

Réamhrá

Creidimid gur chóir go mbeadh rochtain ag gach uile páiste ar bhuntáistí an oideachais trí Ghaeilge, ó naíonra go bunleibhéal go hiar-bhunleibhéal. Is iad na naíonraí bunchloch an tumoideachais, an áit a fhoghlaimíonn an-chuid páistí lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht an Ghaeilge den chéad uair. Leanann siad lena n-aistir foghlama i dtimpeallachtaí lán-Ghaeilge ag leibhéal na bunscoile, agus ba chóir go mbeadh an rogha ag gach páiste leanúint lena gcuid oideachais trí mheán na Gaeilge in iar-bhunscoil ina gceantar féin.

Is léir go bhfuil an-éileamh ann don oideachas lán-Ghaeilge, ach níl an t-éileamh seo á shásamh i láthair na huaire. De réir suirbhéanna a choimisiúnaigh Conradh na Gaeilge in 2018 agus 2023, duirt nach mór 50% dóibh siúd a ghlac páirt sa suirbhé go roghnóidís scoil lán-Ghaeilge dá mbeadh ceann ar fáil ina gceantar – ach sa scoilbhliain 2022-23, ní raibh ach 6.1% de pháistí na tíre ag fáil a gcuid oideachais trí mheán na Gaeilge, figiúir atá tite ó 6.3% in 2019-20.

Tá páistí agus teaghlaigh ó cheann ceann na tíre gur mian leo a gcuid oideachais a fháil trí Ghaeilge, ach nach bhfuil in ann rochtain a fháil ar an tumoideachas de bharr nach bhfuil naíonra nó iar-bhunscoil – nó fiú Gaelscoil, i gcásanna áirithe – ar fáil ina gceantair. Ina theannta sin, tá géarchéim os comhair na naíonraí lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht, géarchéim earcaíochta os comhair na scoileanna, agus easpa acmhainní le tacú le páistí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais acu i suíomhanna lán-Ghaeilge.

Ach is féidir an scéal seo a athru, má tá an toil ann chuige.

Sa cháipéis seo, leagtar amach cuid de na dúshláin atá os comhair earnáil an oideachais lán-Ghaeilge, agus na moltaí atá ag Gaeloideachas le dul i dtreo iad a réiteach. Iarraimid ort iad a léamh agus a bheith mar ghuth ar son phobail an oideachais lán-Ghaeilge. Tá muid sásta na moltaí seo a phlé am ar bith agus más maith leat glaoch nó cruinniú a eagrú linn, ní gá ach ríomhphost a chur chuig eolas@gaeloideachas.ie.

Soláthar Scoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge

Tá gá le níos mó scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge, go háirithe ag an iar-bhunleibhéal, le freastal mar is ceart ar mhianta an phobail, mar atá léirithe sa phróiseas comhairliúcháin don Pholasáí don Oideachas lán-Ghaeilge. Mar atá léirithe sna figiúir thuas, níl soláthar leordhóthanach ann faoi láthair ón naíonra go bunscoil go hiar-bhunscoil. Bíonn ar an-chuid tuismitheoirí rogha a dhéanamh idir thuras mór fada go scoil lán-Ghaeilge, nó géilleadh ar a gcuid cearta agus mianta agus scoil áitiúil a mhúineann trí Bhéarla a roghnú ina ionad.

Cé go bhfuil éileamh ann do scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge, is annamh anois go mbunaítear scoileanna nua de bharr an phróisis bunú scoileanna atá ann faoi láthair. Ní dhéanann próiseas atá bunaithe ar fhás daonra amháin freastal ar riachtanais forbartha an oideachais lán-Ghaeilge, agus níl aon spreagadh nó tacaíocht ón Stát le scoil a iompú ina scoil lán-Ghaeilge. Ina theannta sin, tá an próiseas bunaithe scoileanna iomaíoch don iar-bhunleibhéal ag ceilt deiseanna ar pháistí atá ag freastal ar bhunscoileanna lán-Ghaeilge leanúint lena gcuid oideachais trí mheán na Gaeilge.

Ba chóir don Stát freastal mar is ceart ar mhianta an phobail, mar atá léirithe sa phróiseas comhairliúcháin a dteastaíonn córas láidir tumoideachais uathu, trí soláthar leordhóthanach ón naíonra go bunscoil go hiar-bhunscoil, gan turas mór fada, gan dua. Leis sin a bhaint amach ar son gach páiste, caithfear a chinntiú go bhfuil naíonra, bunscoil agus iar-bhunscoil lán-Ghaeilge ar fáil in achar réasúnta taistil trí fhorbairt phleanáilte soláthair, bunú naíonraí agus scoileanna nua, agus cinntiú go bhfuil soláthar don oideachas speisialta lárnach sna pleananna sin.

Moltaí Gaeloideachas

- Go mbeadh próiseas ar leith ann chun bunscoileanna lán-Ghaeilge a bhunú de réir éilimh agus cruthúnais ar inmharthanacht, lasmuigh de chóras reatha na Roinne Oideachais. Bíodh buntáistí na Gaelscolaíochta ar fáil mar rogha do gach páiste.
- Go mbeadh próiseas ar leith ann chun iar-bhunscoileanna lán-Ghaeilge a bhunú de réir éileamh agus cruthúnas ar inmharthanacht, lasmuigh de chóras reatha na Roinne Oideachais. Bíodh sé de cheart ag daltaí leanúint leis an oideachas lán-Ghaeilge agus caidreamh fadsaoil a chruthú leis an teanga.

