

## Revised English Language Proficiency Benchmarks for Newcomer Post-Primary Students

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Descriptors are colour-coded as follows:

**IILT Benchmarks (2003)**

**Irish post-primary ELP checklists (2004)**

**Council of Europe ELP descriptor bank (2004)**

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These English Language Proficiency Benchmarks are based on the first three levels - A1, A2, B1 - of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR; Council of Europe 2001) and define three steps in the acquisition of English language proficiency, ending with the level at which newcomer students should be capable of communicating with relative freedom in the mainstream classroom. When they have reached this level, however, they will still need to pay attention to their English language development. In order to sit public examinations, especially Leaving Certificate, they need to achieve the fourth CEFR level, B2. Descriptors for this level are currently under development.

### **A1**

At this level newcomer students can interact in a very simple way: ask and answer basic questions about themselves and where they live, the immediate classroom environment, and familiar classroom topics. They are heavily dependent on the communicative support of their native-speaker peers and teachers. They can read and understand basic words and phrases related to their curriculum subjects, can copy from the textbook or the board, and can write very simple personal details.

### **Listening**

Students can understand

- common greetings and formulae used in social interaction
- basic words and phrases concerning themselves (name, age, address), their family and school
- simple classroom instructions, e.g., 'stand up', 'come here', 'open the book', etc.
- important classroom rules, for example, 'be quiet', 'raise your hand if you want to speak'
- the names of everyday objects in the classroom
- days of the week, months of the year, times, dates and (some) numbers

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- simple questions in the classroom provided that teachers and other students speak slowly and clearly and use appropriate visual cues (facial expression, gesture, mime, etc.)
- basic instructions from peers for playing games in the playground

### **Reading**

Students can

- recognize the letters of the alphabet and numerals

Students can

- use the alphabet to find particular items (e.g., their name) in a list

Students can read and understand

- basic words and phrases in a new piece of illustrated text
- basic signs on the way to school (e.g., 'stop') and in the school (e.g., 'fire', 'exit', 'no running', etc.)
- labels on doors in different parts of the school (e.g., 'hall', 'secretary', 'staff room', etc.)
- basic words on labels/posters in the classroom and on maps, diagrams, etc. in textbooks
- simple written comments about their schoolwork/studies (e.g., 'well done', 'revise' etc.)
- short simple messages from their friends, for example, 'meet you at four o'clock'
- very simple instructions that are accompanied by illustrations

### **Spoken interaction**

In interaction with others students can

- greet and take leave
- use 'please' and 'thank you' appropriately
- ask for attention in class and indicate if they have not understood
- respond non-verbally (e.g., with a nod or shake of the head) or with single-word or very brief answers to basic questions on classroom issues
- use very basic words and phrases to ask for directions to another place in the school
- indicate personal needs (e.g., to go to the toilet)
- respond non-verbally (e.g., with a nod or shake of the head) or with single-word or very brief answers to basic questions about their likes and dislikes
- use basic words and phrases to make simple requests in the classroom or playground (e.g., for the loan of a pencil) and respond appropriately to the simple requests of others
- follow short, simple instructions about classroom activities if other people speak slowly and clearly, rephrasing when necessary

### **Spoken production**

Students can

- the letters of the alphabet and numbers

Students can combine words and phrases to

- describe in very basic terms where they live and people they know, especially family members
- describe a playground game (OR: a game they play with their friends)
- make a short, possibly incomplete statement about themselves and their school

### **Writing**

Students can copy

- numbers, words and short phrases that are being learnt in class
- short sentences from the board

Students can write

- their name and address and the name of the school
- labels and/or numbers on a picture, map or diagram
- their personal details in simple forms (e.g., the language passport section of the European Language Portfolio)

## **A2**

At this level newcomer students master the most common features of social and classroom interaction: greeting people, asking how they are, and reacting to news; handling very short social and classroom exchanges; asking and answering questions about what they do at school and in their free time; making and responding to invitations; discussing what to do and where to go; making arrangements; making and accepting offers. Their reading fluency is beginning to develop as they learn more words and concepts central to their curriculum subjects, and they are able to write very simple connected text.

### **Listening**

Students can understand

- phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to themselves and their family, classroom activities and routines, school instructions and procedures, friends and out-of-class activities
- routine instructions given in all school contexts (classroom, gym, playground, etc.) and outside school (e.g., by a traffic warden)
- basic information about half days, school closures, doctor's visits, etc.
- simple messages and announcements at school
- simple instructions about how to use materials and equipment in the class with some help from the teacher
- the general meaning of stories about familiar topics
- topics covered in the mainstream class when key concepts and vocabulary have been studied in advance and there is appropriate visual support

### **Reading**

Students can use

- key words, diagrams, illustrations and comprehension questions to find specific information in mainstream textbooks

Students can identify

- specific information in simple everyday materials (e.g., their subjects in the school timetable)

Students can read and understand

- very short, simple texts that contain a high proportion of previously learnt vocabulary on familiar subjects
- short narratives on familiar topics if the text is written in simple language
- classroom rules written in simple language
- clear step-by-step instructions that are written in simple language, for example, how to make a simple experiment in science (B1?)

