

Scoil Mhuire Soisearach Draft Assessment Policy

April 2013

Introduction: In line with its *Strategic development of Policies* Plan, Assessment was prioritised in Scoil Mhuire for the 2013 school year as the area that would be committed to paper and communicated to the wider community. The policy development process will involve the staff, the members of the parents council and ultimately the board of management. It will articulate what is well established practice and be an integral part of the learning support policy and the team planning process.

Rationale: The basis for the school's practice is the NCCA document *Assessment in the Primary School* launched by the Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, T.D. on 28th November 2007. It identifies a continuum of assessment

From - Child leads the assessment; portfolio assessment; concept mapping; teacher observation; teacher-designed tasks and tests; self assessment; standardised testing; conferencing **to Teacher leads the assessment.**

We have well established practices in regard to the identification of children with special needs. These are supported by the use of the National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS) *Continuum of Support* documentation which is available to staff on the server in the assessment policy folder.

The vision for Scoil Mhuire states that.

The board of management, staff and parents working as a team provide support and education to all children of every class, creed or ability. That every aspect of each child's intellectual, emotional, spiritual and social needs be nurtured and encouraged to develop to its utmost potential, in his or her own time, in a happy safe environment.

This policy aims to:

Outline procedures for assessment in the school for all the education partners and the wider community;
Inform new Teachers and Parents of assessment procedures;
Formalise procedures which already exist in the school;
Give direction to teaching and learning in the school;
Identify and celebrate current learning
Enrich understanding of what a particular child's needs might be
Provide insights into each child, allowing to ensure appropriate planning
Provide opportunities for assessment **for** learning
Provide opportunities for assessment **of** learning
To generate baseline data that can be used to monitor achievement over time

Purposes of assessment:

- To inform planning for, and coverage of, all areas of the curriculum
- To gather and interpret data at class/whole school level and in relation to national norms

- To identify the particular learning needs of pupils/groups of pupils including the exceptionally able
- To contribute to the school's strategy for prevention of learning difficulties
- To monitor pupil progress and attainment
- To enable teachers to modify their programmes in order to ensure that the particular learning needs of individual pupils/groups are being addressed
- To compile records of individual pupils' progress and attainment
- To facilitate communication between parents and teachers about pupils' development, progress and learning needs
- To facilitate the involvement of pupils in assessment of their own work
- To enable teachers to monitor their own approaches and methodologies

Assessment for learning: Teachers use a range of assessments methods in class

- *Child leads the assessment;*
- *Portfolio assessment;*
- *Concept mapping;*
- *Teacher observation*
- *Teacher-designed tasks and tests*
- *Work samples, portfolios and projects.*
- Are there different assessment methods depending on age level, subject ...?
- Are there some that apply across the whole school? Others that are at the discretion of individual teachers?
- Are there guidelines to co-ordinate what is observed/recorded where assessment is based on teacher observation? (checklists, mastery records, profiles, ...)
- Do teachers assemble portfolios of pupil assignments, work samples, projects...? Are there guidelines for these portfolios? e.g. *What subjects, one per pupil or 'class' portfolios, how many samples, draft samples or work refined after consultation/correction, random samples or 'best' work, can they incorporate samples of work in 3D...?*
- Does the school's plan for each curriculum subject address the issue of assessment?
- For which subjects are teacher-designed tasks / tests used?
- In what ways are pupils involved in assessment of their own work/progress?

(a) Standardised tests: The school fulfils the requirements of Department of Education and Skills Circular 0138/2006 and implements standardised tests accordingly. A copy of the circular is in the assessment folder.

- In senior infants the D-Tel test is administered as a screening test at the end of senior infants. The results guide teachers in identifying children in need of further support from members of the learning support team.

