

New Drumcondra Primary Tests: Note for Parents and Guardians

This year, your child will take the New Drumcondra Primary Tests in Mathematics and/or English Reading, and the school will share the results with you. This note is to help you to interpret the results.

New tests and older tests

You may see differences between your child's results on the new tests and their results on older tests.

Standardised test scores compare an individual child's achievement to that of a 'reference group' of children nationally. The reference groups for the older Drumcondra tests, as well as for other standardised tests used in Irish primary schools, were established more than 10 years ago. So, if a child gets an 'average' score on the *older* Drumcondra Primary Reading Test (normed in 2006), their score can be considered 'average' relative to the national sample of pupils who took that test in 2006.

Many tests become easier over time, as the content becomes more familiar. Recent studies have also shown that children in Ireland are performing increasingly well in reading and mathematics generally.¹ A combination of these factors means that it is no longer as useful to compare the achievement of children today with the reference groups used for older tests.²

The New Drumcondra Primary Tests were piloted in spring 2017, and were standardised on a national sample of pupils in spring 2018. Norms based on the 2018 reference groups were then established. So, if a child receives a score in the 'average' range on the *New* Drumcondra Primary Reading Test, their score is 'average' relative to the national sample of pupils at their class level who took that test in 2018.

Due to the mismatch in achievement levels between the old and new reference groups, some changes in scores are expected nationally with the introduction of the new tests. Any change in scores for an individual child could arise because of a real change in their achievement, or changes in teaching practice. However, at the point of transition from older tests to new ones, change is more likely to occur because it is now possible to compare the child's achievement to that of an up-to-date reference group.

Paper-based and computer-based tests

The New Drumcondra Primary Tests are available on paper at all levels from First to Sixth classes. They are also available on computer for Third to Sixth classes. Children at these levels performed similarly on the paper- and computer-based test versions in 2018. However, to take account of any small differences in difficulty, the computer-based tests were normed separately from the paper-based ones. So, for example, if your child took a new test on computer, their scores reflect their performance relative to other children in Ireland at the same class level who also took that test on computer in 2018.

Test scores as estimates

All test scores are only *estimates* of a child's true achievement level, based on a specific set of test questions administered on a particular day. This means that a child's 'true score' on any test may be a little higher or a little lower than the reported score. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA] has developed online resources on interpreting standard scores and STen scores, which you may find helpful. These resources are available in a number of different languages.³

It is particularly important to think of scores as broad estimates if you are interpreting STen scores (scores ranging from 1 to 10, where the average score is 5.5). Each STen score corresponds to a range of standard scores. Therefore, it is possible for two children to have standard scores just one or two points apart (unlikely to indicate a notable difference in their achievement), yet to have different STen scores.

When reflecting on your child's progress, it is important to consider other sources of evidence as well as standardised test scores. For example, you might think about feedback from your child and their class teacher, and performance on other tests during the year. If you need more specific information about your child's performance in reading and/or mathematics, you may wish to contact your child's teacher.

Please see the second page for links to further information that may be of interest.

Further links and resources

1. Examples of **national and international studies** that show an increase in the achievement levels of primary school pupils in Ireland in recent years include:
 - The **National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading, 2014**.
 - Summary available from:
<https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Events/Literacy-and-Numeracy/National-Assessments-of-English-Reading-and-Mathematics-Briefing-Note.pdf>
 - Full report available from:
http://www.erc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/NA_2014_Vol1_Final-updated.pdf
(Shiel, G., Kavanagh, L. & Millar, D. (2014). *The 2014 National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics. Volume 1: Performance Report*. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.)
 - The **Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study [TIMSS], 2015**.
 - Summary available from:
<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/International-Statistical-Reports/Launch-of-major-international-study-of-Irish-Students%E2%80%99-Performance-in-Mathematics-and-Science-in-TIMSS-2015.pdf>
 - Full report available from:
<http://www.erc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/TIMSS-initial-report-FINAL.pdf>
(Clerkin, A., Perkins, R. & Cunningham, R. (2016). *TIMSS 2015 in Ireland: Mathematics and Science in Primary and Post-Primary Schools*. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.)
 - The **Progress in International Reading Literacy Study [PIRLS], 2016**.
 - Summary available from:
<http://www.erc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/PIRLS-2016-Five.pdf>
 - Full report available from:
<http://www.erc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/PIRLS-2016-initial-report-IRL.pdf>
(Eivers, E., Gilleece, L. & Delaney, E. (2017). *Reading achievement in PIRLS 2016: Initial report for Ireland*. Dublin: Educational Research Centre, 2016.)
2. A report on **standardised testing by the Department of Education and Skills (2016)** showed that the proportion of children receiving high STen scores (such as 8 to 10) on the older tests had become much larger than that in the original reference groups. Similarly, the proportion receiving low STen scores (such as 1 to 3) had become much smaller than that in the original reference groups.
 - Report available from:
<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Standardised-Achievement-Tests-An-analysis-of-the-results-at-Primary-school-level-for-2011-12-and-2012-13.pdf>
(Department of Education and Skills (2016). *Standardised achievement tests: an analysis of the results at primary school level for 2011-12 and 2012-13*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.)
3. The **NCCA resources for parents** to help with interpreting standard scores and STen scores are available in English, Irish, Polish, Arabic, Romanian, Russian, French, Chinese, and Portuguese.
 - Available from:
<https://www.ncca.ie/en/primary/resources-for-parents>
(Scroll down the page and select 'Standardised tests'.)