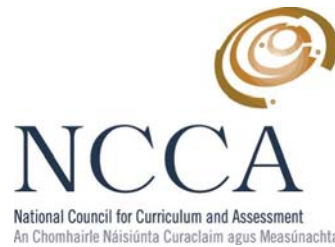


NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CURRICULUM AND  
ASSESSMENT



# SUPPORTING ASSESSMENT IN SCHOOLS - 1

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ASSESSMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

**DRAFT**

APRIL 2005

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Primary School Curriculum (1999) describes assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning. This document, *Assessment in Primary Schools*, provides further information for teachers, principals and boards of management on the functions of assessment in the primary school and considerations in developing a school policy on assessment. The introduction presents the background to the development of this document. The two main sections to the document are summarised below:

Section 2 (Re-envisioning Assessment) describes two functions of assessment in primary schools: assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning.

Section 3 (Developing a school policy on assessment) provides recommendations on developing a school policy on assessment including managing assessment information

### **Section 2: Re-envisioning Assessment**

- The term *assessment* derives from the Latin word *assidere* which means *to sit beside*. It reminds us that there should be a positive rather than a negative association between assessment and the process of teaching and learning in schools.
- Classroom assessment may be defined as the process of gathering, recording, interpreting, using, and communicating information about a child's progress and achievement during his/her development of knowledge, concepts, skills, and attitudes.
- Assessment *for* learning generally focuses on using assessment information to provide feedback to the child and to plan learning experiences which meet the child's learning needs.
- Assessment *of* learning generally focuses on providing a record of the child's progress and attainment at the end of a given period of learning (at the end of a unit of work, at the end of a term, or at the end of a year).
- These two functions of assessment (assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning) are not mutually exclusive. Information gathered for both purposes enables the teacher to create a cumulative record of a child's progress and attainment.

### Section 3: Developing a school policy on assessment

- The school's assessment policy should specify how teachers will
  - gather information about children's progress for the purpose of assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning.
  - assess different dimensions of the child's learning and development including the cognitive, the creative, the affective, the physical and the social.
  - ensure that the school's assessment policy and practice promotes equality and prohibits discrimination against individual children.
  - use diagnostic assessment to identify children with learning difficulties at the earliest possible stage so that appropriate support and intervention can be put in place.
  - record significant observations of children in day-to-day learning activities and details of children's performance in tasks and tests.
  - report the results of the assessment of children to their parents at least twice a year, use one of these reports, to meet parents and discuss their children's progress and ensure that a formal record of an individual child's progress is available to the next teacher to whom the child will transfer.
  - manage assessment records including providing access to records, transferring records, and keeping records secure.

The NCCA will continue to support teacher professional practice in classroom assessment, by providing further practical advice for teachers on assessment in the Primary School Curriculum. The conclusion to this document outlines priorities for the NCCA in the ongoing developmental work on assessment in primary schools.

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## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The Education Act (1998) gives the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) responsibility for advising the Minister for Education and Science on curriculum and assessment in primary schools. The publication of the Primary School Curriculum in 1999 marked a milestone for the NCCA's work in curriculum and assessment at primary level.

The Primary School Curriculum provides the educational rationale for assessment, and presents initial advice for teachers on assessment in the primary school. The curriculum describes assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning. It notes that assessment in the primary school should concern both the process and product of learning and should provide information on the child's cognitive, creative, affective, physical and social development. The curriculum outlines the purposes of assessment for each curriculum area and it recommends a variety of assessment methods and tools which teachers can use in each curriculum subject. These range from "*informal tools such as teacher observation, classwork, homework and discussion with pupils to more formal tools such as diagnostic tests and standardised tests*" and also include projects, portfolios and curriculum profiles.

This document provides further information for schools on developing and implementing a policy on assessment which meets their statutory obligations and which is informed by more recent research and development on assessment internationally. The Education Act (1998) provides the starting point for this document. It places a statutory obligation on principals and teachers to "*regularly evaluate students and periodically report the results of the evaluation to the students and their parents.*" The implications of this requirement for teachers and schools include:

- developing assessment **procedures** which provide an accurate account of children's progress and attainment
- creating and maintaining individual **records** of children's progress and attainment while they are attending the school

- providing parents with assessment **reports** which contain accurate and clearly accessible information about their children’s progress and attainment.

