

Report of the Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce 2009/10

April 2010

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Foreword

This is the second report produced by The Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce and will aim to comment on the progress made following the publication of the first report and to provide an update on the work carried out since February 2009.

The Taskforce was formed in January 2008 and contains a team of experienced, successful educationalists from a range of institutions. Its membership remains unchanged and is not designed to be representative of all stakeholder groups, but to have at its heart, people who are passionate about improving the educational service for **all** children in Northern Ireland. A relatively small group such as this, meeting six times per year cannot be expected to lead reform of literacy and numeracy across the whole school system. What it can do and will do, is signal to the policy makers and practitioners what it sees as the strengths and weaknesses of the present system and what might enhance future educational provision.

Though there seems to be a growing awareness that there are still far too many children who struggle with reading, writing and mathematics and who leave school without the fundamental skills which will equip them for life in the 21st Century, progress on many of the key issues remains far too slow. Members of the Taskforce feel this situation is very disappointing and there is now a pressing need to push ahead with the key reforms which are planned.

The Taskforce has highlighted some further issues in this report and has suggested additional areas which need to be revisited or re-examined. We hope these observations stimulate some action and will prove interesting to the wide range of people concerned with schools and who share the belief that the education of all children is an immensely important part of our society.

Sir Robert Salisbury, Chair of the Literacy & Numeracy Taskforce

Context

Current position in achievement in literacy and numeracy/Challenges and evidence of underachievement

The school system in Northern Ireland has many strengths but there are also significant weaknesses and particular areas of underperformance that need to be addressed.

Overall Performance

In 2008/09 in post-primary schools, 71% of Year 12 pupils obtained 5+ GCSEs¹ at grades A*-C. However, when the measure is amended to include English and Mathematics (i.e. 5+ GCSEs or equivalent including English and Mathematics at grades A*-C) the percentage achieving drops to 57%. Considering 78.2% and 74.4% of these pupils achieved level 5 or above in KS3 English and Maths respectively (2006/07) this is of great concern. As a comparison, but bearing in mind the very different ethnic mix, the equivalent data for England is 70% of Year 12 pupils obtained 5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C and 50% obtained 5+ GCSEs including English and Maths at grades A*-C.

It is worth noting that since the introduction of the new 2-tier GCSE specification in Mathematics (first award August 2008) all candidates now have access to Grade C. Prior to this candidates entered for Foundation tier could only be awarded grades in the range G- D, which contributed to a lack of motivation of many pupils (knowing the highest they could achieve was a D) and restricted their achievement.

At Key Stage 2, the point at which young people complete 7 years of primary education, teacher assessment tells us that in 2008/09, 80.1 % of young people reach or exceed the expected levels in literacy and 81.3% in Mathematics. Approximately 4,500 children, or 1 child in every 5, move from primary to post-primary school with what can be characterised as “poor” standards of literacy and numeracy (4,628 English, 4,342 Maths). There also appears to be some discrepancy between teacher-assessed levels

¹ Where the term GCSE is used it also includes the recognised equivalent qualifications.

awarded to pupils at end of KS2 (in both English and Mathematics) and actual abilities of these pupils at start of Year 8, as evident from teacher observation and results obtained from standardized testing during Term 1 in the post-primary schools. If this tendency proves to be widespread, its impact needs investigated urgently.

Five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C (including English or Gaelige and Mathematics) is recognised as the qualification which puts an individual on the employment/further education ladder. Without this level of qualification young people are left at a disadvantage in both the education and labour markets. Yet in 2008/09, around 10,000 young people did not achieve at this standard at the end of Key Stage 4.

In terms of English and Mathematics:-

- 45% of young people, (11,116 pupils), did not achieve a GCSE Grade C pass in English and Mathematics and therefore do not have the qualifications to progress into higher education and may face difficulties progressing in the workplace; and
- Some 3,000 (2,842) failed to obtain even a Grade G in English and Mathematics and thus have inadequate literacy and numeracy skills to progress.²

Evidence can also be taken from non-examination sources, such as the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). First conducted in 2000, PISA is an examination of the reading, mathematics and scientific skills of 15-year-olds in OECD and other countries. It takes place every three years, and is designed to measure students' ability to *apply* knowledge, and readiness for the scientific, reading, and mathematical demands of future education and adult life.

