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To Boards of Management, Principal Teachers and Teaching Staff of Post-Primary Schools

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL LITERACY AND NUMERACY STRATEGY

1. The National Strategy

Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, 2011 - 2020 was launched on 8 July 2011. This letter serves to draw the attention of boards of management, principal teachers and teachers to the publication of the Strategy.

A copy of the Strategy is available for download on the Department's website, www.education.ie. A printed summary of the key measures in the Strategy in booklet form is attached as indicated in Circular 0058/2011.

Literacy and numeracy are among the most important skills taught in our schools. They are fundamental to a person's ability to succeed in education, to gain fulfilling employment and to lead a satisfying and rewarding life. Advances in communication systems demand ever-increasing competence in literacy and numeracy and emphasise the important roles that schools, teachers and parents play in fully developing these skills.

The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011-2020 seeks to enhance achievement in literacy and numeracy in our primary and post-primary schools. The Strategy includes a number of recommendations in relation to the curriculum, building the capacity of school leaders, enhancing teaching skills through the provision of continuing professional development, strengthening and extending the duration of initial teacher education, and promoting a greater awareness among parents and the community of the importance of literacy and numeracy and their role in relation to literacy and numeracy. These recommendations are being implemented over time.

2. Implications for Post-Primary Schools

The promotion of an integrated, whole-school approach to literacy and numeracy is critical at post-primary level. The Strategy provides that "*Literacy and numeracy activity can become contextualised, meaningful and purposeful to the learner through*

many subjects and areas of learning.” In that context, strengthening skills in this area is a task for **all** teachers, not just teachers of language or mathematics.

Some of the main actions contained in the Strategy to improve the curriculum and learning experience at post-primary level, to help students with additional learning needs to achieve their potential in literacy and numeracy, and to improve assessment and evaluation to support better learning in literacy and numeracy, are already being implemented, or will be implemented shortly. These include:

- syllabus reform beginning with the revision of Junior Certificate English and Irish syllabuses
- continuation of the roll-out of Project Maths including the provision of a comprehensive programme of professional development
- continuing professional development for all teachers with a focus on literacy and numeracy and the use of assessment
- continuing to support enhanced literacy and numeracy provision for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and for students with additional educational needs, including students with special educational needs, students of exceptional ability and migrants whose first language is not the language of the school
- using self-evaluation approaches for whole school development planning

The Minister seeks the co-operation of school management, principals and teachers in the implementation of the above and other actions in the Strategy. These actions will continue to be implemented over time and further information on specific measures required of post-primary schools will be issued.

3. Standardised Testing

The Strategy provides for standardised testing for students in second year in post-primary schools in English reading and mathematics in all schools and, in addition, in Irish reading in Irish-medium schools. Funding will be provided to schools to assist with the testing.

Development of the tests is currently being progressed and further information will issue in due course. It is expected that the tests will be introduced in 2014.

4. Other Testing

In line with the Strategy, all post-primary schools are required to co-operate, when requested, with all national and international surveys approved or commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills.

Participation in international surveys such as, for example, PISA (the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment) enables the achievement of students in reading literacy, mathematics and science to be benchmarked against international standards.

5. Reporting of Student Progress by Primary Schools to Post-Primary Schools

It is important that assessment information is transferred between schools especially when students transfer from primary to post-primary school. This ensures continuity and progression of learning for students. At primary level, students take standardised tests in 2nd, 4th and 6th classes.

Legislative arrangements have been made to provide for the sharing of information on progress, including the results of standardised tests, where students transfer from one school to another. The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 (Section 28) and the (Prescribed Bodies) Regulations 2005 allow schools to share relevant information concerning a child transferring between recognised schools without breaching data protection law.

With effect from the date of this circular:

- Each post-primary principal is responsible for informing the principal of each primary school of the names of students for whom enrolment in his or her post-primary school has been confirmed.
- Upon receipt of this information, the principal of each primary school is required (Circular 0056/2011) to send a copy of the end-of-year report card (including the information from standardised tests at sixth class in primary school) to the post-primary school to which a student is transferring. Reporting templates have been developed for this purpose by the NCCA and can be viewed at www.ncca.ie.
- The primary principal should transfer the report for the student by the end of the first week of September at the latest.