The Education Act also places a responsibility on schools to “*ensure that the educational needs of all students, including those with a disability or other special educational needs, are identified and provided for.*” Specific responsibilities for schools include identifying and responding to pupils with learning difficulties by liaising with the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), where appropriate and co-ordinating the monitoring of pupils’ progress and attainment (by the class teacher, learning support teacher, resource teacher(s), and other professionals).

While the Education Act presents the educational imperative for assessment in primary schools, more recent legislation has enabled the NCCA to identify, in practical terms, the precise implications of these requirements for schools. Similarly, while the Primary School Curriculum provides the educational rationale for assessment, ongoing research and developments in assessment have provided the NCCA with an opportunity to re-envision assessment in the primary school and to translate this vision into practical support for teachers and principals. This document provides information on both the theoretical and practical implications of legislation and recent thinking on assessment for schools. It comprises two main sections as follows:

- Section 2: Re-envisioning assessment
- Section 3: Developing a school policy on assessment

Section 3 focuses on the statutory requirements placed on schools in storing and securing assessment information, providing access to assessment information and transferring assessment information.

**Note to Council:**

Shaded text refers to advice contained in the document *Standardised testing in compulsory schooling* which has not yet been approved by Council.

## SECTION 2: RE-ENVISIONING ASSESSMENT

### Defining assessment

The term *assessment* derives from the Latin word *assidere* which means *to sit beside*. That simple phrase tells us a lot about the essence of assessment in the context of the primary school classroom. Its tone is non-threatening and affirming, and it suggests a partnership between participants in the teaching/learning relationship based on mutual trust and understanding. It reminds us that there should be a positive rather than a negative association between assessment and the process of teaching and learning in schools.

In the broadest sense assessment is concerned with children's progress and achievement. Classroom assessment may be defined as "*the process of gathering, recording, interpreting, using, and communicating information about a child's progress and achievement during the development of knowledge, concepts, skills, and attitudes.*" Assessment, therefore, involves much more than testing. It is an ongoing process that encompasses many formal and informal activities designed to monitor and improve teaching and learning in all areas of the curriculum.

This section describes a re-envisioning of assessment that recognises two principal functions of assessment, *assessment for learning* and *assessment of learning*. These two functions emphasise the contribution that assessment can make to the day-to-day process of teaching and learning (*assessment for learning*), while giving due weight to its role in helping to create a cumulative record of children's progress and attainment (*assessment of learning*). This new categorisation does not replace the more traditional description of the functions of assessment (formative, diagnostic, summative and evaluative), rather, they are subsumed into the new categorisation. Similarly, the references to formal and informal methods of assessment in the Primary School Curriculum are now re-envisaged in the context of the purpose of that assessment.

This description of the functions of assessment is based on a view of learning that posits the child as an active agent in constructing his/her own learning through social

interaction with peers, the teacher, and the wider community. The role of the teacher in supporting learning is central to this view of learning, so too are the functions of assessment. Through a process of assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning, the teacher gathers information about the child's development and progress with learning and uses that information to scaffold the next steps in the learning process. This broader view of the role of assessment envisages assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning as two complementary and interrelated processes.

### **Assessment *for* learning**

Assessment *for* learning is an ongoing process of recognising and responding to the child's learning in order to enhance it. This involves engaging children in their own learning through questioning, and discussion and involving children in peer and self-assessment. The child's response to rich questions and his/her dialogue with the teacher and peers provide evidence of the child's learning which can be used to direct future learning. The quality of a child's response to a question can, for example, suggest further questions which lead the child to a greater understanding of an idea or concept. Central to the idea of the assessment *for* learning is the role of feedback in promoting children's awareness of and participation in their own learning. Feedback that is focused on the learning or task in hand, that indicates next steps and that points to achievement and challenges has been shown to be integral to children's classroom progress and confidence in learning.

Assessment *for* learning includes formative assessment, as well as diagnostic and evaluative assessment. Although the term evaluative assessment is usually associated with the evaluation of schools and of educational systems, the teacher can also use assessment information to evaluate the effectiveness with which he/she is enacting the curriculum and make changes in his/her planning and teaching. A brief description of how assessment methods and tools can be used for the purpose of assessment *for* learning, is provided below. The list of assessment methods and tools is by no means exhaustive, but further illustrates the practice of assessment *for* learning.

### **Teacher observation**

By engaging in classroom observation and listening to children, the teacher can gather evidence of successes and difficulties with learning which children experience. During this process of supporting the child's learning through assessment *for* learning, it may be useful for the teacher to record significant observations that can be referred to as an *aide memoire* when reviewing and discussing the child's progress or when planning future learning experiences.

