



Department of  
**Education**

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**Oideachais**

MÁNNYSTRIE D

**Lear**

**Subject:**

**InCAS**

**Circular Number:**  
**2009/14**

**Date of Issue:**  
**30 September 2009**

**Audience:**

- Principals and Boards of Governors of all grant-aided primary schools, post-primary schools with preparatory departments and special schools;
- Education and Library Boards;
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools;
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment;
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta;
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education; and
- Teachers Unions.

**Summary of Contents:**

This circular formally specifies InCAS as the computer-based assessment method to be used for carrying out statutory diagnostic assessment of reading and maths for pupils in Years 4 to 7 in the autumn term, and sets out the associated arrangements for reporting assessment outcomes to parents.

**Enquiries:**

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**Governor Awareness:**  
Essential

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Advice

**Related Documents:**  
Not applicable

**Superseded Documents:**  
Not applicable

**Expiry Date:**  
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**DENI Website:**  
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## **Introduction**

1. The purpose of this circular is to provide information for schools on the continued roll-out of the Interactive Computerised Assessment (InCAS) diagnostic assessment tool. It also formally specifies InCAS as the computer-based assessment method to be used for statutory purposes for pupils in years 4 to 7 during the autumn term and sets out the associated arrangements for reporting to parents.

## **Requirement to Carry Out Diagnostic InCAS Assessments**

2. The Interactive Computerised Assessment System (InCAS) provides for diagnostic assessment in Reading and General Maths and optional associated assessments. InCAS has been introduced on a phased basis over the three school years from 2007/08 and is an integral part of our wider, collective efforts to raise outcomes in literacy and numeracy for all young people. In 2007/08 it applied to Year 5 pupils; in 2008/09 it was extended to cover Year 5 and 6 pupils; and from the 2009/10 school year it applies to pupils in Years 4 to 7.
3. The Education (Assessment Arrangements) (Foundation to Key Stage 3) Order (NI) 2007 (the 2007 Order) provides for the assessment of pupils in Years 4 to 7 during the autumn term, using a computer-based method specified by the Department. Under that Order, the Department is now specifying InCAS as the method to be used by schools in carrying out those autumn term assessments. The Order also requires the outcomes of these assessments to be recorded and notified to the pupil's parents by the end of that term. A copy of the 2007 Order is available at:  
[http://www.opsi.gov.uk/sr/sr2007/pdf/nisr\\_20070045\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/sr/sr2007/pdf/nisr_20070045_en.pdf)

## **Purpose of InCAS Assessment**

4. InCAS is a diagnostic assessment tool designed to support schools in identifying pupils' strengths and areas where they are having difficulties. The outcomes from the InCAS assessments should therefore help teachers plan their teaching during the school year to meet the needs of pupils in their classrooms. The assessments will also provide schools with useful information for monitoring individual pupil progress – to ensure every pupil is reaching his or her full potential – and, more generally, to inform self-evaluation, development planning and target-setting.
5. **InCAS assessments are not for any purpose related to the transfer of pupils from primary to post-primary school.**
6. The Department recognises that there is a range of assessment tools currently available and used by schools, e.g. the Alta maths assessment tool is available to all schools. We would encourage schools to continue to make use of Alta and other assessment tools in addition to InCAS to support their work to improve pupil outcomes in literacy and numeracy.
7. InCAS outcomes are delivered directly to schools and data on individual pupil performance is not collected centrally. As with all data, schools will need to ensure that they have appropriate arrangements in place for its safe storage.

## **Reporting of InCAS Outcomes to Parents**

8. The InCAS assessments will generate an age-equivalent outcome in Reading and an age-equivalent outcome in General Maths<sup>1</sup>. Under the 2007 Order schools are required to report these outcomes to parents in writing and to offer parents a meeting to discuss outcomes by the end of the autumn term.

## **2009/10 School Year**

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<sup>1</sup> Age-equivalent outcomes are also available for other assessment modules.

