

## Best in Europe

### International survey shows reading skills of Irish pupils are top class

The 2016 PIRLS (the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) report published in December showed the Republic of Ireland's primary school children to be the best in Europe for reading skills.

PIRLS is an international study which examines 50 countries every five years and reports on the reading achievement of pupils in fourth class.

Pupils in Northern Ireland significantly outperformed 41 of the 49 other participating countries in reading. The average score for reading in the north is statistically similar to the Republic of Ireland.

#### *Among the key findings in the Republic of Ireland were:*

- ✎ No country in Europe is better than Ireland for reading skills at primary level.
- ✎ Irish pupils' overall reading achievement score has improved by 15 points since 2011.
- ✎ The gender gap in Ireland is smaller than that the gap internationally and has narrowed significantly since 2011.
- ✎ Since 2011, the number of pupils in Ireland with only basic reading skills has dropped significantly.
- ✎ The percentage of Irish pupils who have advanced reading skills rose from 16% in 2011 to 21% in 2016, which is much higher than the international average.

Northern Ireland's performance in reading has remained stable from 2011 to 2016, with no significant difference in the overall average score.

#### *Key findings include:*

- ✎ The gap between boys and girls has increased slightly since 2011.
- ✎ Over a fifth of pupils (22 per cent) reached the 'Advanced International

#### Mean country reading scores 2016

Russian Federation	581
Singapore	576
Hong Kong SAR	569
Ireland	567
Finland	566
Poland	565
Northern Ireland	565
Norway (Grade 5)	559
Chinese Taipei	559
England	559
Latvia	558
Sweden	555
Hungary	554
Bulgaria	552
United States	549

Benchmark' in reading, the third highest percentage internationally and a significant increase compared with 2011.

- ✎ Only three per cent of pupils in Northern Ireland failed to reach the 'Low International Benchmark'.
- ✎ There was a significant increase in the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland reaching the 'Advanced International Benchmark' in PIRLS 2016 compared with 2011 (22 per cent in 2016; 19 per cent in 2011).

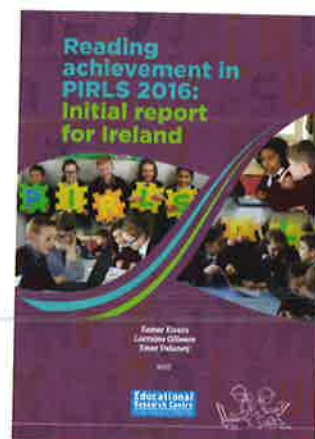
- ✎ A relatively wide spread of attainment for reading between the highest and the lowest attainers.

Fourteen countries, including Ireland, also took part in a new component (ePIRLS), which assesses reading in an online environment. Pupils in the Republic also performed exceptionally well on this test.

Commenting on the report in the Republic of Ireland, the general secretary of the INTO, Sheila Nunan, said the results were down to the tremendous professional work of primary teachers. She said that, since 2011, Irish children have been taught by a fully qualified professional teaching workforce that has driven this improvement.

"However," said Ms Nunan, "there is now a significant shortage of teachers and a rise in the number of people with no qualifications in Irish classrooms. The INTO is putting the Minister and the Department of Education and Skills on notice. These results cannot be sustained without a fully qualified workforce."

Ms Nunan said pay inequality was driving teacher emigration and fuelling a teacher shortage here. "This crisis must be resolved if Ireland is to remain top of the European class."



Read Ireland's national report on PIRLS and ePIRLS 2016 at [www.erc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/PIRLS-2016\\_initial-report-IRL.pdf](http://www.erc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/PIRLS-2016_initial-report-IRL.pdf)