhood education has advanced considerably the thinking underpinning the infant stages of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). It is clear that the latter needs to change to reflect the approach to teaching and learning that is appropriate for young children from three to six years.

Learners need to experience continuity in their development of literacy and numeracy skills from early childhood to adulthood

Similarly, students experience significant changes in content and teaching approaches between primary and lower secondary education. This discontinuity can result in students' achievement failing to advance in their early stages in junior cycle and inevitably their skills in literacy and particularly numeracy can suffer. In addition, we know that children will arrive in first year of post-primary school with a very varied range of achievement in literacy and numeracy. Many twelve-year-olds will have very advanced skills in literacy and numeracy, others will require much more consolidation of these skills, and a minority will not have developed their skills sufficiently to access the post-primary curriculum. Despite the existence of these very varied learning needs, it is not clear that post-primary teachers pay sufficient regard to the prior learning of individual students in literacy and numeracy when they are

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planning and teaching subject lessons. All teachers should be teachers of literacy and numeracy, and we should avoid the tendency to teach subject content in isolation from the core communication skills that all young people need to interact with knowledge and life experiences.

We must ensure, therefore, that the development of learners' literacy and numeracy skills is comprehensively provided for in the national curriculum and that there is clear progression between the different stages of the learner's development. We have to ensure, too, that our aspirations for learners' literacy and numeracy development expressed in the curriculum *documents* are reflected in the curriculum *as experienced* by each child and young person in school. We need to make sure that the learner's progress in literacy and numeracy is carefully monitored at each stage of development, and that there is a focus in teaching on ensuring that all children and young people develop appropriate skills in literacy and numeracy.

The learning experiences in early childhood education

Early years education spans the first six years of life. It is conceptualised in three phases, birth to eighteen months, eighteen months to three years and three years to six years. In Ireland, the last two years of the early education phase are generally provided within the primary education system. Since January 2010, the provision in infant classes has been complemented by the introduction of a free pre-school place for all three- and four-year-olds in the year immediately prior to enrolling in primary school, under an initiative funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Aistear, the early childhood curriculum framework for children aged 0-6 years, spans pre-school and primary school settings. It sets out key principles and themes that should shape the learning experience of children at this stage. Regarding literacy and numeracy, early childhood education should:

• take place through a broad, holistic and interconnected programme of activities

• provide appropriate developmental experiences that foster a firm foundation in literacy and numeracy skills, most notably in the area of language awareness, language development and early mathematical concepts

• be developmentally appropriate and avoid premature formality

- use approaches in the development of emergent literacy and numeracy skills that complement learning in other areas and be child-centred, broadly-based, prioritise play and reinforce the concept of the child as an active learner

- take account of the child's own strengths, interests and previous experiences and use these as contexts for new learning.

Challenges for literacy and numeracy development in ECCE settings and infant classes in schools

We face a number of specific curriculum challenges in ensuring successful learning and development in literacy and numeracy in the early years. These include the following:

- We need to understand the diversity of curriculum practice that currently takes place in ECCE settings and ensure that the key ideas and messages contained within *Aistear* are reflected in children's experiences in these settings.

- We need to revise the literacy and numeracy aspects of the *Primary School Curriculum* for infant classes (4-6 year olds) to bring them into line with the approaches to teaching and learning advocated in the *Aistear* curriculum framework for early years education. *Aistear* emphasises a balance between adult-led and child-led activities; it regards play as a key process underpinning the learning of young children and as a methodology for facilitating learning. Good-quality learning activities of the sort recommended in *Aistear* can make a very significant contribution to improving children's acquisition of literacy and numeracy. The revised curriculum should also take account of provision in the free pre-school year.

- The implementation of the approaches advocated by *Aistear* for all children in the 3-6 years age group presents a considerable challenge. Lower adult-child ratios in junior and senior infant classes would help to facilitate the sort of learning that is envisaged in *Aistear.* If this is to be achieved over time, then it will be necessary to prioritise infant classes in the allocation of available teachers in schools.

- We need to identify children's learning needs as early as possible. Evidence-based assessment systems can provide information that gives an important early indicator of each child's development, allowing issues to be addressed early, thus ensuring that they do not become a barrier to learning as a child progresses. A critical factor in supporting effective assessment in the formal education system is that teachers require

secure knowledge and understanding of early learning that makes a difference to children's congnitive development and longer-term progression in learning.

- When learning needs are identified, we need to ensure that appropriate learning opportunities are provided. At present, Department of Education and Skills policy focuses such intervention at the senior infants stage. However, offering intervention only at this stage may be too late for many children, particularly when it is shown that learning problems stem from difficulties associated with oral language development. The provision of intervention at an earlier stage in ECCE settings and/or in junior infants will necessitate greater communication and sharing of relevant information between ECCE settings and schools.

Challenges for literacy and numeracy development in the primary years

We need to address a range of issues in relation to the content and implementation of the primary curriculum if we are to improve the quality of literacy and numeracy in our primary schools.

- As discussed above, we need to provide teachers with a clearer statement of the learning outcomes that we expect for children in English and Irish at each stage of the primary years and complement this with examples of children's work and learning that illustrate clearly what these learning outcomes mean in practice.

- We need to ensure that the most effective teaching and learning approaches and strategies are used consistently in the teaching of Irish and English. We also need to ensure that the curriculum reflects the reading interests of all students, including boys, and allows them to have access to a better balance of text types.

- While the mathematics curriculum presents clear guidance to teachers regarding what pupils should learn, there are many weaknesses in its implementation especially in the teaching of important aspects such as estimation, the use of cooperative group learning and problem-solving approaches. The existing curriculum should be complemented by the provision of examples of children's work and learning that illustrate clearly what the learning outcomes mean in practice.

- Teachers and principals say that they have insufficient time to address all of the objectives that are contained in the *Primary School Curriculum* and that the inclusion of new areas of learning may have compromised their ability to teach core skills such as literacy and numeracy. We know too, there is

considerable variation in the amount of time devoted to literacy and mathematics teaching in primary schools.

- In the medium term, we need to re-consider the suggested time framework for subjects contained in the *Primary School Curriculum* and provide better guidance and support to teachers on how they can teach and assess literacy and numeracy skills across all areas of the curriculum. In the shorter term, we need to find ways in which schools and teachers have sufficient time to ensure that all children develop satisfactory literacy and numeracy skills. In particular, we need to increase substantially the amount of time recommended for the teaching of mathematics to allow teachers to teach all aspects of the mathematics curriculum using the approaches advocated in the curriculum.

- Students in Irish-medium schools who learn through Irish, including pupils whose home language is Irish, have specific literacy needs that are not fully addressed in the current primary school curriculum. We need to address these specific needs by ensuring that the Irish L1[2] curriculum (for Irish-medium schools) provides for the development of literacy skills in a manner comparable to that provided for in the English curriculum, including the development of children's cognitive and higher-order thinking skills.

- We face considerable challenges in the development of children's ability in Irish in schools where the language of instruction is mainly English. The emphasis that the 1999 *Primary School Curriculum* placed on oral language development was welcomed but the introduction of the Irish L2 curriculum has not driven the desirable improvement in the language competence and literacy skills in Irish of primary pupils. At least some of the problem may be attributed to the design and implementation of the Irish language curriculum. We need to ensure that the Irish L2 curriculum is presented in a way that will enable teachers to plan effectively for progression in the full range of pupils' literacy skills. The potential for developing children's literacy competences in Irish through using the language to teach other subjects (or elements of those subjects) is also worth exploring.

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[2] Irish as L1 refers to the teaching of Irish as a first language or in Irish-medium schools. Irish as L2 refers to the teaching of Irish as a second language, i.e. the teaching of Irish in schools where the main language of instruction is English.

Challenges for literacy and numeracy development in the post-primary years

We face a number of challenges regarding the content and implementation of the post-primary curriculum if we are to improve the quality of literacy and numeracy at this level.

Literacy teaching at post-primary level is addressed in the English and Irish syllabuses in broad outline and is elaborated in the accompanying teacher guidelines. However, a number of challenges present themselves in relation to the implementation of these syllabuses as intended and their potential to develop the full range of literacy skills:

- The lack of a bridge between the learner's experiences of English and Irish in sixth class and first year at present means that first-year English and Irish is often a missed opportunity for raising students' literacy levels.

