

Strict Embargo: 9am Tuesday 11th December 2012

Minister Quinn welcomes international report showing Irish primary students doing well in Reading, Maths and Science

Irish primary school students have scored above average in major international tests of literacy, mathematics and science published today (Tuesday 11th December). However, Ireland did not make it into the top performing countries in any of the three tests.

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS 2011) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS 2011) tested primary school pupils in the equivalent of fourth class in reading, mathematics and science in over sixty countries. The pupils who took part were, on average, just over 10 years old.

The PIRLS report shows that in reading, Irish students were ranked 10th out of 45 participating countries. Students in only five countries performed significantly better than Irish students: Hong Kong, Finland, Singapore, the Russian Federation and Northern Ireland. Irish students scored significantly higher than students in 31 other countries, including Germany, Sweden, Australia and New Zealand.

The TIMSS 2011 test covered mathematics and science. Irish students scored above the international average in mathematics. Ireland was placed 17th out of 50 participating countries. Irish students scored significantly below countries such as Singapore, Korea, Japan, Northern Ireland, Finland, England and the United States, and at about the same level as students in Germany, Lithuania and Portugal.

In science, Irish students again scored significantly above the international average and were placed 22nd out of the 50 participating countries. Irish students scored significantly below countries such as Korea, Singapore, Finland, Japan, the United States, Sweden and England. Ireland's score did not differ significantly from ten countries including Italy, Northern Ireland and Australia.

Welcoming the publication of the reports Minister for Education & Skills Ruairí Quinn T.D. congratulated Irish pupils and teachers on the good results that they had achieved.

"I welcome the fact that Irish students are performing above average in all three tests and especially in reading," he said. "However, we cannot be complacent. In all three tests, pupils in a number of countries are performing significantly above the performance of Irish students."

"This is the first time that we have these international comparisons in reading, maths and science available to us at the primary level. While encouraging, they demonstrate the real need to work on the issues we are seeking to tackle in the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. We need to build on the good work in reading going on at primary level into second level, especially at junior cycle. Clearly, we also need to improve our teaching of mathematics and science at all levels," the Minister said.

"However, I am especially delighted to see that Ireland has a reduced proportion of lower-performing students in reading than other countries."

On average 5% of students in all countries failed to at least reach the Low Benchmark level in reading and 10% in mathematics; the equivalent proportions in Ireland were only 3% for reading and 6% for mathematics.

“I believe that this is further evidence that our supports for DEIS schools and the special needs resources that we have given to all schools are working,” concluded Minister Quinn.

ENDS

Notes for Editors

PIRLS stands for Progress in International Reading Literacy Study. It assesses reading achievement among Fourth grade (Fourth class) pupils, and has taken place every five years, starting in 2001. 2011 is the third cycle.

TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) examines mathematics and science achievement among Fourth (Fourth class) and Eighth (Second Year) grade pupils. In Ireland, Fourth class pupils sit the tests. It has taken place every four years, since 1995. 2011 is the fifth cycle.

Both PIRLS and TIMSS are run under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), an independent, international cooperative of research institutions and agencies. The studies are co-ordinated from the International Study Centre in Boston College.

2011 was the first year in which the PIRLS and TIMSS study cycles coincided, allowing information on reading, mathematics and science to be collected from the same pupils.

In Ireland, PIRLS and TIMSS tests were conducted in 2011 by the Educational Research centre, Drumcondra on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills.

Ireland has only once previously taken part in TIMSS (in 1995), and never previously in PIRLS. In 2011, 50 countries took part in TIMSS at Fourth grade, and 45 took part in PIRLS. Thirty-four countries (including Ireland) took part in both studies. Altogether, almost 300,000 pupils took part in PIRLS and/or TIMSS at Fourth grade, with the majority of these participating in both studies.

In Ireland, more than 4500 Fourth class pupils in 151 randomly-sampled schools completed tests of reading, mathematics, and science.

PIRLS and TIMSS 2011: Reading, Mathematics and Science Outcomes for Ireland is the initial Irish report on the studies which will be published on 11 December 2012 to coincide with the launch of the international reports from the IEA.

More detailed national analyses of Irish performance on PIRLS and TIMSS, including contextual information from pupils, parents, teachers and principals, will follow in early 2013. As well as more detail on the achievement data, these reports will draw on the wealth of contextual information obtained from questionnaires completed by pupils, parents and teachers. They will compare Irish pupils and their home and school environment to their counterparts in other countries. Also, actual test items will be reviewed (including analyses of Irish pupils' performance relative to pupils in other countries on individual items).

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