9. In the **2009/10 school year**, schools are required to provide age-equivalent InCAS outcomes for Reading and General Maths to parents in writing during the autumn term for the 2009/10 school year and, where available, the 2008/09 school year. If they wish, schools may also provide outcomes for the 2007/08 school year and, if parents request outcomes for 2007/08, this information should be provided. These arrangements apply in relation to outcomes for General Maths and to outcomes for Reading, other than Irish Reading outcomes, to which specific arrangements apply in 2009/10. (See paragraphs 14 and 15 below.)
10. It is important for schools to provide information to parents on their child's InCAS outcomes in a manner which is easy to understand. In addition to providing parents with a **written** age-equivalent outcome, set alongside the pupil's chronological age, schools are now required, where two years of InCAS outcomes are available, to provide this information **in a graphical format**.
11. The InCAS system can provide schools with individual pupil information in a range of graphical formats and schools can select which one they feel might be most useful in informing parents.
12. The parents' meeting provides a useful opportunity for schools to set the InCAS outcomes in an educational context as a basis for explaining to parents their child's strengths and any difficulties the child may be experiencing, and the actions the school intends to take to address these. The meeting also provides an opportunity to help parents understand what they can do to support their child's learning.

### **2010/11 School Year**

13. From the **2010/11 school year** schools will be required, where two or more years' information is available, to provide parents with a written age-equivalent outcome in Reading and General Maths, set alongside the pupil's

chronological age, for all available years, and also to provide this information in graphical format.

### **Reporting of Irish Reading Outcomes to Parents**

14. The Department appreciates that – unlike other InCAS assessments, which were made available from the 2007/08 school year – the InCAS Irish Reading assessment was first made available on a trial basis in the 2008/09 school year. Accordingly, in the 2009/10 school year, while Irish-medium schools and units must report 2009/10 Irish Reading outcomes to parents in writing and offer a meeting by the end of the autumn term, they are not required to provide the 2008/09 Irish Reading outcomes to parents. However, if parents request outcomes for 2008/09, this information should be provided in writing.
15. As with the reporting of other InCAS assessment outcomes – see paragraph 12 above – it will be important for schools to set Irish Reading outcomes in an educational context for parents.
16. From the 2010/11 school year, the reporting requirements for Irish Reading assessment outcomes will be the same as for other InCAS assessment outcomes. (See paragraph 13 above.)

### **Exemptions**

17. The 2007 Order provides for the following exemptions from the requirement to undertake InCAS assessments:
  - (a) a pupil with a statement of special educational needs who has been assessed as having severe learning difficulties does not have to undertake InCAS assessments;
  - (b) where a pupil has been exempted from any of the requirements of Articles 5 to 9 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 – these Articles relate to the curriculum, skills and assessment – by Article 14

(Development work and experiments), 15 (Exceptions by regulations), 16 (Pupils with statements of special educational needs) or 17 (Temporary exemptions for individual pupils) of that Order, the assessment provisions of the 2007 Order do not apply in relation to the requirements from which the pupil is exempt and the pupil shall be assessed only in relation to those parts of the curriculum from which he or she is not exempt. A copy of the 2006 Education Order is available at <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2006/20061915.htm>; and

- (c) a new Irish-medium primary school or unit does not have to carry out the InCAS assessments in the school year in which it first becomes grant-aided.

### **Support for Administering InCAS Assessments**

18. InCAS is not a high-stakes assessment and it does not have to be administered in test conditions, e.g. there is no need for a whole class/year group to take the assessment at the same time or on the same day. It can be carried out as part of normal classroom practice at any point during the autumn term and it is for schools to decide the arrangements that best suit their teachers and pupils.
19. Schools have been provided with additional laptops and headphones to support teaching and assessment during the 2007/08 school year and also received computer mouse devices for laptops and further sets of headphones during the 2008/09 school year.
20. CCEA has provided training for teachers in the relevant year groups in administering the InCAS assessment, and in interpreting and using the outcomes to inform teaching and learning. Teachers have been provided with support materials, which are also available on the revised curriculum website at: [http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/annual\\_report/incas/index.asp](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/annual_report/incas/index.asp), along with further information and support material.

A CCEA helpdesk facility is also available on 9026 1274 and a C2k helpdesk facility is available on 0870 6011 666 for hardware, IT and software queries.

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