- The open nature of the Junior Certificate syllabus in English gives freedom to teachers to engage students with rich and varied literary and non-literary texts. However, the opportunity provided by the syllabus to engage students with a range of literary and non-literary texts and develop their literacy skills, including their oral language skills, is not fully exploited in classrooms due to a focus on teaching to the examination and an overuse of textbooks which largely promote lower-order thinking skills.

- The Irish syllabus emphasises the development of students' ability to speak the language as well as their writing skills and their aural and reading comprehension skills. As in the case of English, it is clear that there is a need to structure the Irish language syllabus and associated assessment modes at junior cycle in such a manner that they will drive the systematic development of the full range of literacy skills in the languages, grounded in the development of oral competence.

- A lack of opportunity to engage with non-literary texts and other texts in which boys tend to show interest has an adverse impact on the participation and achievement of boys. We need to ensure that the syllabuses in both English and Irish require greater engagement by all students, including boys, with a broader range of texts.

- The current syllabuses in English and Irish do not adequately address the social and cultural applications of literacy skills in the modern age, such as in electronic communications and digital media. We need to ensure

that all students at junior cycle get opportunities to engage with and use a wide range of literary and non-literary texts in a range of media including digital media in both English and Irish.

- The Irish language syllabuses do not meet the specific needs of students in Irish-medium schools, particularly those whose home language is Irish. We need to ensure that the junior cycle programme for Irish provides for the specific literacy needs of students in Irish-medium schools, including the development of their cognitive and higher-order thinking skills.

- We have had long-standing concerns regarding the teaching and learning of mathematics in post-primary schools. However, considerable change is already underway in the teaching of mathematics at this level. Project Maths, which is being rolled out on a phased basis from September 2010, is designed to revolutionise how mathematics is taught at the post-primary level by restructuring the syllabuses and the assessment of mathematics in the examinations. A bridging framework has also been designed to ensure better transition from the mathematics of fifth and sixth class in the primary school to the mathematics of the junior cycle.

- Project Maths aims to place greater emphasis on student understanding of mathematical concepts, increase the use of contexts and applications, and thereby enable students to relate mathematics to everyday experience. As a consequence, there will be a greater emphasis in the teaching of mathematics on the application of mathematics to problem solving in real-life contexts. However, the adoption of this radically new approach to the subject is challenging for teachers and has to be supported by extensive continuing professional development.

Actions to improve the curriculum and learning experience in ECCE settings and in primary schools

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Monitor and review curricular practice in ECCE settings over time	• Identify the scope of curricular practice in the ECCE sector by surveying settings participating in the universal free pre-school year programme	Department of Children and Youth Affairs	2012-13
	• Review the effectiveness of different curricular practices in the delivery of *Aistear* in the universal free pre-school year programme	Department of Children and Youth Affairs	2013
Revise the English curriculum for primary schools to clarify the learning outcomes to be expected of learners	• Revise the contents of the English curriculum using a "learning outcomes" approach, specifying clearly what children will be expected to achieve at each stage of the primary cycle (while respecting the child-centred and integrated nature of the *Primary School Curriculum* and recognising that pupils will acquire literacy in both Irish and English) • Ensure that there is explicit and systematic attention in the English curriculum to the teaching and assessment of key literacy skills and strategies, including oral and aural skills, phonological/phonemic awareness, phonics, word-identification, reading fluency, vocabulary, comprehension and writing with appropriate attention to the development of lower-order and higher-order skills • Ensure that the curriculum provides for the development of literacy through engagement with a range of texts (literary and non-literary) and a range of media including digital media • Ensure that the reading tastes of all students, including boys, are catered for in the English curriculum • Ensure that the sections of the curriculum that apply to infant classes reflect more fully the principles underpinning the *Aistear* curriculum framework to ensure continuity between provision in ECCE settings for three- to four-year olds and provision in infant classes	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	First elements of the curriculum to be available from 2014 All levels of the curriculum to be available from 2016
	• Provide examples of students' work and learning that demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes in the curriculum to assist teachers in self-evaluation and formative assessment (for end of early years, end of second class, end of fourth class, end of primary years, end of second year in post-primary school)	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	Available progressively from 2014 to 2016

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Revise the Irish curriculum(L1) for Irish-medium primary schools to clarify the learning outcomes to be expected of learners	• Revise the contents of the Irish (L1) curriculum using a "learning outcomes" approach, specifying clearly what children will be expected to achieve at each stage of the primary cycle (while respecting the child-centred and integrated nature of the *Primary School Curriculum* and recognising that pupils will acquire literacy in both Irish and English) • Ensure that there is explicit and systematic attention in the Irish curriculum, specific to the needs of pupils in Irish-medium schools, including pupils whose first language is Irish, to the teaching and assessment of key literacy skills and strategies, including oral and aural skills, phonological/phonemic awareness, phonics, word-identification, reading fluency, vocabulary, comprehension and writing with appropriate attention to the development of lower-order and higher-order skills • Ensure that the curriculum provides for the development of literacy through engagement with a range of texts (literary and non-literary) and a range of media including digital media • Ensure that the reading tastes of boys are catered for in the Irish curriculum • Ensure that the sections of the curriculum that apply to infant classes reflect more fully the principles underpinning the *Aistear* curriculum framework to ensure continuity between provision in ECCE settings for three to four-year olds and provision in infant classes	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	First elements of the curriculum to be available from 2014 All levels of the curriculum to be available from 2016
	• Provide examples of students' work and learning that demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes in the curriculum so as to assist teachers in self-evaluation and formative assessment (for end of early years, end of second class, end of fourth class, end of sixth class)	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	Available progressively from 2014 to 2016

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Revise the Irish curriculum(L2) for primary schools to clarify the learning outcomes to be expected of learners	• Revise the content of the Irish (L2) curriculum using a "learning outcomes" approach, specifying clearly what children will be expected to achieve at each stage of the primary cycle (while respecting the child-centred and integrated nature of the *Primary School Curriculum* and recognising that pupils will acquire literacy in both Irish and English) • Ensure that there is explicit and systematic attention in the Irish curriculum, specific to the needs of pupils acquiring Irish as a second language, to the teaching and assessment of key literacy skills and strategies, including oral and aural skills, phonological/phonemic awareness, phonics, word-identification, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension and writing with appropriate attention to the development of lower-order and higher-order skills • Ensure that the curriculum provides for the development of literacy in a range of texts (literary and non-literary) and a range of media including digital media • Ensure that the sections of the curriculum that apply to infant classes reflect more fully the principles underpinning the *Aistear* curriculum framework to ensure continuity between provision in ECCE settings for three- to four-year olds and provision in infant classes	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	First elements of the curriculum to be available from 2016 All levels of the curriculum to be available from 2018
	• Provide examples of students' work and learning that demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes in the curriculum so as to assist teachers in self-evaluation and formative assessment (for end of early years, end of second class, end of fourth class, end of sixth class)	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	Available progressively from 2016 to 2018

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Revise the elements of the Primary Curriculum that apply to infant classes	• As above, revise the curricula for English and Irish • Revise the contents of subjects other than English, Irish and mathematics to ensure consistency with the *Aistear* framework and to support and facilitate the integrated teaching of subjects especially the development of language across the curriculum and the integrated teaching of the areas of social, environmental and scientific education, social, personal and health education and arts education • Ensure that the curriculum contains additional guidance for teachers on the approaches to teaching and learning advocated in the *Aistear* framework	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	2014-2018
Provide examples of children's work and learning in mathematics	• Provide examples of students' work and learning that demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes in the mathematics curriculum so as to assist teachers in self-evaluation and formative assessment (for end of early years, end of second class, end of fourth class, end of sixth class) • Ensure that the curriculum contains additional guidance for teachers on the approaches to teaching and learning advocated in the curriculum in areas such as estimation, shape and space, measures, the use of cooperative group learning and problem-solving approaches	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	Available progressively from 2014 to 2018
Provide guidance to teachers on how best literacy and numeracy may be developed across all subject areas and areas of learning in the primary curriculum	• Provide guidance to primary teachers (in online and or other formats) on how best literacy and numeracy skills may be taught effectively in the context of subjects other than English, Irish and mathematics	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	2012-2016

