

PIRLS 2021:
**Exploring the contexts for reading of
primary school pupils in Ireland**

Vasiliki Pitsia, Sarah McAteer, Gráinne McHugh, and Emer Delaney

Educational Research Centre

CHAPTER 8

Chapter 8: Educational Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The administration of PIRLS 2021 took place in Ireland in the autumn of 2021, when schools had returned to in-person teaching following the second round of lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In Ireland, during the school year preceding the PIRLS administration (2020-2021), there was an extensive period of school closures, as well as periods of in-person teaching in schools with a number of required protective measures.

The PIRLS 2021 national report for Ireland by Delaney et al. (2023) highlighted the level of disruptions experienced by schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All school principals in Ireland reported that their school was closed for more than eight weeks of instruction during the 2020-2021 school year. Also, due to the high level of school closures, almost all school principals reported providing remote instruction or distance learning during this time, with most pupils in Ireland attending a school that had a whole-school policy on remote learning that was implemented during school closures. According to school principals, the vast majority of pupils in Ireland attended schools that provided internet resources for pupils and digital devices to teachers, as well as recommendations for teachers and parents to help with remote learning. Also, the majority of pupils attended a school where printed learning materials were supplied to pupils, though to a lesser extent than digital resources. This may be due to the need for limiting physical contact, as part of the national restrictions being implemented during the pandemic. Technical support for teachers and digital devices for pupils were the least reported methods of support in Ireland; however, there was still a large proportion of pupils whose school principals reported providing these as part of their remote learning supports.

In Ireland, as part of the PIRLS administration, Fifth Class teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire, while Fourth Class teachers, who had taught PIRLS pupils in the previous school year (2020-2021), were also asked to complete a national questionnaire, as described in Chapter 1. Drawing on these questionnaires, this chapter focuses on the experiences of Fourth and Fifth Class teachers in teaching pupils both during the second COVID-19 lockdown (during national school closures and in-person teaching) and at the time of PIRLS testing, once pupils were back in the classroom. The focus in this chapter is on Ireland only, and findings are reported at a high level and not split by subgroups (e.g., gender).⁴⁰

Remote teaching and learning

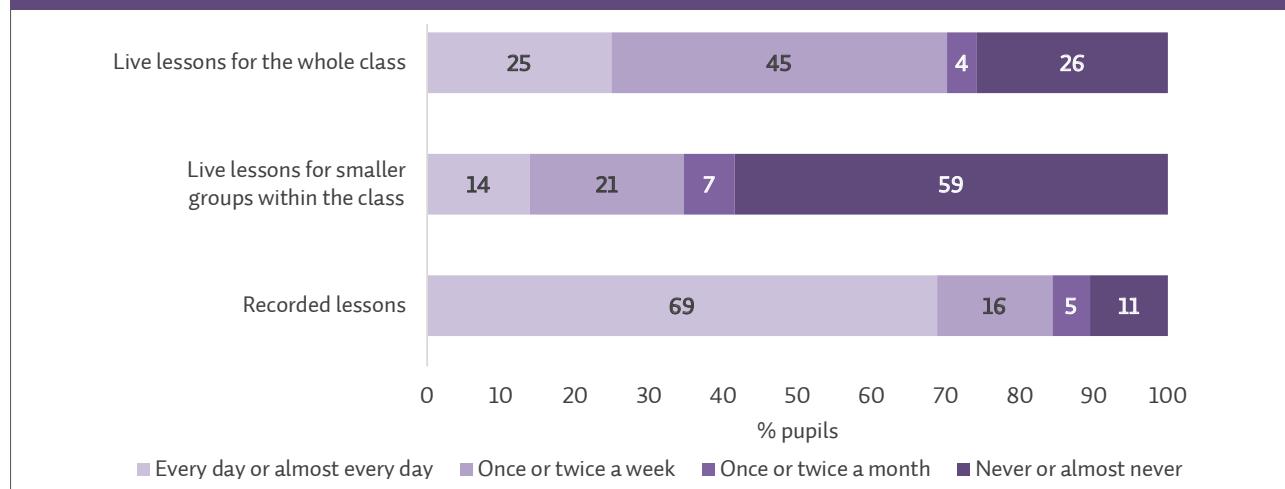
Fourth Class teachers in Ireland were asked to reflect on their time teaching pupils in the previous school year (2020-2021), during the national school closures. Specifically, teachers were asked to reflect on the most recent period of school closures that occurred between January and March 2021. Teachers reported on their experience of implementing remote teaching, the support and level of engagement they experienced, as well as the methods and activities they employed during remote teaching and learning.

Figure 8.1 shows the frequency of specific types of lessons used by Fourth Class teachers to enable remote learning in literacy. *Recorded lessons* were the most frequently used form of

40 Analysis applies only to pupils for whom Fourth Class teacher data were available and whose class group remained intact between school years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022. This comprised 82.3% of the full sample of participating PIRLS pupils.

teaching during lockdown, with 69% of pupils being taught by teachers who used recorded lessons *every day or almost every day* and another 16% whose teachers did so *once or twice a week*. *Live lessons for the whole class* were employed less frequently during school closures, with a quarter of pupils being taught by teachers who used this type of lesson for the whole class *every day or almost every day*, and a further 45% whose teachers did so *once or twice a week*. Just 14% of pupils were taught by a teacher who conducted *live lessons for smaller groups within the class* *every day or almost every day*, while for over half of pupils in Ireland (59%), their teacher *never or almost never* implemented lessons for smaller groups within the class.

