



**To: Boards of Management, Principal Teachers and Teaching Staff of
Primary Schools and Special Schools and Chief Executives of ETBs
Information in relation to Standardised Testing and Other Matters
Academic Year 2018/19 and Subsequent Years**

Circular 0026/2019

Sections 1 and 2 of this circular set out important information for schools regarding Standardised Testing returns in respect of the 2018/19 academic year. Sections 3 to 11 provide updates on a number of curriculum and other matters which are relevant to primary schools and special schools.

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1. Standardised Testing in Primary Schools – Returns for 2018/19

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

You will have received, or will shortly receive, funding in respect of 2018/19 standardised testing. These funds may be used to purchase test instruments and materials such as teachers' manuals, test scoring services or test-related software offered by test providers. These are available from:

- Education Research Centre (<http://www.erc.ie/>) who provide both paper and online tests, i.e. Drumcondra Primary Reading Test – revised, Drumcondra Primary Mathematics Test – revised and for Irish medium schools, Irish reading - Triail Ghaeilge Dhroim Conrach do Bhunscoileanna Gaeltachta agus Lan-Ghaeilge.
- Mary Immaculate College who provide paper based MICRO-T (Mary Immaculate College Reading Attainment Tests) and SIGMA-T (Standardised Irish Graded Mathematics Attainment Tests) tests. These tests are available from www.cjfallon.ie.

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

During May/early June 2019, you should carry out the tests in accordance with circulars 0056/2011 and 0018/2012, available at www.education.ie. The results of these tests must be uploaded onto the Esinet portal on or before Friday, 14th June 2019.

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

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

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



- Transferring assessment data in instances when pupils move to a different school;
- Reporting standardised test results to the Department of Education and Skills – www.education.ie

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

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

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

DATA ENTRY

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

APPROVER

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

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

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

IMPORTANT NOTE FOR SPECIAL SCHOOLS:

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



IMPORTANT NOTE REGARDING EXEMPTION CRITERIA WITH REGARD TO STANDARDISED TESTING

Pupils may be excluded from standardised testing if, in the view of the school principal, they have a learning or physical disability which would prevent them from attempting the tests or, in the case of migrant students, where the level of English required in the test would make attempting the test inappropriate. Exemptions should be considered on a case-by-case basis and be warranted only in exceptional cases. Pupils who are deemed not to be in a position to undertake standardised testing should be included in the return of the standardised assessment data to the Department of Education and Skills as “exempt”. More information can be found at https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services>Returns/Supporting-Assessment/standardised_testing_info_note.pdf.

IMPORTANT NOTE FOR INFANT SCHOOLS:

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

2. Special Education

Schools will be aware that the Department of Education and Skills has introduced a new system of allocating Special Education teachers to mainstream schools. The new model of allocating resources came into effect from September 2017.

Allocations are now based on a school’s educational profile, which includes consideration of the percentage of students performing below a certain threshold on standardised test results.

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

The position remains that standardised test data being returned will continue to be used in the future to inform the development of school profiles and to allocate special education teachers to schools.

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

The use of an aggregate of more than one years’ data is designed to provide the most accurate picture of a school’s educational profile over a period of time, and also to ensure



that schools are not penalised for improving performances generally, or over a shorter period of time.

In general, schools should use the most up-to-date versions of standardised tests. If this involves switching from previous to 'new' versions of the tests for 2018/19, and into the future (whether tests are paper-based or computer-based), this will not negatively impact a school's allocation.

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

As indicated in Circular 45/2014, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has developed a suite of materials to support the dual purpose of reporting to parents and of transferring pupil information to post primary schools once enrolment has been confirmed.

Schools should ensure that an Education Passport for each pupil is sent to the relevant post primary school following confirmation of enrolment and, ideally, by the end of June. Since 2014/15, schools are required to use the NCCA Education Passport materials to support the reporting and transfer of pupil information at the end of sixth class. The materials are presented under the umbrella title of 'Education Passport' and are available at www.ncca.ie/transfer.