### **Questioning and discussion**

The writing process provides a good example of how teachers can use questioning and discussion to support assessment *for* learning. For example, after discussion of the subject, audience, and purpose of a piece of writing, the child's initial draft becomes the basis for a further discussion between the child and the teacher. Through questioning, discussion and suggestion, the teacher helps the child to understand how his/her writing can be improved e.g., by conveying thoughts and feelings in a more expressive form or sequencing the writing in a clearer way. The child then redrafts his/her writing using what he/she has learned from the discussion. In this way the teacher assesses writing in an interactive way with the child, and the assessment is related directly to the next stage of learning.

### **Samples of children's work**

At the end of a longer period of learning, samples of children's work, portfolios, and projects can also be used to inform the teacher's observation of the child, and the different tasks, tests and activities the child has completed.

### **Self-assessment**

A crucial element of assessment *for* learning is the extent to which the child is actively involved in the assessment process. It is important that the child understands the purpose of his/her learning and assessment. The use of good questioning and quality feedback is vital to enabling the child to develop effective strategies for self-assessment. If this practice is incorporated as a consistent feature of assessment throughout the primary school, children should become reasonably good self-assessors by the time they reach sixth class.

### **Standardised tests**

Standardised tests are most often associated with the summative aspect of assessment, or assessment *of* learning. However, the value of standardised tests lies not just in their potential to quantify a child's performance. They also provide information on the child's performance on individual test items. An item by item analysis of a child's performance on a standardised test can sometimes enable the teacher to identify areas of particular difficulty.

### **Diagnostic tests**

In general, diagnostic tests in reading or mathematics are more appropriate (than standardised tests) for identifying learning difficulties and designing appropriate interventions for children. Like standardised tests, diagnostic tests can confirm conclusions drawn on the basis of the teacher's own informal assessments.

Finally, parents have an important contribution to make to assessment *for* learning. Their knowledge of their own children's personalities, strengths, learning styles, home experience, and any difficulties they may be experiencing will help to inform the teacher's own assessments. This will guide the teacher in developing a more robust picture of each child's learning needs and in constructing learning experiences that best promote the child's development.

### **Assessment *of* learning**

Assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning differ in the purposes for which assessment is used. The teacher's purpose in assessment *for* learning is to use assessment information to provide feedback to the child and to plan learning experiences which meet the child's learning needs. In contrast, assessment *of* learning provides a record of the child's progress and attainment, whether at class or school level, at the end of a given period of learning (at the end of a unit of work, at the end of a term, or at the end of a year). Examples of activities for the purpose of assessment *of* learning include:

- reviewing a child's written work for a term, making an overall judgement according to agreed and specified criteria, and assigning a grade
- administering a group-administered standardised test of reading, and generating a standard score and percentile rank for each pupil
- reviewing a child's portfolio of work for a year, making an overall judgement, and after discussion with the child, assigning a grade.

These and other activities which the teacher engages in for the purpose of assessment *of learning*, form the basis for reporting on children's progress and attainment throughout their primary education. The use of standardised tests and diagnostic tests for the purpose of assessment *of learning* are briefly outlined below. This discussion on assessment *of learning* concludes with a focus on recording and reporting assessment information, and transition from the primary to the post-primary school.

### **Standardised tests**

Although summative records of achievement such as standardised test scores or overall grades for a term or a year may be of some value in the context of assessment *for learning*, their primary value is in assessment *of learning*. As part of the process of assessment *of learning* a great majority of Irish primary schools use standardised tests to ascertain children's attainment in literacy and numeracy. The NCCA has advised the Minister for Education that, building on current practice, all pupils in primary schools should be tested in literacy and numeracy at the end of first/beginning of second class and at the end of fourth/beginning of fifth class. Within these timeframes, schools may choose the most appropriate point for the administration of the first test taking into account the circumstances of the school and the age of the pupils.

### **Diagnostic tests**

In addition to this requirement, learning-support teachers will continue to use a variety of diagnostic tests to provide them with the particular information needed about pupils. Similarly, if a teacher believes that a child's test score is at odds with the

results of other assessments or does not seem to reflect the child's achievement the teacher should feel free to administer another test.