On the most recent PISA (2006) there were no statistically significant differences between the OECD and Northern Ireland mean scores for reading and mathematics. Put simply, in an international context, Northern Irish students display average levels of reading and mathematics skills. Further, the mean scores of students in Northern Ireland have dropped over the three PISA cycles (2000, 2003, 2006). For example,

² In 2008/09, 95.3% of entrants achieved a grade C or better in GCSE Gaelige.

whereas the mean score for maths in 2000 was 524 (statistically significantly above the OECD average of 500), the score in 2006 was 494 (below the OECD average of 498, but not significantly so). For reading, the mean of 524 obtained on PISA 2000 (OECD: 500) fell to 495 in PISA 2006 (not significantly above the OECD mean of 492). **In sum, Northern Ireland's students have changed from performing above the OECD average in 2000 to being only average in 2006.**

As well as looking at the *average* achieving student, performance on PISA reading and maths can be described by the size of the gap between the weakly and strongly performing students, and by examining students at either extreme of the scale. In Northern Ireland, the gap is larger than the average across OECD countries. It is also larger than the gap found in England, Scotland or Wales, and is considerably larger than the gap in the Republic. Relative to the situation in many other countries, “weak” performing students fall further behind “strong” performing students in Northern Ireland.

PISA also describes student reading and mathematics skills in terms of proficiency levels. Students who fail to reach “baseline proficiency level” may not have the basic competencies that will enable them to participate effectively and productively in life situations and in future education. In Northern Ireland, 21% of students (30% of males) failed to show baseline reading proficiency in PISA 2006. While this is close to the OECD average of 20% and 19% in England, it is considerably worse than in countries such as the Republic of Ireland (only 12% of students do not reach baseline), Korea and Finland (5%). **For mathematics, 23% of students in Northern Ireland did not demonstrate baseline proficiency (OECD average 21%). The equivalent figures for England and the Republic of Ireland are 20% and 16%.**

The data from PISA (and from GCSEs) suggest that Northern Ireland demonstrates a long “tail” of underachievement. While many students perform at a very high level, there are also many who fail to achieve what would be considered basic levels of literacy and numeracy.

Research³ shows that those with poor literacy and numeracy skills experience practical difficulties in everyday tasks, such as reading safety instructions or using the internet, and are more likely to:

- be unemployed or in a low-paid job, with poor prospects of professional development or promotion;
- suffer from ill-health and depression;
- live in poor quality housing;
- be dependent on state benefits.

³ Audit Office report on Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy, 2009.

Preparation of and consultation on draft literacy and numeracy strategy (& complementary Irish Medium strategy)

The Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce contributed to and reviewed the draft strategy for raising attainment in literacy and numeracy and members provided feedback on the evolving draft.

The strategy was issued for consultation on 23rd June 2008 and the consultation closed on 30th November 2008.

Taskforce Report to DE

The volunteer Taskforce met formally five times in 2009 and received detailed inputs from a range of relevant organisations. Members have also undertaken many informal consultations and visits to try to gain a greater understanding of the underlying issues and extensive analytical data has been provided by DE. Many of the educational shortcomings listed in the previous report remain largely unchanged and there still exists:

1. A marked gap between achievements in the highest- and lowest-performing schools;
2. A marked difference in the performance of boys and girls but an even greater difference when Socio Economic Status is also taken into account, with boys from disadvantaged backgrounds experiencing some of the worst outcomes;
3. A significant tail of underachievement;
4. A need for early targeted interventions and more consistency in the leadership and management of literacy and numeracy to prevent some children being left behind.

The reasons for this lack of action are explored in more detail later in this document.

The Commitment of DE

The Department of Education continues to be fully committed to addressing underachievement and to confronting the issues which led to disappointing outcomes from the 1998 initiative. The Department has worked consistently towards using evidence-based approaches in developing their strategies and the consultation process has been open and inclusive. The draft literacy and numeracy strategy has been amended to take into account feedback received from the various stakeholders. A complementary strategy has been developed in consultation with Irish Medium schools. In short there is coherence about the policy direction and what seems like a wide

acceptance that current practice and educational outcomes are unsatisfactory for many students and need to be addressed.

