Assessment

Pupil Assessment

Assessment in primary school is viewed as building a picture over time of a child’s learning progress across the curriculum and is posited as an integral part of teaching and learning. Each classroom teacher is responsible for the ongoing assessment of his/her own pupils’ progress and achievement. Teachers are advised to use a variety of assessment methods to support them in assessing pupils’ learning and in making decisions about their future learning.

The purpose of assessment in primary schools is to provide information on the performance of a child at a point in time (e.g. testing) or over the school year (report card template). The results are used to plan on-going learning and whole school evaluation. Achievement at a particular level is not a prerequisite for advancement to the next class. Apart from external testing by the Educational Research Centre [1] (ERC), assessment is undertaken by the class teacher and/or learning support/resource teacher.

Data from assessment can be used by teachers and schools to identify priorities for development including changes they may wish to make in teaching approaches, priorities for staff development and for the acquisition of resources. Assessment information can also be used as part of the monitoring of the effectiveness or otherwise of the initiatives put in place to improve students’ learning.

Guidelines for assessment, Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools [2], were developed by the NCCA in 2007 to support teachers’ knowledge and understanding of assessment, and to assist schools in developing and implementing an assessment policy. The guidelines provide examples of how teachers gather information about children’s progress and achievement, use this information to enrich teaching and learning, and report this information to all those concerned with children’s education. Building on the experiences of teachers, principals, parents and children of the Primary School Curriculum 1999 [3], a range of methods that teachers could use in assessing children’s learning and descriptions of how teachers could use these methods to support children’s learning, and their own teaching are outlined as part of daily classroom practice.

Two approaches to assessment are presented: Assessment for Learning (AFL) and Assessment of Learning (AoL). These approaches build on the four purposes of assessment that are outlined in the Primary School Curriculum (1999) - formative, summative, evaluative and diagnostic.

Assessment for Learning takes place when the teacher shares information about the child’s learning with the child and when the teacher uses this information to plan the next steps in their teaching and in the pupil’s learning. Assessment of Learning is used to provide a summary of what the student has
achieved at fixed points, such as at the end of a period of study, or when a unit of work is completed, or at the end of an academic year. It is recommended that schools should use a balanced combination of both practices. Information from assessment of learning can be used to report to others, such as parents and other teachers.

**Standardised testing**

As part of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, since 2012, English-medium schools have been required to implement standardised testing in English reading and Mathematics during the period May/June for all students in 2nd, 4th and 6th classes and to report the results to parents at the end of the year. Irish-medium schools are also required to implement standardised tests in Irish reading and Mathematics to students in 2nd, 4th and 6th classes. The tests are normed for the Irish population. The aggregate results are reported to the school board of management and are used for school self-evaluation and ongoing planning. These tests are administered at school level.

Since 2012, schools have also been required to report aggregate standardised test results to the Department of Education and Skills. This data is being used to inform national educational policy for literacy and numeracy, and identify ways of improving the performance of the school system.

**National testing**

Ireland has had a long history of engagement in national assessments of reading, since 1972, and mathematics, since 1977, in primary schools. As part of the Education Research Centre’s ([www.erc.ie](http://www.erc.ie)) work in monitoring the outcomes of education, it carries out national surveys of achievement at primary level on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills. These tests are externally administered on behalf of the ERC. The most recent study is the [National Assessment of Maths and English Reading](http://www.erc.ie) carried out in 2014.

**International Assessment**

Ireland participated in the Progress in International Reading Study (PIRLS) of 4th class pupils in 2011 (results at [http://www.erc.ie](http://www.erc.ie)) and again in 2016. Ireland also participated in Trends in Mathematical and Science Study in 2015. This assessed the performance of students in 4th class in primary school and 2nd year in post primary school. The results are set out in [TIMSS 2015: Initial Report Ireland](http://www.erc.ie) published in November 2016.

**Reporting to Parents and Transfer of Information to Second level schools**

In accordance with the Education Act (1998), schools are required to create and maintain individual records of children’s learning while they are attending primary school. Schools normally maintain three records: individual teachers’ day-to-day records, a pupil file and a report card for each pupil. Data protection legislation has established parents’ rights to regular information on the progress and achievement of their children. The vast majority of schools hold formal parent-teacher meetings to discuss individual pupils’ progress and to share important information. Informal exchanges of information are also facilitated through notes in a pupil’s homework journal or through appointments before, during or after the school day. Schools also provide reports (normally in writing) to parents at least once in the academic year.

With effect from 2012 all primary schools are required to report to parents on their children's progress at least twice during each school year. One of these must be a written report. Report Card Templates have been developed by the NCCA for this purpose at primary level. In addition, the NCCA has developed an end of year 6th class report card for the dual purpose of reporting to parents and
transferring information to the child's post primary school. This information has been standardised as an Educational Passport by the NCCA for use with effect from 2014/15. Information is transferred only after the post primary school has confirmed enrolment. Schools may not use educational performance as a criterion for admission to second level school.

Legislation also requires schools to report assessment information when requested to other teachers, other schools and the children themselves, where appropriate. Schools are also obliged to share assessment information with other individuals who are involved in the child's education such as Department of Education and Skills inspectors and psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service.

The purpose of assessment in primary schools is to provide information on the performance of a child at a point in time (e.g testing) or over the school year (report card template). The results are used to plan on going learning and whole school evaluation. Achievement at a particular level is not a pre-requisite for advancement to the next class. Apart from external testing by the Educational Research Centre, assessment is undertaken by the class teacher. Aggregate results of standardised testing are reported to the Principal, the school board of management and the Department of Education and Skills. 6th class assessment information is included on the Educational Passport which is transferred to the post primary school once a child has been accepted for enrolment. No State funded school may use academic performance as an entry criterion.

In addition to the above, all schools are required to undertake School Self Evaluations in accordance with guidelines developed by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills, and report the results to the board of management.

The Inspectorate of the Department also undertakes whole-school evaluations and thematic and subject inspections on the performance of schools. Inspection reports are published on the Department’s website.

Progression of Pupils

The Primary School Curriculum (1999) is designed as an eight-year course with pupils normally progressing to the next grade at the end of each school year. To enable pupils with learning difficulties to move consecutively through the different class levels with their peers, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) provides considerable support including learning support and resource teaching together with various schemes for schools in areas designated as disadvantaged (DEIS). Under the DES policy (Primary Circular 32/03), children should only be allowed to repeat a year for educational reasons and in exceptional circumstances. In such exceptional circumstances, a principal teacher, following consultation with the learning support teacher/resource teacher, class teacher and parent(s), may conclude that a pupil would benefit educationally by repeating a grade level. The school must retain a record outlining the educational basis for the decision to retain a child, and should also provide a clear learning programme and its expected benefit. Parental consent is required in any decisions regarding repeat learning. Whilst grades may be repeated at any stage, the largest number who repeat tend to be in the infant classes. The DES policy stipulates that no pupil should repeat a grade more than once in a primary school. 1785 students (0.3% of all students) in primary schools were retained in the same class in 2015/16, rather than progressing to the next class.

Certification

There is no formal examination at the end of primary education and no formal certification is provided. Transfer to secondary education takes place on completion of primary education, usually at age twelve. The Education Passport developed by the NCCA is used to provide information for post
primary schools in respect of 6th class pupils, once they have been accepted for enrolment. This is used for assignment to class groups and to inform ongoing learning. It may not be used as an entry criterion.

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