

Information Note Regarding Exemption / Inclusion Criteria with regard to Standardised Testing in Primary Schools

Gathering evidence about how well pupils are learning, and using this information to improve the learning opportunities provided for them, are essential elements in ensuring that each pupil makes good progress in developing literacy and numeracy skills. This process of gathering and using assessment data should begin at the level of the individual pupil to enable the teacher to adjust instruction to suit the needs of individual learners and to inform them and their parents about the progress that they are making. Standardised tests are one of a number of assessment tools that can be used to inform teaching and learning in primary schools. The guidelines provided in the teacher's handbook should be followed in relation to the administration of the standardised test to ensure consistency and validity.

In accordance with Departmental Circulars, available at www.education.ie/en/SchoolsColleges/Services/Returns/Supporting-Assessment/Standardised-Testing-in-Primary-Schools.html, all schools, both mainstream schools and special schools where appropriate, are required to undertake standardised testing and to submit the results of those tests undertaken independently by individual pupils in second, fourth and sixth classes to the Department of Education. Schools are required to upload the aggregated results of standardised tests undertaken independently by pupils in second, fourth and sixth classes onto the *Esinet* portal <https://www.esinet.ie/portal/login.init.action>.

Section 6.4 of Circular 0056/2011 http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/ActiveCirculars/cl0056_2011.pdf advises: '*Students may be excluded from standardised testing if, in the view of the school principal, they have a learning or physical disability which would prevent them from attempting the tests or, in the case of migrant students, where the level of English required in the test would make attempting the test inappropriate.*' This recognises that it may not be in the best interests of certain pupils to undertake standardised testing. Based on their knowledge of pupils' needs and abilities, principal teachers are in a position to take the decision not to administer standardised tests to individual pupils (i.e. to exempt those pupils from standardised testing). The discretion to exempt a child from standardised testing based on educational grounds lies with the school principal. Exemptions should be considered on a case-by-case basis and be warranted only in exceptional cases. Exemptions should not be used for the blanket exclusion of any group of pupils, for example, Traveller or migrant pupils.

Pupils who are deemed not to be in a position to undertake standardised testing **should be** included in the return of the standardised assessment data to the Department of Education as "exempt".

The following table, provided by the Educational and Research Centre, provides guidance regarding those pupils that may or may not be exempted from standardised testing.

Table 1: Standardised Testing: Exemption/Inclusion Criteria

Type of SEN	Pupils who may be exempted	Pupils who should be included
Functional disability	The pupil has a moderate to severe physical disability such that s/he cannot participate in the testing situation.	The pupil can respond to the test.

Table 1 (cont'd)

Type of SEN	Pupils who may be exempted	Pupils who should be included
Moderate/severe general learning disability, behavioural or emotional disability	The pupil has a moderate or severe general learning disability or a behavioural or emotional disability such that, in the opinion of the school principal or other qualified staff member, s/he cannot participate in the testing situation. This includes pupils who are cognitively, behaviourally, or emotionally unable to follow even the general instructions of the test.	The pupil can respond to the test. S/he should NOT be excluded solely because of poor academic performance or discipline problems.
Insufficient assessment language experience	The pupil meets ALL of the following three criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is not a native speaker in English; • Has limited proficiency in English; and • Has received less than one year of instruction in English. 	The pupil meets fewer than three of the criteria.
Pupil with a specific learning disability (e.g., severe dyslexic difficulties)	The pupil is considered in the professional opinion of the school principal or other qualified staff member to have severe dyslexic difficulties or has been identified as having such difficulties following an appropriate psychological assessment.	The pupil has mild reading/dyslexic difficulties.

Good assessment practice involves the following at school level:

- The maintenance of a school register for standardised testing
- Recording clearly in this register from year-to-year, pupils that have been exempted from standardised testing and the reasons why
- Standardised tests, if used before the end of first class, should be administered in small groups only. The administration of standardised tests to whole classes is inappropriate at infant class level. See www.ncca.ie for more information.
- Provision of a whole-school policy that provides for school-based testing in order to identify and monitor the progress of pupils with special education needs.
- Pupils with moderate learning disabilities should have their literacy and numeracy attainments monitored at least once, if not twice per year, using appropriate testing materials suited to their levels of ability. The results of these tests **will not be forwarded** to the Department but will be used to **inform teachers' practice and planning**.

Finally, some pupils with a learning or physical disability may well be in a position to complete standardised testing. While the mode of implementation is clearly set out in test instructions, some

reasonable accommodations may be made at school level to facilitate individual pupils in completing a test, if it is deemed by the principal that this is in the best interest of the child. These may include:

- Providing reading assistance in the case of a standardised test of Mathematicsⁱ
- Undertaking the test in a quiet environment outside the classroom
- Using a stop watch or a timer on a mobile phone to give movement breaks during the test.

Results arising from modified testing arrangements **should not be submitted to the Department**. The pupils in question should be considered exempted. Only test results **based on strict adherence to the relevant test administration manual** should be submitted to the Department.

ⁱ The SIGMA-T Manual notes that the Sigma-T is not suitable for children with problems in colour recognition.