Capacity of the Education Service to Deliver

As highlighted in the previous report, the formation and introduction of the Education and Skills Authority is, in the view of the Taskforce, a vital ingredient in the revised literacy and numeracy strategy and it is hugely frustrating to see that there has been a delay in its planned operations. The literacy and numeracy strategy will, we expect, set out a very clear set of expectations for the system, which we feel stand the best chance of being advanced if there is clear, coherent leadership through a single organisation charged with raising standards for all pupils and with reducing the differentials in achievement that have persisted in the past. Such expectations should include:

- support for schools in their development planning and target setting;
- monitoring of each school's achievement in literacy and numeracy; and where necessary, challenging schools on their plans, targets or outcomes;
- providing advice, support and professional development to schools, school leaders and teachers in the most effective whole-school and cross-curricular approaches to developing literacy and numeracy;
- providing advice, support and professional development to schools and teachers in the most effective literacy and numeracy pedagogies;
- identifying (along with the ETI) and disseminating best practice;
- working in partnership with all stakeholders (including statutory agencies) to meet the literacy and numeracy needs of all pupils and ensure that teachers' ability to support underachieving pupils is enhanced through any external support provided; and
- providing parents with information, guidance and support in relation to literacy and numeracy.

If ESA continues to be delayed it is essential that any interim arrangements ensure that standards in literacy and numeracy are monitored at school and district level. If schools or teachers are underperforming it is vital that they are supported to improve following the procedures set down in the school improvement policy. Advice and support on

raising standards and the leadership issues linked to literacy and numeracy must be maintained if momentum and support for the present initiatives is to continue and such support needs to be coherent, credible, well-timed and evidence-based.

Similarly, though the revised curriculum is in the process of being implemented in schools and is deemed by most to be a step in the right direction, uncertainty about the future pattern of post-primary schooling and the way in which children will transfer at eleven still remains an issue for many. A clear resolution of this matter would greatly assist schools in establishing common assessment strategies, transfer of key data on individual children and consolidation of curricular continuity at the change over stage.

Progress towards the PAC recommendations

DE continues to take steps towards improving pupil literacy and numeracy levels. The Department commissioned research to consider the nature and quality of outcomes in literacy and numeracy in schools, alongside benchmarking attainment in Belfast against educational outcomes in relevant cities in Britain and Ireland. This research continues to inform the development of a revised literacy and numeracy strategy, which highlights the problem of underachievement, particularly within disadvantaged groups, as an issue to be tackled.

It is recognised that through the work of the Department there is now general acceptance that there have been past, fundamental, deep-rooted failings in parts of the NI educational system which require immediate action.

In the view of the Taskforce not enough has yet been done to identify good practice and to share this with other schools. In a similar way, the Taskforce feels strongly that there must be much greater accountability and challenge for those schools which are consistently underperforming in terms of literacy and numeracy and for those who support schools.

The Department has set clear targets for schools and has stressed that these will be used as the objective measurement of the attainment levels of schools. Hopefully, as work progresses, these targets will be more closely aligned to the individual context of each school

A common baseline data system, which would inform the development of a 'value-added' measure and facilitate benchmarking against schools with similar characteristics and the setting of realistic targets, has not yet been implemented. However, work is in hand to develop an appropriate system.

Parents have expressed a strong desire to be involved and informed about the curriculum to enable them to provide appropriate support for their children. Greater efforts need to be concentrated on highlighting the role that parents can play in developing their child's literacy and numeracy skills, prior to starting school. Such efforts need to be done in conjunction with other government agencies and departments.

Parental involvement in their child's education remains a vital ingredient to raising achievement, though in many schools 'opening the doors' to greater outside cooperation may require a major cultural and operations shift. However, such a shift is a prerequisite for any literacy or numeracy strategy to effect significant change and reports from the Parenting Forum and Barnardo's confirmed this view.

