



**Circular Number 0018/2021**

**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 2020/21 and Subsequent Years**

**Sections 1 and 2 of this circular set out important information for schools regarding Standardised Testing returns in respect of the 2020/21 academic year. Sections 3 to 13 provide updates on a number of curriculum and other matters which are relevant to primary schools and special schools.**

**Contents:**

1.	Standardised Testing in Primary Schools – Returns for 2020/21.....	2
2.	National and International Testing .....	5
3.	Special Education .....	6
4.	Transitions.....	7
5.	Primary Curriculum Developments .....	8
6.	Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Supports .....	11
7.	Continuing Professional Development on Assessment.....	11
8.	Supporting Literacy and Numeracy.....	12
9.	Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017–2022 – Gaeltacht Areas.....	13
10.	STEM Education Policy Statement 2017–2026.....	14
11.	Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2025 .....	14
12.	Public Libraries Support for Schools.....	15
13.	Literacy Support for Parents - NALA.....	17



## **1. Standardised Testing in Primary Schools – Returns for 2020/21**

Thank you for your continued co-operation in providing the results of your standardised testing via the Esinet online system. Standardised Tests are only one of a number of assessment tools that can be used to inform teaching and learning in primary schools. We fully acknowledge the work of school staff in this regard.

While standardised tests were not administered during the 2019/20 school year due to school closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, these tests should be administered as normal for the 2020/21 school year. The results can help schools to evaluate progress in literacy and numeracy, can help to pinpoint areas for improvement and will support teachers in ensuring that literacy numeracy learning experiences meet pupils' needs. The Department acknowledges that the school closures have had a significant impact on teaching and learning, which may be reflected in the standardised test results for primary schools this year. In the interpretation of results, teachers should bear in mind the impact that the school closures may have on pupils' test scores. Results should be communicated carefully to parents and explained in that context. Results of any one standardised test should not be used in isolation, nor used as baseline data for predicting future achievements, nor for solely informing decisions regarding the provision of interventions or targets within learning plans for pupils. Information from ability tests, teacher observations, parental reports, as well as the views of the pupils are also very important aspects of a thorough assessment.

You will shortly receive funding in respect of 2020/21 standardised testing. These funds should be used to purchase test instruments and materials such as teachers' manuals, test scoring services or test-related software offered by test providers. Tests are available as follows:

- The Educational Research Centre provides standardised tests in both paper and online formats, 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 Lán-Ghaeilge. Information on these tests is as [www.tests.erc.ie](http://www.tests.erc.ie)

The ERC's redeveloped online assessment platform, ERC DOTS (*Drumcondra Online Testing System*), will be live from mid-April 2021. Tests can be purchased online on the new system and administered immediately. Users of the previous online testing platform will have access to their old accounts and to any test credits they had which are carried over to the new ERC DOTS. Please address queries on the ERC's DOTS system to [dots@erc.ie](mailto:dots@erc.ie), and queries on the ERC's paper-based tests to [tests@erc.ie](mailto:tests@erc.ie).



- Mary Immaculate College provides paper-based MICRA-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](http://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. In order to gain the most useful data from diagnostic and screening tests, schools should only use these tests when teachers are satisfied that the pupils in question have settled back into learning after the period of school closure.

During May/early June 2021 the tests should be carried out, in accordance with circulars 0056/2011 and 0018/2012, available at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie). **The results of these tests must be uploaded onto the Esinet portal on or before Wednesday 23rd June 2021**

**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](http://www.ncca.ie) for more information.

In order to enter and approve the data please log on to the Esinet portal, click on 'School Data Collection', and then 'Literacy and Numeracy, read the instructions before clicking 'Continue'. It is particularly important that all schools, including special or infant schools without a second class, read and follow the directions in the step-by-step guide to uploading the returns on the Department's website <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/af92e8-standardised-testing-in-primary-schools/>

### **Reporting and Using the Results of Assessments to Improve Pupil Learning**

Schools are reminded of their reporting obligations as per Part 7 of Circular 0056/2011. These include:

- Reporting to parents: Schools are reminded that they should issue a written report, explaining the results to 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 teacher(s) and/or principal to discuss the written report, if necessary. Information for parents on understanding standardised test scores can be found on the [ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie), [https://www.ncca.ie/media/1429/understanding-standardscores\\_eng.pdf](https://www.ncca.ie/media/1429/understanding-standardscores_eng.pdf)  
Using report card templates: All primary schools must use the standard report card template (available at [www.ncca.ie](http://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 via Esinet portal

