



Subject:

**LITERACY/NUMERACY – LESSONS FROM
NORTHERN IRELAND AUDIT OFFICE (NIAO) AND
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE (PAC) REPORTS**

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Audience:

- Principals and Chairpersons of Boards of Governors of all grant-aided schools
- Education and Library Boards
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
- Association of Governing Bodies of Grammar Schools
- Teachers' Unions

Summary of Contents:

Public Accounts Committee (PAC) recommendations following the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) report on improving literacy and numeracy in schools in Northern Ireland.

Enquiries:

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Governor Awareness
Essential

Status of Contents:
Information and guidance for schools

Related Documents:
None

Superseded Documents:
None

Expiry Date:
N/A

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LITERACY/NUMERACY – LESSONS FROM NIAO/PAC

1. The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) published its report on improving literacy and numeracy in schools on 29 March 2006. A Public Accounts Committee (PAC) hearing followed on 21 June 2006, and the PAC produced a report on findings on 8 December 2006. The Department of Finance and Personnel has submitted a Memorandum of Reply to the findings of the PAC hearing. These can be found on [Memoranda of Reply to Public Accounts Committee Reports \(MOR\): PAAB Publications | A A S D N I.](#)
2. This circular sets out the main issues of concern highlighted in the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) and Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Reports. A key finding is that over 20 per cent of children leave primary school without having achieved the appropriate level of performance in literacy and numeracy. Moreover, almost 50 per cent of Year 12 pupils do not achieve GCSE at grades A*-C in English and Mathematics.
3. The Department of Education accords a high priority to literacy and numeracy in line with the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum and asks all teachers, at all key stages, to seek to promote literacy and numeracy in the classroom.
4. Key findings from PAC Hearing
 - (i) NIAO and PAC stressed the failings of the Department in respect, particularly, of strategic leadership and target-setting. These failings will be addressed through the publication and implementation of a revised Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.
 - (ii) They highlighted particular areas of concern:
 - the under-achievement of boys
 - the significant differences between Protestant and Roman Catholic children in socio-economically deprived areas in achievement of GCSE English and Mathematics (and with their peers in Glasgow)
 - the extent of the gap between the best and poorest performing schools
 - (iii) They emphasised the importance of raising standards of leadership in schools, the dissemination of best practice, the effective use of data for schools and teacher planning, the value of benchmarking performance and the involvement of parents.
5. The Department has accepted and responded to the findings. Work on a revised Literacy and Numeracy Strategy is underway. A Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce will be established to ensure that the Strategy is delivered effectively. The Department's revised School Improvement Strategy will reinforce the emphasis on literacy and numeracy.
6. The revised curriculum, being introduced on a phased basis from September 2007, has literacy and numeracy at its core. The curriculum provides for a broad and balanced education and focuses on developing skills as well as teaching content through the wide spectrum of curricular areas. The cross-curricular skills of Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT are statutory from Foundation to

Key Stage 4 for all pupils. They will be assessed for pupils in Key Stages 1-3 with reference to levels of progression.

At Key Stage 4, pupils' skills in these areas will be assessed via revised GCSEs from 2010. Training and arrangements are being provided, and going forward this will build in the outcomes of the revised literacy and numeracy strategy.

Action for Schools

7. As all schools will be in the process of developing their School Development Plans for 2007-08, they should consider the issues raised by NIAO/PAC and ensure that action is taken to reflect these within individual school policies and priorities. Given the crucial importance of literacy and numeracy, the Department will expect each school to have in place measures to:-
 - ensure that the learning needs of each child are assessed and appropriate tasks set and monitored
 - ensure that there are effective arrangements in place to identify those children in need of additional support
 - ensure that appropriate targets are set for literacy and numeracy attainment (within the school development plan and within PRSD as appropriate)
 - consider what might be done at individual school level to help pupils who are experiencing difficulties with numeracy and literacy taking account of gender and motivation issues
 - ensure that interventions are put in place together with monitoring arrangements to assess their effectiveness
 - seize every opportunity to promote literacy and numeracy across the curriculum

8. All children deserve to leave school, equipped with the basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Those who do not achieve this level are most likely to be disadvantaged in adulthood. While others can help in meeting this challenge it is schools and classroom teachers who have the crucial role to play. The Department has made standards in literacy and numeracy a key priority in its plans for the future and asks that schools and other bodies do likewise. It is requested that this circular is drawn to the attention of all teaching staff and Governors.



WILL HAIRE
Permanent Secretary