

Subject:

InCAS

Circular Number:
2011/15

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Audience:

- Principals and Boards of Governors of all grant-aided primary schools, post-primary schools with preparatory departments and special schools;
- Education and Library Boards;
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools;
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment;
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta;
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education; and
- Teachers Unions.

Summary of Contents:

This circular is to advise schools of the arrangements relating to Interactive Computerised Assessment System (InCAS) assessments for pupils in years 4 to 7 in autumn 2011, and the associated arrangements for reporting assessment outcomes to parents.

Enquiries:

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Essential

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Not applicable

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InCAS ARRANGEMENTS FOR AUTUMN 2011

Introduction

1. The purpose of this circular is to advise schools of the arrangements relating to Interactive Computerised Assessment System (InCAS) assessments for pupils in years 4 to 7 in autumn 2011, and the associated arrangements for reporting to parents.

Key Points

2. The key points regarding the InCAS arrangements for autumn 2011 are:
 - Assessments may be completed by pupils, as timetabled by schools during the autumn term, as usual;
 - Schools may transfer their upload files on completion of the assessments;
 - Assessment outcomes will be available for download within 48 hours;
 - Schools are required to provide age-equivalent InCAS outcomes for Reading and General Maths to parents in writing during the autumn term for the 2011-12 school year only;
 - Schools are not required to provide parents with outcomes for years before 2011-12, but may choose to do so; however, schools are advised not to present any longitudinal information in relation to General Maths in graphical format;
 - Schools are required to offer parents a meeting to discuss outcomes by the end of the autumn term.

Requirement to Carry Out InCAS Assessments

3. InCAS is designed to be used for diagnostic purposes. It provides assessments in Reading and General Maths and optional associated assessments and is an integral part of our wider, collective efforts to raise outcomes in literacy and numeracy for all young people.

4. The Education (Assessment Arrangements) (Foundation to Key Stage 3) Order (NI) 2007 (the 2007 Order) provides for the assessment of pupils in Years 4 to 7 during the autumn term, using a computer-based method specified by the Department. InCAS is the method which the Department specifies is to be used by schools in carrying out those autumn term assessments. The Order also requires the outcomes of these assessments to be recorded and notified to the pupil's parents by the end of that term. A copy of the 2007 Order is available at:
http://www.opsi.gov.uk/sr/sr2007/pdf/nisr_20070045_en.pdf

Purpose of InCAS Assessment

5. InCAS is an assessment tool designed to support schools in identifying pupils' strengths and areas for improvement. The outcomes from the InCAS assessments should therefore help teachers plan the learning and teaching during the school year to meet the needs of pupils in their classrooms. The assessments will also provide schools with useful information for monitoring individual pupil progress – to ensure every pupil is reaching his or her full potential – and, more generally, to inform self-evaluation, development planning and target-setting.
6. The primary purpose of InCAS assessments is to contribute to diagnostic support for pupils' learning – it is not to compare pupils.
InCAS assessments are not for any purpose related to the transfer of pupils from primary to post-primary school.
7. The Department recognises that there is a range of assessment tools currently available and used by schools, e.g. the Alta maths assessment tool is available to all schools. We would encourage schools to continue to make use of Alta and other assessment tools in addition to InCAS to support their work to improve pupil outcomes in literacy and numeracy.

8. Data on InCAS outcomes is returned directly to schools and is not collected or collated centrally. As with all data, schools will need to take account of data protection requirements and to ensure that they have appropriate arrangements in place for the safe storage of data.

Developments for 2011

9. Following each year's assessment period, the University of Durham's Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM) provide CCEA with a detailed analysis report on the performance of all assessments within the InCAS tool . As a result of recommendations in this year's report, the following adjustments have been made to the General Maths assessment.
 - Amendments have been made to the General Maths algorithm; this means that a small number of questions have now been placed in a different order within the assessment in order to maximise their effectiveness;
 - The difficulty ratings of questions have been adjusted and the General Maths section re-standardised to take account of the 2010/11 data.
10. There have been no changes to the content of the questions in either General Maths or Reading.
11. Some minor adjustments have been made to the Irish Medium assessments in General Maths and Comprehension and these have been trialled prior to inclusion in this year's software.
12. In addition, a new Progress Chart is available for schools this year to ensure that they have an easily downloadable feedback format for parents. This includes the option to present current year outcomes for Reading and General Maths or to include 2, 3, or 4 years of longitudinal data for their class where appropriate (see Para.19 below).