Additional information for the 2020/21 school year:

- As per guidance issued in May 2020<sup>1</sup>, parents should be provided with a summary of their children's learning progress and achievement as normal, despite the transition for pupils to remote learning and back to face-to-face teaching and learning. Reports provided should also consider the child's remote learning experiences, although due to a range of circumstances, the engagement of some pupils with the teacher may have been limited. This should not be reflected negatively in the report.
- In light of the school closure period as a result of COVID-19 during the 2020/21 school year, schools should report on the number of days attended out of the number of school days that the school was open. This approach could be explained in a cover letter to parents which accompanies the report.

### Update to Report Card Creator

Building on feedback from schools in the last school year, the *Report Card Creator*, used to support schools in reporting on children's progress, has been adjusted in response to the impact of COVID-19 and extended periods of remote learning during this school year. As you create the 2020/2021 report card helpful prompts will support the inclusion of comments related to children's progress in school and their engagement with remote learning. When providing feedback on children's progress you might consider the following:

- *Your child as a learner* – it may be helpful to acknowledge the child's engagement in remote learning and the support they received from parents/guardians
- *Your child's social and personal development* – it may be helpful to comment on how the child has settled back into school following the period of remote learning
- *Your child's learning during the year* – it may be helpful to extend the comment boxes in this section of the report card template to provide a description of learning across the curriculum areas during this exceptional school year

---

<sup>1</sup> Guidance on Continuity of Schooling – for Primary Schools (DE, May 2020) available here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/cee11-guidance-on-continuity-of-schooling-for-primary-schools/>



- *How you can further support your child's learning* – it may be helpful to acknowledge the efforts of parents/guardians to support learning at home during school closures and provide suggestions in this context.

You can access the Report Card Creator here: <https://ncca.ie/en/primary/reporting-and-transfer/report-card-templatescreator/>

## **2. National and International Testing**

As per Circular 0056/2011

(<https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/fb6452652f1d496996393ffef32b0c4c/>), the Department is requesting that schools do their utmost to participate in large-scale assessments conducted by the ERC. The Department and the ERC greatly appreciate schools' continued participation in these studies

### **NAMER 2021 – National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading**

The national assessments are an important means to monitor and understand progress and standards in reading and mathematics. NAMER 2021 allows, for the first time, a detailed description of the achievements and contexts of children in urban DEIS schools in comparison to their non-DEIS peers.

NAMER was scheduled for spring 2020, but has been adapted and rescheduled for May 2021. The 194 primary schools invited to take part in NAMER were contacted in 2020, and again in 2021. These schools are being asked to choose dates during the first half of May for administering the surveys and tests. The Department is advising schools that NAMER should be administered before the school administers its annual standardised tests.

If you are a school selected to take part in NAMER 2021, and have any questions or concerns, please contact the NAMER team at [namer2020@erc.ie](mailto:namer2020@erc.ie).

### **PIRLS 2021 – Progress in International Reading Literacy Study**

PIRLS 2021, allows Ireland to benchmark reading literacy standards internationally and describe progress over time, since PIRLS takes place every five years.

In Ireland, 148 primary schools have been invited to take part. Testing has been moved to autumn 2021. ERC will contact each of the schools to advise when in the autumn the testing should be completed.

If you are a school selected to take part in PIRLS 2021, and have any questions or concerns, please contact the PIRLS team at [pirls@erc.ie](mailto:pirls@erc.ie).



### **3. Special Education**

Schools will be aware that the Department of Education 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 for schools were updated in 2019 and are designed to be updated in future, at regular intervals, every two to three years.

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. 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. For future revisions of the Special Education Teacher model an aggregate of the most recent number of years standardised test data will continue to be used to develop school profiles, with the exclusion of the 2019/2020 school year data.

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 2020/21, and into the future (whether tests are paper-based or computer-based), this will not negatively impact a school's allocation.

#### **Additional information for the 2020/21 school year:**

Due to the school closures during the 2020/21 school year, *Continuum of Support* plans for individual pupils with special educational needs may not have been reviewed in the usual manner. Schools should prioritise an up-to-date review of all support plans as soon as possible after schools re-open to ascertain any gaps in learning and to inform a relevant learning plan for term three. This should be reviewed in collaboration with the relevant school staff, parents/guardians and the pupils themselves, where appropriate.