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Increase the amount of time spent on the teaching of literacy and numeracy in primary schools	• Issue guidance from the NCCA on a revised time allocation for subjects in the Primary School Curriculum that will provide increased time for literacy and numeracy development • Over time, revise the required learning outcomes in subjects other than English, Irish and mathematics to take account of the reduced time available for these subjects and provide guidance on the possibilities for cross-curricular teaching and learning	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	2016
	• Pending the furnishing of a revised guideline on time allocation by the NCCA, issue Departmental circular putting in place interim advice to schools regarding the timeframe for subjects in the primary school; the advice to ensure increased time for literacy and numeracy development	Department of Education and Skills	2011

Actions to improve the curriculum and learning experience at post-primary level

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Prioritise the revision of the junior cycle English syllabuses and the Junior Certificate English examination	• Prioritise the revision of the English syllabuses (as part of the reform of junior-cycle education) using a "learning outcomes" approach, specifying clearly what students will be expected to achieve • Ensure that the revised syllabuses connect more effectively with the learning outcomes articulated for English in the primary curriculum and that the syllabuses recognise that pupils will acquire literacy in both Irish and English • Ensure that there is systematic and explicit attention in the syllabus to the teaching and assessment of a range of literacy skills in English including oral and aural skills, fluency, reading comprehension strategies[3], language awareness skills including functional and structural aspects of language[4], vocabulary development, writing skills[5] and appropriate development of lower-order and higher-order skills • Ensure that the syllabus provides for the development of literacy in a range of texts (literary and non-literary) and a range of media including digital media, and ensure that the reading tastes of boys are catered for	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	2014
	• Provide examples of students' work and learning that demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes in the syllabus so as to assist teachers in self-evaluation and formative assessment	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	Available progressively from 2014
	• Provide necessary online and other supports to assist teachers' practice in the teaching of English	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	Available progressively from 2014
	• Revise the Junior Certificate modes of assessment for English to encompass a greater emphasis on the assessment of literacy skills	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and State Examinations Commission	2017

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[3] including the ability to respond critically, analyse, evaluate, describe, discuss, explore, reflect on, question, infer meaning
[4] including competence in spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, paragraph organisation, awareness of the concept of style and knowledge of fundamental literary concepts
[5] including the ability to express, explain, defend opinions, use language appropriate to context and audience in a range of literary forms

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Prioritise the revision of the junior cycle Irish syllabuses and the Junior Certificate Irish examination	• Prioritise the revision of the Irish syllabuses (as part of the reform of junior-cycle education) using a "learning outcomes" approach, specifying clearly what students will be expected to achieve • Ensure that the revised syllabuses connect more effectively with the learning outcomes articulated for the subject in the primary curriculum and that the syllabuses recognise that pupils will acquire literacy in both Irish and English • Ensure that there is systematic and explicit attention in the syllabuses to the teaching and assessment of a range of literacy skills in Irish including oral and aural skills, reading fluency, reading comprehension strategies[6], language awareness skills including functional and structural aspects of language[7], vocabulary development and writing skills[8] • Ensure that the syllabuses provide for the development of literacy in a range of texts (literary and non-literary) and a range of media including digital media, and ensure that the syllabuses cater appropriately for the reading tastes of all students, including boys • Ensure that syllabuses provide for the specific literacy needs of students in Irish-medium schools, including the development of their cognitive and higher-order thinking skills	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	2014
	• Provide examples of students' work and learning that demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes in the syllabuses so as to assist teachers in self-evaluation and formative assessment	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	Available progressively from 2014
	• Provide necessary online and other supports to assist teachers' practice in the teaching of Irish	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	Available progressively from 2014
	• Revise the Junior Certificate modes of assessment for Irish to encompass a greater emphasis on the assessment of literacy skills	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and State Examinations Commission	2017

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[6] including the ability to respond critically, analyse, evaluate, describe, discuss, explore, reflect on, question, infer meaning
[7] including competence in spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, paragraph organisation, awareness of the concept of style and knowledge of fundamental literary concepts
[8] including the ability to express, explain, defend opinions, use language appropriate to context and audience in a range of literary forms

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Continue the development and roll-out of Project Maths	• Continue to implement Project Maths and monitor the effect of implementation on standards achieved in mathematics using a range of indicators, including commissioned research, thematic evaluation by the Inspectorate and national sample testing in first and second year • Work towards implementing the recommendations of the Report of the Project Maths Implementation Support Group	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Department of Education and Skills and schools	Syllabus roll-out to be completed for student cohort commencing September 2013

Ensure that senior cycle curriculum development builds on the emphasis placed on literacy and numeracy in junior cycle reforms	• Ensure that all revisions of syllabuses at senior cycle:
	  o seek to build upon the literacy and numeracy skills developed by students in the junior cycle
	  o include specific requirements regarding the development of literacy and numeracy across all subjects
	  o use a learning outcomes approach in their presentation
	  o provide guidance to teachers to support Assessment for Learning and Assessment of Learning in literacy and numeracy
		National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	Ongoing

Increase the time available for the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills	• Ensure that as part of the reform of the junior cycle, sufficient time is made available for the development of literacy and numeracy skills • Pending the full reform of the junior cycle, introduce as an interim measure, a limit on the number of subjects that a student may sit in the Junior Certificate examination to a maximum of eight subjects (to include Irish, English and mathematics) to take effect for the cohort of students entering schools in September 2013 • Increase the time devoted to the teaching of mathematics to a minimum of five periods per week (i.e. one per day) • Require that mathematics be taught regularly during Transition Year	Department of Education and Skills	2013
	• Ensure that revised syllabuses for all subjects provide specific guidance on how teachers can develop literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	As syllabuses are revised

7. HELPING STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS TO ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL

Some children require additional help to learn literacy and numeracy skills

Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life is about how we will improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for all children and young people. However, we know that some children need much greater levels of support to achieve their potential. This chapter sets out how we will work to enable these young people to acquire the literacy and numeracy skills that they need to progress in the education system and to function effectively in society.

This chapter addresses the needs of four groups in particular:

- Children and young people attending schools that serve communities where there are high concentrations of social and economic disadvantage, including members of the Traveller community

- Children of migrants whose first language is not the language of the school

- Children and young people with special educational needs, including children who are exceptionally able

- Young people who have dropped out of school early and for whom centres for education provide a second chance to acquire literacy, numeracy and other necessary skills.

Social, economic and educational disadvantage affects some young people disproportionately

Children from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds are significantly more likely to experience difficulties in literacy and numeracy achievement than other children. There are many complex reasons for the relatively poor achievement of this group of children and young people. Some of these reasons are connected with poverty, poor housing and health, and parental unemployment. In some instances, parents themselves have not had good educational experiences in the past or, as in the case of many parents from the Traveller community, may not have had an opportunity to participate in school over a sustained period in their youth. These parents may be very anxious for their children to get on well at school but they may lack knowledge of the education system generally and

of how best they can support their children's learning from the early years into adulthood. These factors and others frequently combine and persist over long periods of time, often from generation to generation.

We will continue to support the needs of children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds

Addressing these social, economic and cultural factors in a way that can break the cycle of poverty and educational disadvantage is an enormous challenge. Many of the factors involved lie far beyond schools and the education system. Students spend only a small part of their time in school and what happens outside the school gates has a huge impact on their learning. Nevertheless, schools and the education system can and do make a difference to the life chances of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The actions that we set out in this chapter concentrate on what we can do within the education system to alleviate educational disadvantage and to help children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to acquire the literacy and numeracy skills that we know are so vital to their future well-being and indeed to the future well-being of their children.

We have to concentrate support on those most at risk of failure

While there are children and young people from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds in most schools, schools in which there are high concentrations of students from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds may be affected by a "multiplier effect". In these schools, the concentrated nature of disadvantage may mean that students from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds achieve significantly less well than if they were attending schools where socio-economic disadvantage is less common. They are at greater risk of failing to acquire satisfactory literacy and numeracy skills and of leaving school early and without qualifications. It is for this reason that very significantly enhanced resources to counteract disadvantage are concentrated in some schools under the Department's Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative, while in other schools, the learning needs of students who come from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds are supported with the provision of resource and learning support teachers and other initiatives. Raising the educational attainment of these lowest performing students who are most at risk of failure, is vitally important because of the enormous impact improvement can have on the life-chances of these young people and also because it fosters greater equity in the education system and society in general.