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

4. Review and Redevelopment of the Primary Curriculum

The NCCA's review and redevelopment of the wider primary curriculum continues. Informed by the consultation findings on curriculum structure and time (2018), the current phase of work involves:

- Reviewing an extensive body of research on aspects of a primary curriculum. This research is summarised and published in a series of short research papers on the NCCA website at www.ncca.ie/en/primary/primary-developments/curriculum-review-and-redevelopment. You and your teaching colleagues might be interested in reading some of the research and/or listening to recorded presentations and giving feedback to the NCCA. Details of how to do this are available on the NCCA website www.ncca.ie
- Discussing key ideas in the research with the education partners and other interested stakeholders, and learning from their experiences and perspectives.
- Working with 41 schools across the country including three preschools and three post primary schools, to tease out key ideas for a redeveloped curriculum. Reflecting the



rich diversity of school types, this Schools' Forum plays a central role in helping to shape what the next primary curriculum needs to do for children, teachers and principals, and the supports needed to implement that curriculum. A note on the work of the Forum on the NCCA website <https://www.ncca.ie/en/primary/primary-developments/curriculum-review-and-redevelopment>

Together, these three strands are helping to shape the direction of the next primary curriculum. A key milestone in the work will be the publication, later this year, of a draft overview of a redeveloped curriculum. This will be the basis for an extensive consultation ahead of work beginning on the curriculum. See www.ncca.ie/en/primary/primary-developments/curriculum-review-and-redevelopment for updates on the work.

5. Primary Language Curriculum

The Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile (PLC/CTB) for all four stages of primary school (junior infants to sixth class) has been finalised and will be available to schools in September 2019. The curriculum applies to all school contexts — English-medium schools, Gaeltacht schools, Irish-medium schools and special schools.

Teachers and principals have played a key role in the development of the curriculum. As part of this, schools' early experiences of implementing the curriculum for stages 1 and 2 (junior infants to 2nd class) have informed the NCCA's ongoing work. Key changes include:

- Foregrounding the learning outcomes in the curriculum
- Expanding the online Primary Language Toolkit to incorporate the Progression Continua
- Expanding the approaches to language teaching and learning
- Improving the accessibility of the curriculum document
- Redeveloping the online space to support teachers' work with the curriculum.

The PLC/CTB is the first learning outcomes-based curriculum for primary schools. Learning outcomes describe the expected learning and development for children at the end of a period of time. They focus on learning being an enabling process that helps children to develop concepts, skills and dispositions. The outcomes are also designed to support greater decision-making at school and classroom levels — decisions about what children learn, the sequence in which they learn it, the pace at which they learn, and the activities and experiences through which they learn.

The new curriculum book for junior infants to sixth class, will be delivered to schools in September 2019 and will be available online at www.curriculumonline.ie. A circular will accompany the launch of the curriculum and will detail the support to be provided to teachers.



6. Primary Mathematics Curriculum

The new Primary Mathematics Curriculum (PMC) for all four stages (junior infants to 6th class) is being developed by the NCCA. As with the new language curriculum, this involves working with primary schools. The development work is drawing on a consultation that took place in 2018, the findings of which are published at www.ncca.ie/media/3605/pmc_consultation_report_july2018.pdf.

Like the Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile, the PMC uses learning outcomes to describe children's mathematical learning at the end of a period of time. It is a curriculum for all children and NCCA continues to work with specialists in the field of inclusion of children with special and additional needs and of very able children to ensure that this intention is fulfilled.

NCCA will publish a draft of the curriculum for junior infants to sixth class for consultation early in 2020. Following a decision in December 2018 by the Minister for Education and Skills, the new PMC will be published in September 2021, with implementation in schools beginning in September 2022.

7. Early Years: Preschool to Primary School Transition

As part of the actions arising from Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020, the NCCA has developed Mo Scéal, reporting templates for the transition from preschool to primary school. The purpose of these templates is to: Improve arrangements for the transfer of information about the progress and achievement of pupils between all schools and state-funded ECCE settings. The templates and an accompanying set of support materials are available at www.ncca.ie/en/early-childhood/mo-scéal.

The development of Mo Scéal involved research and consultation with teachers, practitioners, parents and children. Early drafts of the templates were piloted as part of the NCCA Preschool to Primary School Transitions Initiative. There is no requirement to use the templates. Instead, the templates and the support materials are a resource which preschools and schools can use as they work together to make young children's transition into primary school as positive as it can be. Of particular interest in this regard are the Joint Transition Activities for preschools and primary schools available at www.ncca.ie/media/3757/joint-transition-activities-for-preschools-and-primary-schools-7.pdf. These materials might be especially helpful in the weeks and months ahead as visits to school by the new junior infants and their families are planned, and as other preparations for the new intake get underway.



8. Public Libraries Support for Schools

Membership of the public library is free and as of the 1st of January 2019, fines for overdue books have been removed and there are no replacement charges for children's books which have been lost or damaged.

The establishment of a collaborative approach for the provision of educational support and leisure reading materials between schools and public libraries is an objective of the Public Library Strategy 2018–2022, *Our Public Libraries 2022*. All public libraries provide standard services to primary schools, as identified and agreed nationally. These services are outlined below.