Figure 8.1: Frequency of lesson types to enable remote learning in literacy during school closures from January to March 2021 (2021)

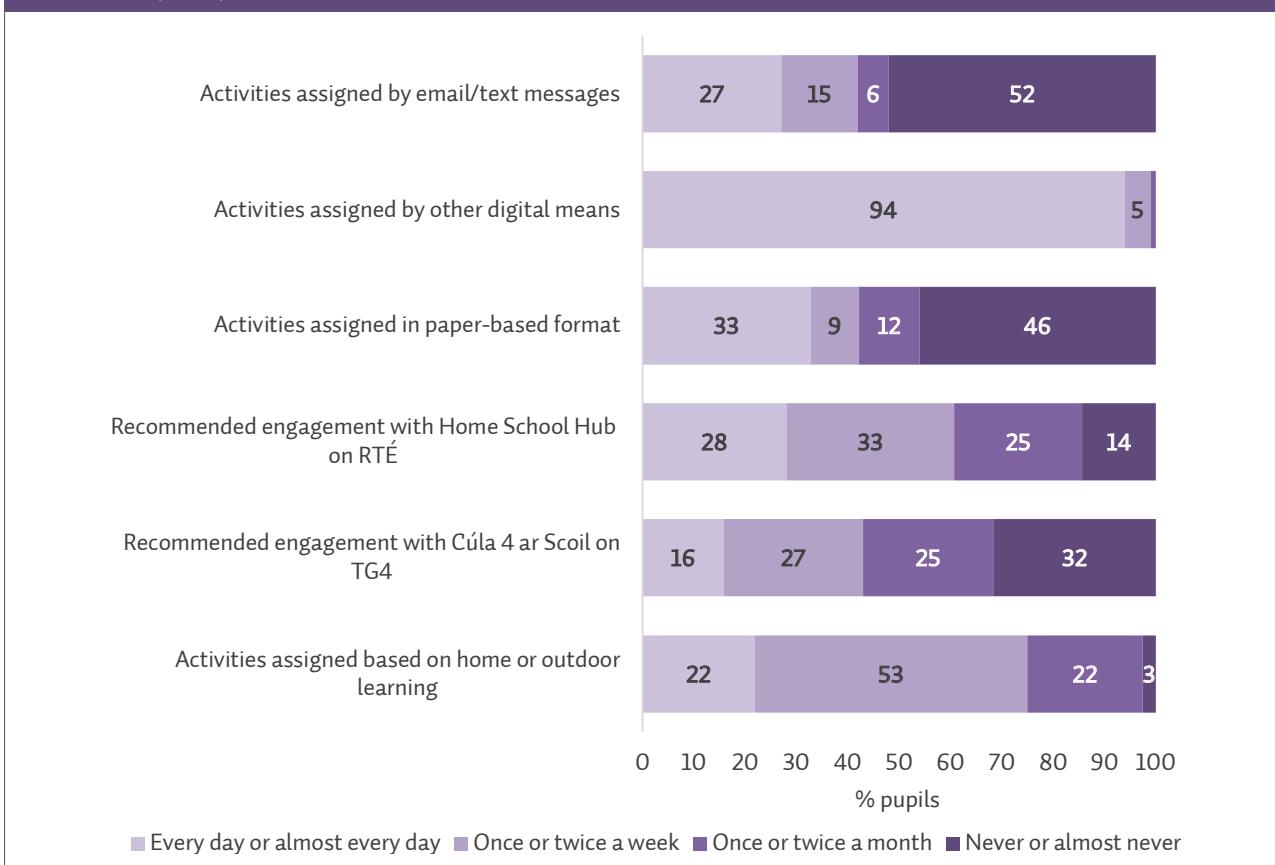


Source: Appendix Table A8.1.

Note. Due to rounding, some differences may appear inconsistent with those reported in text or the Appendix.

Figure 8.2 shows selected activities and recommendations provided by teachers to enable learning in literacy during school closures. Several activities were used daily by a proportion of teachers in Ireland during school closures. The majority of pupils (94%) were taught by teachers who assigned activities by digital means (e.g., school websites) *every day or almost every day*. One-third of pupils were taught by teachers who assigned paper-based activities *every day or almost every day*, though 46% of pupils had teachers who *never or almost never* did so. This may be due to relevant national COVID-19 guidelines at the time, which restricted the distribution of paper resources. Other methods of assigning activities were also applied by Fourth Class teachers, as 27% of pupils had teachers who assigned activities via email or text messages and 22% of pupils had teachers who assigned activities based on home or outdoor learning *every day or almost every day*. A proportion of Fourth Class teachers also reported recommending engagement with television programmes frequently, with 28% of pupils being taught by teachers who recommended RTÉ's Home School Hub *every day or almost every day*, while a smaller proportion of pupils (16%) were recommended the Irish language show Cúla 4 ar Scoil on TG4 *every day or almost every day*.

Figure 8.2: Frequency of activities to enable remote learning in literacy during school closures from January to March 2021 (2021)

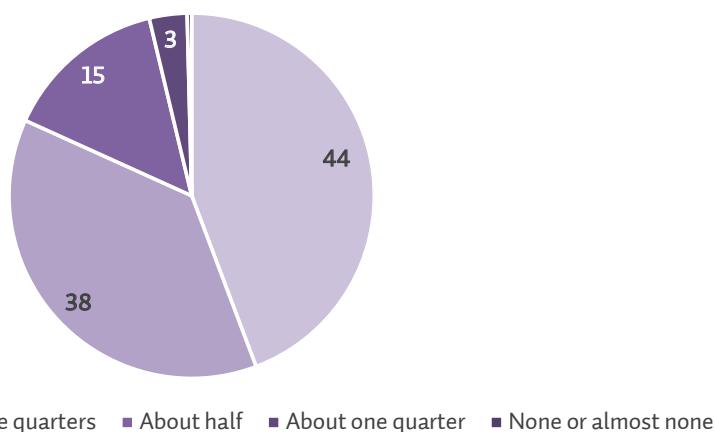


Source: Appendix Table A8.2.

Note. Due to rounding, some differences may appear inconsistent with those reported in text or the Appendix.

Fourth Class teachers were asked to report on the proportion of their class that regularly (at least 2-3 times per week) engaged in remote learning in literacy during the school closures from January to March 2021 (Figure 8.3). More than four out of 10 pupils in Ireland (44%) were taught by teachers who reported that *all or almost all* pupils regularly engaged in remote learning in literacy, with a further 38% whose teachers reported that *about three quarters* of their class engaged regularly in remote learning in literacy. A smaller percentage of pupils were taught by teachers who estimated that between *about half* and *about one quarter* of their class regularly engaged in remote learning in literacy; notably, less than half a percent of pupils were taught by teachers reporting that *none or almost none* of their class engaged in remote learning in literacy.