- The NRIT¹ is administered in the second term to children in 1st class by the class teacher with a member of the learning support team present during testing. The results of this test are used to give an indication of the child's intellectual ability and it is considered when judging if a child is performing to the best of their ability.
 - Micra T and Sigma T are administered to the children in 1st and 2nd classes during the month of May each year by the class teacher. A member of the learning support team is present during testing. In the case of newly qualified teachers, as part of the school mentoring programme, the deputy principal meets those teachers prior to testing and instructs them in the administration of the test. The tests are corrected by the class teacher and copies of the results are filed.
 - The learning support team is responsible for purchase, distribution and co-ordination of testing. Any child absent on the date of testing will be tested at a later date by the support teacher assigned to that class.
 - Results are recorded on the school database system using raw score, standard score, percentile rank, STEN, and Reading age. Different results are used when communicating to different audiences. The Sten is used for communicating results to parents.
 - Class teachers and learning support teachers are involved in the analysis of results for each individual. Parents and other professionals are consulted where necessary.
 - Class teams in consultation with the relevant learning support teacher consider results in September, across a number of classes and at whole school level.
 - The information gathered from tests informs teaching and learning by considering the areas of strength and weakness and applying appropriate methodologies to remedy areas of concern
 - Normally results are communicated to parents at parent teacher meeting time in November of each year. The Sten score is used and a note of explanation is included with the copy of the annual report issued in June. In the event of the results being a cause of concern a meeting is arranged with the parents to consider referral for further assessment.
- (b) Screening:** Screening begins at the junior infant introductory meeting. Parents are asked to complete a *Junior Infant Information Form* in which they can provide the information which allows teachers to identify needs that a child may have.
- While children are engaged in activities on their first visit to the school two members of the learning support team observe the children to get a first impression of what their needs will be in a setting of 28 children. Each child is given a ranking of 1,2,3 and that is one of the criteria in the *Allocation of children to classes policy*. When a child in the judgement of a teacher is

¹ ***The Non Reading Intelligence Test New Non-Reading Intelligence Tests 1-3 Manual by Dennis Young, Colin McCarty Paperback; ISBN: 9781444148381***
Published: 24/02/2012 Extent: 48 pages

considered to have special needs, a follow up appointment is arranged for parents.

This is with a view to arranging further more detailed assessment so that we can assess, understand and cater for the needs.

- A range of screening tests are used to facilitate the early identification of learning strengths / difficulties. Class teachers use various tick sheets depending on the area being screened for.
 - Screening tests are administered mainly at the beginning or end of the year. They can also be undertaken during term time and particularly prior to parent teacher meetings. They are administered by class teachers and in the case of there being a concern they will be administered by a member of the learning support team.
 - Depending on the need, different instruments are used. If the need is in regard to second language teaching then the *English as Second Language policy is adhered to*. If there is thought to be a specific learning difficulty or a behavioural need then the appropriate *Continuum of Support*² documentation and a checklist is used to screen a child.
 - The class teacher administers the initial checks and there will be consultation with the learning support teacher and the principal when interpreting the results.
 - There is a policy in the school of early intervention and children will be referred as soon as resources permit for identification of specific needs.
 - Children showing signs of behaviour or learning difficulties beyond the norm will be given support initially in the classroom context. An appointment will be made with parents by the class teacher to discuss the matter as soon as a concern arises. The relevant range of options open to the school will be explained to parents and a course of action will be agreed
- (c) **Diagnostic Assessment:** Chapter 4 of the *Learning Support Guidelines*³ explains the approaches that are used to identify the needs of children. See page 60 in particular
- What formal diagnostic tests are used to determine the appropriate learning support for individual pupils who present with learning difficulties?
 - The class teacher in consultation with colleagues, the learning support teacher and principal make initial decisions in regard to a child's needs.
 - Parents are consulted at an early stage about their child and their support is sought in order to progress matters. Parents grant permission for their child to work with learning support teachers on completion of question 10 of the *Application Form* to the school
 - Depending on the needs the class teacher or the relevant member of the resource learning support team will administer the tests. Results are interpreted in a collaborative manner through meetings between teachers, parents and special needs assistants. Results can be interpreted by a range of personnel depending on their training and expertise.
 - Results of the assessments inform subsequent learning plans when class teachers are preparing yearly and fortnightly class plans and when learning

² http://www.sess.ie/sites/default/files/neps_special_needs_resource_pack.pdf
http://www.sess.ie/sites/all/modules/wysiwyg/tinymce/jscripts/tiny_mce/plugins/filemanager/files/Documents_Publications/neps_besd_continuum_teacher_guide.pdf

