

Press Release

Benchmarking School Science, Technology and Mathematics Education in Ireland Against International Good Practice – A new report by ICSTI

The profound importance of our educational system to Ireland's future well-being led the Irish Council for Science, Technology and Innovation (ICSTI), with the assistance of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to initiate a study to benchmark school science, technology and mathematics education (STM) in Ireland against international good practice.

Science, technology and innovation are taking on an increasingly important role in Irish society and the Irish economy. Effective primary and second level science, technology and mathematics education in Irish schools is a priority given this changing environment. As the knowledge age unfolds, it is recognised that national competitiveness and well-being become more and more dependent on the scientific capability of the population.

The aim of the report *Benchmarking School Science, Technology and Mathematics Education in Ireland Against International Good Practice* is to provide a factual, qualitative and quantitative description of science, technology and mathematics education in the Irish school system in comparison with that of four other countries - Scotland, Finland, Malaysia and New Zealand.

It draws on policy documents, research findings and experience of the practical realities of the education systems of the countries concerned. In the nature of many such international comparisons, the available information ranges from qualitative to quantitative. The purpose of the report is to identify key issues in school science, technology and mathematics education in Ireland that require attention and to inform the education debate in this area.

The report was prepared in consultation with education representatives in Ireland and abroad. All the countries in the study were identified as open, knowledge-based societies, generally on the periphery of major trading areas. The study highlights the attention that such progressive countries are giving to strengthening and developing STM in the school system.

Three key issues in science, technology and mathematics education identified by ICSTI are:

- *How to develop and implement STM education policy on a time-scale that meets the rapidly changing needs of an emerging knowledge-based society, while continuing to meet individual students' long-term needs and ensuring a high level of ownership among the social partners*
- *How to recruit, train and retain high-quality STM teachers, particularly in the physical sciences and mathematics*
- *How best to teach and assess science, technology and mathematics.*

Commenting on the report the chairman of ICSTI, Dr. Edward Walsh said: “If these key issues are addressed in Ireland, the Council believes that science, technology and mathematics education here will effectively contribute to equipping students for a meaningful and productive role in the knowledge-based society. Scientific and technological literacy, appropriate to the needs of the individual, is an essential life skill, which the education system must provide. The Council hopes that the information in the benchmarking report and supporting database will stimulate discussion and assist in the formulation of new policies for science, technology and mathematics in Irish education”.

**For further information, please contact:
Tom O'Dwyer, Forfas Press Office, Tel: (01 6073085**