### **Spoken interaction**

In interaction with others students can

- use a variety of greetings and leave-takings naturally and appropriately
- ask simple questions based on words and phrases from the textbook
- respond with confidence to simple questions about family, friends, school work, hobbies, holidays, etc., but they are not always able to keep the conversation going
- use simple phrases and sentences to talk about themselves and their country of origin
- initiate simple conversation on a personal topic (e.g., why they were late for school)
- generally sustain a simple conversation with another pupil when working collaboratively in the classroom
- explain a situation that has arisen (e.g., a dispute with another student) with appropriate support from the teacher
- pass on a simple message from one teacher to another
- say how they feel (tired, upset, ill, etc.) in response to questions from the teacher and other students
- handle very short social exchanges with peers, through they usually can't understand enough to keep the conversation going
- make and respond to invitations, suggestions, apologies and requests for permission
- talk about likes / dislikes, agree or disagree with people in a polite way
- make comparisons
- ask and answer questions about past activities
- give or follow simple instructions with the help of a map or plan e.g., in games

### **Spoken production**

Students can

- tell a simple story in a list of points
- describe in simple terms their family, daily routines, past activities, and plans for the immediate and more distant future (e.g., out-of-school activities, holiday plans)
- describe in simple terms their own appearance, including eye and hair colour, size and weight
- give a simple account of what they did at school
- make brief statements about and compare objects and possessions
- express personal feelings in a simple way
- express likes and dislikes

## Writing

Students can copy

- newly-learnt words in a personal dictionary (e.g., in the European Language Portfolio), possibly including sample sentences

Students can write

- a series of connected simple phrases and sentences on familiar or very specific new topics (themselves, school, daily routines and activities etc.), for inclusion in the European Language Portfolio
- a short message (e.g., a postcard) to a friend
- a series of connected simple sentences to describe different objects, people they know and past activities
- short, simple texts describing their family, daily routines etc.
- short, simple texts describing personal interests, likes and dislikes (food, TV, programmes, etc.)
- short, texts describing the classroom or other pupils in the class
- short texts based on a topic recently studied in class

## **B1**

At this level newcomer students are able to maintain interaction and get their meaning across: giving and seeking personal views and opinions; contributing to classroom discussion; getting their main point across, though they often pause in order to repair what they have just said or plan what they want to say next. They can cope flexibly with most situations likely to arise in the classroom. Their reading fluency is beginning to approach that of their native-speaker peers, and they can write short texts in the various genres required by the curriculum.

### **Listening**

Students can understand

- detailed instructions and directions given in all school contexts (classroom, gym, playground, etc.)
- simple technical instructions about how to use materials and equipment in the class
- the main points of topics that are presented and texts that are read aloud in the mainstream classroom provided that key concepts and vocabulary have been studied in advance
- the main points of television and radio news bulletins
- short films on familiar topics in standard speech
- talk on familiar topics between two or more native speakers, only occasionally needing to request clarification
- short stories about familiar topics

### **Reading**

Students can use

- key words, diagrams and illustrations to support reading comprehension and learn new words/concepts

Students can identify

- the main arguments and conclusions in a text
- specific information in different parts of a longer text or in different texts to fulfil a classroom task

Students can read and understand

- the main points in texts encountered in the mainstream class, provided the thematic area and key vocabulary are already familiar or specially prepared in advance
- the main points in short newspaper articles and magazines about familiar topics (who has done what and where)
- most important information in stories
- descriptions of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters, newspapers / magazines and short works of fiction

- age-appropriate texts about people whose lives (and cultures) are similar to/different from their own
- clearly written instructions (e.g., for a game, for carrying out a classroom task, answering questions in an exam, conducting a simple experiment, assembling or using a piece of equipment, etc.)

### **Spoken interaction**

In interaction with others students can

- exchange personal opinions (and give reason)
- negotiate decisions and ideas
- make brief comments on the views of others
- repeat what has been said (e.g., by the teacher giving instructions) and convey the information to another person
- express and respond to feelings and attitudes, (e.g., surprise, happiness, sadness, interest, uncertainty, indifference)
- express their feelings and thoughts about literature, music, films and art
- articulate personal worries or concerns to the teacher or some other responsible person
- engage spontaneously with other students in discussing topics of common interest (songs, football, pop stars, etc.), though they may still have some difficulty making themselves understood from time to time
- ask and answer questions in classroom discussion
- give parents a detailed account of what happens at school
- engage spontaneously with other students in games and activities in the playground

### **Spoken production**

Students can

- talk in an age-appropriate way about the people, history and geography of their country of origin
- explain in an age-appropriate way their personal attitudes (e.g., family values, ethnic or religious differences)
- describe experiences and events, hopes and ambitions
- summarise information from a text that is being studied in class in a simple way
- summarize the plot of a film they have seen or a book they have read and describe their reactions
- briefly give explanations and reasons for opinions and plans, intentions and actions
- pass on detailed information to other students about what has taken place in class
- describe their successes and achievements
- give a short, connected talk about the school

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- give other students a short, connected account of going to school in another country
- give a short prepared presentation/talk about a topic of their interest
- talk about (say some things about) their school subjects

### **Writing**

Students can write

- simple connected text that meets the different writing requirements of the curriculum, using key words and phrases from textbooks (e.g., a brief summary of a book)
- a short personal letter or a short entry in the European Language Portfolio describing experiences and impressions
- connected text about important personal experiences or family events (a new baby in the family, travelling to Ireland etc.)
- connected text about personal likes, dislikes, hobbies, interests etc.
- a short connected account of the daily routine in the school
- a short, connected account of their friends in school and what they like to do together
- a brief comparison of their life now and in the past (e.g., at primary school, in another country)