Figure 8.3: Regular pupil engagement (at least 2-3 times per week) in remote learning in literacy during school closures from January to March 2021 (2021)

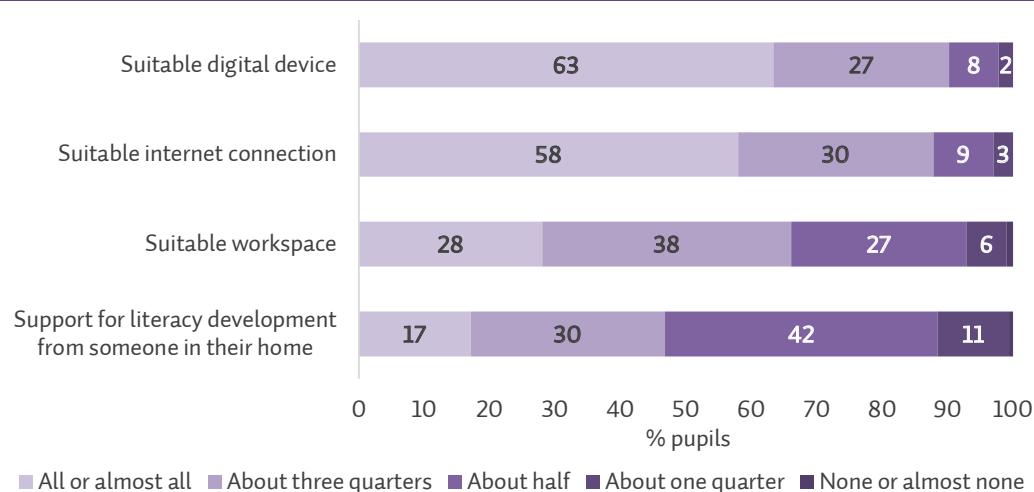


Source: Appendix Table A8.3.

Note. Due to rounding, some differences may appear inconsistent with those reported in text or the Appendix.

Figure 8.4 shows the estimated proportions of pupils that had certain resources available to them at home to help them engage in remote learning, according to their Fourth Class teachers. Resources such as *suitable digital devices* and *suitable internet connection* were available to most pupils, with 90% and 88% of pupils having a teacher who reported that three-quarters or more of their class had a *suitable digital device* and a *suitable internet connection* available to them, respectively. In Ireland, 28% of pupils had a teacher who reported that *all or almost all* of their pupils had a *suitable workspace* for remote learning, with a further 38% of pupils having a teacher reporting that *about three quarters* of their pupils had this resource. Fourth Class teachers were also asked to estimate the proportion of pupils in their class who had *support for literacy development from someone in their home*. A large percentage of pupils (42%) had a teacher who reported that *about half* of their class had support from someone in their home, with a further 30% of teachers reporting that *about three quarters* of their class had such a support at home. Just 17% of pupils had teachers who reported that *all or almost all* of their class had support for literacy development at home.

Figure 8.4: Resources available to pupils in their homes to enable remote learning during school closures from January to March 2021 (2021)

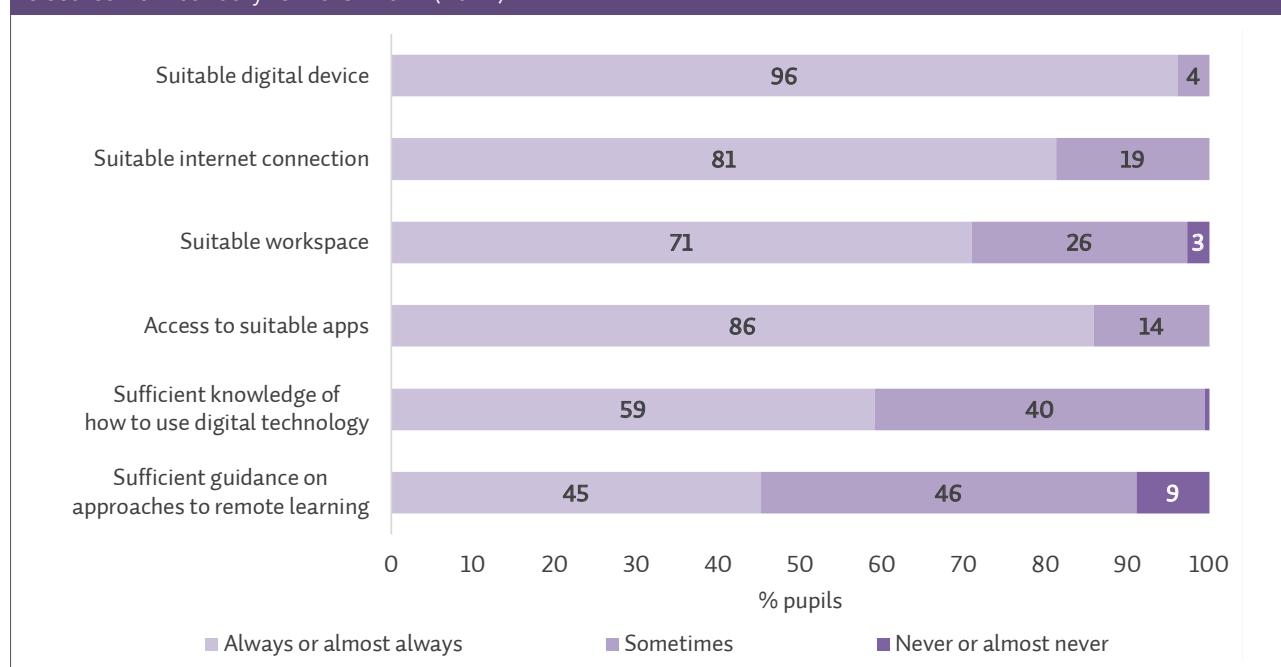


Source: Appendix Table A8.4.

