

## About Our New Primary Tests

The Educational Research Centre (ERC) is a Statutory Body, and our core functions include supporting good assessment practices in Irish schools and providing suitable assessment instruments to schools. The Centre is currently revising its primary tests, and wishes to involve additional schools in piloting the computer-based versions. The tests are delivered via a cloud-based system that requires minimal bandwidth, but provides high levels of data security, and pupil engagement.

### Pilot tests

Schools are invited to pilot one or both of the following:

- English reading literacy (Second to Sixth classes).
- Mathematics (Second to Sixth classes)

The tests were initially piloted in a random sample of schools in Spring 2017. There is now an opportunity for additional schools to preview the new tests – the first on-line tests developed in Ireland for primary schools. It is expected that they will be standardised in Spring 2018. Schools that administered the pilot tests in Spring 2017 are welcome to test at additional class levels. The tests are based on current curricula in use in primary schools and all content is newly-developed.

### Requirements for computer-based tests

Using **cloud-based** technology, pupils and teachers can access the tests through standard web browsers such as Safari, Chrome, Firefox, or Internet Explorer. Access does not require any specialist software or a separate keyboard or soundcard. Tests can be taken on any device with a passable connection to the internet – e.g., tablet, iPad, desktop, laptop. It is even possible to access tests using your mobile phone, although we do not recommend this. The suitability of devices for administering the tests can be checked by running the system check on the top right hand corner at <https://takethetest.erc.ie/>. The tests place a similar load on devices as browsing the average website.

Schools are invited to test pupils at any or all classes levels from Second to Sixth. However, schools should have access to a sufficient number of computing devices to test classes. For example, if you want to assess 20 pupils at the same time, there should be 20 devices available. It should also be noted that each test takes about 90 minutes to administer. Thus, three hours of testing time, and a break, is required to test both English reading and mathematics in the same class.

### Other features of the DOTS

The Drumcondra Online Testing System (DOTS) has been developed in parallel with the test development programme. Like the tests that it hosts, the DOTS was developed in Ireland, specifically for use in Irish schools. It is cloud-based, fully integrated, and secure. It helps to establish high levels of pupil engagement with test content and ensures that pupils have minimal opportunity to copy. The DOTS also supports pupils during testing, ensuring they understand what they need to do and how, but does not let technology overshadow what it is we are trying to assess. It also enables teachers to monitor pupil progress through tests and facilitates good test administration practices.

The **integrated** nature of the DOTS means that teachers can add pupils, buy tests, set up test sessions and produce reports, all from the one site. When the primary tests have been

standardised, it will be possible to download reports directly from the system after testing. In this current phase, reports will be generated by the ERC and sent to schools before the end of August 2017. The system also contains test administration manuals, user manuals, and *how to* video guides.

In terms of **security**, data are secure, pupil answers are secure, and access is restricted to approved users. All data are stored on a secure server (located in Ireland) and transmitted over SSL. Data storage is on a SAN architecture, applications and data are behind a firewall, and a significant portion of the database architecture is encrypted. Access to the DOTS is restricted and only teachers who have registered with the ERC can see test content and organise pupil tests. Pupils' answers are saved as they are made, meaning that test data are never lost. For example, even if there is a power failure in the middle of a test session, pupils can log back in when power returns, and they are brought back to the last question they answered, with the same time left on the clock.

The DOTS deliberately targets **pupil engagement** through high quality and interesting test content and an appealing test interface. Good levels of engagement make it more likely that tests provide accurate measures of what they are intended to assess (uninterested pupils tend to underperform on standardised tests). Each test is available in multiple, parallel versions that are randomly assigned by the DOTS to pupils in a test session. Pupil passwords show which version of the test has been assigned to a pupil, and teachers can use this information to ensure that pupils sitting together are seeing different test content. In addition, only one question at a time is displayed on-screen. These features mean that pupils have very **limited opportunities to copy!**

Test administrators can use the **monitor** function to see all active pupils in a session, what question they are on, and how much time is left. Pupils who press a Help button are flagged on the monitor's screen, and the monitor can then intervene as appropriate. The monitor function includes the capacity to pause and to resume tests for an individual pupil or for an entire session, if needed.

The DOTS draws on the latest developments in technology but the **technology does not overshadow** what is being assessed. Pupils require only minimal IT skills, and they are brought through a set of simple instructions and sample questions, with hints, before they start any test. During testing, pupils see a built-in timer and question tracker so they know exactly how much progress they have made and how much time is left.

### More information

If you want to access the pilot tests (cost-free to schools), you must first complete the application form. The form is available on the ERC homepage ([www.erc.ie](http://www.erc.ie)) and Twitter account (@erc\_Irl). Once completed, please save the form and email it to [primarytests@erc.ie](mailto:primarytests@erc.ie).

Use the form to indicate how many of each type of test you would like. If you would like more information or advice on how to use the DOTS, please email us at [primarytests@erc.ie](mailto:primarytests@erc.ie)

**Once we receive your completed application form, we will register you on our system and email you the relevant documentation.**