Schools in which there are high concentrations of students from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds are affected by a "multiplier effect"…

....the concentrated nature of disadvantage means that these students achieve significantly less well than if they were attending schools where socio-economic disadvantage is less common

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)

DEIS provides enhanced staffing, additional financial resources, access to specialised initiatives in literacy and numeracy development, and targeted continuing professional development opportunities for teachers. DEIS seeks to bring together a number of separate initiatives in a coherent way to improve learning outcomes for students. DEIS acknowledges that the circumstances of different schools vary, and that schools have to use varied responses to meet the needs of their students and communities.

At the heart of the DEIS initiative is the opportunity and requirement for schools to determine their own needs, set their own targets, and use resources as they think best

At the heart of the DEIS initiative is the opportunity and requirement for schools to determine their own needs, set their own targets, and use resources as they think best. The achievement of literacy and numeracy outcomes is among the key areas in which schools are expected to improve while supported by the DEIS initiative. A strong emphasis is placed on schools establishing their baseline data, on setting attainment targets and actions, and on monitoring the outcomes.

We have to learn lessons from the experience of DEIS to date

The experience that we have gained through the DEIS initiative to date provides some important guidance to us as we seek to continue to tackle concentrated social, economic and educational disadvantage in schools. The roll-out of DEIS began in 2005 and the initiative has been extended gradually to include a broad range of initiatives in selected primary and post-primary schools. As part of the DEIS initiative, the Department commissioned the Educational Research Centre (ERC) to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of measures and supports provided to schools under DEIS. In addition, the Inspectorate of the Department was asked to evaluate how effective schools were at identifying and setting targets for improvement, at implementing changes to their practice, and at monitoring their effectiveness in achieving real improvements in learning outcomes for students. The Inspectorate was also asked to identify examples of good practice where DEIS schools were being particularly successful in raising literacy and numeracy standards.

The evidence that is emerging suggests that the supports provided by DEIS are having a positive effect in many schools

The evidence emerging from the ERC evaluation suggests that the range of supports provided to schools is having a positive effect. For example, the early indications are that schools are managing to show significant gains in improving the learning of students who are performing least well in literacy (those scoring at or below the 10th percentile on tests of reading literacy). The evaluation also points to positive engagement by school personnel with the range of supports provided under the school support programme. Evidence from Inspectorate evaluations of DEIS schools shows that some schools are managing to set realistic targets for improvement and to use the resources to deliver the planned improvements. The stories of eight schools in which different initiatives were used successfully to raise literacy and numeracy standards were published by the Inspectorate in *Effective Literacy and*

Numeracy Practices in DEIS Schools in 2009. However, the Inspectorate's evaluations showed that DEIS schools are not universally successful in raising standards of achievement, despite facing similar challenges and receiving similar supports. This makes it all the more important that best practice in the use of DEIS resources is disseminated and all schools are challenged to deliver the best outcomes for students.

Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life shows how we will continue to support students from socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds through existing DEIS provision, but also ensure that the additional resources given to DEIS schools are used to best effect. In addition, we need to upskill teachers regarding the learning needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Both initial and continuing professional development must enable teachers and principals to use the most appropriate and effective approaches with these students. Teachers and principals also need to understand fully how best to foster effective engagement between school and the home.

We need to support students who do not speak English or Irish at home

Children of migrants, whose first language is not the language of the school, bring to schools a welcome diversity which has the potential to raise language awareness throughout the school. However, these students require extra language support which builds on their mother tongue knowledge to achieve better literacy and numeracy outcomes in English and Irish. In recent years, an increasing number of children attending early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings and schools come from such homes and have to learn the language of the school – English or Irish – as an additional language.

Some 12 per cent of primary students and approximately 10 per cent of post-primary students were from a migrant background in 2009/10. The numbers have been increasing over the last decade. Almost all post-primary schools have migrant students and some 60 per cent of primary schools have migrant students. These migrant students come from over 160 countries and speak up to 200 languages. An estimated 70 to 75 per cent of these students do not speak English as a first language. The rate at which new families are migrating to Ireland has slowed considerably from the levels seen in recent years but substantial numbers of students continue to enter the school system from homes where neither English or Irish is the main language.

While some students may acquire a level of competence in English or Irish and become able to converse socially, their acquisition of communicative language may mask a deficit in academic language skills that are needed to succeed at school. A further barrier for migrant students is their parents' lack of knowledge of English, in some cases, and of the Irish education system. The outcomes of the OECD's PISA 2009 tests demonstrated clearly that,

DEIS schools are not universally successful in raising standards of achievement, despite facing similar challenges and receiving similar supports

Students whose first language is not the language of the school require extra language support to achieve better literacy and numeracy outcomes

like migrant students in other countries, migrant students in Ireland perform less well in literacy and numeracy than their native peers. The OECD has highlighted the need to target resources at non-English speaking migrant students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. It also points out that experience in other countries shows that second-generation migrant students may be particularly at risk of low achievement.

We need to use resources for supporting EAL students more effectively

We must adjust the way we use the resources that are available to support students for whom English is an additional language

The Department of Education and Skills currently spends around €73m per annum on providing supports for English as an additional language through the provision of in excess of 1,150 EAL (English as an Additional Language) teachers in the primary and post-primary sectors. Continuing professional development has been provided to schools through the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and other support services. Significant resources are available for schools and parents which can be accessed on the NCCA web site and through AIM – an information repository on the web site of the Department of Education and Skills.

A value-for-money (VFM) review of the effectiveness of the current supports for EAL students has shown that a very high proportion of this spending went on the provision of additional teachers. While such teachers can and do play a valuable role, the VFM study proposed that spending would be more effective if a greater proportion of it was targeted at improving all teachers' ability to respond to the learning needs of EAL students and a smaller proportion spent on additional EAL teachers. The study noted that this was the practice in Northern Ireland where there had been considerable success in getting teachers and schools to understand the importance of *all* teachers playing their role in supporting language development, including, in particular, subject-specialist teachers at the post-primary level. This suggests that we must adjust the focus of the allocation of, and encourage more targeted use of, available resources for students for whom English is an additional language, by placing greater emphasis on the continuing professional development of teachers. Including mandatory units on teaching children and young people for whom English is an additional language in initial teacher education and providing access to continuing professional development for serving teachers in this area will be vital to improving learning outcomes for these students.

We need to continue to support children with special educational needs

Children with special educational needs, including children who are exceptionally able, need to be supported in different ways. They should leave school with the skills necessary to participate, to the level of their capacity in an inclusive way, in the social and economic activities of society and in order to live independent and fulfilled lives.

These students include students with general learning disabilities, those who are deaf/hard of hearing, students with dyslexia, students with emotional and behavioural difficulties and students with other forms of disability. Students attending special schools, and, in particular, special schools for children with severe and profound learning disabilities, will experience even greater challenges in acquiring literacy and numeracy skills. While children and young people who are exceptionally able may not experience difficulties in acquiring literacy and numeracy skills, we need to adjust their educational experience to enable them to achieve their potential.

The purpose of this strategy is to raise achievement in literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students, including those with special educational needs. As with all students, the learning potential of students with special educational needs should be recognised and developed as fully as possible. Assessment, differentiation and personalisation in teaching and learning are vital skills for all teachers and ECCE practitioners in all contexts but are particularly important in the case of children and students with special educational needs.

The purpose of this strategy is to raise achievement in literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students, including those with special educational needs

We need to use existing resources to best effect

The Department has allocated some 10,000 additional teacher posts in primary and post-primary schools to provide extra teaching support for students with special educational needs and students with low achievement in literacy and numeracy. These posts include learning-support/resource teachers under the General Allocation Model and resource teachers for children with low incidence special educational needs at primary level, and for post-primary schools, learning support teachers and resource teachers for special educational needs. In addition, some 1,000 teachers are allocated to special schools.

Considerable investment continues to be made in initial and continuing professional development for teachers in the area of special needs education. Several initial teacher education courses include modules on teaching students with special educational needs. However, these modules are not available on all initial teacher education programmes and this gap needs to be addressed in the reform of teacher education. Specific continuing professional development programmes for serving teachers are available at post-graduate level. The Department's support services provide further courses for teachers and guidance documents for schools on the best practice in the deployment of teachers in the area of special needs education. Teachers will need to continue to access these professional development programmes and consult these guidance documents. It is critical that schools use staffing resources to best effect in order to maximise their impact and benefit for students. In particular, it is important that mainstream and specialist teachers work collaboratively with one another and with parents in drawing up, implementing and reviewing focussed programmes in literacy and numeracy for pupils with learning needs.

