

June 5, 2012

Dear Parent,

As you may know, many schools now report results of standardised tests to parents on a regular basis. The purpose of this note is to provide you with some guidance on interpreting your child's scores on the *Triail Ghaeilge Dhroim Conrach*, a standardised test of Irish reading, administered by many Irish-medium schools.

Your child's achievement in English reading and mathematics is usually assessed on tests that are standardised based on representative national samples of pupils at the same class level as your child. This allows you to compare your child's achievement with that of other children at your child's class level nationally, across all schools in the education system, including English-medium and Irish-medium schools.

Five years ago, when the Department of Education and Skills asked the Educational Research Centre to develop a standardised test in Irish that could be used to assess the achievement of pupils attending Irish medium schools, a decision was taken to base the test norms on pupils attending Irish-medium schools only (rather than all children nationally). The decision was informed by the outcomes of a national study oral language and reading performance in Irish in representative national samples of Irish-medium and English-medium schools carried out in 2002. The study found that standards in oral language and Irish reading in Irish-medium schools, and Gaelscoileanna in particular, were well ahead of standards in English-medium schools. If we had developed a standardised test in Irish covering all schools, it would not have been possible to differentiate among pupils attending Irish-medium schools. Most would achieve scores at or near the top of the scale, and the test would not have picked up on differences between pupils, that might be of use to teachers in planning teaching and learning.

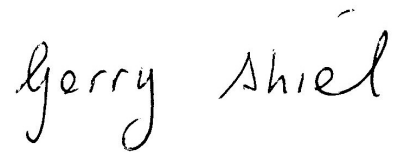
There are, however, some consequences of interpreting test performance with respect to norms based on pupils attending Irish-medium schools only.

In general, Irish-medium schools (both Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools) have high average levels of achievement in English and mathematics compared with schools in general. This was shown in a study carried out by the Educational Research Centre in 2010 in a sample of Irish-medium schools. Given the high average levels of performance in English and mathematics in Irish-medium schools, it is likely that some children may appear to perform very well in English and/or mathematics compared with Irish. However, it is important to note that their performance in English and

mathematics is linked to national standards, while their performance in Irish is linked to standards in Irish-medium schools only. Thus, a child in an Irish medium school who achieves a Sten score of 4, 5 or 6 on Irish reading, has an achievement level that is in the average range, compared with other children in Irish medium-schools at the same class level. It is likely that that the same child would have achieved a much higher Sten score, if the test norms had been based on a national sample of schools and pupils that included all schools.

By the same token, a child attending an Irish-medium school who achieves a Sten score of 1-3 in Irish reading has below average performance relative to other children attending Irish-medium schools, but would probably also have achieved a much higher Sten score in Irish if the basis for comparison had been all schools nationally.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerry Shiel". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Gerry" and the surname "Shiel" written in a single continuous line.

Gerry Shiel