

The Parental Alliance for Choice in Education

Northern Ireland Branch
Chairman: L. Stephen Elliott
4 Rathblane, The Folly
Antrim BT41 1JT
02894 464874
e-mail paceni@btinternet.com
mobile 07759344052

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Northern Ireland's Key Stage 3 literacy levels crash

PACE has uncovered that in the last 2 years Northern Ireland's Key Stage 3 literacy levels have crashed. The general decline in pupils' attainment is best evidenced in the results obtained in English at Key Stage 3. Statistical figures obtained from the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) demonstrate a year-on-year decline in the Levels of attainment obtained in the examinations. Key Stage 3 tests are taken by students in third year at post-primary school.

Selected Results of Northern Ireland Key Stage 3 Assessments 2004 - 2009

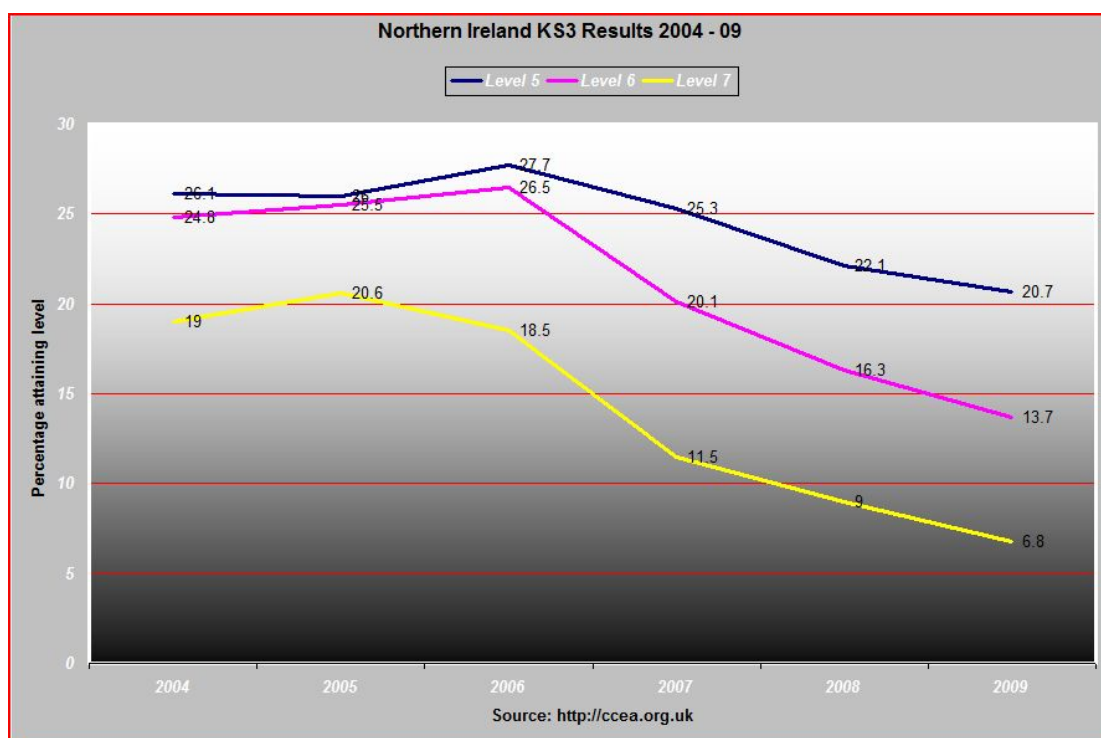
English	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7+	Absence
2009	20.7 (<i>26.4</i>)	13.7 (<i>28.9</i>)	6.8 (<i>19.9</i>)	44.5%
2008	22.1 (<i>26.5</i>)	16.3 (<i>29.2</i>)	9.0 (<i>19.5</i>)	35.3%
2007	25.3 (<i>25.4</i>)	20.1 (<i>29.4</i>)	11.5 (<i>19.3</i>)	24.8%
2006	27.7 (<i>26.5</i>)	26.5 (<i>29.4</i>)	18.5 (<i>18.0</i>)	2.6%
2005	26.0 (<i>24.9</i>)	25.5 (<i>28.5</i>)	20.6 (<i>17.9</i>)	2.6%
2004	26.1 (<i>24.9</i>)	24.8 (<i>28.6</i>)	19.0 (<i>18.2</i>)	2.6%

The figures in italics are the Teacher Assessment in %
Absence signifies that the pupils were absent from one or both of the tests.

Source: CCEA: Key Stage 3 Assessment 2008/2009

NORTHERN IRELAND SUMMARY <http://www.ccea.org.uk/>
[HOME](#) » [CURRICULUM](#) » [KEY STAGE 3](#) » Research and Statistics

The Direction of Change



Data Source: <http://www.ccea.org.uk/>

Graph prepared by: the Parental Alliance for Choice in Education©2009

In an unexplained development the pupil absence figures for Key Stage testing have risen from a baseline of around 3% to a staggering 44.5% this year.

The Government examination body statistics also show that in recent years following the introduction of the revised curriculum Teacher Assessment predictions have overestimated the pupils' actual results by a factor of two or more. (See Table above)

The natural consequence is that both the parent and pupil will believe that satisfactory progress is being made and discover too late the truth of the matter after irreplaceable learning time has been lost.

In 2006 the decline in standards in literacy was critically highlighted by reports of the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee in Westminster. Responses by the Department of Education Permanent Secretary, Will Haire, promised to focus on improvement. (See DENI Circular 2007/11)

The Circular states:

“The Department of Education accords a high priority to literacy and numeracy in line with the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum and asks all teachers, at all key stages, to seek to promote literacy and numeracy in the classroom.”

In February 2007 the Northern Ireland Department of Finance and Personnel issued a Memorandum on the 2nd and 3rd Reports from the Committee of Public Accounts Session 2006-2007. An abstract from the report states:

“The creation of a new, single Education and Skills Authority (ESA) to support the school system from April 2008 will also have a positive impact on literacy and numeracy. The primary task of the ESA will be to work with schools to improve quality and raise standards across the system and to place literacy and numeracy at the centre of this responsibility.”

Instead of improvements the Key Stage 3 literacy levels have crashed. As parents can see from the CCEA figures the Department of Education has failed on this vital issue yet again.

While the decline in pupils achieving Level 6 at KS3 has doubled over a five year period and the negative trend has almost tripled at Level 7 there has been no comment or concern raised from any quarter of the education establishment. The fact that none of the highly paid education watchdogs have reported that something has gone seriously wrong must reflect a degree of complacency over numeracy and literacy.

PACE believes the Revised Curriculum to be the chief suspect in the literacy decline. The questions must be put;

- What is going to be done to reverse this numeracy and literacy decline in schools before the betrayal of an entire generation of pupils in Northern Ireland becomes irreversible?
- When will those responsible for failed education initiatives be actually held to account?