There is much to be gained also from greater interaction and collaboration across the Education and Health services. Speech and language therapists (SLTs) have argued persuasively that co-operation across disciplines at pre-service level could be beneficial to both therapists and teachers. At school and pre-school level, closer interaction between SLTs, teachers and ECCE practitioners could lead to better literacy outcomes for children with special educational needs and those with transient developmental delay in speech and language because of their disadvantaged background or other causes.

Youthreach provides a "second chance" education to early school leavers

Youthreach caters for some of our most vulnerable young people, many of whom come from backgrounds of multiple disadvantage and need support in a range of ways. Since its establishment in the 1980s, Youthreach has been a very important element of the education system, catering for students who leave school early, and it now caters for close to 6,000 learners in VEC Youthreach and FÁS Community Training Centres (CTCs) nationally.

One of the greatest challenges facing Youthreach is the development of learners' literacy and numeracy skills

A considerable proportion of the learners in Youthreach have significant literacy and numeracy difficulties. One of the greatest challenges facing Youthreach is the development of learners' literacy and numeracy skills. We know that provision for literacy and numeracy in centres for education requires a higher level of professional skills and greater targeting of the needs of individual learners. We need, therefore, to make professional development opportunities – such as those provided currently for teachers in schools – available to literacy and numeracy tutors working in centres offering the Youthreach programme.

In Youthreach, the curriculum is a flexible framework on which learning activities are built; but in particular the curriculum should be relevant, challenging and imaginative. Best practice involves the development of an overall, individual action plan that builds on interests and abilities and affirms and engages the learner. Multiple methodologies and integrated actions, such as team and interdisciplinary projects, are used. Elements such as personal development, guidance, basic skills and health promotion are integrated into the general curriculum and innovation and creativity are encouraged throughout. In particular, integrated whole-centre approaches to literacy and numeracy and to personal development are crucial.

Literacy and numeracy development is a core element of the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) which has proven to be successful in flexibly catering for individual learners' needs within mainstream education. Youthreach centres should be encouraged, where appropriate, to offer the JCSP programme as a part of a flexible curriculum and an integrated whole-centre approach. This would also give focus to the training of Youthreach staff in teaching and assessing young people's progress in literacy and numeracy.

Actions to help students with additional learning needs to achieve their potential in literacy and numeracy

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Continue to support enhanced literacy and numeracy provision for students from socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds	• Continue to support the provision of early childhood care and education through the free ECCE programme	Department of Children and Youth Affairs	Ongoing
	• Continue to support enhanced provision for literacy and numeracy in DEIS Band 1 and DEIS Band 2 schools, using a broad range of initiatives and supports	Department of Education and Skills	From 2011
	• In the light of recent evaluations in DEIS schools, concentrate DEIS supports in post-primary schools in the junior cycle	Department of Education and Skills	From 2011
	• Ensure that all initial teacher education courses and ECCE training programmes include mandatory modules to enable teachers and ECCE practitioners to address the specific literacy and numeracy learning needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds	Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with the Teaching Council and Awarding Bodies	From 2013
	• Ensure that serving teachers and principals have access to continuing professional development and guidance on meeting the learning needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds	Department of Education and Skills	From 2012-13
	• Incentivise ECCE practitioners in state-funded ECCE settings to engage in continuing professional development to enhance their ability to address the literacy and numeracy learning needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds	Department of Children and Youth Affairs	From 2013
	• Continue to provide targeted continuing professional development opportunities in initiatives that improve the teaching, learning and assessment of literacy and numeracy in DEIS schools	Department of Education and Skills	From 2011
	• Improve the skills of teachers and ECCE practitioners in assessing, monitoring and recording literacy and numeracy outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds • Ensure that schools prioritise the tracking, assessment and analysis of the achievement of students from disadvantaged backgrounds as part of the school's self-evaluation and improvement process	Department of Education and Skills	From 2012-13
	• Encourage the management of ECCE settings and schools and their communities to put in place procedures to facilitate schools and ECCE settings to work collaboratively with parents to improve literacy and numeracy learning.	Department of Education and Skills and Department of Children and Youth Affairs	From 2012-13

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Rebalance the supports made available to address the literacy and numeracy learning needs of EAL students	• Build on the findings of the VFM study on EAL provision and re-prioritise spending for supports for EAL students to allow for the building of teacher skills and whole-school capacity on EAL and integration; this will involve allocating a higher proportion of available funding and personnel to CPD on EAL and integration issues and a reduction in teachers allocated to schools for EAL	Department of Education and Skills	Ongoing
	• Ensure that all initial teacher education courses and ECCE training programmes include mandatory modules to o enable teachers and ECCE practitioners to address the specific literacy and numeracy learning needs of students for whom English is an additional language o raise awareness among teachers and ECCE practitioners that some migrant students will be receiving informal support in their mother tongue in out-of-school educational settings	Department of Education and Skills and Awarding Bodies	From 2013
	• Ensure that serving teachers and principals have access to continuing professional development and guidance on meeting the learning needs of students for whom English is an additional language	Department of Education and Skills	From 2012-13
	• Encourage teacher education providers and/or providers of continuing professional development to provide post-graduate qualifications for teaching of English as an additional language	Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with teacher education providers and/or providers of continuing professional development	From 2014
	• Promote the use of available guidelines and online resources for schools on best practice in supporting the needs of students for whom English is an additional language	Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with teacher education providers and/or providers of continuing professional development	From 2011
	• Improve the skills of teachers in assessing, monitoring and recording literacy and numeracy outcomes for EAL students • Ensure that schools prioritise the tracking, assessment and analysis of the achievement of students for whom English is an additional language as part of the school's self-evaluation and improvement process	Department of Education and Skills	From 2012-13

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Continue to support enhanced literacy and numeracy provision for students with special educational needs, including students of exceptional ability	• Continue to support the learning needs of students with identified special educational needs through the provision of resource teachers and learning support teachers • Continue to support access to learning for students with identified special educational needs through the provision of special needs assistants	Department of Education and Skills	Ongoing
	• Ensure that all initial teacher education courses and ECCE training programmes include mandatory modules to enable teachers and ECCE practitioners to address the specific literacy and numeracy learning needs of students with special educational needs	Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Awarding Bodies	From 2013
	• Incentivise state-funded ECCE practitioners to engage in continuing professional development to enhance their ability to address the specific literacy and numeracy learning needs of students with special educational needs	Department of Children and Youth Affairs	2013
	• Ensure that serving teachers and principals have access to continuing professional development courses and guidance on meeting the learning needs of students with special educational needs	Department of Education and Skills and CPD providers	From 2013
	• Continue to support the provision of post-graduate courses related to the teaching of students with special education needs	Department of Education and Skills, teacher education and continuing professional development providers	From 2014
	• Promote the use of available guidelines and online resources for schools and ECCE settings on best practice in supporting the needs of students with special educational needs	Department of Education and Skills, teacher education and continuing professional development providers	From 2011
	• Improve the skills of teachers and ECCE practitioners in assessing, monitoring and recording literacy and numeracy outcomes for students with special educational needs • Ensure that schools prioritise the tracking, assessment and analysis of the achievement of students with special educational needs as part of the school's self-evaluation and improvement process	Department of Education and Skills	From 2012-13
	• Encourage the management of ECCE settings and schools and their communities to put in place procedures to facilitate schools and ECCE settings to work collaboratively with parents to improve literacy and numeracy learning	Department of Education and Skills and Department of Children and Youth Affairs	From 2012-13

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Improve the quality of literacy and numeracy provision in Youthreach, and community training centres (CTCs)	• Require the further education and training authority to ensure that adequate attention is paid to the development of learners' literacy and numeracy skills in all relevant further education courses and programmes • Make available the JCSP to learners in Youthreach and CTCs for whom this provision is appropriate • Increase the number of learners in Youthreach and CTCs who achieve certification in courses in which literacy and numeracy are major components	Department of Education and Skills and the further education and training authority (when established)	Ongoing
	• Improve the quality of literacy and numeracy tuition in Youthreach provision by ensuring that Youthreach staff have access to the continuing professional development programmes and online resources being made available to primary and post-primary teachers	Department of Education and Skills	2012-13
	• Encourage providers of further education and training courses and programmes to encourage their tutors and instructors to engage in continuing professional development to enhance their ability to address the specific literacy and numeracy learning needs of students in the sector	Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with further education and training authority	2012-13
	• Improve the skills of staff in assessing, monitoring and recording literacy and numeracy outcomes for learners in Youthreach and CTCs • Ensure that Youthreach centres and CTCs prioritise the assessment and analysis of outcomes for learners as part of the centre's self-evaluation and improvement process	Department of Education and Skills and further education and training authority	From 2012-13

