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How good at mathematics do students need to be on entry to primary school initial teacher education?

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Summary: There is a momentum in Ireland towards recruiting students who are competent in mathematics into primary school teaching. It is hoped that by doing so, standards of teaching, learning and assessment will improve. The initiative instigated was to revisit current minimum entry requirements for mathematics with a view to increasing threshold levels. This paper attempts to ascertain if there is a correlation between attainment at Leaving Certificate (LC) level, a state run examination taken by students aged approximately 18, and competency in primary school mathematics. It goes further to determine if it is possible to establish a minimum threshold level. Finally it looks at the potential effects on enrolment into initial teacher education (ITE) should entry grades be increased. 95 first year ITE students completed a standardised attainment test that is typically taken by children in their final year in primary school. The results were compared with their LC mathematics grades. There was a moderate correlation between the two scores. A possible revised threshold level would have excluded 40 % of students who are competent in mathematics from entering into ITE. Therefore, mathematics grades at LC appear to be an unsuitable measure for establishing a threshold entry requirement for ITE.

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