**Irish 4th class Students Best in Reading in Europe - Minister Bruton**

**International survey shows reading skills of Irish pupils has improved significantly since 2011**

The Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton T.D., today launched the 2016 PIRLS (the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) report, which shows that Ireland’s primary school children are best in Europe and OECD countries for reading skills.

PIRLS is an international study which examines fifty countries every five years and reports on the reading achievement of pupils in Fourth Class. Fourteen of these countries, including Ireland, last year also took part in a new component (ePIRLS), which assesses reading in an online environment.

Minister Bruton has set the ambition to make Ireland’s education and training service the best in Europe within a decade. Today’s results show that the reading skills of our primary school children, both in the paper based and online assessment are among the best in all European and OECD countries.

Key Results

* No country in Europe is better than Ireland for reading skills at primary level
* Irish pupils’ overall reading achievement score has improved by 15 points since the last cycle of the study which was in 2011
* The gender gap in Ireland is smaller than that the gap internationally. Furthermore, this gap has narrowed significantly between 2011 and 2016 in Ireland
* Since the last study in 2011, the number of pupils in Ireland with only basic reading skills has dropped significantly
* The percentage of Irish pupils who have advanced reading skills rose from 16% in 2011 to 21% in 2016, which is much higher than the international average in PIRLS
* Irish pupils also performed exceptionally well on the new online reading assessment in ePIRLS. Only one other country (Singapore) outperformed Ireland on this test

PIRLS 2016 data does not compare pupils’ performance in DEIS and non-DEIS schools. However, the most recently available data from the Educational Research Centre indicate that the reading achievement of pupils in DEIS primary schools has continued to improve from 2007 onwards. Much of this improvement has been among lower achievers.

**Commenting on the report, Minister Bruton said**:

“I would like to pay tribute to all principals, teachers and all those who made these fantastic results possible.

“I have set the ambition to make Ireland’s education and training service the best in Europe by 2026. There are many aspects to achieving this ambition but few are more important than the ability of our education system to equip our children with exceptional literacy skills. I am delighted with the results of this internationally recognised, in-depth study, which shows that no country in Europe is better than Ireland for reading performance at primary level.

**“**I am also very encouraged by the significant improvements that have been made since the last cycle of PIRLS which was in 2011. These findings are consistent with a number of other recent, major reports including the National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics 2014 and PISA 2015.

“Being literate is a fundamental skill. It enables our young people to confidently participate in education and fulfil their full potential in life. The basic aim of this Government is to sustain our economic progress and use it to build a fair and compassionate society. Ensuring our children are highly literate ensures they are given the best start in life. .”

He commended the report’s authors and thanked all of the pupils, teachers, principals and parents who took part in the study and responded to the questionnaires.

**Eemer Eivers, one of the report’s authors, said that** “The results of the online reading assessment – ePIRLS – are particularly interesting. This is the first assessment of its kind at primary level and it is encouraging to see that most Irish pupils had little or no difficulty navigating through the complex online scenarios they encountered. Equally, they seem able to evaluate information in a digital environment – for example, identifying the more reliable sources of information and integrating information from multiple web pages.”

**Lorraine Gilleece, another of the authors, noted that** “A positive feature of the results is that the improvement in performance since 2011 is very balanced. We see improvements on all aspects of reading and types of texts, and both boys and girls have improved. Also, in Ireland boys have slightly narrowed the gender gap on what we call *Literary style* texts. Perhaps contrary to popular perception, boys here are well able to engage with and to enjoy literary texts.”

**Note to Editors**

Among all countries included in the study, only two out of fifty significantly outperformed Ireland in reading in the paper based assessment, compared to five out of 45 countries in PIRLS 2011. Only pupils in the Russian Federation and Singapore statistically significantly outperformed Irish pupils in 2016. On ePIRLS, the online component, only Singapore obtained a significantly higher mean score than Ireland’s mean of 567 in 2016.