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Promote better understanding of the role of speech and language therapy in supporting students with special educational needs	• Explore possibilities for synergies between initial and continuing professional development courses for teachers and ECCE practitioners, and those for speech and language therapists • Ensure that an understanding of the role of speech and language therapy is included in the content of initial and continuing professional development courses for teachers and ECCE practitioners	Department of Education and Skills, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, FETAC/HETAC in conjunction with initial and continuing professional development course providers for teachers, ECCE practitioners and speech and language therapists	2016

8. IMPROVING ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION TO SUPPORT BETTER LEARNING IN LITERACY AND NUMERACY

Knowing how well students are learning can help us to improve their achievement

Improving the ways in which we use student assessment can play a major role in improving literacy and numeracy learning

Gathering evidence about how well students are learning, and using this information to improve the learning opportunities we provide for them are essential elements in ensuring that each student makes good progress in developing literacy and numeracy skills. This process of gathering and using assessment data should begin at the level of the individual student to enable the teacher to adjust instruction to suit the needs of individual learners and to inform them and their parents about the progress that they are making.

Gathering and using assessment data also needs to take place at the level of the school, where principals, teachers and boards of management can use this information to identify how well they are providing for the literacy and numeracy needs of individual students and groups of students in the school and how best they can improve the learning in the school.

We also need to have assessment data to inform national educational policy for literacy and numeracy and identify ways of improving the performance of the school system. Our collection and analysis of information about students' learning in literacy and numeracy need to be improved significantly.

We need to be clear about what we expect students to know or be able to do

Before we make judgements about how well students are achieving, we need a clear statement of the learning outcomes that we expect children and young people to achieve at each stage in the education system. In literacy and numeracy, this means that we need to prioritise the reform of the curricula for English and Irish at both primary and post-primary level and to continue with the ongoing reforms of the mathematics curriculum at post-primary level in the ways described in Chapter 6 of this strategy.

Teachers need clear examples of what learners should know or be able to do when they have mastered the learning outcomes at each level in the curriculum. As discussed in Chapter 6 above, these examples can help teachers to plan better learning experiences for their students. They also help them to make informed judgements about the learning successes and needs of their students. A curriculum that combines clear statements of learning outcomes

and accessible examples of what learners should know or be able to do in literacy and numeracy can provide a reliable framework of reference against which teachers, parents and students can benchmark achievement and progress.

We need to ensure that teachers use assessment to inform their practice and monitor learning

Teachers should base their judgements about the progress pupils are making on different sources of evidence, including conversations with the learner, an analysis of the learner's own self-assessment, the teacher's observations of the learner's engagement with tasks, test scores, examples of students' work and, in the post-primary school, written, oral and practical examinations. But simply assessing the progress that learners have made is not enough.

We know that the most effective teachers use assessment information on the progress that their students have achieved to date, they share this information with their students, and they use this information to plan the next steps in their teaching and their students' learning. This approach, sometimes referred to as *assessment for learning (AfL),* should be used to inform all teaching but it is not used sufficiently widely in our schools and we need to enable teachers to improve this practice.

We need to combine good *assessment for learning* practice with appropriate *assessment of learning (AoL)* approaches. By *assessment of learning* we mean approaches that provide an indication of the progress that the student has made in achieving the learning outcomes that are set out in the curriculum. *Assessment of learning* should give us a summary of what the student has achieved at fixed points, such as the end of an academic year. This information on the students' progress can come from teachers' informed judgements, the students' performance on tests or tasks constructed by the teacher or school, the students' performance on standardised assessments and, at the post-primary level, performance in the state examinations. The NCCA guidelines on assessment and the Council's Action website www.action.ncca.ie give important examples of good practice in AfL in both primary and post-primary settings.

We need to combine good assessment for learning (AfL) practice with appropriate assessment of learning (AoL) approaches

Assessment of children's learning in ECCE settings

The *Guidelines for Good Practice* that accompany the *Aistear* curriculum framework for ECCE contain extensive advice on how ECCE practitioners can collect, document, reflect on and use evidence of children's learning to inform their work. The guidelines describe how ECCE practitioners can collect evidence though various approaches including conversations, observation, setting tasks for the child and the use of specially designed tests. Information can be captured through video or audio records, through looking at samples of children's work, through making

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notes about children's involvement in a particular activity or event, or though daily diaries or records of care. As the guidelines advise, ECCE practitioners need to look for evidence of children's progress in developing dispositions to learning (for example, curiosity, concentration, resilience), in developing skills (such as walking, cutting, writing and problem solving), in developing attitudes and values, and in acquiring knowledge and understanding.

We have to encourage practitioners in ECCE settings to use these various assessment approaches regularly as they enable young children to learn. This means that they need to monitor and document the progress individual children are making, identify the child's learning needs and provide appropriate learning experiences in an *assessment for learning* approach. They also need to be able to adopt an effective *assessment of learning* approach when they report information on children's progress to parents, to the schools to which the children transfer and to other professionals.

Standardised tests can help in the assessment of literacy and numeracy skills

While standardised assessment tests have their limitations, when used properly they can provide very useful information about the progress of individual students

Standardised tests are available for reading (in English and Irish) and mathematics at primary level In Ireland. These scientifically constructed tests can provide teachers and parents with information about how well a child's achievement compares with that of children at the same class level in Irish primary schools and the rate of progress that they have made over time.

Standardised tests cannot measure the progress students have made in achieving many important learning outcomes, including, for example, students' oral language abilities or their ability to write creatively. However, they are one important tool that teachers can use to monitor student progress.

An analysis of the outcomes of standardised tests at school level can provide useful data for the school's self-evaluation process

Aggregating standardised test scores for students within different classes can help to inform a school's planning, self-evaluation and external evaluation. The aggregated results will not tell the whole story of literacy and numeracy achievement, as they will be based on the results of tests that can capture only some of what children learn. But they can help schools to gain a clearer understanding of trends in achievement and they can provide evidence about how well initiatives to promote better learning are working.

It is important to note that there are some limitations to the inferences that can reliably be made when making comparisons based on the results of a small number of student assessments. For example, there is a greater possibility that chance factors will influence the aggregate scores of tests when the number of students tested is small. Inferences from comparisons are more reliable when the numbers assessed are in the region of ten students or more at each class level, especially when comparing trends in achievement over time or in comparing results with those of similar schools.

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We can improve the way we use information from standardised tests to improve literacy and numeracy

Despite the potential of standardised tests to assist teachers to monitor important aspects of students' learning in literacy and numeracy and to inform schools' self-evaluation processes, we know that the use of standardised tests for these purposes is relatively rare in Irish primary schools. Primary schools are required by DES Circular 138/2006 to assess achievement in English reading and mathematics at the end of first class *or* the beginning of second class, *and* at the end of fourth class *or* the beginning of fifth class using standardised tests. Many schools also use such tests at other stages in primary school, but a minimum of twice is specified, along with a requirement that the results of these tests be reported to parents.

We can improve the ways in which collect and use assessment information

We know, however, that while the tests are administered conscientiously, primary teachers are not using the information that may be obtained from them to best effect and there are considerable deficiencies in the way outcomes are reported to parents. At least some of this may be attributed to shortcomings in initial teacher education and to the lack of focus on assessment in teachers' continuing professional development.

The situation is even less satisfactory at post-primary level. There are no standardised tests of reading or mathematics with Irish norms available currently for second-level schools In Ireland. We need, therefore, to improve considerably our use of these assessment tools and to make them available for second-level schools.

We have to improve the assessment of literacy and numeracy in the state examinations

Formal and state examinations are a significant element of the assessment approaches that are used in the post-primary school. The future direction of junior-cycle reform is currently the subject of discussion with the partners in education at the NCCA following a public consultation process. This is an opportunity to ensure that the new curricula and assessment system that we put in place will provide the best possible opportunities for young people to develop and consolidate literacy and numeracy skills. This approach also needs to permeate curriculum development at the senior cycle.

