

# Irish-medium Education Policy — Food for thought & Recommendations

## Gaeloideachas’ Guidelines and Recommendations for the Consultation Questions

The questions with the grey background represent the open questions from the Department of Education survey.

The text with the blue background represents the context provided by Gaeloideachas based on the organisation’s experience and expertise.

The text with the green background represents recommendations being made by Gaeloideachas in response to the consultation questions.

Please note that there is a limit to the number of characters that can be written in the survey. It is recommended, as far as is possible, to include a submissions along with surveys in order to flesh out the answers.

OLG = Oideachas lán-Ghaeilge [Irish-medium Education]

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## Access & Opportunities

### The question asked in the survey:

How could people be encouraged to choose Irish-medium education?

### The context provided by Gaeloideachas:

The consultation document does not recognise the demand for OLG. The Department's focus is on the issue of provision (number of spaces) only, regardless of the type of provision and the parent's preference.

### Gaeloideachas' Recommendations:

- Provide a solid foundation for pre-primary schools in order to make them viable and so that they become the cornerstone of early immersion education (see the pre-primary school section on page 5)
- Recognise the importance of continuity with the pre-primary schools through the amendment of primary enrolment legislation
- Provide proper access to Irish-medium schools through a school-based system that supports OLG
- Independent schools for those who wish to have OLG at post-primary level so that every student in this country choosing Irish-medium education has equal opportunity in terms of a full immersion experience in an Irish-medium school
- Real opportunities for students in rural areas to continue their education through Irish
- A national awareness raising campaign (funded by the State) on the benefits, merits and ability of the system to cater for children from all backgrounds
- Proper infrastructure for/around schools to attract pupils (sports resources, after-school opportunities, extra-curricular, etc.). Irish-medium provision must be of the same standard as English on a national basis.

## The move to Secondary School

### The question asked in the survey:

What could be done to encourage pupils from Irish-medium primary schools to continue their education in Irish-medium secondary schools?

### The context provided by Gaeloideachas:

- There is no reference to or emphasis on continuity between pre-primary schools and primary schools
- The Department's statistics show that there is no such continuity to any extent. This has to do with a lack of opportunities: 35.7 % to a Gaelcholáiste, 12 % to a school with a Unit
- The Unit model is an obstacle to the development of provision going forward
- In the question asked by the Department, there is no reference to the encouragement of pupils from English-medium primary schools to enter the Irish-medium system.

### Gaeloideachas' Recommendations:

- Only independent schools for the new provision of OLG at the post-primary level.
- A new system for the creation of schools. The current system discriminates against those who want OLG
- End the use of the term 'Stream' as a model in the system. CLIL is the correct term. 'Sruth' should not be considered as an acceptable model for the Irish-medium system
- Revise the satellite school model concept, the commissioning of research on it and the testing and revision of the pilot scheme.
- Develop awareness amongst parents of the benefits of continuity in the immersion education system.

## Boosting supply & how to support it — key challenges

### The question asked in the survey:

What are the main challenges in providing a high standard of Irish-medium education?

### Gaeloideachas' Recommendations:

- Neither the initial training or the professional development required for playschool teachers is available
- Pre-primary schools are the cornerstone of immersion education, but the profession is overlooked for the following reasons primarily: there is no proper salary scale; there is no 12-month salary — wages are by 38/40 weeks; The conditions are not good; it is not seen as a proper profession
- There are no policies which specifically focus on pre-primary schools to ensure the viability of provision
- There is a lack of opportunities to continue working in OLG because of the lack of schools at post-primary level
- The need for language support hours for all children according to the different levels of ability — the number of pupils in Irish-medium schools is higher on average without having the additional support for immersion education
- Immersion education in an independent school must be offered as a fundamental right
- Provision of teachers who are qualified in relevant subjects (IBL) and proficient in immersion education
- Provision of teachers generally — as well as a recruitment and retention crisis due to a lack of State strategies to encourage teachers to remain
- A systematic and supportive approach for teachers to develop their language abilities
- A lack of appropriate recognition for the additional work done by teachers in the immersion education setting
- A lack of sufficient provision of ITE (Initial Teacher Training) in terms of number and location of programmes nationally
- A context adapted CPD is not made available at the same time as it is for English-medium schools
- A lack of clear policy or direction from the inspectors in relation to the implementation of early immersion education (each school having its own approach)
- A lack of clear guidelines for the implementation of (early)immersion education
- Promoting Irish as the language of communication and socialisation in schools (primary and post-primary) represents a huge challenge.
- For most schools the implementation of a differentiated teaching approach in responding to the diverse and linguistic needs of the pupils (Composite Inspectorate Report, p. 8) represents a challenge.

## Boosting supply & how to support it — solutions

### The question asked in the survey:

How might these challenges be addressed to reinforce and support provision in the sector?