The long standing gap between the best and lowest attainment in literacy and numeracy still prevails. There is now a wider acceptance that a system which sets up children for failure is unfair and inappropriate in a modern society. There are tensions in managing the equity and entitlement agenda and the achievement agenda. Improving the performance of weaker performing pupils does not have to come at the expense of raising standards at the top end. Moving things forward in practice is proving to be difficult but DE has given helpful guidance on the way forward. Poland provides one example of the impact of educational reform on student achievement (see below).

However, much more international evidence should be brought into the public debate, especially in terms of the negative impact which selection has on those children not selected.

Example: Poland

Between PISA 2000 and 2006, Poland raised its reading performance from significantly below to significantly above the OECD average. This was initially (PISA 2003) achieved through increases at the lower end of the performance distribution, but in PISA 2006, increases in the percentages of high performing students were also observed. Extensive analyses have associated this improvement with the fact that the 15-year-old students assessed by PISA were no longer separated into different school tracks (educational reforms resulted in tracking being restricted to upper secondary level only).

In short the PAC recommendations have been largely acknowledged and work is underway.

Progress towards the NIAO recommendations.

The central recommendations identified by the NIAO report have been addressed by the DE with the development of the revised literacy and numeracy strategy and the school improvement policy. Earlier in this report, the Taskforce again stressed the importance of establishing the ESA and getting this body operational in order to address the strategic and structural weaknesses of the five Education and Library Boards, identified by the NIAO. This should also address the problems associated with having a large degree of variability in the reports from the different Boards and the disparity in target setting and data analysis. The NIAO's concerns about setting up a system of targeted resources, encouraging greater parental involvement and giving more precise

pedagogical guidance in terms of successful 'good practice' are addressed in other sections of this or the earlier report.

The NIAO recommendations have been accepted and progress to address them is underway.

Though some progress has been made during the year, the Taskforce still feels there are ongoing Key Challenges which should be addressed:

1 Establishment of a baseline database across all schools.

Most schools already collect data in some form but its use is unsystematic and varied so benchmarking performance with other similar schools is very difficult. A 'value-added' system, which takes a detailed look at the context of each school, would help schools determine realistic targets for action and would reassure them if they are on the right track. Evidence from recent inspection reports is emerging that some schools are beginning to heed this message and are now using data analysis in a more structured and systematic manner. The case studies at Annex A illustrate the resulting improvements that can be achieved.

- 1.1 Development of an individual plan for every child based on the outcomes of standardised diagnostic tests and teacher assessment conducted within the school. This should include better provision for SEN pupils because the present situation is not conducive to raising standards and requires urgent and thorough review. Some finance is available for material resources and the modification of school buildings but very little is made available for human resources to support the education process. Classroom assistants and teachers are not adequately trained to meet the specific needs of statemented pupils and this impacts greatly on achievement in literacy and numeracy for SEN pupils.

In addition, looking more closely at re-engaging disaffected pupils would have an impact, as a substantial percentage of D grades achieved are due to disengagement of pupils rather than low abilities.

- 1.2 Development of a 'shared good practice' culture across all schools is essential but as yet there appears to be no clear plan or desire to make this happen.

- 1.3 Establishment of an 'internal culture' which openly identifies and shares good practice within schools. This last point may seem so obvious that it is not worth making but one of the key components of successful schools is that they have developed an acceptance that regularly 'talking about teaching' moves everyone forward. Opportunities should be provided to quality teachers of literacy and numeracy to impart their expertise to colleagues.

Clearly a strong correlation exists between teachers' knowledge, enthusiasm, ability to motivate, confidence, competence and the quality of lessons they teach. A maths specialist teacher in every primary school to lead and disseminate good practice would be productive. A survey, assessing the beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and levels of confidence, competence and enthusiasm of trainee teachers and primary school teachers, would also be worthwhile and provide valuable information to inform the support provided for teachers.

- 1.4 The establishment of a common value-added data system would assist the transfer of data at the Primary/Post Primary intersection. It would also assist the ETI in identifying and challenging those schools that are consistently underperforming.
- 1.5 There are no recent comparative international data for primary pupils in reading and maths. This means an excessive reliance on Key Stages to assess the "health" of the primary system. While there are undoubtedly merits associated with this form of assessment, it would be more appropriate to employ a diverse set of assessment tools to assess something as complex and important as an education system. In this regard, participation in some international, externally moderated, evaluations of reading and mathematics achievement among primary school pupils would seem an appropriate step to take.