Project Maths is already introducing very significant changes to the mathematics curriculum at both junior and senior cycle – changes that are designed to ensure that students have a much more successful engagement with all aspects of mathematics. This is also reflected in the very significant changes to the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations for the subject, which will encourage the development of skills such as problem solving and the ability to use mathematics in every day life. As the syllabuses for English and Irish are revised to ensure greater clarity in the literacy skills that we want young people to develop, the Junior Certificate examinations for English and

Irish will also need to be changed substantially. Reforms to subjects at senior cycle should also reflect the emphasis on the consolidation and application of literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.

There is also a significant challenge in making sure that teachers of all subjects at the post-primary level recognise how they can contribute to improving the students' literacy and numeracy skills. Opportunities for literacy and numeracy development within specific disciplines and across the curriculum need to be reflected in syllabus documents. Teaching and learning activities in all subjects and in the assessment processes used in the junior cycle need to promote better literacy and numeracy standards.

We have to provide better information to parents about their children's progress in literacy and numeracy

Parents play a critical role in supporting their children's learning. As discussed in Chapter 3, schools and ECCE settings can strengthen the capacity of parents to support their children in this way. One of the ways that teachers and ECCE practitioners can do this is by sharing meaningful information with parents about the progress that children are achieving in the education system. This information needs to draw on the different sources of evidence that teachers and ECCE practitioners use, such as conversations with the learner, examination of students' own self-assessment data, documented observations of the learner's engagement with tasks, outcomes of other assessment tasks and tests, and examples of students' work. In turn, parents will often be able to enrich teachers' knowledge of their students' progress through providing further information about the students' learning at home.

Schools and ECCE settings can strengthen the capacity of parents to support their children by sharing meaningful information with them about the progress that children are achieving in the education system

We know, however, that parents do not always receive adequate, meaningful and clear assessment information from schools and ECCE settings. We also know that sometimes they need help to understand fully the evidence of learning that the school reports to them, especially information from standardised tests. The NCCA has provided standard report templates to assist schools in reporting information about the progress of primary pupils to parents, including information from standardised tests, but evidence from the National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics and other studies demonstrates considerable gaps in the reporting of information to parents.

While the format of reporting to parents in the junior cycle has yet to be determined, it is intended to develop a report card template for this stage of education, similar to what the NCCA has provided for primary schools. Such a reporting format will be useful in ensuring consistency of reporting across schools. The results of standardised tests in reading and mathematics will be included as areas for reporting.

Information on each student's progress should transfer more effectively between schools

We also have weaknesses in how we transfer information about students' progress between ECCE settings and primary schools and between primary and post-primary schools. This contributes to potentially damaging discontinuities in the learning of students and the risk of students' learning actually regressing.

There are no agreed systems for how ECCE settings should report on the progress of young learners or for how this information should transfer to primary schools. Similarly, we need to improve greatly the system of transferring assessment information from primary to post-primary schools. The timing of this transfer of information is important in ensuring that there are no 'stakes' attached. It should happen immediately after enrolment and when first year is under way. The assessment information from the primary school should provide different sources of evidence – the test scores, teachers' comments, and examples of students' work. The suite of report car templates that has been prepared by the NCCA for this purpose needs to be developed further and used consistently across the school system.

Transferring information on student progress more effectively between schools helps to ensure continuity for the learner

We also need to improve how post-primary schools use the information that is provided to them about the progress achieved to date by their incoming students. We have to end the mistaken view that literacy and numeracy learning should be "finished" by the end of primary school and instead recognise that students will arrive at the post-primary level with different levels of achievement, ranging from those who have mastered many literacy and numeracy skills to those who are at a much earlier stage on the road of literacy and numeracy learning for whatever reason. Using assessment data from the end of the primary cycle can help post-primary teachers to adjust their teaching to address more effectively the individual needs of students. The information from the primary schools should be an essential source of reference in planning the programme for junior cycle and in keeping track of students' progress across the three years of junior cycle.

Schools should use assessment information to inform self-evaluation and school improvement plans

Aggregated assessment data for classes or groups in a school can be a very important source of evidence for a school community as it seeks to improve teaching and learning. Effective schools analyse data from standardised tests and other sources regularly and track trends over time. They track not only the general achievement of all students but also the achievement of particular groups, including more able students and vulnerable groups who are at risk of encountering learning difficulties.

Better assessment data can help schools and all of us in the education system to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for learners

Teachers, principals and boards of management in effective schools use assessment information, including information about literacy and numeracy, to inform their school self-evaluation, reflective practices and their school improvement plans. They use the data to identify priorities for their development including changes they may wish to make in teaching approaches, their priorities for staff development and for the acquisition of resources. They also use assessment information as part of their monitoring of the effectiveness or otherwise of the initiatives that they put in place to improve students' learning.

We need better assessment information to ensure effective literacy and numeracy learning

Just as schools need to use information from the assessment of their students' learning in literacy and numeracy to identify how best they can improve learning outcomes, we need aggregated assessment information to form a national picture of how well second-year students are acquiring literacy and numeracy. Currently, our information on literacy and numeracy achievement in Ireland is limited to periodic assessments of samples of students at primary level collected by the Educational Research Centre in the National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics. and the information that we obtain from the international studies in which Ireland participates. The periodic National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading need to be extended to at least one point at the post-primary level.

In addition we need to collect aggregated data from each school to form a national picture of how well students are acquiring literacy and numeracy. Schools will be aggregating this data to inform their self evaluation and school improvement plans. Putting in place simple, straightforward ways in which the aggregated data can be collected from all schools regularly will not give us the complete picture about the work of schools in improving literacy and numeracy achievement, nor should it be used to compile "league tables" of schools, but it can fill a significant gap in the information available to the education system. It can help to inform quality assurance of the system and the identification of schools that may need additional supports. It can also inform policy initiatives by helping us to have a better understanding of what is working well and what needs improving in our children's literacy and numeracy learning.

Actions to improve our use of assessment and evaluation to support better learning in literacy and numeracy

The revision of the literacy and numeracy elements of the curriculum at primary and post-primary levels using a "learning outcomes" approach and the development of associated samples of children's work and learning are important necessary actions to enable teachers and ECCE practitioners to engage in meaningful assessment of learning and assessment for learning. These actions are described in detail in Chapter 6 and are not repeated here.

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date

Improve the ability of teachers and ECCE practitioners to use assessment approaches and data	• Ensure that all initial teacher education courses and ECCE training programmes include mandatory modules to enable teachers and ECCE practitioners to use a range of assessment approaches to:
	  o inform the planning of subsequent steps in students' learning of literacy and numeracy, i.e. *assessment for learning* (AfL) approaches
	  o monitor effectively learners' achievement in literacy and numeracy, i.e. *assessment of learning* (AoL) approaches
	  o document students' learning in literacy and numeracy and report to parents, other teachers and other professionals as appropriate
	  o identify specific learning needs
		Department of Education and Skills	2013

	• Ensure that serving teachers and principals have access to continuing professional development and online and other guidance on the effective use of assessment to:
	  o inform the planning of subsequent steps in students' learning of literacy and numeracy (i.e. *assessment for learning* approaches)
	  o monitor effectively learners' achievement in literacy and numeracy (i.e. *assessment of learning* approaches)
	  o document students' learning in literacy and numeracy and report to parents, other teachers and other professionals as appropriate
	  o identify specific learning needs
		Department of Education and Skills	From 2012-13

	• Incentivise state-funded ECCE practitioners to engage in continuing professional development to enhance their ability to use a range of *assessment for learning* (AfL) and *assessment of learning* (AoL) approaches	Department of Children and Youth Affairs	2014

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Improve the use of assessment information to support better teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy for individual students	• Support the development and publication of assessment tools to assist ECCE practitioners and teachers of infants to monitor and report on the progress that children in ECCE settings and infant classes are achieving	Department of Education and Skills and Department of Children and Youth Affairs	From 2012
	• Implement intervention strategies in the second term in junior infants for those students identified as having difficulties in literacy and numeracy and provide in-class support from learning support teachers	Department of Education and Skills	2013-14
	• Require all primary schools to administer standardised tests of English reading and mathematics to all eligible students at the end of second, fourth and sixth class • Require all Irish-medium primary schools to administer standardised tests of Irish reading, English reading and mathematics to all eligible students at the end of second, fourth and sixth class	Department of Education and Skills	2012
	• Commission the development of standardised tests of English reading, Irish reading and Mathematics for students at the end of second year in post-primary school	Department of Education and Skills	2014
	• Require all post-primary schools to administer standardised tests of English reading and mathematics to all eligible students at the end of second year • Require all Irish-medium post-primary schools to administer standardised tests of Irish reading, English reading and mathematics to all eligible students at the end of second year	Department of Education and Skills	2014-15
	• Require all schools to report to parents (through written school reports and parent-teacher interviews) in clear terms about the progress their child is making (using information from a range of assessment approaches including the outcomes of standardised assessment tests and information on how their child is progressing compared to national norms)	Department of Education and Skills	Primary level 2012 Post-primary 2015
	• Improve the guidance available to parents to help them to understand the information that they receive on their child's progress • Encourage schools to assist parents in understanding assessment information	Department of Education and Skills and National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	2012-15