Note. Due to rounding, some differences may appear inconsistent with those reported in text or the Appendix.

In addition to pupil resources, Fourth Class teachers were asked to report the frequency with which they themselves had access to different types of resources to facilitate remote learning during school closures (Figure 8.5). Approximately all pupils (96%) had teachers who *always or almost always* had a *suitable digital device* available to them for remote learning, while 86% of pupils were taught by teachers who *always or almost always* had *access to suitable apps* (e.g., for video conferencing). Eight out of 10 pupils (81%) had teachers who *always or almost always* had a *suitable internet connection* to teach remotely, while 71% of pupils had teachers who *always or almost always* had a *suitable workspace* to facilitate remote learning. More than half of pupils in Ireland (59%) had teachers who *always or almost always* had *sufficient knowledge of how to use digital technology* for remote teaching. Roughly equal percentages of pupils had teachers who *always or almost always* (45%) or *sometimes* (46%) had *sufficient guidance on approaches to remote learning*. However, it is not specified within the question if such guidance was supplied by schools or if it was via the teachers' own initiative.

Figure 8.5: Frequency of access to resources for Fourth Class teachers to facilitate remote learning during school closures from January to March 2021 (2021)



Source: Appendix Table A8.5.

Note. Due to rounding, some differences may appear inconsistent with those reported in text or the Appendix.

Table 8.1 shows the frequency with which Fourth Class teachers used specific supports to help facilitate remote learning during school closures from January to March 2021. The most frequently used supports tended to come from the teachers' immediate working environment (e.g., the colleagues in their school, or other teachers offline and online, and their school management). Around three-quarters (76%) of pupils were taught by teachers who *often* engaged with teaching colleagues within their schools for support during school closures. Approximately two-thirds (63%) of pupils had teachers who *often* received support from other teachers or educators, some of whom they engaged with through social media, while 47% of pupils had teachers who *often* looked for support from school management.

Fourth Class teachers also reported drawing on *guidance from the Department of Education*, but tended to do so *sometimes* rather than *often*, with 54% of pupils being taught by teachers who *sometimes* drew on this type of support and fewer of them (12%) being taught by a teacher who did so *often*, while the remaining one-third of pupils (34%) were taught by teachers who reported *never or almost never* drawing on guidance from the Department of Education.

Fourth Class teachers also reported drawing on supports provided by specific educational organisations to help facilitate remote learning. Among the organisations listed in the question, teachers most frequently drew on supports provided by the PDST. Specifically, 22% of pupils were taught by teachers who *often* relied on these supports, while an additional 49% were taught by teachers who did so *sometimes*. A small percentage of pupils (12%) were taught by teachers who *often* drew on supports provided by the NCCA, with over one-third (36%) of pupils being taught by a teacher who reported drawing on supports provided by the NCCA *sometimes*. Supports to help facilitate remote learning from other organisations (e.g., The Education Centre Network, the NCSE, Tusla Education Support Service [TESS]) during school closures were less popular among Fourth Class teachers, with the majority of pupils being taught by teachers who reported to *never* or *almost never* use supports provided by these organisations.

Table 8.1: Use of supports by Fourth Class teachers to help facilitate remote learning during school closures from January to March 2021 (2021)

| | Often | Sometimes | Never or almost never |
|---|-------|-----------|-----------------------|
| | % | % | % |
| Collaboration with teaching colleagues in your school | 76 | 22 | 2 |
| Support from other teachers or educators, including on social media | 63 | 31 | 6 |
| Support from school management | 47 | 35 | 18 |
| Guidance from the Department of Education | 12 | 54 | 34 |
| Supports provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) | 22 | 49 | 29 |
| Supports provided by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) | 12 | 36 | 51 |
| Supports provided by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) | 8 | 29 | 63 |
| Supports provided by An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) | 4 | 14 | 82 |
| Supports provided by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) | 3 | 23 | 74 |
| Supports provided by Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) | 0 | 7 | 93 |
| Supports provided by the Education Centre Network | 11 | 28 | 62 |
| Supports provided by other agencies/organisations | 4 | 36 | 60 |

Source: Appendix Table A8.6.

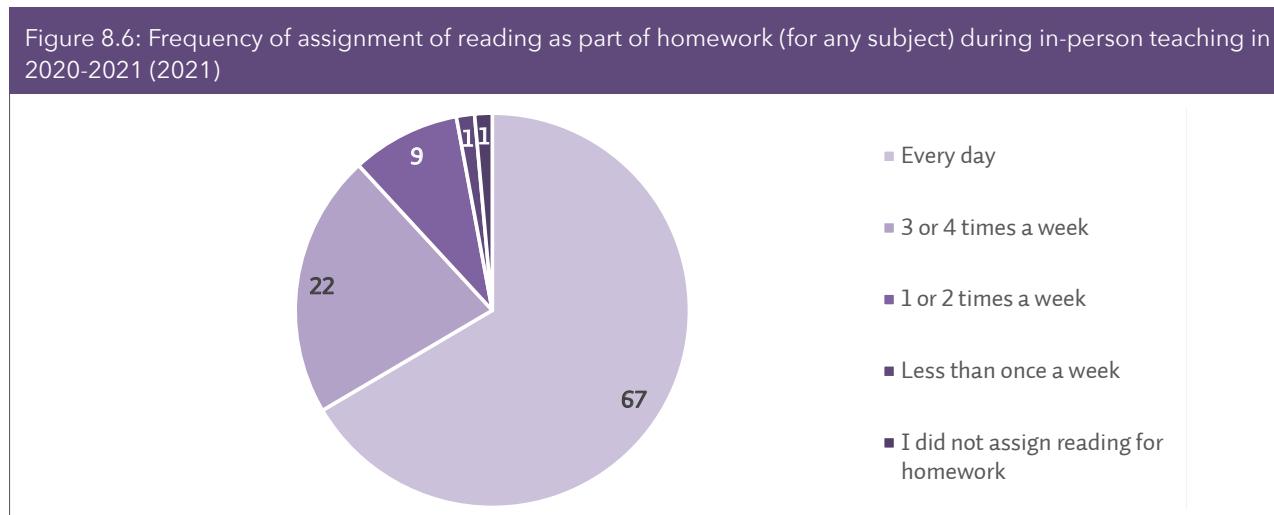
Note. Due to rounding, some differences may appear inconsistent with those reported in text or the Appendix.

