

23 September 2026

Dear Principal

Publication of 2025/26 End of Key Stage Assessment Outcomes

Today, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) published the 2025/26 End of Key Stage Assessment Outcomes for literacy and numeracy.

These assessments, undertaken by pupils in Years 4, 7 and 10 in March 2026, represent an important milestone for our education system. They are the first system-level domestic assessments in over 20 years and the first to use a single validated assessment across all participating schools.

The assessments provide a robust and consistent measure of literacy and numeracy outcomes across Northern Ireland and establish an important baseline against which future progress can be measured. They offer valuable insight into how our children and young people are performing at key stages of their educational journey and will help inform future policy, support and intervention.

A representative sample of more than 12,000 pupils from 358 schools participated. Pupils completed the assessments under consistent conditions and all assessments were externally marked by CCEA. The resulting data therefore provides a reliable indication of performance across the wider education system.

The outcomes and associated analysis are available at: [Statutory Assessment Reports and Statistics | CCEA](#)

Key findings

It is encouraging to see strong performance amongst the highest-attaining pupils, with at least 20% of pupils performing above the expected level at each Key Stage. However, the findings also highlight significant challenges that require our collective attention.

Notably, by the end of primary school almost 3 in 10 pupils are not at the expected level in literacy (27%) and numeracy (26%). In numeracy, this extends to almost one-third of pupils (32%) by the end of Key Stage 3. If we consider that some pupils have been exempted from the assessments for a variety of reasons, including SEN, the outcomes are starker.

The results broadly reflect findings from other national and international evidence sources and point to the need for sustained focus on improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for all learners.

Later this term, CCEA will make individual school data available to participating schools that wish to access it. We hope this information will support professional reflection, self-evaluation and ongoing school improvement activity.

Literacy and Numeracy as system priorities

The Minister has published a Written Ministerial Statement reflecting on the outcomes and their implications for the education system ([Written Ministerial Statement - Publication of Key Stage Assessment Outcomes | Department of Education](#)). I would encourage you to read the statement in full. The statement recognises the significant challenges schools are working to address. It also reaffirms the need for sustained support, investment and collective effort at government level to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes over the long term.

As you know, literacy and numeracy are the foundation upon which all learning is built. They underpin success across the curriculum and are critical to young people's future participation in further learning, employment and wider society.

Strong literacy and numeracy are particularly important in supporting pupils with additional needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. They are also closely linked to wider outcomes including attendance, engagement, confidence and wellbeing.

The Department recognises the central role that schools play in developing these core skills and is committed to supporting that work. Through TransformED, the Department has placed renewed emphasis on literacy and numeracy as key drivers of educational

improvement. The recently published literacy framework has been positively received by the profession, and a complementary numeracy framework will be published in the coming months. These will be accompanied by further support, resources and professional learning opportunities for schools in these important areas.

Working Together

Improving literacy and numeracy is a shared responsibility. Success depends on a sustained partnership between schools, families, communities and government.

We know that schools are operating in increasingly challenging circumstances. School leaders, teachers and support staff continue to work tirelessly to meet the needs of children and young people against a backdrop of increasing complexity, growing levels of special educational need and ongoing resource pressures.

On behalf of the Department, I wish to place on record our sincere thanks for your professionalism, dedication and unwavering focus on pupils. The publication of these assessments provides us with valuable evidence to inform action and an opportunity to focus collectively on the foundations that matter most.

Yours faithfully,



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