## 4. Transitions

### Pre-school to Primary school

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 or the transfer of information about the progress and achievement of pupils between all state-funded preschools<sup>2</sup> and primary schools. The templates and an accompanying set of support materials are available at [www.ncca.ie/en/early-childhood/mo-scéal](http://www.ncca.ie/en/early-childhood/mo-scéal). 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.

### Primary school to Post Primary school

The successful transfer of sixth class pupils to post-primary education in 2021 will require ongoing, collaboration and careful planning between primary schools and post-primary schools. This may happen at a local level through transition programmes, open days/nights, including on-line events and meetings between teachers and families as well as through the transfer of key information to the post-primary schools. The NEPS Continuum of Support and the Home School Liaison Officers in DEIS schools can also be utilised to support the transition of pupils. Communication between the primary and post-primary schools and with the parents and pupils is of utmost importance in order to ensure progression is as seamless as possible. Sharing information about pupils' learning is a key way of supporting their transition from primary to post-primary school.

Since 2014/15, schools are required to use the Education Passport materials to support the reporting and transfer of pupil information at the end of sixth class. 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. All materials supporting this process are available at [www.ncca.ie/transfer](http://www.ncca.ie/transfer).

The transfer of children in need of additional support can be facilitated through the NEPS Student Transfer Form which should be completed and signed by parents before sending to the relevant post-primary school. To ensure the allocation of specialised resources, such as special needs assistants, assistive technology or school transport, in a timely manner NCSE application deadlines should be considered. All materials supporting this process are available at:

---

<sup>2</sup> The preschools are participating in the state funded Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme providing two years of free preschool.



<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/84e52e-national-educational-psychological-service-neps-guidelines-tips-and-/#transfer-from-primary-to-post-primary>

### **Transitions within primary schools**

The Primary School curriculum is designed as an eight year course, including a two year infant cycle followed by six years in standards from first to sixth, with children progressing to the next grade at the end of each school year. In line with the Department's policy (Circular 0032/2003), children should only be allowed to repeat a year for educational reasons in exceptional circumstances. While the school closures during the 2020/21 school year were challenging for many pupils, it is not envisaged that pupils should be retained in the same grade for another year as a result of the impact of COVID-19. The primary curriculum is flexible and child-centred, and can be adapted to meet children's' needs. Class teachers and support teachers, where relevant, should facilitate sharing of appropriate information to ensure transitions to a new class level are as seamless as possible

## **5. Primary Curriculum Developments**

### **Draft Primary Curriculum Framework**

The NCCA published the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* for consultation in February 2020. Drawing on work with the Schools Forum<sup>3</sup>, research, and work with education partners and wider stakeholders, the draft framework sets out proposals for the redevelopment of the primary curriculum. The impact of COVID-19 required changes to the consultation timeline with a revised two-phased approach agreed upon and put in place. Phase one closed at the end of January 2021 with the intention that phase two will run from September – December 2021, concentrating on re-engagement with teachers, school leaders, parents and children.

During phase two, schools will have opportunities to contribute through:

- focus groups
- an online questionnaire
- written submissions
- consultation materials for school-based workshops.

In addition, the NCCA has commissioned a consultation with children which will take place in the next school year and ensure that children's voices are central to the finalisation of the draft framework. You can access the framework and details of the consultation at

---

<sup>3</sup> The NCCA established a Schools Forum consisting of 43 primary schools, post-primary schools and preschools to support and shape the review and redevelopment of the primary curriculum. This has now been extended to 60 schools and together, these represent the rich diversity of school contexts in Ireland





<https://ncca.ie/en/primary/primary-developments/consultation-on-the-draft-primary-curriculum-framework/>

Feedback from teachers, school leaders, parents and children during the consultation in autumn 2021 will play an important role in finalising the details within the *Primary Curriculum Framework*. Upon completion in 2022, this framework will then guide the NCCA's work in developing a specification for each curriculum area. A timeline for the introduction of the redeveloped curriculum will be set out by the Department of Education.