2 Ensuring that Literacy and Numeracy is an essential part of school strategic planning by creating linkage between SDP, PRSD, CPD, individual lesson plans, data collection etc.

The Taskforce felt that there should be a literacy/numeracy 'thread' running through all aspects of the work of the school so that it is clearly viewed as a priority. It is possible for Governors, especially those who are new to the process, to be unsure of their legitimate areas of responsibility so the development of 'key questions' for Governors to ask of the school leaders about assessment, actions and outcomes ought to be devised. These could be offered as part of the Governor training programme and would help to ensure that matters of literacy and numeracy are constantly part of the agenda. With the ever increasing responsibilities of governors to be accountable, especially for raising levels of literacy and numeracy, it might be an opportune moment to review the make up and precise responsibilities expected of governing bodies.

2.1 It is very difficult for any school to raise standards of literacy and numeracy in isolation and it is clear that a culture must be developed which strives to create an appropriate nexus between home and school, parent and child. Many other countries have already implemented successful home-school intervention models which have proved effective but the current process is weak here. Many teachers take the understandable view that school should be an 'island haven' separated from home or city influence but this is an approach which is, in the view of Taskforce members, not based on sound educational principles. In order to move things forward we need to introduce strategies which 'blur the edges' where traditional schools stop and where outside communities begin. Inputs from The Parenting Forum, Barnardos and the Home School Liaison programme in the south of Ireland reiterated this (see Appendix)

2.2 Parents, business, commercial organisations, charitable organisations and other interested stakeholders should be invited and encouraged to be part of the overall push to improve literacy and numeracy.

Public attitudes to numeracy also need to change and the media especially should be encouraged to promote mathematics in a more positive way. This is a huge area for development which potentially could have a substantial impact.

The role played by maths in sport offers exciting opportunities to enrich the teaching of maths in schools and the 2012 Olympics provides a huge range of potential opportunities to explore mathematical topics.

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Case studies of schools that have brought about improvement through more effective use of data

School A was evaluated as 'very good', having addressed areas for improvement identified at its previous inspection. The school put in place robust and agreed systems for the monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching. It makes very good use of data to set targets, track progress in children's learning and identify whole-school areas for development. It has embedded a culture of self-evaluation, underpinned by a strong collegiate approach to whole-school improvement, resulting in an improving trend in the standards achieved by the children by the end of Key Stage 2 in English and mathematics.

School B was evaluated as 'very good', having addressed areas for improvement identified at its previous inspection. The promotion of a self-evaluative culture contributed significantly to the improvement made. A comprehensive school development plan was put in place and supplemented by appropriate targets and detailed action plans to inform and guide learning and teaching across the school. Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) is used as a focus for self-evaluation and staff development. There is a strong focus on differentiation with an emphasis on matching work to the ability of all of the children and staff make extensive use of internal and external assessment data to set targets for the children and to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning and teaching. The Principal provides good leadership for the staff and ensures the targets are met and good standards are maintained.

Inputs from the relevant stakeholders in 2009 are summarised below:

Presentation by Katrina Godfrey, DE, on the responses to the consultation on the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

213 responses were received and in general responses were broadly supportive of the aims of the strategy and the specific questions set out in the consultation document. A number of common themes emerged:

- **Early Years** – there was agreement that the emphasis on early years could be stronger. Respondents felt that intervention and investment in early years was important to create high quality pre-school provision.
- **Dissemination of Good Practice** – respondents felt that the strategy does not take cognisance of the good practice already in existence. In promoting the dissemination of good practice it was suggested that teachers should be afforded more opportunities to share expertise and more importance should be placed on the role of ETI in disseminating good practice.
- **Resourcing** –the strategy needed to be adequately resourced, providing more time, training and support for class teachers and classroom assistants.
- **Parents** – the role of parents in supporting the development of literacy and numeracy should be integral to the strategy.
- **Initial Teacher and Early Teacher Education** – newly qualified teachers must be fully equipped to teach literacy and numeracy. ITE needs to place a greater emphasis on the diagnosis and remediation of specific learning difficulties in literacy and numeracy.

