

**Subject:**

**InCAS**

**Circular Number:**  
**2010/20**

**Date of Issue:**  
**18 August 2010**

**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 2010, and the associated arrangements for reporting assessment outcomes to parents.

**Enquiries:**

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**Governor Awareness:**  
Essential

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Advice

**Related Documents:**  
Not applicable

**Superseded Documents:**  
Circular 2009/14

**Expiry Date:**  
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**DENI Website:**  
<http://www.deni.gov.uk>

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# **InCAS ARRANGEMENTS FOR AUTUMN 2010**

## **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 2010, and the associated arrangements for reporting to parents.
2. These arrangements follow extensive work (referred to below) which has been carried out since last year to ensure the accuracy of InCAS outcomes for schools.

## **Key Points**

3. The key points regarding the InCAS arrangements for autumn 2010 are:
  - Additional quality assurance checks will take place at the start of the autumn term with a small number of schools;
  - Assessments may be completed by pupils, as timetabled by schools during the autumn term, as usual;
  - Schools may upload their transfer files on completion of the assessments;
  - To allow time for the additional quality assurance checks, assessment outcomes will be available for download from 8 October;
  - Schools are required to provide age-equivalent InCAS outcomes for Reading and General Maths to parents in writing during the autumn term for the 2010-11 school year only;
  - Schools are not required to provide parents with outcomes for years before 2010-11, but may choose to do so; however, schools are advised not to present any longitudinal information 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

4. 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.
5. 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](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/sr/sr2007/pdf/nisr_20070045_en.pdf)

## Purpose of InCAS Assessment

6. 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 their 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.
7. 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.**

8. 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.
9. 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.

### **Actions to Prepare for Autumn 2010**

10. Following correction of the errors in InCAS outcomes which occurred last autumn, an extensive programme of work has been undertaken to ensure the accuracy of outcomes and to rebuild school confidence.
11. This programme has included the following actions:
  - CCEA and the University of Durham's Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM) have engaged in an ongoing process of quality assurance checks and reviews of the InCAS tool. This included reviewing CEM's testing procedures, business processes and risk management processes;
  - Additional quality assurance procedures have been undertaken for 2010. These included additional independent checks of the InCAS algorithms following school trials;
  - An independent review about the circumstances giving rise to the errors was carried out.
12. In addition, the Minister of Education established an independent Working Group, including school principals and teacher union and school governor representatives, to provide an assessment of the impact of the two errors on school confidence and to make recommendations. This Group recommended

a number of measures, in particular to improve data reliability and quality control, and to ensure more effective communication to parents about InCAS.

13. An action plan has been developed in response to the recommendations of the Working Group. This may be found at [www.deni.gov.uk](http://www.deni.gov.uk) .

14. A key recommendation of the Working Group was that:

“arrangements are made to test the performance of the InCAS data processing before general release of analysed age-equivalent and standardised scores. It would not be practical or sensible to do this for all schools as the response times for analysed data would probably be seriously extended. However, it could be accomplished by collaborating with a selection of volunteering schools which provide their data early in the autumn term and contribute to the necessary checking and feedback.”

15. Accordingly, arrangements have been made with a small number of schools to take part in this additional quality assurance measure, at the start of the autumn term. These checks are to determine that the software operates as expected in a live situation in a school, including situations where classes of pupils are taking the assessment at the same time, and where laptops and a wireless network are used. This will supplement the rigorous software testing which has already taken place on the C2k network, and will test the performance of the data processing in advance of the general release of outcomes to schools, in line with the Working Group recommendations.

### **Restandardisation**

16. The suitability and performance of questions within the InCAS assessments have been checked annually since 2007. However, the 2009/10 academic year was the first time that four full cohorts of pupils here (Years 4 – 7) had been assessed for the mandatory sections of Reading and General Maths, and a large number of these pupils had also been assessed for the other modules.

17. CEM was therefore asked to carry out an analysis of all InCAS assessments to determine if questions remained suitable and if the overall standardisation of the tool was still appropriate. In light of this analysis the InCAS tool has now been restandardised and an updated release of the software has been tested to ensure its performance and the accuracy of outcomes in a live situation.

### **Assessment Arrangements for Autumn 2010**

18. The updated InCAS software is already available to schools, and CCEA and C2k have issued advice to schools on preparing for and administering assessments. 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>.

19. 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.

20. This year, to allow time for additional quality assurance testing in some schools at the start of the autumn term, as recommended by the Working Group (paragraphs 14 and 15 above), **InCAS outcomes will be available from the InCAS+ secure site from 8 October**. Therefore, in the period up to 8 October, outcomes will not be available to download.

21. 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

22. The InCAS assessments will generate an age-equivalent outcome in Reading and an age-equivalent outcome in General Maths<sup>1</sup>. 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.
23. Within this context the Department has reviewed the reporting requirements for the 2010/11 school year, particularly in light of the restandardisation of the InCAS tool (paragraphs 16 and 17 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 2010 outcomes and those of previous years, or analysis of progression from year to year, is not necessarily comparing like-with-like.
24. In light of this schools are **required**, in the 2010/11 school year, to provide age-equivalent InCAS outcomes for Reading and General Maths to parents in writing during the autumn term for the 2010/11 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.
25. Schools are **not required** to provide parents with their child's age-equivalent InCAS outcomes for Reading and General Maths for years before 2010/11 but may choose to do so. However, in this instance – or should parents who already have these outcomes seek to compare these with 2010/11 outcomes – schools would need to explain the impact of the restandardisation. Schools are advised not to present any longitudinal information in graphical format.
26. 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

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<sup>1</sup> Age-equivalent outcomes are also available for other assessment modules.

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

27. 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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