

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-Flyer.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'.)

Standardised Testing

What is a standardised test?

We are all familiar with the idea of tests in school. Your child probably tells you how he/she did in a spelling or tables test prepared by the teacher. A standardised test is another kind of test. It is used to measure a child's achievement in English reading and Maths compared to other children throughout the country at the same class level or age level. The English reading test gives information about how well your child can understand what he/she has read. This test does not gather information on your child's written or spoken English. The Maths test finds out how well your child can use numbers for different purposes and solve maths problems.

Are standardised tests the same as intelligence tests?

No. Standardised tests are not intelligence tests. The main purpose of using standardised tests are to help the teacher plan your child's learning and to inform you about how well your child is doing in English reading and Maths. When the test scores are used alongside other information gathered by the teacher through observing your child at work, talking with him/her, looking at his/her work, they show how your child is getting on in English reading and Maths, and help the teacher to identify your child's strengths and needs.

What are standardised tests used for?

- Standardised tests are used to report to you as a parent on your child's achievement in English reading and Maths.
- Helps to find out if your child has learning difficulties in English reading and Maths.
- So that the school can put appropriate supports in place to help find out if your child is a high achiever in English reading and Maths.
- So that appropriate learning experiences can be provided for him/her.
- Helps your child's teacher plan for further learning across the curriculum.

How will I know what the test scores mean?

You will be familiar with hearing your child say he/she got 62% in a maths test or 9 out of 15 in a spelling test. Standardised tests generally use other types of scores. Your child's teacher may tell you how your child did in the test using a STen (standard ten) score.

Understanding STen scores

STen scores go from 1 to 10. The table below describes what the different STen scores tell you about your child's achievement in English and Maths. STen score	What the score means	Proportion of children who get this score.
8-10	Well above average	1/6
7	High average	1/6
5-6	Average	1/3
4	Low average	1/6
1-3	Well below average	1/6

If your child's STen score is 5 or 6, you will know that his/her performance on the test is average. About one third of children in Ireland have STen scores in this range. You can see from the table that there are also STen scores above and below average.

Children in 1st class.

This year there is a new reporting procedure to parents/guardians of children in 1st class. Schools are to use descriptors that correspond with standard score ranges rather than STen scores. It is the descriptor that is now reported. The following is the appropriate descriptor scale.

Descriptors corresponding to standard score ranges

Standard Score range	General descriptor	Criterion-referenced Descriptor*	Proportion of pupils
115 or higher	Well above average	Criterion reached	One-sixth
108-114	High average	Criterion reached	One-sixth
93-107	Average	Criterion reached	One-third
85-92	Low average	Approaching criterion; Reading may need monitoring.	One-sixth
84 or below	Well below average	Criterion not reached; Likely to be at risk of Difficulties with reading; further diagnostic testing may be advisable	One-sixth

As with other tests your child does in school, his/her result on a standardised test can be affected by how he/she feels on the test day or by worry or excitement about a home or school event. This means that each test result is only an *indication* of your child's achievement in English reading and Maths; similarly, both tests last for a prolonged period of time and as you know every child has different levels of concentration and this may also impact on their results.

If my child's score is low, what does this tell me?

A STen score of 1, 2 or 3 suggests that your child may have some difficulties in English reading or Maths. One test score by itself does not give a complete picture of your child's learning. The teacher will gather other information about your child from other tests, as well as his/her observations in class. The teacher may also decide that your child might benefit from additional support from the SET teacher.