- **Continuing Professional Development** – there should be an increased focus on professional development of teachers throughout their careers. As with ITE, provision for CPD needs to place an emphasis on diagnosis and remediation of specific learning difficulties.
- **SEN Review/Code of Practice** – terminology in the literacy and numeracy strategy and SEN review need to be synchronised.

Presentation by Alison Loughlin, Parenting Forum, on consultation with parents on the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

Alison Loughlin from the Parenting Forum presented the outcomes of its consultation with parents. 116 parents participated through a series of focus groups across the full range of Section 75 groups. Key issues arising were:

- **What parents would like to see their child achieve** – a happy, confident children was top of list; good balance of academic and personal skills; to reach their full potential; to have a profession; to go into further education; to go to university.
- **Understanding the curriculum** – parents felt disempowered to support their children’s learning because of changes in the curriculum. Giving parents clear information on the curriculum and any proposed changes would help them to support their child.
- **Information and communication** – parents felt that they were kept in the dark at many levels by some of the schools in terms of fully understanding the changes proposed by the Department of Education. They suggested that simple to read newsletters sent out at regular intervals would be helpful.

- **Relationship between home and school** – an excellent relationship between child, teacher and parents was crucial to supporting a child’s learning and development. More training should be provided to support school to develop this relationship.
- **Involvement and inclusion of parents** – parents felt that they needed support to be involved at all levels of their child’s learning and to assist in the implementation of the strategy. Parents should be involved in decision making processes in schools through the establishment of parent councils.
- **Re-introduction of vocational training** – parents recognised that not all young people have the capabilities to achieve a GCSE in English and Maths. They suggested that there should be a re-introduction of a vocational skills plan based on developing a trade, incorporating English and Maths.

Presentation from Barnardo’s on consultation with children and young people on the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

Barnardo’s consulted with 556 children through a series of focus groups and questionnaires. The key findings among children at each level were:

- **Primary school key findings** – children generally feel positive about learning how to read and write with maths being viewed less positively. Help at home is very important for children, particularly for reading and writing, with mothers mostly fulfilling this role. Around 1/3 of children in focus groups don’t have anyone to help with school work at home and many children found the help at home inadequate. When asked what would help raise achievement suggestions included making learning interesting and fun through the use of games, quizzes etc...clubs for reading and mathematics and treats to motivate and reward.
- **Post Primary school key findings** – overall the majority of students describe experiences of learning literacy and numeracy as good. Girls are slightly more likely

to have had a positive experience than boys. Pupils were most likely to seek help with literacy and numeracy from a class teacher. Just over half said they got help at home from parents and other family members. When asked what would help raise achievement suggestions included dedicated clubs for English and Maths and the use of ICT in Maths and English.

Presentation by Paddy Mackey, Eithne Mullen and Yvonne Mathers, Literacy Steering Group, on the literacy strand of the Regional Literacy & Numeracy Action Plan 2009/10

The literacy strand of the regional action plan for 2009/10 has five elements:

1. Leadership and Management and the effective use of data – joint with numeracy;
2. Quality literacy provision;
3. Raising Achievement Programme (RAP) – a targeted intervention;
4. Parents & Community; and
5. Communications.

Discussion focused on support for, and the capacity of schools, in relation to the effective use of data. Issues raised included the use made of data in the classroom, making data meaningful for teachers, the provision within ITE in relation to the effective use of data and the need for coherent and reliable data to be available in all schools.

Other issues discussed were the impact of Boards' support on pupil outcomes, developing a culture of accountability, the need for a contextual value-added measure, the importance of home-school links, and ways to encourage the sharing of best practice among schools.

Presentation by Gerry McGuinness and Liz McPartland, Numeracy Steering Group, on numeracy strand of the Regional Numeracy Action Plan 2009/10

The numeracy strand of the action plan has three elements:

1. Leadership & Management and the effective use of data (joint with literacy);
2. Quality whole class teaching, including the 'Improving Learning in Mathematics' programme; and
3. Quality whole class teaching plus additional/personalised support – the Raising Achievement in Numeracy Programme (RAIN).

