

Your child and standardised testing

Understanding the STen score

During your child's time in primary school he/she will complete standardised tests in English reading and in maths. Children in Irish medium schools will also complete standardised tests in Irish reading. Schools must use the tests in 2nd, 4th and 6th classes and share the results with you. This leaflet explains what standardised tests are and how they can help your child's learning.

What is a standardised test?

We are all familiar with the idea of tests in school. Your child probably tells you how he/she did in a spelling or tables test prepared by the teacher. A standardised test is another kind of test. The standardised tests in English reading and maths measure a child's achievement compared to other children in **all schools** at the same class level or age level. The standardised test in Irish reading measures a child's achievement compared to other children in **Irish medium schools** at the same class level or age level. The English reading and Irish reading tests give information about how well your child can understand what he/she has read. The tests do not gather information on your child's written or spoken English and Irish. The maths test finds out how well your child can use numbers for different purposes and solve maths problems.

Schools can choose from a number of standardised tests which have been developed for use in primary schools in Ireland. These tests are based on the curriculum. There are different levels of the tests so, for example, the test your child does in first/second class will relate to your child's age and the curriculum for that class level.

Will all children complete all the standardised tests?

No. Children in English medium schools will complete standardised tests in English reading and maths. Children in Irish medium schools will complete standardised tests in English reading, maths and Irish reading.

Are standardised tests the same as intelligence tests?

No. Standardised tests are not intelligence tests. The main purposes of using standardised tests are to help the teacher plan your child's learning, and to inform you about how well your child is doing in English reading, maths and Irish reading. When the test scores are used alongside other information gathered by the teacher through observing your child at work, talking with him/her and looking at his/her work, they show how your child is getting

on in English reading, maths, and Irish reading, and help the teacher to identify your child's strengths and needs.

What are standardised tests used for?

Standardised tests are used to

- report to you as a parent on your child's achievement in English reading, maths and Irish reading
- help to find out if your child has learning difficulties in English reading, maths and Irish reading so that the school can put appropriate supports in place
- help to find out if your child is a high achiever in English reading, maths and Irish reading so that appropriate learning experiences can be provided for him/her
- help your child's teacher plan for further learning across the curriculum because your child's achievement in English reading, maths and Irish reading is important for all his/her learning.

When are standardised tests carried out?

Schools are required to use standardised tests at three identified stages during your child's time at primary school:

- English-medium schools are required to implement standardised testing in English reading and maths during the period May/June for all children in 2nd, 4th and 6th classes with effect from 2012 onwards
- Irish-medium schools are required to implement standardised testing in Irish reading, English reading and Mathematics during the period May/June for all children in 2nd, 4th and 6th classes with effect from 2012 onwards.

Many schools use standardised tests in other classes too.

Do all children take standardised tests?

A small number of children might not take the tests. For example, if your child's first language is not English, the teacher may decide that he/she should not take the English reading test. Your child may, however, take the maths test. If your child has a learning or physical disability, the teacher may decide not to give the test but to use a different way to check on your child's progress. In all cases, the teacher will use the information he/she has about your child to decide whether or not your child should take the English reading test, the maths test and Irish reading test.

Should I help my child prepare for standardised tests?

No. Standardised tests are one source of information about your child's achievement in English reading, maths and Irish reading. The teacher gathers information about your

child's learning all the time. Your child will take the standardised tests on a regular school day as part of his/her daily work in the classroom. Indeed, your child may not even realise he/she has taken the tests!

How will I know how my child has done on the standardised tests?

Your child's class teacher will share the test results with you, typically at a parent/teacher meeting or in a school report. You will see the results of the tests on your child's school report at the end of 2nd, 4th and 6th classes.

How will I know what the test scores mean?

You will be familiar with hearing your child say he/she got 62% in a maths test or 9 out of 15 in a spelling test. Standardised tests generally use other types of scores. Your child's teacher may tell you how your child did in the test using a **STen (standard ten) score**.

Understanding STen scores

STen scores go from 1 to 10. The table below describes what the different STen scores tell you about your child's achievement in English reading, maths and Irish reading.

STen score	What the score means	Proportion of children who get this score
8-10	Well above average	$\frac{1}{6}$
7	High average	$\frac{1}{6}$
5-6	Average	$\frac{1}{3}$
4	low average	$\frac{1}{6}$
1-3	Well below average	$\frac{1}{6}$

If your child's STen score is 5 or 6, you will know that his/her performance on the test is average. About one third of children in Ireland have STen scores in this band. You can see from the table that there are also STen scores above and below the average.

As with other tests your child does in school, his/her result on a standardised test can be affected by how he/she feels on the test day or by worry or excitement about a home or school event. This means that each test result is an indication of your child's achievement in English reading, maths and Irish reading. You play an important role in encouraging and supporting your child no matter what he/she scores on the test.

If my child's score is low, what does this tell me?

A STen score of 1, 2 or 3 suggests that your child may have difficulties in English reading or in maths or Irish reading. One test score by itself does not give a complete picture of your child's learning in English reading, maths and Irish reading. The teacher might decide to gather more information about your child from other tests, as well as his/her observations in class. You too will have additional information from helping your child with homework, and hearing him/her talking about school work. The teacher may ask a colleague called the learning support teacher to look at your child's test scores and other assessment information. They may decide that your child would benefit from extra support with reading or maths. This extra support may be given by the learning support teacher. Your child's teacher will talk to you about this.

You may find the DVD for parents, [The What, Why and How of children's learning in primary school](#) helpful in talking to your child about working with the learning support teacher. Courtney, a girl in second class, and her mum talk on the DVD about their experience in getting extra help with Courtney's English reading. If you don't have a copy of the DVD, you can view an internet video of it from the NCCA website homepage at: www.ncca.ie. (Click on the button for Primary School Curriculum: Information for parents.)

If my child's score is high, what does this tell me?

A high score on the test may suggest that your child is a high achiever in English reading or maths or Irish reading. As with low scores, one high score is not enough to confirm this. Your child's teacher will use information from other classroom assessments to understand more clearly how well your child is doing in English reading, maths and Irish reading.

Should I share the score with my child?

You know your child best. No matter what the score is, you play an important role in encouraging your child to do his/her best, and in helping your child with English reading, maths and Irish reading. If the score is low and your child needs extra help with reading or maths, it may be helpful to talk to him/her about this and to see the help in a positive way.

Helping my child to enjoy school and to succeed in learning

Using standardised tests at least twice during primary school to gather information on your child's achievement in English reading, maths and Irish reading can play a vital part in supporting your child's learning. Ultimately, this support can help your child enjoy school and make the most of the many opportunities to learn created by you and by your child's teachers.