An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

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 2017/18 and Subsequent Years

Circular 0032/2018

Sections 1 and 2 of this circular set out important information for schools regarding Standardised Testing returns in respect of the 2017/18 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.

1. **Standardised Testing in Primary Schools – Returns for 2017/2018**

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 2017/2018 standardised testing. These funds may be used to purchase test instruments and materials such as teachers' manuals, test scoring services or test-related software offered by test providers. Any funds remaining after the standardised testing costs have been met may be spent on diagnostic tests, in accordance with a school's needs.

During May and early June 2018, 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, 15th June 2018**.

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

Schools are reminded of their reporting obligations in Part 7 of Circular 0056/2011: Reporting and Using the Results of Assessments to Improve Pupil Learning. These include:
* Reporting to parents: Schools are reminded that they should issue a written report to their parents in sufficient time, before the closure of the school for the summer vacation, to allow parents a reasonable opportunity to seek meetings with the principal and/or teacher(s) to discuss the written report, if necessary;

- Using report card templates: All primary schools must use the standard report card template (available at www.ncca.ie) for reporting to parents on pupils' progress and achievement at school;
- Reporting, analysing and using assessment information at school level;
- Reporting information from standardised tests to their board of management;
- Transferring assessment data in instances when pupils move to a different school;
- Reporting standardised test results to the Department of Education and Skills – www.education.ie

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

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

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

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

APPROVER

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 literacynumeracy17/18@education.gov.ie.

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

IMPORTANT NOTE FOR INFANT SCHOOLS:
As infant schools have no pupils in second, fourth or sixth class, no return is required. If an infant school logs on to the system, the school will not be recognised by the system. If such a school is in doubt, please contact literacynumeracy17/18@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 is in effect from September 2017 with schools already receiving their allocation for 2017/18

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.

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

As indicated in Circular 45/2014, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has developed a suite of materials to support the reporting and transfer of pupil information from primary to post-primary schools. 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.

Education Passport Materials include

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

The Education Passport materials have been developed by the NCCA to support the dual purpose of reporting to parents and of transferring pupil information to post-primary schools once enrolment has been confirmed.

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

4. Primary Language Curriculum

From September 2018 onwards, all strands of the Primary Language Curriculum will be implemented for pupils in infants to second classes. Schools are being encouraged to use the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process to help teachers work through the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum. An additional planning day to assist the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum will be provided in the school year 2018-19. A separate notice will shortly be issued to schools in relation to this additional full-day school closure.

The Primary Language Curriculum applies in all school contexts—English-medium schools, Gaeltacht schools, Irish-medium schools and special schools.

The NCCA's work on the Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile for third to sixth class continues. A draft curriculum has been made available for consultation www.ncca.ie. The work of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's (NCCA) development group, in consultation with a network of primary schools, on the Primary Language Curriculum from third to sixth class (Stages 3 and Stage 4) is nearing completion. The Primary Language Curriculum from third to sixth class builds upon the junior infant to second class curriculum which was published in 2015. The components, strands and elements of language remain the same to support continuity and coherence in pupils' learning in Irish and in English. The Primary Language Curriculum from third to sixth class, which responds to feedback from the introduction of the curriculum from Junior infants to second class, extends the learning outcomes and the progression continua from Stage 1 and Stage 2 and continues to map out the progress that all children will make in their language learning, irrespective of age, class or abilities. The curriculum is designed to support all children in English-medium schools, Scoileanna Gaeltachta, Scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge and

special schools.   Informed by the consultation findings, the curriculum will be finalised by the end of 2018

The school year 2020-21 will see the full implementation of all strands of the Primary Language Curriculum from junior infants to sixth class. Its full implementation will then be incorporated into inspection processes.

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

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

In addition, the National Adult Literacy Agency 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, email Margaret Murray at mmurray@nala.ie.

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 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.

5. Primary Mathematics Curriculum

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) began developing the new Primary Mathematics Curriculum in September 2016. This curriculum is for all children and is underpinned by the view that every child is capable of engaging with mathematical concepts and ideas from birth. Initial work focused on junior infants to second class. Consultation on a draft of this part of the curriculum began in October 2017 and finished in mid-March 2018 and included the following:

- an online questionnaire generating 1,105 responses;
- consultation seminars in Limerick, Sligo and Dublin;
- written submissions;

- a network of nine primary schools working with the draft curriculum and providing feedback on its content and structure, as well as generating ideas around planning and support material.

Work has begun on the analysis of the data gathered through the consultation. This work will be presented in a consultation report which will be published on the NCCA website before the summer. The report will also set out next steps for work on the primary mathematics curriculum including work on the senior classes. Following the recent decision of the Department of Education and Skills for a single-stage implementation of the new primary mathematics curriculum, from junior infants to sixth class, the NCCA will publish the draft curriculum in late 2018 for consultation. This draft will incorporate work carried out on foot of findings from the recent consultation. The second consultation will again include work with a network of schools.

