**New report examines reading skills of Fourth Class pupils**

The Educational Research Centre (ERC) today launched a report examining Irish pupils’ performance on questions asked in the international study, PIRLS 2016 (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), and its related online reading assessment, ePIRLS. The report uses the real texts used in the study and real pupil answers to examine Irish pupils’ particular strengths and weaknesses, and to highlight gender differences. ***PIRLS and ePIRLS 2016: Test content and Irish pupils’ performance*** is written by Eemer Eivers and Mary Delaney, and is the latest in the ERC’s new Research Series.

The initial results from PIRLS and ePIRLS 2016 (published in December 2017) revealed that pupils in Ireland performed extremely well on both assessments. Of the 50 countries that participated in PIRLS, only pupils in the Russian Federation and Singapore statistically significantly outperformed Irish pupils. In ePIRLS (in which 14 countries took part), only Singapore obtained a significantly higher mean than Ireland.

As well as performance, the new report examines pupil enjoyment of texts, which was generally high, in Ireland and internationally. Dr Eemer Eivers, one of the authors, commented that **“Irish pupils were more positive than average in their ratings of the online texts, but less positive than the average for the paper-based texts. The online reading tasks seemed to really appeal to Irish children, perhaps because it is quite different to what they normally encounter in school.”**

Irish pupils performed best on “Literary” texts (narrative texts that tell a story), rather than the more factual “Informational” texts. They displayed a particular strength in recognising or explaining a character’s feelings, motivations or actions as well as in the ability to infer and integrate multiple elements within narratives to provide descriptions, explanations and evaluations.

While girls outperformed boys on overall reading skills in almost all countries, including Ireland, there were a few Informational texts on which gender differences in Ireland were negligible. Author Mary Delaney noted **“Literary texts were generally less popular with Irish boys than girls. The exception was one text, in which the main protagonists were animals, not humans. Boys were more enthusiastic about Informational texts, and this is reflected in much smaller gender gaps on these texts.”**

Irish pupils (girls in particular) did less well on some ePIRLS items incorporating visual content and online navigational skills. While Irish pupils had high levels of access to digital devices at home, they reported less frequent use in a school setting of digital devices than the ePIRLS average. Mary Delaney commented “**Increasing exposure to digital and graphical texts within a school context may benefit pupils, not only in terms of performance on ePIRLS, but in supporting the types of skills needed to negotiate real life complex online environments.**”

Finally, a less positive finding was an incorrect assumption of maleness by pupils in particular contexts (e.g., a scientist, a strong protagonist). Lead author, Dr Eemer Eivers said “**It is somewhat depressing that young children still seem to fall back on gender stereotypes, such as assuming that a science writer is male, even when she is clearly flagged as a woman in the article.  It seems that there is more work to be done in identifying and addressing the unconscious gender biases that permeate everyday lives, including those of young children in school”.**

**Notes:**

**About PIRLS**

Progress in International Reading Literacy Study(**PIRLS**) is among the world’s largest study of reading achievement in primary school. It assesses the reading skills of pupils in Fourth grade ‎‎(Fourth Class in Ireland) in participating ‎countries. In so doing, it provides national and cross-national comparative information for ‎policy-makers and educators. Over 340,000 pupils in 50 countries participated in 2016. ‎

PIRLS is organised by the ‎International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), a non-‎profit consortium of research institutes. The ERC managed ‎Ireland’s participation in PIRLS on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills.

The current report is based on data arising from the most recent cycle of PIRLS, in 2016. ‎Ireland’s national report, released in December 2017, which can be accessed from [www.erc.ie/pirls](http://www.erc.ie/pirls)

**More information**

The report is available for free download from [www.erc.ie](http://www.erc.ie). More information about PIRLS is available from [www.erc.ie/](http://www.erc.ie/)PIRLS.

* **Eemer Eivers & Mary Delaney. (2018). *PIRLS and ePIRLS 2016: Test content and Irish pupils’ performance.* Dublin: Educational Research Centre.**

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