³ <http://www.sess.ie/sites/default/files/Learning%20Support%20Guidelines.pdf>

support resource personnel are preparing Individual Pupil Learning Profiles (IPLPs) and Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

- In the event that diagnostic tests show a need for further assessment then this will be communicated to parents. Parental permission will be sought to have the child attend any of the possible professionals that may help with the need for example speech therapists; occupational therapists; psychologists; psychiatrists; opticians; audiologists and other relevant professionals. The criteria used will in some instances be objective such as being below a particular level in a standardised test. The professional judgement of the teacher on the need for further advice is also a valid criteria.
- Consultation with the relevant professional will be arranged by the learning support teacher or the principal. Parental permission is sought, in the event of it not being granted this will be treated as a child protection concern and is reported to the relevant child protection agency.

(d) Psychological Assessment: (*Refer to Circular 02/05*)

- In the first instance the class teacher liaises with parents to consider and get approval for referrals. In the case of a psychological assessment or other assessment required Stage 3, of Circular 02/05 will be adhered to. A standard consent form is signed by parents and the assessment is arranged by the member of the middle management team with responsibility for special needs.
- Reports from all the relevant personnel (psychologist; psychiatrist; psychotherapist; speech therapist; occupational therapist; kineaseologist; play therapist etc) will inform the learning support teacher and the class teacher in devising learning plans for the children.
- Reports on children are stored in a learning support room and filed under the child's name. The child's class teacher, learning support teachers, principal and relevant professional have access to such report.

(e) Recording the results of assessment

- Results of standardised tests are stored electronically and ultimately all reports and results will be stored electronically, currently commissioned reports are filed in paper form.
- Teachers will record only such comments as would be expressed to the child's parents. The child and its parents are regarded as the first audience for any records or discussions in regard to a child's needs. Only personnel directly involved with a child will have access to or be involved with a child's information.
- Sensitive information is kept confidential to those personnel directly involved and files on particular children are securely maintained.
- A template is maintained and updated on a termly basis of the children who are referred or are in the process of referral for assessment by professionals.

Success Criteria

- A range of informal and formal assessment modes are used to place assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning. There is ongoing discussion on teaching teams in relation to the development of the assessment policy. Discretion is given to individual teachers to trial different approaches and to

share expertise and experience with colleagues in regard to the evolution of such policies

- Each class teacher has ease of access to the ear of learning support personnel and the principal through informal contact on a day to day basis and through email communication in order that concerns about children are expressed. Dates of referral are available on the reports in Aladdin and these will be verified against the progress of the referral process.
- The facility is provided at the end of September for newly appointed class teachers to meet with last year's teacher to discuss children and their needs.

Roles and Responsibility:

Responsibility for the coordination of the policy rests with the principal. The responsibility is delegated to a middle management team member and to the relevant member of the learning support team. The team is made up of learning support, resource, English as second Language; reading recovery; maths recovery teachers. They work closely and collaboratively to further the best interests of each child.

Implementation date:

This policy will be considered at a series of team and staff meetings in the final term and put before the board for Approval in June.

Timetable for Review

The policy will be reviewed within the next five years and updated as necessary in the interim.

Ratification and Communication:

The policy when ratified will be posted on the school's website and a communication will be issued to parents by text to indicate its availability.

Reference Section

- Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum – Guidelines for Schools, NCCA, 2007
- Special Educational Needs – a Continuum of Support, Guidelines for Teachers and Resource Pack for Teachers, NEPS, 2007
- Learning Support Guidelines, DES, 2000
- Circular 0138/2006 Supporting Assessment in Primary Schools
- Circular 02/05 Organisation of Teaching Resources for Pupils who need Additional Support in Mainstream Primary Schools
- Primary School Curriculum – section on assessment for each subject
- Working together to Make a Difference for Children, NEPS
- Drumcondra English Profiles. G. Shiel & R. Murphy, ERC, 2000
- Commonsense Methods for Children with Special Needs, Peter Westwood, Routledge Falmer, 1997
- A range of assessment tests are listed on the SESS website www.sess.ie
- Draft Report Cards Templates. www.ncca.ie
- info@ncca, September 2005. Issue 1, p. 8. Assessment for Learning

Approved June 25th subject to SALF demonstration.