### Gaeloideachas' Recommendations:

#### Pre-primary schools:

- A scheme for recognition as an Irish-medium playschool
- Develop best practice indicators for the immersion education context and a support plan for it
- That the Department of Children make specific provision for the early years through the medium of Irish by implementing the new *Partnership for the Public Good* plan and for funding to be made available to enable the playschool staff to be paid an allowance as part of a strategy to address the recruitment crisis in the sector.
- The provision of positive supports to playschool teachers under the *Nurturing Skills* Plan, including bursaries, better capital incentives, and the wider availability of Irish-medium education programmes to encourage greater competence in Irish
- Quality assurance in relation to the functioning of immersion education in pre-primary schools — a system that recognises, demands and supports the required standards
- Appropriate professional development for playschool teachers
- Primary language qualifications for all playschool teachers (TEG, B2 level) and an action plan to support the objective
- A supportive transfer system between playschool and Irish-medium primary schools
- A regulation to support Irish-medium primary schools who wish to give priority to children from playschool or from playschool services operating through Irish
- The inclusion of an immersion education site in any State funded plans for projects and resources
- Increase the ECE grant in order to provide high quality pre-primary schools for children

#### Primary Schools:

- Implement best practice indicators for the immersion education context and a support plan for it

- A classroom assistant for the infants to assist with their acquisition of the language. This is very challenging task for class teachers on their own in classes that are too large (more than the average in English-medium schools)
- 2 years of early immersion education as recognition criteria
- Establishment a GTB Scheme — Múinteoir Gaeilge mar Theanga Bhreise [Teacher of Irish as an Additional Language Teacher] for students whose first language is not Irish. EAL Model
- A comprehensive and extensive CPD on the implementation of early-immersion education for teachers
- Teaching guidelines for the immersion education context
- Continuous professional development which has been adapted for teachers in Irish-medium education (at both levels) and simultaneous provision through Irish of the PDST, NCSE programmes in their entirety and of all support providers
- Additional support for schools is needed to assist with oral, cognitive and social language — as identified by the School Inspectors (Composite Inspectorate Report, p. 6)
- Additional support is needed in schools (additional staff and guidelines) in order to implement differentiated teaching strategies.

#### **Post-primary schools**

- Implement best practice indicators for the immersion education context and a support plan for it
- Independent immersion schools replacing units for any new provision going forward
- Distance teaching/distance learning through videoconferencing with another Gaelcholáiste in cases where a teacher is unavailable for specific subjects
- Additional support to help students' knowledge and accuracy for the majority of lessons and on a cross-curricular basis, as identified by the School Inspectors (Composite Report of Inspection, p. 14)
- Continuous professional development which has been adapted for teachers in Irish-medium education (at both levels) and simultaneous provision through Irish of the PDST, NCSE programmes in their entirety and of all support providers

## General Recommendations for Tackling the provision/recruitment/retention crisis among teachers — in pre-primary schools/Irish-medium primary and post-primary schools

1. An appropriate system of teacher supply for Irish-medium education (a quality framework for immersion education; a standard of the European Work as a criterion for appointment; separate panels for teachers in the Irish-medium system, etc.)
2. Strategies — higher incentives/allowances/salary to address the recruitment and retention crisis.
  - The issue of lifestyle as a whole in urban areas. Teachers cannot survive on the current salary.
  - An allowance for teachers in the Irish-medium and Gaeltacht system as recognition for the additional workload
3. The inclusion of Irish-medium schools be taken in the comprehensive national analysis of procurement (which will be published by the Department in 2023). This deficit does not give an accurate picture of the level of current and future challenges
4. More initial teacher training programmes which prepares them for the immersion education system, and for all subjects
5. Strategies are needed to tackle the recruitment and retention crisis — newly qualified teachers are not been attracted to the profession to the same extent as in other countries. These teachers are very popular abroad and some countries are offering them attractive packages (in terms of salary, better conditions, free accommodation)
6. Recognition by the State of teachers' true value through better salary and through recognition of their additional work in the immersion education system
7. The prospect of permanent positions from the outset instead of 2-year fixed-term contracts so that the profession is attractive to teachers
8. Offer better opportunities for development (jobs with responsibilities etc).

## SEN in settings/schools

### The question asked in the survey:

How do you think the provision of support for children and young people with SEN in Irish-medium settings can be improved?

### The context provided by Gaeloideachas:

- The Aim Scheme (pre-primary schools) suitably qualified recruitment staff are unavailable — not to mention ability in the Irish language
- TOS at IBL level is significantly lower than in English-medium schools — there is a negative attitude whereby the OLG is unable to accommodate them appropriately.