For further information including the extensive body of mathematics research which informed the development of the draft curriculum, see https://www.ncca.ie/en/primary/primary-developments/maths-curriculum#panel2.

6. Review and redevelopment of the primary curriculum

As part of the wider review and redevelopment of the primary curriculum, the NCCA held a consultation in 2017 on a set of proposals for rethinking the structure of the curriculum and how time is allocated within it. This consultation was the first time, in almost twenty years, that those working in primary education had an opportunity to consider the type of curriculum needed for children in the next decade and beyond. The report on the consultation is published at https://www.ncca.ie/media/3242/primary-developments_consultaion-on-curriculum-structure-and-time_final-report.pdf.

The report sets out findings across the consultation and describes the next phase of work which centres on a draft overview of a redeveloped curriculum—a new 'Introduction/Red Book'. As part of this, the NCCA is establishing a Schools' Forum which will generate and contribute to future directions for the redevelopment of the primary curriculum. This work recognises the central role and agency of schools in the curriculum development process. Schools are being nominated by management bodies, the INTO and IPPN, and through an open invitation at www.ncca.ie. Work on the draft overview is also informed by a suite of research papers on key aspects of a primary curriculum, and by a series of seminars. The first seminar, involving teachers and principals, took place on March 21st of this year, with subsequent seminars planned for May, October and November.

The above activity should help to signpost, more clearly, directions for a redeveloped curriculum, with 2019 bringing an opportunity for extensive consultation on those directions before moving ahead with work on the curriculum itself from late 2019.

7. **Public Libraries Support for Schools**

The establishment of a collaborative approach for the provision of educational support and leisure reading materials between schools and public libraries is an objective of the Public Library Strategy 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.

Membership of the public library is free and 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 www.librariesireland.ie/services-to-schools.

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

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

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

- Providing information for parents about the range of library resources and the activities available to support the development of their children's literacy and numeracy skills
- Providing 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, the national Summer Stars reading programme and the Children's Book Festival, all of which support the continuing development of children's literacy and numeracy skills (www.librariesireland.ie). The Spring into Storytime initiative runs during the month of April each year. 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.

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

The publication in January 2015 of the positive results of the National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics indicate that the overall targets at primary level, which were set out in the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy published in 2011, have been met.

In March 2017, the Minister launched the Report of an *Interim Review of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*, including new and updated targets. An Information Note for Primary and Post-Primary Schools is enclosed with this circular.

9. 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 a 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 a Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme. Under the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme, schools in Gaeltacht language-planning areas were invited to seek status as Gaeltacht Schools in line with specified language-based criteria aimed at strengthening Irish-medium educational provision in the Gaeltacht. Circulars 0021/2018 and 0033/2017 for primary schools and Circulars 0022/2018 and 0034/2017 for post-primary schools outlining the details of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme have recently issued to schools in Gaeltacht language-planning areas outline the 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 or 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, DO1 RC96.**

10. <u>Creative Ireland</u>

Creative Ireland is a culture-based programme designed to promote individual, community, and national wellbeing and is the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach.

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 culture at the centre of young people's lives, both inside and outside formal education. It recognises that arts and creativity can act as vehicles for learning which can be utilised to support the learning of other subjects and acknowledges the ongoing work in classrooms, and that the formal education system is vital in delivering the commitment in the Creative Ireland programme.

Recent announcements around Creative Schools and the 'Schools Excellence Fund – Creative Clusters' form part of the actions in the plan. Applications for Creative Schools closed on 22 March 2018 and schools will be notified of the outcome in the coming weeks. Applications for Creative Clusters will close on 11 May 2018.

In addition, under the plan, the "Teacher/Artist Partnership as a CPD model to Support and Enhance Arts Education" CPD course will be made available in the summer of 2018.

11. STEM Education Policy Statement 2017-2026 and Implementation Plan 2017-2019

The STEM Education Policy Statement 2017-2026 and Implementation Plan 2017-2019 were launched on 27 November 2017. There are many strengths in STEM education in Ireland but a number of challenges also exist. 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.

Phase 1: Implementation Plan

Phase 1 of implementation will focus on establishing what is necessary to provide a quality STEM education experience. The programme of work to be implemented in Phase 1 (2017-2019) will include

- STEM curricular reform and access to excellent resources in order to ensure that students leave school with the required STEM skills
- Support for principals and teachers to incorporate STEM into their whole-school planning activities
- Support for schools and teachers to work together on innovative and collaborative initiatives in STEM as part of a programme to improve the STEM learning environment and to implement successful initiatives
- Scoping out the partnership with STEM business and industry and the education sector
- Support effective and engaging STEM teaching in all schools through a quality assured programme of professional learning for teachers and school leaders
- The Department's Inspectorate will continue to evolve models of inspection to support, build capacity and monitor the quality of STEM education from early-years to post-primary level
- Development of actions to promote and support increased participation in co-curricular and out-of-school STEM learning opportunities
- Teachers and early years practitioners will use a cross-disciplinary approach in and across the four STEM disciplines

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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