Issues raised in discussion included the confidence and competence of primary teachers in teaching Maths, the importance and impact of positive attitudes in the teaching and learning of Maths, the nature of the RAIN programme, and issues of confidence regarding unmoderated teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 2. It was also noted that employers have highlighted the amount of time they spend on literacy and numeracy remediation programmes for young people who have joined the workforce.

Presentation by Carol Lannin on the Home-School Community Liaison Programme

This is an existing scheme based in the south of Ireland and issues raised in discussion included:

- the importance of obtaining acceptance and buy-in from schools;
- the importance of building the relationship with parents and providing them with support – Importance of having co-ordinators around the school and the community;
- how to reach parents at post-primary, for example, through joint parent-child art classes;
- vetting of parents – in the HSCL Programme, children are under the care of the teacher the whole time parents are in the school;

- the advantages of the co-ordinators being qualified teachers, e.g. their curricular and professional knowledge, their time to work with and support parents, and credibility with and access to teachers and principals;
- the links co-ordinators have to other agencies – this is arranged through the local committee and co-ordinators can make parents aware of the services available, while their privacy is respected;
- longitudinal analysis – there has been some evaluation of the Programme (e.g. by the ERC), and some achievement gains and behavioural changes observed, but it was pointed out that the programme has evolved and implementation varies by school; the DEIS programme, of which HSCL is a part, is currently under evaluation;
- Funding – HSCL is targeted at disadvantaged schools, schools are invited to participate and funding is provided on a graduated basis. The co-ordinators are funded centrally, with some shared across, for example, small schools.

Average Assessment Outcomes per Academic Year

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
KS2 Assessments	% of pupils achieving				
KS2 English (level 4 or above)	76.6	78.0	78.0	78.8	80.1
KS2 Mathematics (level 4 or above)	79.0	80.0	79.5	80.6	81.3
	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
KS3 Assessments (all post-primary)	% of pupils achieving				
KS3 English (level 5 or above)	74.6	76.6	78.2	79.2	78.9
KS3 Mathematics (level 5 or above)	73.9	72.9	74.4	74.1	77.3
	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
GCSEs (non-selective)	% of pupils achieving				
5+ GCSEs (or equivalent) Grades A*-C	40	43	44.9	50.3	N/A
5+ GCSEs (or equivalent) Grades A*-C including Maths & English	n/a	27.5	28.8	29.8	N/A
	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
GCSEs (grammar)	% of pupils achieving				
7+ GCSEs (or equivalent) Grades A*-C	n/a	n/a	91.2	90.7	N/A
7+ GCSEs (or equivalent) Grades A*-C including Maths & English	n/a	n/a	87.8	87.8	N/A
	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
'A' Level (all post-primary)	% of pupils achieving				
2+A Levels (or equivalent) Grades A-E	97	98	97	97.2	N/A
3+A Levels (or equivalent) Grades A-C	61	63	62.4	62.8	N/A
	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
GCSEs (all post-primary)	% of pupils achieving				
5+ GCSEs (or equivalent) Grades A*-C	61	63	64	68.1	N/A
5+ GCSEs (or equivalent) Grades A*-C including Maths & English	51	51.2	52	53	N/A

N/A – not currently available

GCSE Performance data - % achieving each grade in English and Mathematics

	Mathematics				English			
	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
A*	6	6	8	7	4	4	4	5
A	11	10	12	12	16	16	15	15
B	19	20	19	19	21	24	24	24
C	26	26	26	26	27	26	27	27
D	14	14	13	15	18	17	16	16
E	12	11	10	9	8	8	8	8
F	7	7	7	6	4	3	3	3
G	3	3	4	4	1	1	1	1
U	2	3	2	2	1	1	1	1

Gaelige		
Grade	2007/08	2008/09
A*	6.3	8.6
A	23.8	27.6
B	34.1	41
C	19	18.1
D	10.3	1.9
E	5.6	1
F	0	1.9
G	0.8	0