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
	• Improve arrangements for the transfer of information about the progress and achievement of students between all schools and state-funded ECCE settings by requiring all settings and schools to provide written reports in standard format to schools and settings to which students transfer (reports to be provided following admission of student to the new school/setting)	NCCA to develop suitable reporting templates and make available online Department of Education and Skills and Department of Children and Youth Affairs to make transfer of information a requirement	2012-14 2013-15
Ensure that all schools use assessment data to inform their three-year school improvement plans	• Require all schools to engage in robust self-evaluation and put in place a three-year school improvement plan which includes specific targets for the promotion and improvement of literacy and numeracy	Department of Education and Skills	From 2012-13
	• As part of the initial and continuing professional development for teachers and principals noted above, provide guidance on how best standardised assessment data may be aggregated, tracked over time and interpreted to support robust school self-evaluation; including guidance on identifying how the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy may be improved in schools (including cautionary advice regarding difficulties that may arise when the number of students assessed at any one class level fall below ten students)	Department of Education and Skills	2012-2013
	• Ensure that schools' self-evaluation and school improvement plans are informed by good assessment data: require principals in primary schools to report (annually) aggregated assessment data from standardised tests (of English reading and mathematics in all primary schools and Irish-reading in Irish-medium primary schools)[9] to boards of management	Department of Education and Skills	2012
	• Following the availability of standardised tests, require principals in post-primary to report (annually) aggregated assessment data from standardised tests (of English reading and mathematics in all post-primary schools and Irish-reading in Irish-medium post-primary schools) to boards of management	Department of Education and Skills	2015
	• Include guidance on the interpretation of standardised assessment data and its use in school self-evaluation in training for boards of management	Department of Education and Skills	From 2012-13

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[9] See Appendix for possible format of reporting

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date
Improve the availability of national assessment data on literacy and numeracy achievement	• Collect aggregated data on student achievement on standardised assessment tests in English reading and mathematics in all primary schools and in Irish reading in all Irish-medium primary schools at the end of second class, fourth class and sixth class	Department of Education and Skills	From 2012
	• Following availability of the tests, collect aggregated data on student achievement on standardised assessment tests in English reading and mathematics in all post-primary primary schools and in Irish reading in all Irish-medium post-primary schools at the end of second year	Department of Education and Skills	From 2015
	• Report on the national achievement trends in reading and mathematics in primary and post-primary schools at least every two years using aggregated data from standardised tests in schools	Department of Education and Skills	From 2013 at primary level From 2016 at post-primary
	• Commission research to explore the potential to analyse assessment data from schools so as to enable the provision of national trend data on achievement in different categories of schools (schools serving students from different socio-economic and demographic contexts, etc.) and the potential for this analysis to assist schools in benchmarking their standards against a norm for similar schools and to set targets for improvement	Department of Education and Skills	2016
	• Continue to conduct and publish the *National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading* (based on a scientific sample of schools) on a five-yearly basis and extend these to include the assessment of students at post-primary level • Extend the National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading to include tests of digital literacy	Department of Education and Skills	2014, 2019

Benchmark the literacy and numeracy achievement of students in Irish schools with that of students in other developed countries	• Participate in international surveys such as PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS to enable the achievement of students in reading literacy, mathematics and science to be benchmarked against international standards at primary and post-primary levels	Department of Education and Skills	Next PISA in 2012 TIMSS and PIRLS in 2011
	• Require all schools to cooperate when requested with all national and international surveys approved or commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills	Department of Education and Skills	2012

Objective	Detail	Responsible for this action	Indicative date

Use self-evaluation and external inspection to support improvements in literacy and numeracy achievement	• Support the use of robust self-evaluation in schools through
	   o The provision of targeted continuing professional development for principals and teachers (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 5)
	   o The provision of support materials, guidance and advice on the creation and implementation of school improvement plans
	• Require schools to make available their school improvement plans to the school community
		Department of Education and Skills	Commence work in 2011-2012
			
			Implement in schools from 2012-13

	• Ensure that all whole-school type inspections evaluate and report on literacy and numeracy standards in schools, including an evaluation of the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plan in these areas, and in post-primary schools on the promotion of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum	Department of Education and Skills	2011-12
	• Use aggregated data from standardised tests *as one element* of the evidence used to support the inspection of schools (for example, in inspection planning; during the inspection process; in the identification of good practice; and in the targeting of under-performing schools)	Department of Education and Skills	2013

	• Improve the quality assurance of state-funded ECCE provision by:
	   o Requiring self-evaluation to be carried out in all state-funded ECCE settings
	   o Providing materials and guidance to support self-evaluation
	   o Developing and implementing pilot external evaluations of the quality of provision (including the quality of early literacy and numeracy provision) in ECCE settings
	   o Review outcomes of pilot evaluations and use learning to improve quality assurance mechanisms and models
		Department of Children and Youth Affairs in conjunction with Department of Education and Skills (Inspectorate)	Conduct initial pilot evaluations in 2011-12
			
			Review in 2012-13

ABBREVIATIONS

AfL   Assessment for Learning (AfL focuses on using assessment information from the learner in planning the next steps in their learning and development)

AIM   Accessing Intercultural Materials (on-line listing of resources for intercultural education hosted on website of the Department of Education and Skills)

AoL   Assessment of Learning (the main purpose of AfL is to report on a learner's achievement to date and to inform parents and relevant professionals, such as teachers and therapists, about this achievement)

CPD   Continuing Professional Development

CTC   Community Training Centre

DEIS   Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (the Department of Education and Skills' programme to support learners in disadvantaged communities)

DES   Department of Education and Skills

EAL   English as an Additional Language

ECCE   Early Childhood Care and Education

ERC   Educational Research Centre (independent educational research body located at St Patrick's College Drumcondra, Dublin)

IEA   International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement

IPPN   Irish Primary Principals' Network

ITE   Initial Teacher Education

L1   The primary language of instruction (for example, Irish as L1 refers to the teaching of Irish as a first language or its use as the medium of instruction in Irish-medium schools)

L2   A language taught as a second language (for example, Irish as L2 in English-medium schools)

NAMER	National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading
NAPD	National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (international study of reading literacy conducted under the auspices of the IEA)
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment (international study of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy conducted under the auspices of the OECD)
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SESS	Special Education Support Service
SLT	Speech and Language Therapist
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (international study of mathematics and science achievement conducted under the auspices of the IEA)
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
VFM	Value for Money (evaluation studies conducted in line with Department of Finance guidelines)

APPENDIX

Possible format for reporting of aggregated data from standardised assessments

English Reading

Please enter the number of students in second, fourth and sixth classes whose standard scores on a standardised test of reading fall within the following ranges:

Class	Up to 80	81-90	91-100	101-110	111-120	Above 120	Test administered
Second class							Drumcondra Reading Test or Micra-T Reading Test
Fourth class							Drumcondra Reading Test or Micra-T Reading Test
Sixth class							Drumcondra Reading Test or Micra-T Reading Test

Mathematics

Please enter the number of students in second, fourth and sixth classes whose standard scores on a standardised test of reading fall within the following ranges:

Class	Up to 80	81-90	91-100	101-110	111-120	Above 120	Test administered
Second class							Drumcondra Maths Test or Sigma-T Maths Test
Fourth class							Drumcondra Maths Test or Sigma-T Maths Test
Sixth class							Drumcondra Maths Test or Sigma-T Maths Test

Note: Standard scores are transformations of raw scores achieved on standardised tests, and usually range between 55 and 145, with an average of 100.

A similar reporting table may be used for the return of standardised assessment data from second-level schools when the tests become available.