**A note on mean scores and scales ‎**

All PIRLS scores are reported on a scale which is set to a ‘centrepoint’ of 500 set during the first PIRLS assessment in 2001. **This is not the international average for PIRLS 2016**. It is a constant reference point against which countries can monitor changes in their performance over time. Thus, we can directly compare Ireland’s score of 567 in 2016 with our score of 552 in PIRLS 2011, and say that Ireland has improved by 15 points.

**About PIRLS 2016**

PIRLS is organised by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), a non-profit organisation based in The Hague, Netherlands. At an international level, the study is managed by the PIRLS & PIRLS International Study Centre in Boston College, USA. In Ireland, the Educational Research Centre (ERC) manages PIRLS on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills (DES), and provides the national report on PIRLS 2016.

As well as reading achievement, PIRLS provides detailed comparisons of home activities, teaching practices and characteristics of education systems in the various participating countries. The study operates on a five-year cycle, with the first administration taking place in 2001. Ireland has taken part in PIRLS once previously, in 2011.

Altogether, 50 countries participated in PIRLS, while 14 took part in ePIRLS. Approximately 340,000 pupils in 50 countries/regions (and 11 benchmarking participants) took part in ‎PIRLS. Benchmarking participants are sub-national regions or entities which must follow the same procedures and meet the same data quality standards as countries in order to participate (e.g., the province of Ontario, Canada, or the city of Madrid). As well as pupils, 330,000 parents, 16,000 teachers and 12,000 schools took part.

In Ireland, PIRLS and ePIRLS took place in schools in April 2016. The PIRLS assessment preceded the ePIRLS assessment, and both were conducted on separate days. In total, 4,607 pupils completed PIRLS, while a randomly selected subset of 2,473 pupils also completed ePIRLS. The ‎assessments were administered by teachers in participating schools. Each test was allocated 80 minutes, with a short break in the middle. After the PIRLS tests, and generally on ‎the same day, pupils completed questionnaires, which took about 30 minutes*.* ‎

**Current and forthcoming national reports**

The report released today – *Reading achievement in PIRLS 2016: Initial report for Ireland* – describes the reading achievement of pupils in Fourth Class, for both paper-based reading and reading in an online environment. It focuses on the results of the tests, and contains information on mean (average) performance, the distribution of performance (e.g., how higher- and lower-achieving pupils in Ireland compare to their peers in other countries), the percentage of pupils reaching each of four internationally-defined Benchmarks of achievement, and areas of relative strength and weakness in the performance of pupils in Ireland.

In 2018, a number of contextual reports will be published by the Educational ‎Research Centre that will examine the educational context in Ireland more broadly, together with ‎associations between contextual factors and pupil achievement. In particular, it will examine the relationship between performance on the online assessment and on the paper-based assessment.

**More information**

The report is available for free download from [www.erc.ie](http://www.erc.ie). More information about PIRLS is also available from [www.erc.ie/PIRLS](http://www.erc.ie/timss). The authors and report title are as follows:

Eemer Eivers, Lorraine Gilleece & Emer Delaney. Reading achievement in PIRLS 2016: Initial report for Ireland. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

**On DEIS schools**

Report on DEIS schools from the Education Research Centre: Kavanagh, Weir & Moran,. The evaluation of DEIS: Monitoring achievement and attitudes among urban primary school pupils from 2007 to 2016 (2017)

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**Country mean scores**

PIRLS mean scores and standard errors, and position relative to the Irish mean and PIRLS centrepoint