In-person teaching and learning

Fourth Class teachers in Ireland were asked to reflect on their time teaching the PIRLS pupils in the previous school year (2020-2021). Specifically, teachers were asked to reflect on periods during the 2020-2021 school year when they had returned to in-person teaching in their schools. This would have been at a time when there were a number of national restrictions and procedures that would need to be implemented within the classrooms and schools.

Figure 8.6 shows the frequency with which Fourth Class teachers assigned reading as part of pupils' homework (for any subject) during in-person teaching in early 2021. The majority of pupils in Ireland (67%) were taught by a Fourth Class teacher who assigned reading as part of homework (for any subject) *every day*. A further 22% of pupils had teachers who assigned

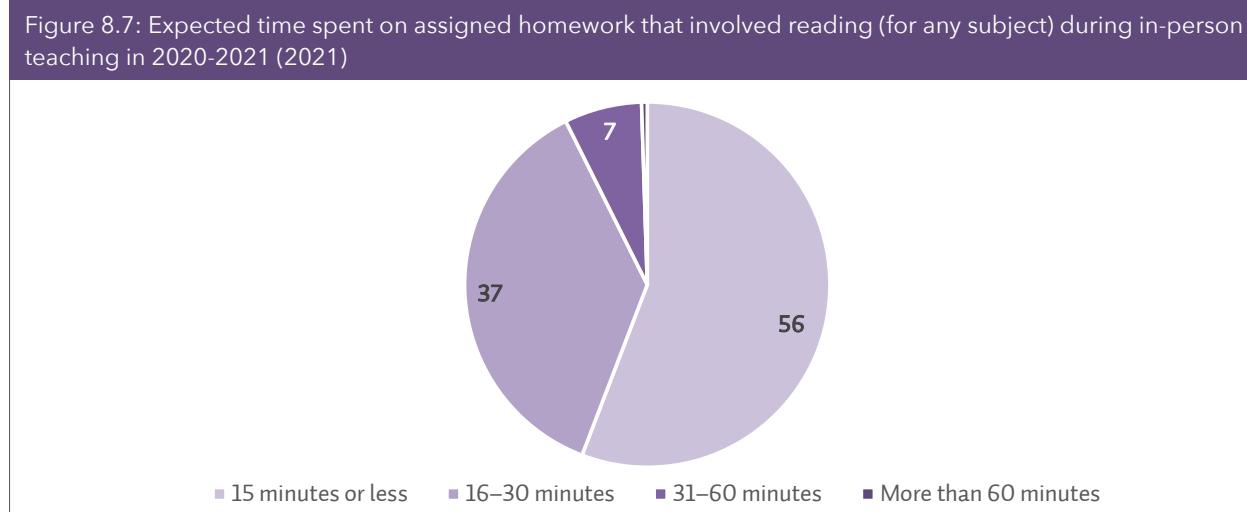
homework that involved reading *3 or 4 times a week*. Very few pupils in Ireland had a Fourth Class teacher who reported assigning reading as part of homework *less than once a week* (1%) or not assigning reading as part of homework at all (1%).



Source: Appendix Table A8.7.

Note. Due to rounding, some differences may appear inconsistent with those reported in text or the Appendix.

Figure 8.7 shows how much time Fourth Class teachers expected pupils to spend on assigned homework (for any subject) that included reading, when assigned. Although the majority of Fourth Class teachers assigned homework daily (see Figure 8.6), they did not expect pupils to spend too much time on their homework, with 93% of pupils taught by Fourth Class teachers who expected pupils to spend up to 30 minutes on such homework. Of these, the majority (56%) were expected to spend *15 minutes or less* on their homework. Very few pupils in Ireland had a teacher who expected them to spend more than half an hour on homework that included reading (8%).



Source: Appendix Table A8.8.

Note. Due to rounding, some differences may appear inconsistent with those reported in text or the Appendix.

Fifth Class teachers (i.e., those teaching the PIRLS pupils at the time of testing) were asked to report if their school had provided any summer programmes funded by the Department of Education in 2021. As reported in the PIRLS 2021 national report for Ireland (Delaney et al., 2023), two-fifths of pupils (40%) attended a school where a summer programme had been provided. Of the schools that provided a summer programme, Table 8.2 shows the percentage that took part in selected programmes, as reported by teachers. Within those schools, 43%

of pupils attended schools that provided a *DEIS Literacy and Numeracy camp*, 68% of pupils attended schools that provided an inclusion programme for pupils with special educational needs and/or at risk of disadvantage who were in mainstream classes, while 62% of pupils attended schools that provided a *Special Educational Needs Programme for pupils in special classes and special schools*.

Table 8.2: Summer programmes funded by the Department of Education provided by schools in Ireland (2021)

| | Yes % | No % |
|---|----------|---------|
| DEIS Literacy and Numeracy camp/Campaí Samhraidh | 43 | 57 |
| Inclusion programme for pupils in mainstream classes (with SEN, and/or at risk of disadvantage) | 68 | 32 |
| Special Educational Needs programme for pupils in special classes and special schools | 62 | 38 |

Source: Appendix Table A8.9.

Notes. Due to rounding, some differences may appear inconsistent with those reported in text or the Appendix. Recent guidelines require that the term *Special Educational Needs* is used in full, and these guidelines are followed in this report. However, the statement “Inclusion programme for pupils in mainstream classes (with SEN, and/or at risk of disadvantage)” was presented in the teacher questionnaire using the acronym (i.e., *SEN*); hence, the acronym is used in this table.