### **Recording and reporting assessment information**

Under the Education Act (1998), parents have a right to be informed of their child's progress. The legislative basis for recording and reporting assessment information is described in more detail in the next section which identifies the range of people to whom the school must provide access to assessment information including parents, teachers in other schools, and other professionals associated with the education of the child. It is important, therefore, that assessment information is readily communicable to such a varied audience.

In order to support teachers and schools in this regard the NCCA will develop a common template for recording assessment information and reporting such information to parents. The NCCA is also developing guidelines for parents to support their involvement in their children's learning which will include understanding assessment data from schools.

### **Transition from primary school to post-primary school**

The transition from the primary to the post-primary school can present particular challenges for the child, the teacher, and the school. To facilitate upward continuity and progression in the child's learning experiences, it is important that a reliable and informative record of the child's progress and attainments in the primary school is available to the post-primary school to which he/she transfers.

Research conducted by the ESRI for the NCCA showed that twenty-six different tests are currently administered by post-primary schools to provide them with information about pupils leaving primary schools. These tests are drawn from a variety of sources and provide schools with a range of information, depending on the test chosen. The research pointed to poor transfer of information between the two sectors, evidenced by the need so many schools felt to administer their own tests, and made clear that there was a lack of continuity and progression for students.

As part of its remit to advise on the transition between primary and post-primary schools, the NCCA will initiate a number of pilot projects to build on and consolidate good practice in transfer. The outcome of these projects will enable the NCCA to provide advice to the Minister on developing a national policy on transfer from primary to post-primary schools.

## **ICT and assessment**

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has the potential to play an integral role in both assessment *of* and *for* learning. ICT can be used as an assessment tool including the use of electronic portfolios and also as an administration and management tool for recording, storing, analysing and presenting findings from a variety of assessment methods

A number of ICT software programmes are available which provide instantaneous test-feedback and progress report information to teachers and children. Diagnostic testing software can be used to record the child's cognitive skills, including short term memory, phonological awareness, decoding skills, reading comprehension rate and fluency. The software records each child's responses and generates a graphical profile of his or her cognitive abilities using standardised norms. Teachers and children can use this test-generated information to identify gaps in their learning and to plan appropriate learning activities.

Electronic portfolios of children's work provide the teacher with a further means of monitoring children's progress and attainment. Individual children should have some autonomy in deciding what is to be included in their portfolios. This will both stimulate their interest in using ICT for learning and foster their ability to assess their own work. The earlier discussion in relation to traditional types of portfolios, work samples and projects are equally relevant to electronic portfolios.

ICT also provides teachers and schools with an effective means of recording and storing the results of assessments. Assessment records can be stored in a manageable and easily accessible form, and databases and spreadsheets can be used to analyse and

extrapolate information on the progress and attainment of individuals, groups and classes in the different curriculum areas. There are legal implications relating to the nature of such records, rights of access to them, and their transfer to another individual or body, the length of time they should be retained, and the security of records. These issues are addressed in the next section of *Assessment in Primary Schools*.

## SECTION 3: DEVELOPING A SCHOOL POLICY ON ASSESSMENT

Assessment should be included as part of the School Plan to guide assessment planning and practice in classrooms and schools. A useful assessment policy should provide information on

- assessment *for* learning
- assessment *of* learning
- dimensions of the child's learning and development to be assessed
- assessment of children throughout their primary school education
- diagnostic assessment and the early identification of learning difficulties
- recording assessment information
- reporting assessment information
- managing assessment records

### **Assessment *for* learning**

The school's assessment policy should specify how the school will gather information about children's progress for the purpose of assessment *for* learning. In preparing the policy schools should consider how best to

- **ensure that information from a broad range of assessment methods and tools is used** to plan for and support the child's learning experience in all areas of the curriculum
- **match assessment methods and tools to curriculum objectives** in order to maximise learning
- **identify practical methods for recording assessment information including** teacher observation, teacher-designed tests and tasks, standardised tests, diagnostic tests, and so forth.

- **use information derived from a range of assessments**, including standardised tests, to construct relevant learning experiences for individual children
- **provide opportunities for parents to share relevant information about their children** and incorporate this information in the process of planning for the child's learning
- **specify the kinds of opportunities they will provide for children to discuss the assessment information** as a means of motivating them to learn, and provide children with opportunities to develop self assessment skills using, for example, portfolios and learning logs
- **use the results of assessment in planning the acquisition and deployment of educational materials and resources**, taking account of the full range of children's abilities.