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

A partner library branch has been identified for every primary school based on catchment area. This information is available on the public libraries' website at <https://www.librariesireland.ie/services/services-to-schools>

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

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

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



- Providing reference resources and research assistance to pupils and teachers for school project work
- Providing information for parents about the range of library resources and the activities available to support the development of their children's literacy and numeracy skills
- Providing access to a wide range of historical material about the local area, including maps, photographs, documents and information and collections relating to 1916 and subsequent commemorations.
- Providing ongoing library programmes and initiatives throughout the year, including the Spring into Storytime initiative in April, the national Summer Stars reading programme, the Children's Book Festival and Family Time at Your Library, all of which support the continuing development of children's literacy and numeracy skills (see www.librariesireland.ie). Spring into Storytime provides story time and reading activities in branches during April. The Summer Stars Reading Adventure runs throughout the summer and is a fun reading programme open to all children who register for it at their local library. The Children's Book Festival takes place in October and celebrates children's books and family reading and Family Time at Your Library offers fun events in local branches in December.

9. Support for Parents

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) offers help and advice for parents who have difficulty reading, writing, spelling or doing math. They have a Freephone number parents can call 1800 20 20 65 or a website www.takethefirststep.ie – parents can learn with their local ETB Adult Education Service or over the phone and online through NALA's Distance Learning Service. All services are free.

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

In addition, NALA has produced promotional posters and bookmarks with information about the website Help My Kid Learn, and how parents can support their children's learning over the summer. If you would like to order a free promotional pack for your school, please fill in this [form](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScT6UULtEs09pG4JZcdNvGc0YPz4yudIXuc9k1qEjvRiCiuA/viewform)
(<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScT6UULtEs09pG4JZcdNvGc0YPz4yudIXuc9k1qEjvRiCiuA/viewform>)

We encourage schools to:

- Add a link from the school website to www.helpmykidlearn.ie (many schools have done this already) and www.cogg.ie, particularly in Gaeltacht schools and in Gaelscoileanna;



- Mention the NALA Freephone and websites to new parents visiting the school in May/June;
- Recommend them to parents as a source of suggestions for enjoyable activities in which parents and their children can engage;
- Encourage staff to access the websites and mention them in parent/teacher meetings.

10. Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011– 2020: Interim Review of the Strategy and New Targets

Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020 is a key pillar of the Programme for Government. In July 2011, the Department of Education and Skills (the Department) launched the National Strategy: Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life 2011–2020 (the Strategy). The Strategy sets a clear vision for raising standards in literacy and numeracy in early years, primary and post primary settings by 2020.

In March 2017, the Minister launched the Report of an Interim Review of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, which acknowledges our significant achievements in literacy but also highlights the critical need to focus on improving our achievements, especially in numeracy. Updated and ambitious targets for literacy and numeracy in schools were identified in the interim review, identifying the priority areas of numeracy, literacy and DEIS, specific actions, as well as new targets.

The review restated the commitment made to provide resources to support work on literacy and numeracy, which has been a top priority for the Department. Some €17 million was allocated for literacy and numeracy-related expenditure in 2017, with a similar figure for 2018 and 2019. This funding is supporting CPD (including dedicated literacy and numeracy teams for both the primary and the post primary sectors); upskilling of out-of-field Mathematics teachers at post primary; reconfiguration of Initial Teacher Education to support literacy and numeracy; and updating of standardised testing instruments.

11. Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017–2022 – Gaeltacht Areas

Following on from a comprehensive review of educational provision in the Gaeltacht, the Department of Education and Skills launched its Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017–2022 (the Policy) in October 2016.

The publication of the Policy is a central commitment contained in the Department's Action Plan for Education 2016–2019. Publishing and implementing the Policy on a phased basis and as resources permit is also a major element of the Government's 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010–2030.



The overarching goal of the Policy is to ensure the availability of high quality and relevant Irish-medium education in Gaeltacht schools and in this way to support and encourage the use of Irish in Gaeltacht communities. Specifically, the Policy aims to ensure that a sufficient number of schools and early-years settings use Irish as the language of communication and instruction for all areas of learning (apart from English and other languages), in each of the Language-Planning Areas within the Gaeltacht (as set out under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012).