The NCCA will disseminate updates on the consultation through e-bulletins and [info@ncca.ie](mailto:info@ncca.ie). You can sign up for these here: <https://ncca.us18.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=3fd7ed695f4522f76fba99bcf&id=9e0cee1c22>

### **New Primary Mathematics Curriculum**

The new Primary Mathematics Curriculum for stages 1–4 (junior infants to sixth class) is being developed by the NCCA. This work draws on consultation findings (NCCA, 2018), work with schools, and research. Recently, a series of five short research papers focusing on mathematical teaching and learning in the senior classes of primary school have been published. Covering the five key mathematical areas of Algebra, Data and Chance, Number, Measures, and Shape and Space, these papers add to the research base that supports the development of the new primary maths curriculum. They can be accessed on NCCA's website at: <https://ncca.ie/en/primary/primary-developments/maths-curriculum>.

Like the *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile*, the new mathematics curriculum will use learning outcomes to describe children's mathematical learning at the end of a period of time. Support materials are being developed to aid teachers in working with the new *Primary Mathematics Curriculum* when it is published. Further work on the draft will take account of findings from the consultation on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*.

### **Primary Language Supports**

The *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* for stages 1–4 (junior infants to sixth class) was published in September 2019.

The curriculum is supported by an online *Primary Language Toolkit/Uirlisí Úsáide Teanga na Bunscoile*. The toolkit has recently been updated and now includes additional Support Information, related to the *Examples of Children's Learning/Samplaí d'Fhoghlaim Teanga na bPáistí*, and which include detail on the classroom context presented in the Examples, as well as the choices made by the teacher in preparing, teaching and assessing children's learning. These might be particularly useful as



teachers engage with the curriculum at a whole-school level. The toolkit also presents newly developed *Support Materials for teachers/Ábhar Tacaíochta do Mhúinteoirí* supporting Irish in English-medium school, Digital Literacy, and Linguistic Diversity through the curriculum. The design of the *Progression Continua/Contanaim Dul chun Cinn* has also been updated to support teachers as they work with the learning outcomes of the curriculum. You can access the online curriculum and toolkit by visiting [www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Primary-Language/](http://www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Primary-Language/).

In [\*Returning to School: Curriculum Guidance for primary school leaders and teachers \(July 2020\)\*](#), Section 5.4 Primary Language Curriculum /Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile (PLC/CTB) outlined a comprehensive programme of support for the implementation of the PLC/CTB which began in the 2019/20 school year. This included a whole-staff seminar for all schools and two webinars which were released in January 2020 (PLC webinar 1) and May 2020 (PLC webinar 2) respectively. However, some schools did not have the opportunity to engage with PLC webinar 2 during the school closure period. In addition, sustained support for the first cohort of schools began in January 2020 but could not be continued due to the school closure periods. In recognition of the work involved in re-engaging pupils following the re-opening of schools, no school closures were sanctioned for Term 1 of the 2020/21 school year.

Revised plans for sustained support are being drawn up at present and will be communicated to schools by the Department.

### **Guidance on Preparation for Teaching and Learning**

Since the launch of the *Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* in 2019, teachers and school leaders have been planning with both content objectives from the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) along with broad learning outcomes from the new Languages Curriculum.

To support all primary school and special school teachers in their preparation for teaching and learning, guidance has been developed through a collaboration led by the Department of Education and involving the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the National Council for Special Education, and the Professional Development Service for Teachers.

This guidance describes a renewed understanding of ‘preparation for teaching and learning’. It presents preparation as a process involving three aspects – invisible, visible, and recorded preparation. It also provides details on ‘key pillars’ that support preparation including; knowledge of the children, knowledge of the curriculum, and knowledge of pedagogy. Importantly, it provides clarity on how to demonstrate preparation to school leaders and during moments of inspection. Within the guidance document there are also statements on ‘what may be helpful to consider’ and ‘what



may be helpful to avoid' during preparation for teaching and learning, as well as links to support materials.

The Guidance will be launched on 27 April of this school year during an Information Event hosted by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. A recording of the event will be available to access here: [www.ncca.ie/en/primary/curriculum-planning/](http://www.ncca.ie/en/primary/curriculum-planning/).

## **6. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Supports**

During the *Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) across Primary and Post-primary Schools* teachers requested greater guidance on the teaching of RSE across the primary years. In response, a toolkit is being developed to support teachers working with RSE as an aspect of *Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)*.

The NCCA has published a resource portal which provides a single access point for freely available materials developed by Irish state agencies and organisations with expertise in SPHE/RSE. The portal is organised by class level and linked directly to the SPHE Curriculum ensuring age-appropriate material is available for all primary schools.