### Recommendations made for Gaeloideachas & teachers at the SEN Conference:

- Awareness programme — the message and the support shows that children with SEN are able for the OLG system can and that the latter system is worthwhile for them
- Widespread availability of a training programme (pre-training) prepared by teachers of pre-primary schools and other schools for the formation of SEN specialists in the immersion education system (A dedicated undergraduate Course (B.Ed.; compulsory modules in the training colleges)
- Common SEN planning co-ordinator between Irish-medium schools
- Irish-medium schools' need additional allocation to deal with literacy difficulties in both languages/ need for more learning support teachers — Additional language support for English and Irish (with a specific allocation for each language) as well as for Maths. Recognition of both languages is a requirement as per official DE documentation.
- Additional support from the SENOS who focus on the various language circumstances in schools
- A basic principle is to have support services through Irish for schools including occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, physiotherapists and psychologists and to have mandatory awareness programmes available to professionals
- Development by the NCSE of a training course in Irish aimed at special educational needs assistants in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools and to have a support scheme which ensures the availability of Irish language pre-training and CPD for them.
- More speech and language assessment and diagnostic tools for the immersion education context. Formal standardised tools to assess oral language, language aptitude, illustrative language, and social communication.

- Provision at the same time as English version of Irish versions of documentation, supports and resources for schools and for parents and the adaptation of the material to the Irish-medium and Gaeltacht context instead of translations from an English version which does not reflect the context of immersion education and bilingualism
- Guidance and support on in class supports for pupils
- Need for additional support for SEN students to undertake Irish & English T1 at post-primary level
- Resources in Irish, designed for the immersion education context, instead of translation from English. The need for more investment to be made in the development of digital facilities for children with learning difficulties, facilities which are attractive, and which facilitate the learning process
- Advice and guidance from the Inspectorate/SENOs on the operation of special needs classes through Irish
- Increased COGG investment for facilities to support assessment through Irish/OLG in general
- Guidelines (including from medical and other services) and appropriate resources for SEN in the pre-primary schools and in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools.
- Compulsory training in the immersion education context for all providers providing a service at 3 levels.

## Equality, diversity & inclusion

### The question asked in the survey:

What do you think could be done to promote equality, diversity and inclusion in Irish-medium education?

### Gaeloideachas' Recommendations:

- Appropriate choice and opportunities. The priority is usually for the local option — this is not the case in terms of GSA.
- Establishment a GTB Scheme — Múinteoir Gaeilge mar Theanga Bhreise [Teacher of Irish as an Additional Language Teacher] for students whose first language is not Irish. EAL model as a source of support
- Raising awareness of the Irish-medium system in all communities.
- Provision of appropriate guidance and support to Irish-medium DEIS schools in relation to the best practices of immersion education taking into account the DEIS conditions of the schools and the level of disadvantage of the area in which the school is situated.
- Inclusion of the specific needs of Irish-medium DEIS schools in ongoing training and in professional development programmes to ensure that there is appropriate expertise among staff members.

- Provision of a language support teacher to Irish-medium DEIS schools to support the pupils' language skills and the staff, to implement best practices in relation to early language acquisition in disadvantaged areas and to appropriately meet the language needs of pupils.

## Irish in education settings & in the wider community

### The question asked in the survey:

How could better links be created between Irish-medium education and the community in general in order to foster the use of Irish within the community?

### The context provided by Gaeloideachas:

It is important to solve the problem of provision and standards, rather than the schools' role in the promotion of the Irish language in the community — the creation of support infrastructure for the schools is the State's responsibility. The school should not be solely responsible for the promotion of the language in the community.

### Gaeloideachas' Recommendations:

- External services' support of the school/network — through Irish
- Religious services through Irish
- Clear policy and appropriate support for the promotion of Irish as a language of communication, fun and socialisation
- A support infrastructure around the schools with a clear policy and an investment plan on the part of the State. Irish Language Officers having links to networks which support the promotion of the Irish language in the community/connection with the schools. The school has a role to play with its own community, but the school should not any more of a responsibility than that.

## Views/further insights into policy development

- What is the vision of the State/RO for the OLG? This needs to be defined

- Immersion education in the context of the OLG needs to be defined
- Pre-primary school/primary/post-primary need to be defined in terms of range, standards, immersion approach
- Units needs to be defined in relation to the quality, scope and approach of immersion education — as in the case of Current Units — but these would not be part of an offer for new procurement in the future. Only independent schools are recommended
- Recognition of the importance of providing an allowance to pre-primary school teachers/Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools as a sign of recognition for the substantial extra work they are doing on behalf of the schools and the education system, (to assist with the issue of provision)
- It is necessary to resolve the issue of teacher provision in pre-primary schools, primary and post-primary schools — a solution which is supportive of the immersion education system and of teachers in the achievement and in the promotion of excellence among children
- Develop and implement the quality, quality framework and criteria of good practice in the immersion education system
- A proper State infrastructure which is supportive of the creation and maintenance of language communities around the pre-primary schools and Irish-medium schools