

Department of Education

Action Plan

to address

Recommendations of InCAS Working Group*

* An independent working group set up by the Education Minister to assess the impact of the two 2009 errors in InCAS outcomes on school confidence and make recommendations on actions to improve confidence in InCAS among schools, teachers and parents in the 2010 InCAS assessments. The group was also empowered to provide views or recommendations on wider aspects of computer-based diagnostic assessment in primary schools in the north of Ireland.

WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION	ACTION TO BE TAKEN (in light of recommendation)	LEAD RSPONSIBILITY
1. Steps are taken to emphasise to parents that the primary purpose of the InCAS assessments is in contributing to diagnostic support for pupils' learning – and not for comparing pupils.	Communicate message to CASS and C2k colleagues via SEO network.	DE
	Message to be stressed in all relevant training provided by CCEA and CASS.	CCEA/ELBs
	DE to issue circular or letter at start of autumn term confirming primary purpose of InCAS.	DE
	Preparation of a new parent leaflet for issue in the autumn term.	CCEA
	Message to be included the September on-line training for new teachers and Principals' seminars to emphasise this message.	CCEA
2. The trialling of items should be separate from formal use of the assessments, perhaps being developed in collaboration with schools that volunteer to participate.	Ensure this is a clearly stated requirement from autumn 2011 as part of contract extension arrangements.	CCEA/C2k
	Ensure also that this requirement is built into specification for new tender for computer-based diagnostic assessment.	CCEA/C2k
	Take action to identify volunteer schools in advance of requirement for trialling.	CCEA
3. If the formal use of assessments must continue to incorporate trial items, this should be notified to pupils and teachers so that they	For autumn 2010, this information will be included in the September on-line training for new teachers.	CCEA

WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION	ACTION TO BE TAKEN (in light of recommendation)	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY
<p>know the additional items do not contribute to the assessment.</p>	<p>Additionally, seminars for principals will illustrate that new trial items will be included in the software this year (2010/11) but do not contribute to the assessment outcome.</p>	<p>CCEA</p>
	<p>CCEA will also remind teachers to inform pupils in case they get a second comprehension passage.</p>	<p>CCEA</p>
	<p>Letter will issue to all school Principals (August dispatch) along with letter for parents to ensure they are informed that pupils may have to do an additional comprehension passage which will not contribute to the outcome.</p>	<p>CCEA</p>
<p>4. Arrangements are made to test the performance of the InCAS data processing before general release of analysed age-equivalent and standardised scores. It would not be practical or sensible to do this for all schools as the response times for analysed data would probably be seriously extended. However, it could be accomplished by collaborating with a selection of volunteering schools which provide their data early in the autumn term and contribute to the necessary checking and feedback.</p>	<p>Testing arrangement to be built into contract extension negotiations.</p>	<p>CCEA/C2k</p>
	<p>CCEA to identify a group of schools which will sit the assessments early in September.</p>	<p>CCEA</p>
	<p>CCEA to seek the schools' permission to access their data to check feedback as an additional quality assurance procedure.</p>	<p>CCEA</p>

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5. The annual summer term briefings of relevant schools staff on the upcoming assessment period should include information on the measures being taken to ensure the system is robust and dependable.	Additional material will be added to the on-line training for new teachers and Principals' seminars. These sessions will be used to rebuild confidence in the system.	CCEA
6. InCAS-related training should increase the emphasis on the interpretation and sharing of InCAS results with parents.	The training planned for 2010 already carries a strong focus on interpretation and feedback to parents; however, additional material will be added along with exercises using InCAS data for illustration and interpretation purposes. Case study on interpretation of feedback to be available on NI Curriculum website.	CCEA
7. CCEA and DE take steps to ensure that the CEM quality control procedures are regularly and independently reviewed to reduce the potential for recurrences of errors of the types experienced in October 2009.	C2k to prepare guidelines for schools in the use of wireless computers.	C2k
	Additional clauses to be added to the new contract along with a service level agreement to be agreed by all parties and signed off.	CCEA/C2k
8. Meetings with principals are convened in the third term of 2009/2010 to set out and give assurances on the steps being taken to secure the reliability of the system in the future.	Slides for the Principals' seminars in September 2010 will cover action taken in the autumn term to address errors and additional quality assurance procedures now in place.	CCEA

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	<p>These sessions will be used to rebuild confidence in the system and to give principals an opportunity to ask any questions or express any concerns they may have.</p> <p>Sessions also will be used to reinforce the message that schools are also accountable for checking that all assessments are completed and processed.</p>	
9. All schools should be asked to give specific feedback (perhaps through the annual evaluation surveys) on the diagnostic use and performance of the assessments.	An opportunity for feedback on this issue will be provided in the next CCEA evaluation.	CCEA
10. Research should be commissioned into the extent of usage of commercial practice tests by schools and parents.	DE to write to NITC to ask for views on the extent to which this is a concern for teachers.	DE
	CCEA to explore the scope to include this as a question in future evaluations.	CCEA
11. Research should be commissioned into how teachers and principals use InCAS scores for diagnostic, planning and evaluative purposes.	DE will commission ETI to undertake an evaluation of how effectively primary schools are using InCAS for diagnostic and planning purposes and to improve outcomes for pupils in literacy and numeracy. It is likely that this will take place in 2011.	ETI

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12. CCEA and DE seek to recoup the costs of substitution cover for CEM.	Relevant costs to be pursued and recouped from CEM.	C2k
13. The legislative dimension of computer-based assessments should be reviewed.	DE will review the legislative basis for computer-based assessment after the arrangements have been in place for sufficiently long to allow for detailed evaluation of the effectiveness of this legislative provision on pupil attainment. The normal policy evaluation cycle is 5 years so this is likely to be timed for 2015, after the requirement has applied to five full cohorts of pupils.	DE
14. The size of item banks are considerably increased in order to improve diagnostic potential and to maintain credibility by reducing both the risk of memorisation and the effectiveness of practising as a means to improving performance levels.	Requirement for reasonable increase of item banks will be built into any new contract and also in discussions with CEM.	CCEA/C2k
15. Differential item functioning analyses are carried out for sub-groupings within the pupil population including gender, second language, special needs, socio - economic status and minority ethnic groupings.	CCEA to check with CEM if this information is readily available.	CCEA
	Consider how this might be built into specification for new tender for 2013.	CCEA

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16. InCAS consider offering standardised scores on the basis of raw scores and that these standardised scores should be referenced to both Year cohorts and age.	Discussion to take place with CEM to reach agreement on this area to include how standardised scores are to be calculated in future.	CCEA
17. CCEA and CEM agree a policy on standardisation as soon as possible.	Policy to be formally agreed between CCEA and CEM re frequency of future standardisation.	CCEA
18. CEM institute appropriate modifications to ensure that information on the various types of inappropriate access to and usage of InCAS is available and traceable.	Explore with CEM the introduction of sufficient mechanisms in their system to identify schools where pupils are re-sitting assessments.	CCEA
	Explore with CEM the mechanisms in place to identify who has downloaded data and when.	CCEA
19. A review of ICT resources for InCAS administration is carried out to identify schools needing support.	DE to ask C2k, working in partnership with CCEA, to assess the adequacy of ICT resources in the context of the statutory requirements for InCAS and bearing in mind the place of ICT as a cross-curricular skill and the planned introduction of the new Levels of Progression.	DE/C2k