



INSPIRING STORIES

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Introduction

The Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS), under the auspices of the Department of Education and Science (DES), supports schools in curricular and organisational development. Urban DEIS schools (schools designated as disadvantaged) are prioritised by the PPDS and customised support is provided to these schools.



PPDS—DEIS Advisors

Why First Steps?

As part of *Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools (DEIS) - An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion* (DES, 2005), a commitment was made to these DEIS urban schools to provide intensive professional development for teachers in literacy and numeracy (p. 36). This involves training in a number of internationally recognised literacy and numeracy programmes including *First Steps*. *First Steps* is unique in that it is the only classroom based programme that can be implemented on a whole-school basis.

Three strands of the *First Steps* literacy resource are currently being implemented in Ireland:

- Writing (1st edition)
- Reading (2nd edition)
- Speaking and Listening (2nd edition)

So what's working well?

At the request of the DES, the Education Research Centre are independently monitoring the implementation of the DEIS action plan and evaluating its impact. While this evaluation will not be published until the end of 2010, PPDS advisors have identified a number of successes due to effective implementation of *First Steps* in Irish schools:

- **Gradual Release of Responsibility**

One of the notable successes advisors have observed when working with teachers is the introduction of the Gradual Release of Responsibility model of instruction (*Pearson and Gallagher, 1983*) in Irish classrooms. Through this model, teachers are provided with a framework for moving children from a supportive context where the teacher has a high degree of control (modelling, sharing) to a more independent context where the student has more control (applying).

“(Due to *First Steps*)...children are reading a higher standard of literacy at a very early stage”
Principal

- **Leading implementation:**

Each DEIS school is invited to nominate a teacher to be trained to the level of tutor (facilitator). Tutors provide training to colleagues in *First Steps*, models lessons in classrooms, devises action plans in consultation with the staff and keeps *First Steps* “on-the-boil” by establishing display areas, updating *First Steps* notice boards and so on. Such an approach ensures staffs are led internally by a fellow colleague and motivated to continue implementation.

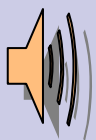
“The tutor is excellent, very non-threatening. Gently leading people along.”
School A

- **Assessment underpinning teaching and learning**

Teachers in Ireland have found that the diagnostic frameworks or Maps of Development very effectively link assessment with teaching and learning. This enables teachers to accurately assess and monitor children’s competencies and progress on an on-going basis. Teachers can then match children’s performance in oral language, reading and writing with appropriate and relevant activities and strategies for development.

- **Integration with ICT**

Teachers have identified innovative means to bring *First Steps* to life using ICT. These include [blogging](#), creating [PhotoStories](#), animating book reports using Crazy Talk, and so on.



Click on the hyperlinks to see fantastic examples of children applying what they have learned.

Taking stock – taking action!

2010 has been identified as the final year of the timeframe indicated in *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) - An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion* (DES, 2005). Therefore, in this academic year, key goals for the PPDS are to support the **embedding** and **implementation** of *First Steps*.