### **Assessment *of* learning**

Similarly, the school's assessment policy should specify how the school will gather information about children's progress for the purpose of assessment *of* learning. In preparing the policy schools should consider how best to

- **ensure that assessment takes account of the full range of learning appropriate to the child**, identifying gaps, if there are any, in the child's learning
- **use methods and tools that are particularly appropriate to assessment *of* learning**, when compiling a cumulative record of each child's progress, attainment and development

- **compile a record of children’s progress and attainment at least twice a year**, for the purpose of reporting to parents
- **be aware of the individual circumstances and requirements of children with special needs or learning difficulties**, in the assessment *of* learning and in the interpretation of the results of assessment
- **inform parents of the school’s policy on assessment**, in order to involve them as fully as possible in their children’s education
- **combine information acquired about children through assessment for learning with information acquired through assessment of learning**, taking account of all facets of the child’s progress and attainment
- **give due importance to every curriculum area in the assessment of learning.**

### **Dimensions of the child’s learning and development to be assessed**

Just as the Primary School Curriculum takes the broadest view of what is entailed in the education of the child “*the cognitive, the creative, the affective, the physical and the social*” (Introduction, 1999, p.18), the school’s assessment policy should address not only each area of the curriculum but also the different dimensions of the child’s development. In preparing the school plan, schools should consider how best to address

- **Assessment of the cognitive dimension** will take account of the child’s acquisition of knowledge, concepts and skills. It will also take account of the development of the child’s literacy and numeracy skills, and his/her mastery of higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills.
- **Assessment of the creative dimension** will take account of the development of the child’s capacity for creative expression and response. Just as creative

thinking requires going beyond accepted knowledge in order to generate new knowledge and understandings, assessment of the child's creative development will focus on the child's ability to develop insights, and interpretations in responding to his/her environment.

- **Assessment of the affective dimension** is concerned with developing the child's sense capacity for expressing ideas and emotions in artistic form. It will encompass the emotional reactions of the child to artistic expression and to human relationships. It will also take account of the moral and spiritual development of the child.
- **Assessment of the physical dimension** will take account of the child's development of fine and gross motor skills and the gradual development of his/her bodily control and co-ordination. Assessment of the child's development of psychomotor skills will not be limited to Physical Education but will be relevant to all learning experiences that involve the child in physical interaction with objects encountered in his/her learning environment.
- **Assessment of the social dimension** will take account of the child's interpersonal and intrapersonal development, including the behaviour, attitudes and social values he/she develops throughout his/her engagement with the Primary School Curriculum.

### **Assessment of children throughout their primary school education**

The child's perspective on the world and on his/her experience of learning is more holistic in the early years when the separation of different curriculum subjects or areas in learning is largely irrelevant to the child. Later, children become more conscious of the nature of their experiences with different curriculum subjects. A school policy on assessment should reflect this growth and change and provide the basis for teachers to

- **take account of the developmental variability displayed by individual children,** while being aware of the accepted milestones in children's development
- **take account of the contextual basis of a young child's learning,** and the degree to which school experience differs from home and pre-school experience
- **allow time in each classroom day for observation of children and for listening to children in addition to the normal use of observation in the learning process,** in order to construct as full a picture as possible of each child's progress and development
- **make judgements over a period of time,** and avoid snapshot judgements
- **use assessments which are appropriate to the child's age and stage of development,** at all stages *in* his/her career in primary school
- **fulfil the minimum requirement of administering standardised tests in literacy and numeracy,** at the end of first/beginning of second class and at the beginning/end of fifth class
- **ensure vigilance in identifying learning difficulties in particular children,** noting whether these relate to individual learning styles, and use assessment information in providing appropriate intervention and support
- **maintain close and consistent contact with parents,** in order to share information about children and to explore the interpretation of children's attitudes, actions and learning styles.

The school's assessment policy must also promote equality and prohibit discrimination against individual children, on the grounds of religion, age, disability or race (Equal Status Act 2000). The process of developing an assessment policy

provides schools with an opportunity to explicate the relationship between the school's context, culture and language and their assessment practices. For example, in the course of developing the school policy, principals and teachers need to identify and address any particular issues associated with the assessment of children special educational needs, or children whose first language is not English, and provide appropriate alternatives. In general, standardised tests will not serve the assessment needs of children for whom English is an additional language, or many children with special educational needs.