6. Time for Literacy and Numeracy

Junior Cycle

Junior Cycle reform proposals have been published and discussions on their implementation are beginning. The proposals are designed to enable schools to provide additional time to support literacy and numeracy as well as making time and space for the embedding of key skills, active learning, compiling portfolios, and ensuring that students acquire and consolidate the skills they need for their future learning throughout life.

Further guidance will be provided to schools to enable them to make the transition to the revised junior cycle programme. If schools are in a position to begin the transition with the cohort of students enrolling in 2013, they are encouraged to so.

Across the Curriculum

Literacy and numeracy are cross-curricular skills and they can be supported across the curriculum. There is particular scope to address literacy and numeracy in the context of instruction in the language of the school and in Mathematics

Mathematics

As you will be aware, the recent circular on mathematics (0058/2011) asked schools to make every effort to ensure that students have access to a mathematics lesson every day, particularly in junior cycle, from the earliest possible date; that mathematics be strengthened in Transition Year, where available; and that every effort should be made, insofar as is possible, to deploy teachers who hold a qualification in mathematics to mathematics teaching. This is particularly important in the formative years of junior cycle.

English and Irish

Similarly, students should have access to an English lesson every day, particularly in junior cycle, from the earliest possible date. In addition, students in Irish-medium schools should have access to an Irish lesson every day.

7. Continuing Professional Development

Supports for schools and teachers are already being made available through enhanced provision for Continuing Professional Development (CPD). In this context, a key focus of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) in the coming years will be to support post-primary schools (both English and Irish-medium) in driving improvement of literacy and numeracy outcomes.

The PDST will communicate with schools, in collaboration with the national Education Centre network, to inform them of upcoming CPD opportunities. Full day seminars on the literacy and numeracy Strategy have already been provided to school leaders. In 2012/13, CPD on School Self-Evaluation will be offered to all schools. In addition, a seminar will be provided for a 'link' teacher for literacy or numeracy from each post-primary school. To register for link teacher seminars or for further CPD information, see www.pdst.ie.

The PDST will also facilitate requests for in-school/whole-school CPD, where possible.

Participation in summer courses will also constitute part of the range of professional development opportunities available to all teachers. Course providers will continue to be encouraged to submit summer course applications for post-primary teachers, including courses related to literacy and numeracy themes.

The National Induction Programme for Teachers will carefully tailor supports to the professional needs of newly qualified teachers in the post-primary sector by building on their learning at initial teacher education stage. This is particularly important at

post-primary level where teachers qualify as subject specialists but all must support their students to maximise their proficiency in literacy and numeracy as well as in content-specific knowledge and skills. Website support, workshops and school-based support will be available in a range of areas including literacy, numeracy and assessment.

This Department recently put in place a Professional Diploma in Mathematics for Teaching, which is aimed at ‘out-of-field’ teachers of Mathematics at post-primary level. It covers mathematical content and knowledge, and teaching and learning strategies/approaches relevant to the Project Maths syllabi, which are being rolled out in schools. The course will be available nationwide free of charge, with specific provision for teachers in Irish-medium schools. It will be accredited jointly by the University of Limerick and National University of Ireland Galway through their strategic alliance, and the National Centre for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching and Learning will be responsible for all aspects of course design, delivery and administration. The course will commence this autumn and there is capacity for 390 teachers. All queries on eligibility or on applications should be made through the University of Limerick.

The Department strongly encourages principals and teachers to avail of all relevant CPD opportunities including those offered by the PDST, other support services and education centres and through the Professional Diploma in Mathematics for Teaching.

8. School self-evaluation and Literacy and Numeracy

The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy also provides for the introduction of school self-evaluation to support school improvement. Further details and guidance regarding school self-evaluation will be issued to schools early in the school year 2012-13. This information will include details of the supports that will be provided to schools to assist in the implementation of school self-evaluation.

During the implementation of school self-evaluation, schools will be asked to prioritise the review and improvement of literacy and numeracy so that the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and the introduction of school self-evaluation will complement each other.

9. Circulation

Please bring this letter and enclosure to the attention of your principal, teachers and members of the school board of management.

**Breda Naughton
Principal Officer
June 2012**