



# LITERACY AND NUMERACY FOR LEARNING AND LIFE

**The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy  
among Children and Young people 2011-2020**



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy  
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## A NOTE FROM MINISTER RUAIRÍ QUINN, TD



Ruairí Quinn, TD  
Minister for  
Education and Skills

In July I launched *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* – the national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people. The strategy was developed following an extensive consultation process and I want to thank the many individuals, schools, groups and organisations that contributed to shaping this important document.

This leaflet gives you a flavour of the key parts of the Strategy and I hope it will encourage you to access the full document on the Department’s website.

I believe passionately that literacy and numeracy are among the most important life skills that our schools teach. Children should not 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. 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 the ambitious actions and 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 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**

## **THE STRATEGY IS FOR ALL OF US**

*Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* – the national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people – is a very important blueprint for how we will work to reform and improve the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy. The Strategy sets out a comprehensive set of targets and actions covering the teaching, learning and assessment of literacy and numeracy from early childhood to the end of schooling.

Over time, it will bring significant changes to areas such as teachers' professional development, the curriculum in primary and post-primary schools, the work of school management, the way we use assessment in literacy and numeracy, how schools report to parents, boards of management and the Department about student progress. The Strategy acknowledges that the education system alone cannot deliver better literacy and numeracy and it envisages a central role for parents and communities in supporting and encouraging children and young people to learn to use and understand literacy and numeracy in their lives.

## **ACCESS THE FULL VERSION OF THE STRATEGY**

This leaflet provides a short summary of key parts of the Strategy. The full text of the Strategy is available on the website of the Department ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)). You will also find submissions, many of them from schools,

and other documents arising from the consultation process that shaped the writing of the Strategy on the website.

## **HOW HAS THE STRATEGY BEEN DESIGNED?**

The development of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* was informed by an extensive consultation process. Following the publication of the Department's Draft Plan to improve literacy and numeracy in schools in November 2010, a public consultation process was launched. Almost 480 submissions were received and a series of face-to-face consultative meetings were held with key organisations. Many teachers and school staffs made submissions and several colleges and university education departments submitted extensive research-based documents to the consultation process.

All of the written submissions and a brief listing of any additional points raised at the face-to-face meetings are available on the website of the Department of Education and Skills.

Department officials also made school visits and consulted with officials and experts in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Educational Research Centre, Drumcondra, An Chomhairle Um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the Teaching Council.

## **KEY AREAS IN THE STRATEGY**

The Strategy addresses six key areas aimed at improving literacy and numeracy outcomes, these are:

- Enabling parents and communities to support children's literacy and numeracy development
- Improving teachers' and early childhood education and care practitioners' professional practice through changes to both pre-service and in-service education
- Building the capacity of school leadership to lead improvements in the teaching and assessment of literacy and numeracy in schools
- Getting the content of the curriculum for literacy and numeracy right at primary and post-primary levels by making sure that the curriculum is clear about what we expect students to learn at each stage
- Targeting available additional resources on learners with additional needs, including students from disadvantaged communities, students learning English as an additional language and students with special educational needs
- Improving how teachers, schools and the educational system use good assessment approaches to plan the next steps for each learner and monitor progress.

## **TARGETS IN THE STRATEGY**

The Strategy sets a series of targets for improving literacy and numeracy standards for the period 2011 to 2020. These are:

*Improve our attitudes to literacy and numeracy*

- 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 oral-language competence of very 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 percentage of primary children performing at Level 3 and Level 4 (the highest levels) in the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading by at least 5 percentage point at both second class and sixth class by 2020

- Reduce the percentage of children performing at or below Level 1 (minimum) 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 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 and Level 5 (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

### **ACTIONS WILL BE IMPLEMENTED OVER THE PERIOD 2011 TO 2020**

The actions in the Strategy will be implemented over its lifetime from 2011 to 2020. Many of the actions in the Strategy are long-term initiatives, the effect of which will not be seen for a good number of years, while others will have a more immediate effect. The Minister has stated that all the actions need to be tackled with a sense of urgency and commitment. Each of the actions in the Strategy has a timeline and clear lead responsibility for delivery is assigned.

Actions in the Strategy to support **parents and communities** include:

- Supporting a national information campaign to build up awareness of the important role that parents and communities can play in supporting literacy and numeracy learning
- Providing better information to parents to enable them to support their children's language, literacy and numeracy development



- Encouraging schools to work closely with parents and to support parents in helping their children's learning.

Actions in the Strategy to **improve teacher education** for pre-school, primary and post-primary teachers include:

- lengthening the BEd. degree programme for primary teachers to four years and the diploma for primary teaching to two years
- replacing 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
- lengthening the teacher education course for post-primary teaching to two years
- ensuring that modules on the teaching, learning and assessment in literacy and numeracy is a mandatory requirement for all primary and post-primary teacher education courses
- specific requirements that continuing professional development courses for teachers include mandatory units on literacy, numeracy and assessment
- improvements to education courses for staff working in pre-schools.

Actions in the Strategy to build the capacity of **school leadership** include:

- Improving principals' and deputy principals' understanding of the most effective approaches to improve the teaching of literacy and numeracy and the use of assessment
- Supporting principals and deputy principals in implementing robust school self-evaluation, focussing in particular on improvements in literacy and numeracy.

Actions in the Strategy on the **content of the curriculum** include:

- Revising the English (for all schools) and Irish curricula (for Irish-medium schools) in primary schools to show clearly what skills children are expected to learn at each stage; subsequently to revise the Irish curriculum for English-medium schools
- Revising the elements of the primary curriculum in infant classes to ensure consistency with the *Aistear* curriculum framework for pre-schools announced in 2009 and putting a greater emphasis on early language and numeracy development
- Increasing the amount of time spent on the teaching of literacy and numeracy in primary schools
- Prioritising the reform of the English and Irish curricula in the review of junior cycle to make sure literacy skills are prioritised

- Continuing the roll-out of Project Maths in post-primary schools
- Increasing the time available for the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills by capping the number of subjects a student may sit in junior certificate at eight and requiring that mathematics be taught for a minimum of five periods per week.

Actions in the Strategy to assist **learners with additional needs** include:

- Continuing to support enhanced literacy and numeracy provision for students from socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds
- Rebalancing the supports made available to support the literacy and numeracy learning needs of EAL (English as an Additional Language) students by increasing spending on continuing professional development for all staff and reducing teachers allocated to schools for EAL
- Continuing to support enhanced literacy and numeracy provision for students with special educational needs, including students of high ability.

Actions in the Strategy to improve the way in which schools **assess and report on students' progress** in literacy and numeracy include:

- Ensuring that the curriculum is presented in clear learning outcomes and supported by examples of students' learning

so as to enable teachers to use assessment to inform their teaching, i.e. use of assessment for learning (AfL)

- Requiring the use of standardised assessments in literacy and numeracy at end of second, fourth and sixth classes in primary schools and at the end of second year in post-primary schools
- Requiring all schools to use this and other assessment data as part of the self-evaluation process to inform the development of a school improvement plan (as required in the Programme for Government)
- Requiring teachers to report to parents and the board of management on the achievement of pupils
- Putting in place better arrangements for the transfer of pupil achievement data from pre-schools to primary schools and from primary to post-primary schools
- Collecting the aggregated outcomes of standardised tests nationally and using this information to monitor standards. It is not the intention to use this data for the creation of league tables
- Improving the evaluation of schools regarding literacy and numeracy (using both school self-evaluation and external inspection)
- Participating in international assessments that facilitate the benchmarking of Irish students' achievement with that of students in other countries.



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