### **Diagnostic assessment and the early identification of learning difficulties**

It is important that assessment is used to identify children with learning difficulties at the earliest possible stage so that appropriate support and intervention can be put in place. The school's assessment policy should address the role of diagnostic assessment in this process. It is not necessary to administer formal diagnostic tests to all children. A summary of the approach to the early identification of learning difficulties recommended in the Learning-Support Guidelines issued by the DES is provided below.

- **The class teacher should understand the nature and function of diagnostic assessment**, and be familiar with a range of formal and informal diagnostic tests.
- **All class teachers should be familiar with the Learning-Support Guidelines issued by the DES.**
- **The class teacher should routinely monitor children whom he/she perceives as experiencing learning difficulties**, using monitoring activities such as running records of oral reading, identifying conceptual and computational difficulties in mathematics, and analysing individual children's learning styles.

- **The class teacher should select those children for whom further, more formal, diagnostic assessment is appropriate,** on the basis of his or her own assessments and the results of screening tests, and in conjunction with parents.
- **The learning-support teacher, in conjunction with the class teacher, should perform a formal diagnostic assessment, interpret the results of that assessment, and determine the most appropriate form of learning support for each child.**
- **Diagnostic assessment, where relevant, should lead to the development of an Individual Profile and Learning Programme for the child,** constructed by the learning-support teacher in consultation with the class teacher.
- **The learning-support teacher, in conjunction with the class teacher, resource teachers, other relevant members of staff, and parents should conduct a review of each child's progress at the end of an instructional term,** comprising
  - an assessment of the child's progress
  - an evaluation of the learning programme that has been implemented
  - a consideration of the level of learning support the child may require in the future
  - a review of learning targets.
- **The learning-support teacher and the class teacher should decide, on the basis of their assessment of an individual child, whether the NEPS psychologist for the school should be consulted by teachers and parents, as described in NEPS Model of Service document,** to consider further possible approaches and interventions including the option of psychoeducational assessment, or whether another relevant professional should be involved.

## Recording assessment results

Assessment information should be recorded in different ways as appropriate to the child's particular learning experience and the different assessment tools available. The school's assessment policy should explain how teachers will record significant observations of children in day-to-day learning activities and details of children's performance in tasks and tests. For the purposes of assessment *of* learning the record of a child's assessment outcomes needs to be more formal. As a general guide in developing a policy in relation to recording assessment outcomes

- **the school should develop a report card for recording assessment information and reporting such information to parents, based on the national report card template** developed by the NCCA.
- **the class teacher should keep a record of each child's progress and attainment, which should be updated at least twice a year**, preferably at the end of the first term or early in the second term and at the end of the school year, and used as the basis for reporting to parents and others
- **the results of assessment should be recorded in different forms**, including marks, grades, checklists, profiles, and narrative comment
- **the results of standardised tests should include a standard score and percentile rank for each child** (additionally, raw scores, reading ages, sten scores, etc. may be used)
- **the teacher should involve the children in the assessment of portfolios, work samples, and projects**, in a manner appropriate to the age of the child
- **there should be a close correspondence in the ways in which the results of assessment are recorded from class to class in each curriculum area**, both within schools and, where possible, among schools, in order to ensure consistency

- **a summary record of each child's progress should be held by the principal as part of the school records**, based on assessment information compiled by class teachers, learning-support teachers and resource teachers
- **the central record of each child's progress, attainment, and development should be updated annually**, and take account of the child's strengths and needs, the progress he/she has made, and areas of development that need particular attention
- **in recording the results of assessments the teacher should be mindful of the needs of those to whom the results will be reported**, and the results of the assessment of children should be recorded in such a way as to facilitate the provision of the most relevant and useful information about children's progress and development to other professionals concerned with the child's education.

### **Reporting assessments results**

Assessment information is central to a variety of individuals and bodies who will be involved in furthering the child's progress and development both in primary school and later. These include children themselves, parents, other teachers, other schools, and other professionals concerned with the children's education. In this context, the school's assessment policy should explain how/when schools will:

- **report the results of the assessment of children to their parents at least twice a year**, preferably towards the end of the first term or early in the second term, and at the end of the school year
- **use one of these reports, ideally the earlier report, to meet parents**, and discuss their children's progress and development, and the setting of future learning goals

- ensure that a formal record of each class teacher's assessment of individual children is available to the next teacher to whom the children transfer
- ensure that a full and accurate summary of the progress and development of each child is available to another school, primary or post-primary, to which a child is transferring, whether inside or outside the State.