The SPHE/RSE Toolkit and resource portal will be added to over time and you can access all available materials here: [www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Social,-Personal-and-Health-Education/SPHE-RSE-Toolkit/](http://www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Social,-Personal-and-Health-Education/SPHE-RSE-Toolkit/)

## **7. Continuing Professional Development on Assessment**

At present, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) incorporates assessment, both summative and formative, in all aspects of Continuous Professional Development (CPD), given that assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning. Assessment as a central component of circular and pedagogical practice , features in PDST CPD provision during seminars, workshops, webinars and in particular within the context of school based support, where the PDST can work with teachers in exploring how standardised test results can meaningfully inform future teaching and learning in classrooms. With regard to the particular school context, the School Self Evaluation (SSE) process/ DEIS action planning, where relevant, is central to PDST's facilitation of professional reflection and dialogue in this regard given the inextricable link between school improvement and assessment.

- More information on the CPD available can be found at: <https://pdst.ie/primary>



- The NCCA Assessment Guidelines (2007) were developed to support teachers and assist schools in the development of assessment policy, it can be found online here: <https://www.ncca.ie/media/1351/assessment-guidelines.pdf>

## **8. Supporting Literacy and Numeracy**

The Department of Education is committed to raising standards in literacy and numeracy in early years, primary and post primary settings. In 2011 the Department published the Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020. The Interim review of the strategy was published in 2017 with updated and new targets for literacy and numeracy, identifying the priority areas of numeracy, literacy and DEIS.

Work has commenced on the development of a follow on Literacy and Numeracy strategy.

### **Resources**

To support the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, the following resources have been developed by the Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS):

- **The Balanced Approach to Literacy Development in the Early Years (English & Gaeilge)**  
The Balanced Approach to Literacy Development in the Early Years draws on international research, evidence based practice and samples of that practice in Irish primary schools to give a coherent and comprehensive guide to teachers. This is a resource that can be used by class teachers working with children from Junior Infants to First Class. It may also be helpful to schools who have identified the need to improve reading standards as part of the school-self-evaluation process.  
<https://assets.gov.ie/40640/dab7f9cd97a84c1db2990023c5de2445.pdf>
- **Cur Chuige Cothromaithe i leith Fhorbairt na Litearthachta i mBunranganna na Bunscoile** is the product of a collaborative project undertaken by NEPS along with An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta (COGG). This resource is not just a translation of a previously existing English resource, but a resource that is wholly tailored to the teaching of literacy in the Irish language, with a focus of those children who receive their education through the medium of Irish. It is freely available on the DES website and includes 16 short video clips of good practice in action.  
<https://assets.gov.ie/40640/e61aa5badf2f4d8bacf6bbf65c7cd4ac.pdf>
- **Effective Interventions for Struggling Readers**  
This on-line resource is now in its second edition (2019). It is a guide for teachers, particularly special education teachers, which outlines evidence-



based approaches to teaching reading to struggling readers. The guide covers the age range 6 to 18 years. It encompasses all students with reading difficulties. It includes:

- How best to organise learning support for struggling readers
- Information about interventions that have been found to be effective in Irish schools
- A range of resources to support literacy teaching

<https://assets.gov.ie/40346/6a3b58f7e4d14c47906c0edecf95abca.pdf>

### **9. Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017–2022 – Gaeltacht Areas**

Following an extensive consultation process, the Department of Education published the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017–2022 (the Policy) in October 2016.

<https://assets.gov.ie/24606/a526faa89eb64675ab685c074f93b0af.pdf>

The Policy is a central commitment of the Government’s 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010–2030 and the 5-year Action Plan for Irish 2018-2022 and the Department of Education’s Strategy 2021-2023. The overarching goal of the Policy is to ensure the availability of high quality Irish-medium education in Gaeltacht schools and in this way to support and encourage the use of Irish in Gaeltacht communities.

A key action in the Policy is the implementation of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme (the Scheme), which was launched in April 2017. Under the terms of the Scheme, schools in Gaeltacht language-planning areas are being provided with the opportunity to seek recognition as Gaeltacht Schools and have been provided with a range of resources to support their implementation of specified language-based criteria aimed at strengthening Irish-medium educational provision.