The PIRLS 2021 national report for Ireland (Delaney et al., 2023) noted that most pupils (71%) were taught by Fifth Class teachers who reported that *none or almost none* of their pupils in the PIRLS class took part in the funded summer programmes provided by the school, while 24% of pupils were taught by teachers who reported that *about one quarter* of the PIRLS class attended such a programme. The national report also noted that there was some emphasis on literacy within the provided summer programmes, with 56% of pupils being taught by teachers reporting that literacy was included *to some extent*, and 17% being taught by teachers reporting that literacy was included *to a great extent*.

COVID-19 and literacy learning

In Ireland, both Fourth and Fifth Class teachers were asked to report the extent to which selected procedures and restrictions, which were put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, had limited literacy learning. Fourth Class teachers were asked to recall the period of in-person teaching from the previous school year (2020-2021), while Fifth Class teachers were asked to report their experiences at the time of the PIRLS assessment (autumn 2021) within the context of in-person teaching with certain procedures and restrictions in place.

Table 8.3 shows both Fourth and Fifth Class teachers' responses to this set of questions. The majority of pupils had both Fourth Class (66%) and Fifth Class (59%) teachers who indicated that having *restricted access to facilities due to COVID-19* had, *to some extent*, limited pupils' literacy learning, while similar proportions of pupils had Fourth Class (27%) and Fifth Class (29%) teachers who indicated that this restricted access to facilities had limited literacy learning *to a great extent*. Substantial proportions of pupils, ranging between 28% and 30%, were also taught by Fourth and Fifth Class teachers who reported that the unavailability of support teachers due to COVID-19 related cover/activities limited literacy learning *to a great extent*.

Over half of pupils had teachers from both grades (52% and 59%, respectively), who reported that the additional *planning time required to facilitate adapted education provision for some pupils due to COVID-19* had, *to some extent*, limited literacy learning, while 25% and 22% of pupils had Fourth and Fifth Class teachers, respectively, who reported that the time spent on such adaptations limited pupils' literacy learning *to a great extent*. Teachers were also asked if COVID-19 related activities, such as hand sanitising, that had resulted in a loss of teaching/

learning time for reading had limited their pupils' literacy learning. Over a third of pupils (35%) were taught by Fourth Class teachers who reported that such activities did limit pupils' literacy learning *to a great extent*, and 29% of pupils had Fifth Class teachers who also reported such an impact on learning. Fourth Class teachers were also asked if the loss of teaching/learning time for reading due to the need for readjustment to in-person learning in the previous school year (2020-2021) had limited literacy learning, with the vast majority of pupils having teachers who reported that it had affected learning either *to some extent* (66%) or *to a great extent* (24%).

Teachers from both grades were also asked to report on the extent to which specific COVID-19 measures had limited pupils' literacy learning. Around a third (34%) and one-quarter of pupils had Fourth and Fifth Class teachers, respectively, who indicated that communication was impeded by face coverings *to a great extent*, with these data showing that this was still an issue but not to the same extent when pupils were back in the classroom in autumn 2021. Over half of pupils (59%) had a Fourth Class teacher who reported that the social distancing between themselves and their pupils had limited literacy learning *to a great extent*, while substantially fewer pupils were taught by a Fifth Class teacher who regarded this as an issue that limited pupils' literacy learning *to a great extent* (41%). More pupils had Fourth and Fifth Class teachers who reported that social distancing between pods of pupils limited pupils' literacy learning in comparison to social distancing between teachers and pupils. Two-thirds of pupils (66%) had Fourth Class teachers who considered that social distancing between pods had limited literacy learning *to a great extent*, while the equivalent percentage as reported by Fifth Class teachers was 47%.

Finally, both Fourth and Fifth Class teachers were asked to report on whether pupil absences due to COVID-19 had limited literacy learning. Just under a third of pupils (32%) were taught by Fourth Class teachers who reported that an *increased frequency of pupil absences, due to COVID-19*, had limited literacy learning *to a great extent* in the previous school year. Notably, the proportion of Fifth Class teachers reporting this was higher, with 41% of pupils having a Fifth Class teacher who reported that such absences during the autumn of 2021 had limited pupils' literacy learning *to a great extent*.

Table 8.3: Fourth and Fifth Class teachers' perceived impact of restrictions due to COVID-19 on literacy learning (2021)

| | Not at all | | To some extent | | To a great extent | |
|---|--------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|
| | Fourth Class | Fifth Class | Fourth Class | Fifth Class | Fourth Class | Fifth Class |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Restricted access to facilities (e.g., library, shared digital devices) due to COVID-19 | 8 | 12 | 66 | 59 | 27 | 29 |
| Support teachers unavailable due to COVID-19 related cover/activities | 26 | 21 | 46 | 48 | 28 | 30 |
| Teaching/learning time for reading lost to COVID-19 related activities (hand sanitising, etc.) | 9 | 15 | 55 | 55 | 35 | 29 |
| Teaching/learning time for reading lost due to need for readjustment to in-person learning | 10 | - | 66 | - | 24 | - |
| Communication impeded by face coverings | 16 | 23 | 50 | 51 | 34 | 26 |
| Activities limited by social distancing between you and the pupils | 4 | 12 | 37 | 48 | 59 | 41 |
| Activities limited by social distancing between pods | 3 | 8 | 32 | 45 | 66 | 47 |
| Increased frequency of pupil absences, due to COVID-19 | 10 | 6 | 58 | 53 | 32 | 41 |
| Planning time required to facilitate adapted education provision (e.g., ongoing remote learning) for some pupils, due to COVID-19 | 23 | 19 | 52 | 59 | 25 | 22 |

Source: Appendix Tables A8.10 and A8.11.

