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New ERC report highlights high levels of satisfaction among parents with their child's school

The Educational Research Centre (ERC) today launched a report describing the home learning environment of students in Ireland. ***The home learning environment in Ireland: Insights from TIMSS 2015*** was written by Dr Aidan Clerkin, Dr Rachel Perkins, and Emma Chubb. It reports data collected for TIMSS 2015 (*Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study*), one of the world's largest studies of educational achievement

The report is based on the responses of approximately 9000 students in Fourth Class and Second Year who took part in TIMSS 2015 in Ireland, as well as their teachers and the parents of Fourth Class students. It focuses on different aspects of the home learning environment, attitudes towards education, and education-related practices at home, with international comparisons. Topics examined include:

- **Parents' views of their child's school.**
- **Parents' attitudes to mathematics and science.**
- **Teachers' reports of parental support for their child's education.**
- **The availability of books, educational resources, and technology at home.**
- **Early literacy activities and early numeracy activities at home before children start school.**
- **Teachers' reports on difficulties in the classroom related to poor nutrition and lack of sleep among students.**
- **Frequency and duration of homework.**
- **Participation in shadow education (grinds) outside school in mathematics and science, and whether such additional classes are 'to excel' or 'to keep up'.**

Dr Aidan Clerkin, one of the report's authors, said that *"One important finding is that the parents of Fourth Class students described a high degree of satisfaction with many aspects of their child's education. In fact, parental satisfaction in Ireland was substantially above the TIMSS international average. Most parents in Ireland agreed that their child's school provides a safe environment, cares about their child's progress, and does a good job of including them in their child's education. This indicates a high degree of trust and respect among parents for the work being done by teachers, principals, and other school staff. From the schools' perspective, teachers also reported a higher level of parental support for children's learning in Ireland than was found in many other countries."*

He also noted *"However, although parents say that their child's school does a good job at helping them to improve in maths and reading, there was less support for the idea that schools are helping Fourth Class students to improve in science. There are various possible reasons for this. For example, relatively little time is devoted to teaching science at Fourth Class compared to some other subjects. It could also be because parents are less familiar*

with their child's progress in science compared to reading and maths, since standardised test results are much more common in reading and maths than in science."

Dr Rachel Perkins, another of the authors, said *"About one-sixth of Second Year students reported taking additional maths tuition outside school. However, extra lessons in science were rare. In general, shadow education or 'grinds' were less common in Ireland than the international average. Students gave 'keeping up in class' as their reason for taking extra lessons slightly more often than 'to excel'."*

Other notable findings include:

- **Parents in Ireland reported more positive attitudes about mathematics and science than parents in most other countries. In Ireland, and in most other countries, more positive parental attitudes were associated with higher student achievement in both domains (subjects).**
- **A lower incidence of early learning activities (such as reading books, playing with alphabet toys, and talking about things they had read) was apparent in homes with fewer resources for learning, indicating that there is an ongoing need for support for some families.**

Notes:

About TIMSS

TIMSS assesses the mathematics and science skills of students in Fourth grade (Fourth Class in Ireland) and Eighth grade (Second Year) around the world. In so doing, it aims to provide national and cross-national comparative information for policy-makers and educators. Fifty-six countries participated in 2015. TIMSS is organised by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), a non-profit consortium of research institutes. The ERC managed Ireland's participation in TIMSS 2015 on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

The current report is based on data arising from the previous cycle of TIMSS, held in 2015. TIMSS is repeated every four years. Initial national results from TIMSS 2019 will be published on December 8th, 2020.

Related reports

The current report, ***The home learning environment in Ireland: Insights from TIMSS 2015***, will be followed in November 2020 by a companion volume (***Students' perspectives on learning mathematics and science: Results from TIMSS 2015 in Ireland.***) that will describe students' attitudes towards learning mathematics and science, and school more generally.

These reports are the fifth and sixth volumes in the ERC's Research Series. The Research Series is intended to make the findings of large-scale assessments such as TIMSS more accessible to the public through the publication of short reports, each focused on a specific topic.

More information

The home learning environment in Ireland: Insights from TIMSS 2015 is available for free download from www.erc.ie. More information about TIMSS, including previous reports, is available from www.erc.ie/TIMSS. The authors and title of the new report are:

- Aidan Clerkin, Rachel Perkins & Emma Chubb. (2020). ***The home learning environment in Ireland: Insights from TIMSS 2015***. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

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