Circulars 0012/2021 for primary schools in the Scheme, 0013/2021 for post-primary schools in the Scheme and 0014/2021 for primary schools not yet in the Scheme will shortly issue to schools in Gaeltacht language-planning areas to outline the next steps required to support the effective implementation of the Scheme. Schools participating in the Scheme must also demonstrate that they are participating in the language-planning processes provided for under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012.

### **Schools Participating in the Gaeltacht Schools Recognition Scheme Evaluation (GSRS) Evaluation and Research Study**

The ERC is working with the Department to conduct an independent evaluation of this Scheme. This involves some 105 primary and 29 post-primary schools. Further information on the ERC's evaluation work is available here:

<https://www.erc.ie/programme-of-work/evaluation-of-the-gaeltacht-schools-recognition-scheme/>



Testing and survey activities are planned for the Spring 2021 and, as with all of its studies, the ERC is working closely with schools to minimise disruption in the current challenging environment. If you are a school taking part in the evaluation of this Scheme and have questions, please contact the GSRS team at [sceim@erc.ie](mailto:sceim@erc.ie).

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 should be emailed to [aog@education.gov.ie](mailto:aog@education.gov.ie).

### **10. STEM Education Policy Statement 2017–2026**

The Department’s STEM Education Policy Statement 2017–2026, published in November 2017, sets out the ambitious goals and actions required to achieve and improve the STEM education experience and outcomes for all learners. The STEM implementation plan 2017-2019 built 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. The next phase of the STEM Education Implementation Plan is currently under development.

#### **Guidelines in relation to forming Industry-school partnerships**

Guidelines in relation to forming Industry-school partnerships were launched on 14th November 2019 and are available on the Department’s website, with an accompanying toolkit here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/756dd-stem-partnerships/>

The guidelines have been developed, in conjunction with education and business/industry partners 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. The toolkit accompanying these guidelines includes case studies/examples of good practice, information on STEM Activities and Competitions, information on Continuing Professional Development, STEM careers, STEM in other Jurisdictions, amongst other things.

### **11. Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2025**

The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice was published by the Department in 2018 and refreshed in 2019 and sets out the ambition and vision that



the promotion of wellbeing will be at the core of the ethos of every school and centre for education in Ireland. The Policy included the intention that all schools should embark on their wellbeing promotion process by 2023. In view of the impact of Covid-19 on school activities, this date is now changed to 2025.

The policy can be accessed at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/35100b-wellbeing-policy-statement-and-framework-for-practice-20182023/>

### **Wellbeing Resources**

Wellbeing resources to support this process are available at

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/35100b-wellbeing-policy-statement-and-framework-for-practice-20182023/>

These resources include:

- Indicators of Success & Statements of Effective Practice
- Parent, teacher and student questionnaires
- Focus group guidelines

A Directory of Wellbeing Services, Supports and Resources for Schools is available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/af24b-wellbeing-guidance-documents-for-parents-students-and-schools/#school-staff-post-primary-schools>

Following an action research project involving 30 schools the PDST are currently developing CPD to support schools as they engage in a wellbeing promotion process. This national rollout of CPD is due to begin in September 2021 dependent on public health advice.

### **12. Public Libraries Support for Schools**

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

The growth and development of the collaborative approach for educational and leisure reading support and 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. Public libraries are committed to delivering the services set out, however individual library services' ability to deliver the services in 2021 to the extent set out will be impacted by the levels of COVID-19 restrictions in place at a given time. Where feasible, libraries, working with schools, will look to alternative methods of services delivery if required.

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, 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](http://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.

### **13. Literacy Support for Parents - NALA**

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) offers help and advice for parents who have difficulty reading, writing, spelling or doing mathematics. They have a Freephone number parents can call 1800 20 20 65 or a website [www.takethefirststep.ie](http://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](http://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/1FAIpQLSdKA9hYhxT3vM\\_LQ5-Sm-ZAxXO8Oq\\_KJkMJre3ThHr0rD31Kw/viewform?vc=0&c=0&w=1](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdKA9hYhxT3vM_LQ5-Sm-ZAxXO8Oq_KJkMJre3ThHr0rD31Kw/viewform?vc=0&c=0&w=1))

We encourage schools to:

- Add a link from the school website to [www.helpmykidlearn.ie](http://www.helpmykidlearn.ie) (many schools have done this already) and [www.cogg.ie](http://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.

*Evelyn O'Connor*

Evelyn O'Connor  
Principal Officer  
Curriculum & Assessment Policy Unit  
24 March 2021