### **Managing assessment information**

Recent legislation has a number of implications for how assessment is planned and managed in schools. Of particular significance are the Education Act 1998, the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003<sup>1</sup> and the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. (The Freedom of Information Act 1997 does not currently apply to schools.) The school's assessment policy should be informed by the relevant legislation concerning:

- **Nature of assessment records:** Any assessment information or personal data recorded by the school, including both formal school records and less formal records, whether in automated or manual form, comes under the terms of the Data Protection Act 2003. As already noted, ongoing reporting to parents should ensure that schools regularly share assessment information with parents.
- **Access to assessment information:** Under the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003 parents have a right to all assessment information about their children in intelligible form and they have the right to know the source of the assessment information, for example the class teacher or learning-support teacher. The following designated persons are also entitled to direct access to individual, group or class assessment information:

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<sup>1</sup> The Data Protection Commissioner has published a booklet entitled *Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003, A Guide for Data Controllers*. It includes a self-help checklist, which is designed to assist organisations and individuals in examining the issues involved in data protection. This booklet is a valuable guide to principals and schools in formulating a policy in relation to the compilation, retention, and use of assessment information concerning children under their care. It is available on the Data Protection Commissioner Website at: <http://www.dataprivacy.ie/images/A%20Guide%20for%20DC's.pdf>

- the child's class teacher
  - the class teacher, within the same school, to whom the child is transferring
  - the principal
  - relevant learning-support and resource teachers, and other relevant professionals, including Special Educational Needs Officers (SENOs)
  - the DES inspector
  - the relevant NEPS psychologist
  - the Education Welfare Board and its officers
- **Transfer of assessment information:** The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 places a responsibility on the principal of a school to pass on to the principal of another school to which a child is transferring, details of the child's attendance record and, where the principal considers it appropriate, information relating to the child's progress and attainment. The 2000 Act also provides that assessment information for individual children is also available to officers of the Education Welfare Board.
  - **Length of time assessment information should be retained by the school:** The period of time for which a school should maintain records is ultimately one which each school must decide for itself. However, for litigation arising from alleged failure to educate, a period of three years after the child's eighteenth birthday will apply. For primary schools, there are arguments for keeping assessment records for at least seventeen years, i.e. from the earliest date at which a child may be enrolled in a primary school until his/her twenty-first birthday. The Data Protection Acts require personal data to be destroyed when the need for such data ceases, i.e., until the possibility of litigation ceases.
  - **Security of assessment records:** The Data Protection Acts are very specific in relation to the security of data. This is the responsibility of the *data controller*, who in the case of the school includes the Principal and any other members of

staff responsible for compiling and recording data about individual children. A data controller has certain key responsibilities, which are summarised in terms of eight fundamental rules. These are to

1. obtain and process information fairly
2. keep it only for one or more specified, explicit and lawful purposes
3. use and disclose it only in ways compatible with these purposes
4. keep it safe and secure
5. keep it accurate, complete and up-to-date
6. ensure that it is adequate, relevant and not excessive
7. retain it for no longer than is necessary for the purpose or purposes
8. give a copy of his/her personal data to that individual on request.

Of the key responsibilities listed, number 4 is concerned, in the case of schools, with ensuring that assessment and personal data on pupils, whether manually or electronically recorded, are retained in a secure environment and are protected from any inappropriate or unlawful access.

## SECTION 4: CONCLUSION

The statements on assessment in the Primary School Curriculum outline an approach to assessment for the different subjects that is general in nature. At the time the curriculum was published it was intended that these statements would be developed in greater detail in order to provide teachers and schools with appropriate support in assessing children for the purposes of both assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning. *Assessment in Primary Schools* constitutes an essential step in this development. It proposes a re-envisioning of assessment in terms of assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning and it makes specific recommendations that will support the development of a school policy on assessment.

There is firm tradition in Irish primary schools of assessing children and of reporting the results of assessment to parents. Building on current practice, and in the context of this document, the NCCA will continue to develop a range of supports that will help teachers and schools to bring greater coherence and consistency to the assessment of children. These include the development of practical guidelines on assessment including exemplars of children's work and the construction of a template for recording and reporting assessment information. [Details provided in the document *Standardised Testing in Compulsory Schooling*, to be approved by Council].

Through these initiatives, the NCCA will provide practical advice and information to support teachers in achieving a closer alignment of assessment in the process of teaching and learning, in developing a clearer picture of children's progress and attainment, and in generating effective methods of recording and reporting the results of assessment.