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Mean | SE | vs Ireland | vs centrepoint |
| Russian Federation | 581 | 2.2 | Higher  | 🡅 |
| Singapore | 576 | 3.2 | Higher | 🡅 |
| Hong Kong SAR | 569 | 2.7 | Similar | 🡅 |
| **Ireland** | **567** | 2.5 |  | 🡅 |
| Finland | 566 | 1.8 | Similar | 🡅 |
| Poland | 565 | 2.1 | Similar | 🡅 |
| Northern Ireland | 565 | 2.2 | Similar | 🡅 |
| Norway (Grade 5) | 559 | 2.3 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Chinese Taipei | 559 | 2.0 | Lower | 🡅 |
| England | 559 | 1.9 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Latvia | 558 | 1.7 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Sweden | 555 | 2.4 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Hungary | 554 | 2.9 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Bulgaria | 552 | 4.2 | Lower | 🡅 |
| United States | 549 | 3.1 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Lithuania | 548 | 2.6 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Italy | 548 | 2.2 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Denmark | 547 | 2.1 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Macao SAR | 546 | 1.0 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Netherlands | 545 | 1.7 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Australia | 544 | 2.5 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Czech Republic | 543 | 2.1 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Canada | 543 | 1.8 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Slovenia | 542 | 2.0 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Austria | 541 | 2.4 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Germany | 537 | 3.2 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Kazakhstan | 536 | 2.5 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Slovak Republic | 535 | 3.1 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Israel | 530 | 2.5 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Portugal | 528 | 2.3 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Spain | 528 | 1.7 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Belgium (Flemish) | 525 | 1.9 | Lower | 🡅 |
| New Zealand | 523 | 2.2 | Lower | 🡅 |
| France | 511 | 2.2 | Lower | 🡅 |
| Belgium (French) | 497 | 2.6 | Lower | **⭤** |
| Chile | 494 | 2.5 | Lower | 🡇 |
| Georgia | 488 | 2.8 | Lower | 🡇 |
| Trinidad and Tobago | 479 | 3.3 | Lower | 🡇 |
| Azerbaijan | 472 | 4.2 | Lower | 🡇 |
| Malta  | 452 | 1.8 | Lower | 🡇 |
| United Arab Emirates | 450 | 3.2 | Lower | 🡇 |
| Bahrain | 446 | 2.3 | Lower | 🡇 |
| Qatar | 442 | 1.8 | Lower | 🡇 |
| Saudi Arabia | 430 | 4.2 | Lower | 🡇 |
| Iran | 428 | 4.0 | Lower | 🡇 |
| Oman | 418 | 3.3 | Lower | 🡇 |
| Kuwait | 393 | 4.1 | Lower | 🡇 |
| Morocco | 358 | 3.9 | Lower | 🡇 |
| Egypt | 330 | 5.6 | Lower | 🡇 |
| South Africa | 320 | 4.4 | Lower | 🡇 |

ePIRLS mean scores and standard errors, and position relative to the Irish mean and PIRLS centrepoint

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | ePIRLS Mean  | SE | PIRLS Mean1 | Vs Ireland |
| Singapore | 588 | 3.0 | 576 | Higher |
| Norway (Grade 5) | 568 | 2.2 | 560 | Similar |
| **Ireland** | **567** | 2.5 | 566 |  |
| Sweden | 559 | 2.3 | 555 | Lower |
| Denmark | 558 | 2.2 | 548 | Lower |
| United States | 557 | 2.6 | 550 | Lower |
| Chinese Taipei | 546 | 2.0 | 559 | Lower |
| Canada | 543 | 3.2 | 543 | Lower |
| Israel | 536 | 2.3 | 532 | Lower |
| Italy | 532 | 2.1 | 548 | Lower |
| Slovenia | 525 | 1.9 | 543 | Lower |
| Portugal | 522 | 2.2 | 528 | Lower |
| Georgia | 477 | 3.3 | 489 | Lower |
| United Arab Emirates | 468 | 2.2 | 451 | Lower |

1 Means shown are based only on pupils who participated in **both** PIRLS and ePIRLS. They may differ slightly from means based on the full PIRLS dataset. e.g., Irish PIRLS mean of 566 is based on the PIRLS score of the 2473 pupils who completed PIRLS **and** ePIRLS, not the total 4607 Irish pupils who completed PIRLS.