A key feature of the Policy, which relates to schools, is the management and implementation of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme, which was launched in April 2017. Under the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme, schools in Gaeltacht language-planning areas are being provided with the opportunity to seek status as Gaeltacht Schools in line with specified language-based criteria aimed at strengthening Irish-medium educational provision in the Gaeltacht. Circulars [0009/2019](#) for primary schools in the Scheme, [0010/2019](#) for post primary schools in the Scheme and [0011/2019](#) for primary and post primary schools not yet in the Scheme have recently issued to schools in Gaeltacht language-planning areas to outline the next steps required to support the effective implementation of the Scheme.

Additional information and updates on the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme and on the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017–2022 are published regularly on the Department’s website. Queries in relation to the operation of the Scheme and the Policy on Gaeltacht Education should be emailed to aog@education.gov.ie or addressed to: *An tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta, An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna, Sráid Maoilbhríde, Baile Átha Cliath 1, D01 RC96.*

12. Creative Ireland

The five-year Creative Ireland programme (2017–2022) contains five pillars. The Department of Education and Skills will be a key partner in implementing pillar one: Enabling the Creative Potential of Every Child, and will be working in conjunction with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Arts Council. The plan for pillar one, Creative Youth, was launched in December 2017. The Creative Youth plan can be found at https://creative.ireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2018-03/CI_ChildrensPlan_Screen_1.pdf

The Creative Youth plan aims to put arts and creativity at the centre of young people’s lives, both inside and outside formal education. It recognises that the integration of the arts and creativity in the curriculum can act as catalysts for learning which can be utilised to support the learning of other subjects and acknowledges the ongoing work in classrooms. The formal education system is vital in delivering on many of the commitments in the Creative Youth programme.

Applications for Creative Clusters, which demonstrate how the arts and creativity can support clusters of schools working together to address common learning challenges, will be announced shortly and details will be available on the Department of Education and Skills



website www.education.ie and also from local full-time Teacher Education Centres. Under the Creative Youth Plan, the “Teacher Artist Partnership as a CPD model to Support and Enhance Arts Education” is a free Summer Course with EPV day approval, which will also run in each of the 21 full-time Teacher Education Centres commencing in July 2019. The summer course provides teachers with an opportunity to explore an arts-in-education initiative where Artists and Teachers train to work in partnership with the subsequent opportunity to engage in a funded in-school Artist in Residency during the following academic year (for further details on Creative Clusters and Teacher Artist Partnership Summer Courses contact info@edcentretralee.ie).

13. STEM Education Policy Statement and Implementation Plan 2017–2026

The STEM Education Policy Statement 2017–2026 and Implementation Plan 2017–2019 were launched on 27 November 2017. The Policy Statement sets out the ambitious objectives and high-level actions required to improve the STEM education experience and outcomes for all our learners. The STEM implementation plan builds on a range of reforms and initiatives already underway in STEM, in areas such as curriculum and assessment reform, teacher professional development, embedding digital learning and advances in initial teacher education.

Current progress under the STEM Education Implementation Plan

- Focus on Industry-school partnerships – A Department of Education and Skills, Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and Industry sub-group was set up to advance the actions in relation to collaboration with business/Industry. A framework is being developed to provide the basis for schools, both primary and post primary to form quality, inclusive and relevant educational linkages with business and Industry, improving the STEM learning experience for all students
- STEM Awareness - Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) promote STEM in schools and across the country through the Discover funding programme, Discover Primary Science and Maths (DPSM), Smart Futures, Science Week, SciFest and SFI research centres. In conjunction with the Department of Education and Skills, SFI Smart Futures is currently running a country-wide advertising campaign, in conjunction with the Department of Education and Skills, with the #IGetPaidToDoThis, in order to promote and raise awareness of STEM Education and STEM Careers
- Professional Development – Teachers have been provided with opportunities to develop STEM learning throughout the year through the support services.
- STEM related curriculum review, development and assessment is ongoing - Primary Maths will be introduced to schools as a single-stage implementation, from Junior Infants through to sixth class in September 2022
- Cluster innovation in STEM involving outside partners comprising of ten cluster groups have been set up under the schools excellence fund. The initiative runs for three years



- STEM and the Arts – The STEM Implementation Policy Statement also recognises strong linkages between STEM and Arts education. In support of STEM education practice, a sub-group is being established to integrate aspects of Arts education into all STEM learning experiences
- Gender Balance in STEM Working Group – This group will initially have a focus on females in STEM. The STEM Education Policy Statement acknowledges the need to increase participation of females in STEM education and careers, view to addressing the issue of gender imbalance in STEM Education, a females in STEM sub-group is currently being established.

Effective implementation is dependent on commitment of all stakeholders. From school leaders, teachers, learner and parents to the Department, NCCA, Teaching Council and Business and Industry.

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April 2019