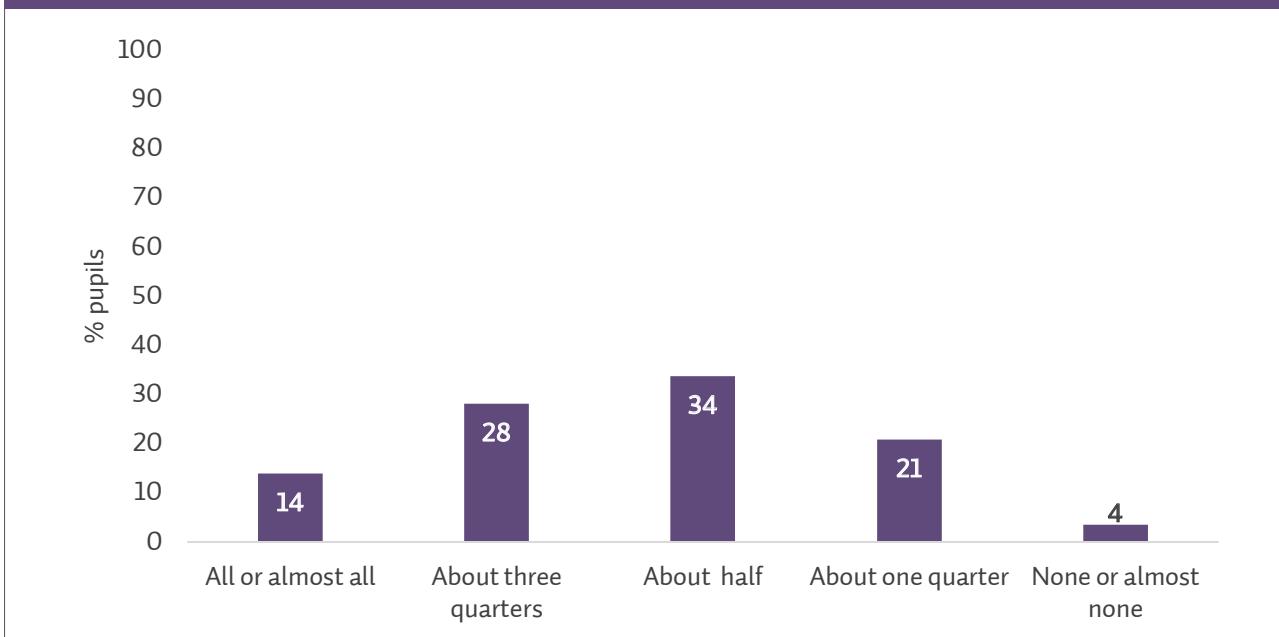
Note. Due to rounding, some differences may appear inconsistent with those reported in text or the Appendix.

- Question not administered.

Figure 8.8 shows Fourth Class teachers' reports of the proportion of pupils in Ireland whose literacy development was negatively affected by the challenges faced since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost all pupils in Ireland (96%) were taught by Fourth Class teachers who indicated that literacy development of at least one quarter of their pupils had been negatively affected. In fact, only 4% of pupils were taught by a Fourth Class teacher who thought that *none or almost none* of their classes' literacy development had been affected. More than half of pupils (55%) had teachers who estimated that between *about one quarter* and *about half* of pupils in their class had their literacy development affected, while a further 42% of pupils were taught by a Fourth Class teacher who estimated that this was the case for a larger proportion of their pupils, i.e., *about three quarters of or all or almost all* pupils.

As part of the PIRLS 2021 national report for Ireland, Delaney et al. (2023) reported on Fifth Class teachers' responses to the same question presented in Figure 8.8 for Fourth Class teachers. When looking at both Fourth and Fifth Class teachers' estimates, it seems that the literacy development of fewer pupils was regarded to be negatively affected by challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the autumn of 2021 (the time of the PIRLS assessment) than in the previous school year (2020-2021). Notably, twice as many pupils (8%) had Fifth Class teachers who viewed that *none or almost none* of their class had their literacy development negatively affected in the autumn of 2021 in comparison to 4% based on the reports of Fourth Class teachers for the previous school year. Also, fewer pupils had Fifth Class teachers who estimated that between *about three quarters of and all or almost all* pupils' literacy development had been negatively affected (33%) in comparison to Fourth Class teachers (42%).

Figure 8.8: Percentages of pupils by the proportion of their class for which literacy development was negatively affected by challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as reported by Fourth Class teachers (2021)



Source: Appendix Table A8.12.

Note. Due to rounding, some differences may appear inconsistent with those reported in text or the Appendix.

Chapter summary

In Ireland, during periods of remote learning, the majority of Fourth Class teachers (69%) implemented teaching via *recorded lessons* on a daily basis. *Live lessons for the whole class* were employed less frequently as were *live lessons for smaller groups within the class*, with over half of pupils in Ireland having a teacher who *never or almost never* implemented such lessons. Several activities were used daily to enable literacy learning during school closures. Specifically, the majority of pupils in Ireland were taught by teachers who assigned activities by digital means, such as the school website, on a daily basis. In contrast, although a third of pupils were taught by Fourth Class teachers who assigned paper-based activities every day, a substantial percentage of pupils (46%) had teachers who *never or almost never* assigned paper-based activities. This may be linked with the national COVID-19 restrictions at the time, which required that movement of paper resources was limited. Other types of activities were also assigned by Fourth Class teachers, such as recommendations for engagement with television programmes (e.g., Home School Hub and Cúla 4 ar Scoil) or activities based on home or outdoor learning, but to a lesser degree.

Fourth Class teachers reported that a large proportion of pupils regularly engaged in remote learning in literacy during school closures from January to March 2021, with regular engagement defined as engaging with reading lessons at least two to three times per week. Specifically, the majority of Fourth Class teachers estimated that *about three quarters* or more of their class engaged regularly in remote learning. A smaller percentage of pupils were taught by teachers who estimated that between one quarter or half of their class regularly engaged in remote learning in literacy, while, notably, only a minuscule percentage of pupils in Ireland had teachers who reported that *none or almost none* of the class engaged in remote learning in literacy.