Assessment Arrangements for Autumn 2011

13. The updated InCAS software is already available to schools, and CCEA and C2k have issued advice to schools on preparing for and administering assessments – [InCAS Assessments School Preparation and Support \(2011-12\)](#). This advice takes account of feedback from schools following last year's assessments. A CCEA helpdesk facility is available on 028 9026 1274 for questions on the use and interpretation of InCAS, while a C2k helpdesk facility is available on 0870 6011 666 for queries on the operation of InCAS on the C2k network. Further information and support material are also available on the revised curriculum website at: <http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk>.
14. As in previous years, InCAS assessments may be completed by pupils, as timetabled by schools during the autumn term, and schools may upload their transfer files to the InCAS+ secure site on completion of assessments.
15. InCAS is not a high-stakes assessment and it does not have to be administered in test conditions, e.g. there is no need for a whole class/year group to take the assessment at the same time or on the same day. It can be carried out as part of normal classroom practice at any point during the autumn term and it is for schools to decide the arrangements that best suit their teachers and pupils.

Reporting of InCAS Outcomes to Parents

16. The InCAS assessments will generate an age-equivalent outcome in Reading and an age-equivalent outcome in General Maths¹. Under the 2007 Order, schools are required to report these outcomes to parents in writing and to offer parents a meeting to discuss outcomes by the end of the autumn term.

¹ Age-equivalent outcomes are also available for other assessment modules.

17. Within this context the Department has reviewed the reporting requirements for the 2011/12 school year, particularly in light of the restandardisation of the General Maths element of the tool (paragraph 9 above). This restandardisation means that, whilst it is still appropriate to compare a pupil's age-equivalent score with their chronological age, any comparison between 2011 outcomes in General Maths and those of previous years, or analysis of progression from year to year, is not necessarily comparing like-with-like.

18. In light of this, schools **are required**, in the 2011/12 school year, to provide age-equivalent InCAS outcomes for Reading and General Maths to parents in writing, during the autumn term for the 2011/12 school year only. This information may be presented in either tabular or graphical format, depending on which presentation schools consider is most accessible to parents.

19. Schools **are not required** to provide parents with their child's age-equivalent InCAS outcomes for years before 2011/12 but may choose to do so. However, in this instance schools would need to explain the impact of the adjustments to the General Maths assessment as outlined above. Schools are advised not to present any longitudinal information for General Maths in graphical format.

20. The parents' meeting provides a useful opportunity for schools to set the InCAS outcomes in an educational context as a basis for explaining to parents their child's strengths and any areas for improvement, as well as the actions the school intends to take to address these. The meeting also provides an opportunity to help parents understand what they can do to support their child's learning. Schools should ensure that parents are aware that **the primary purpose of InCAS assessments is to contribute to diagnostic support for pupils' learning – it is not to compare pupils.**

Exemptions

21. The 2007 Order provides for the following exemptions from the requirement to undertake InCAS assessments:

- (a) a pupil with a statement of special educational needs who has been assessed as having severe learning difficulties does not have to undertake InCAS assessments;
- (b) where a pupil has been exempted from any of the requirements of Articles 5 to 9 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 – these Articles relate to the curriculum, skills and assessment – by Article 14 (Development work and experiments), 15 (Exceptions by regulations), 16 (Pupils with statements of special educational needs) or 17 (Temporary exemptions for individual pupils) of that Order, the assessment provisions of the 2007 Order do not apply in relation to the requirements from which the pupil is exempt and the pupil shall be assessed only in relation to those parts of the curriculum from which he or she is not exempt. A copy of the 2006 Education Order is available at <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2006/20061915.htm>; and
- (c) a new Irish-medium primary school or unit does not have to carry out the InCAS assessments in the school year in which it first becomes grant-aided.

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