Among the resources enabling remote learning, *suitable digital devices* and *internet connection* were available to most pupils, according to Fourth Class teachers. Alongside these, the majority

of pupils in Ireland (66%) had a teacher who reported that *about three quarters* or more of their class had a *suitable workspace* for learning at home. Just under half of pupils had a Fourth Class teacher who reported that most of their class (three-quarters or more) had support from someone in their home for literacy development. Fourth Class teachers were also asked to report the frequency with which they themselves had access to different types of resources, in order to facilitate remote learning during school closures. Nearly all pupils in Ireland had a teacher who *always* or *almost always* had a *suitable digital device* available to them for remote learning, while over four-fifths of pupils had a teacher who *always* or *almost always* had access to *suitable apps* that they could use on such devices. However, although forming a substantial proportion, fewer pupils had teachers who reported *always* or *almost always* having a *suitable internet connection* or a *suitable workspace* to facilitate remote learning. More than half of pupils in Ireland had teachers who *always* or *almost always* had *sufficient knowledge of how to use the digital technology* available to them for remote learning, while almost equal numbers of pupils (45% and 46%, respectively) had teachers who either *always/almost always* or *sometimes* had guidance provided to them on the different approaches to remote learning. However, it is not specified within the question if such guidance was supplied by schools or if it was via the teachers' own initiative.

The most frequently used supports for teachers to facilitate remote learning tended to come from the teachers' immediate working environment. Over three-quarters of pupils were taught by teachers who *often* engaged with their teaching colleagues within their schools for support during school closures. Just under two-thirds of pupils had a teacher who *often* took support from other teachers or educators, some of whom they engaged with through social media, while just under half *often* looked for *support from school management*. Although Fourth Class teachers did draw on *guidance from the Department of Education*, they did so less frequently, with over half of pupils having teachers who *sometimes* drew on such guidance, while fewer pupils (12%) had a teacher who did so *often*. Of the educational organisations listed in the questionnaire, teachers engaged most frequently with the PDST, followed by the NCCA, while smaller proportions of pupils were taught by teachers who reported drawing on supports from the NCSE, the An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta (COGG), the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the Education Centre Network, or other agencies/organisations.

The majority of pupils in Ireland (89%) were taught by Fourth Class teachers who assigned homework, in which reading was a component, at least three times a week. Very few pupils had a Fourth Class teacher who reported assigning reading as part of homework less than once a week or not assigning reading as part of homework at all. Although most Fourth Class teachers assigned homework, they did not expect pupils to spend too much time on their homework, with the majority of pupils (93%) having been taught by Fourth Class teachers who expected pupils to spend up to 30 minutes on such homework. Of these, over half expected pupils to spend *15 minutes or less* on their homework. Very few pupils in Ireland had a teacher who expected them to spend more than half an hour on homework that included reading.

As noted in the PIRLS 2021 national report for Ireland (Delaney et al., 2023), most pupils in Ireland were taught by Fifth Class teachers who reported that *none* or *almost none* of their pupils took part in the funded summer programmes provided by the school in 2021. Within the 40% of schools that provided a summer programme funded by the Department of Education, 43% of pupils attended schools that provided a *DEIS Literacy and Numeracy camp*, 68% of pupils attended schools that provided an inclusion programme for pupils with Special Educational Needs and/or at risk of disadvantage who were in mainstream classes, while 62%

of pupils attended schools that provided a *Special Educational Needs Programme for pupils in special classes and special schools*.

The majority of both Fourth and Fifth Class teachers agreed that having restricted access to facilities due to COVID-19 had limited pupils' literacy learning to either *some* or *a great extent*. Most Fourth and Fifth Class teachers also reported that the unavailability of support teachers due to COVID-19 related cover/activities limited pupils' literacy learning to at least some extent. Over half of pupils had Fourth and Fifth Class teachers who reported that the additional *planning time required to facilitate adapted education provision for some pupils due to COVID-19* had, *to some extent*, limited literacy learning, while COVID-19 related activities (e.g., hand sanitising) seemed to be more strongly linked with a loss of teaching/learning time for reading according to Fourth Class teachers than according to Fifth Class teachers. Fourth Class teachers were asked if the loss of teaching/learning time for reading due to the need for readjustment to in-person teaching in the previous school year (2020-2021) had limited literacy learning, with the majority of pupils having teachers who reported that it did either *to some* or *a great extent*.

Around a third of pupils had a Fourth Class teacher who noted that trying to communicate while wearing a face covering impeded teaching *to a great extent*, yet fewer pupils had a Fifth Class teacher who reported likewise. Also, over half of pupils had a Fourth Class teacher who reported that the social distancing between themselves and their pupils had affected literacy learning *to a great extent*, while substantially fewer pupils were taught by a Fifth Class teacher who regarded this as an issue that limited pupils' literacy learning *to a great extent*. More pupils had Fourth and Fifth Class teachers who reported that social distancing between pods of pupils limited pupils' literacy learning in comparison to social distancing between teachers and pupils. Two-thirds of pupils had a Fourth Class teacher who considered that social distancing between pods had limited literacy learning *to a great extent*, while the equivalent proportion as reported by Fifth Class teachers was 47%. A third of pupils were taught by Fourth Class teachers who reported that pupil absences (due to COVID-19) had limited literacy learning *to a great extent* in the previous school year (2020-2021). Yet, more pupils had a Fifth Class teacher who reported that pupil absences in the autumn of 2021 had limited literacy learning *to a great extent*.

Almost all pupils in Ireland were in a class for which Fourth Class teachers reported that literacy development had been negatively affected by challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic for at least some part of the class. In fact, only 4% of pupils were taught by a Fourth Class teacher who thought that *none or almost none* of their class' literacy development had been affected. More than half of pupils had teachers who estimated that between *about one quarter* and *about half* of pupils in their class had their literacy development affected, while a further two-fifths of pupils were taught by Fourth Class teachers who estimated that a larger proportion of their class had been affected, i.e., at least three-quarters of pupils. When looking at both Fourth and Fifth Class teachers' estimates, it seems that the literacy development of fewer pupils was regarded as negatively affected by challenges due the COVID-19 pandemic in the autumn of 2021 (the time of the PIRLS assessment) than in the previous school year (2020-2021).