- Go mbunófar scoileanna neamhspleácha in áit aonaid, de bharr nach bhfuil múnla an aonaid lán-Ghaeilge inchurtha le scoil neamhspleách tumoideachais ó thaobh cur chuige ná eispéireas an tumoideachais.
- Go n-aontófar polasaí láithreach do na haonaid reatha a éascaíonn an próiseas dóibh feidhmiú go neamhspleách gan mhoill.

Soláthar Múinteoirí don Earnáil Lán-Ghaeilge

Cé go bhfuil géarchéim earcaíochta ann san earnáil oideachais i gcoitinne, tá géarchéim níos measa ann san earnáil lán-Ghaeilge agus Ghaeltachta le blianta fada. Eascraíonn sé as ganntanas múinteoirí ag an dá leibhéal a bhfuil an cumas cuí teanga acu le múineadh i scoil lán-Ghaeilge nó Ghaeltachta.

Ó cuireadh deireadh leis an liúntas don teagasc trí Ghaeilge sa bhliain 2011, níl aon dreasacht nó aitheantas ceart á thabhairt do na freagrachtaí móra breise atá i gceist do mhúinteoirí a bhíonn ag múineadh i suíomhanna tumoideachais. I measc na bhfreagrachtaí bhreise seo, bíonn ar mhúinteoirí san earnáil tumoideachais:

- Ábhair comhaimseartha a chruthú go pras trí Ghaeilge le teacht lena bhfuil ag titim amach ar fud an domhain, as an nua nó trí oiriúnú ar ábhar Béarla nó trí aistriúcháin;
- Uirlisí measúnaithe a chruthú i nGaeilge, go háirithe chun tacaíocht chuí a chur ar fáil do scoláirí a bhfuil riachtanais tacaíochtaí faoi leith acu, uirlisí nach bhfuil á gcur ar fáil ar bhonn caighdeánach ag áisíneachtaí Stáit;
- Tacaíocht foghlama le cur ar fáil sa dá theanga, de réir riachtanais an pháiste;
- Réimse scileanna agus eolais teangeolaíochta a fhorbairt agus a gcuid scileanna inniúlachta sa teanga a choinneáil ag leibhéal ard;
- An Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn mar theanga na cumarsáide agus an tsóisialaithe ar scoil, chomh maith le himeachtaí agus turais chun na Gaeltachta a eagrú;
- Scrúdaithe caighdeánacha don Ghaeilge le déanamh ar bhonn éigeantach i rang 2, 4, agus 6, agus go bliantúil mar dhea-chleachtas, san áit nach bhfuil aon riachtanas sna scoileanna Béarla;
- Cothromaíocht a aimsiú idir sainábhair a mhúineadh agus béim chuí a leagan ar an sealbhú teanga; agus
- Cumarsáid a dhéanamh le tuismitheoirí go dátheangach.

Creideann Gaeloidachas gur chóir luach ceart a chur ar an obair seo, aitheantas a thabhairt do na múinteoirí atá á dhéanamh, agus tacaíocht a thabhairt do mhúinteoirí ar mhaith leo múineadh i scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge. Is gá aghaidh a thabhairt ar an ngéarchéim earcaíochta ar bhonn práinne ionas go mbeidh a dhóthain múinteoirí sa chóras.

Moltaí Gaeloideachas

- Go dtabharfar ar ais an liúntas don teagasc trí Ghaeilge le haitheantas a thabhairt don obair bhreise atá á dhéanamh ag múinteoirí i scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge agus Ghaeltachta.
- Go gcuirfear scéimeanna tacaíochta teanga ar fáil le gur féidir le múinteoirí tógáil ar a gcumais sa Ghaeilge.
- Go gcuirfear breis spásanna agus scoláireachtaí ar fáil ar chúrsaí oiliúna trí Ghaeilge, le cinntiú go mbeidh múinteoirí nuacháilithe ag tosú ag múineadh sa chóras oideachais lán-Ghaeilge amach anseo.
- Go gcinnteofar go bhfaigheann múinteoirí gach tacaíocht le hoideachas ionchuimsitheach trí mheán na Gaeilge a chur ar fáil do gach páiste.

Na Luathbhlianta

Cailltear deiseanna do na céadta páistí Gaeilge a shealbhú agus iad ag tús a n-aistear oideachais mar nach mbíonn naíonra ar fáil dóibh, agus tá líon na naíonraí lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht ag laghdú le blianta beaga anuas.

De réir suirbhé de chuid na Roinne Leanaí a foilsíodh i 2023, níl ach 53 naíonra ann anois lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht atá ag feidhmiú go hiomlán trí Ghaeilge. Go fóill, níl córas ag an Stát le naíonra a aithint mar chineál seirbhís ar leith, suíomh ina bhfuil tumoideachas á chleachtadh agus a bhfuil riachtanais tacaíochta ar leith ag a phobal dá réir. Níl fiú eolaire poiblí ar fáil ón Stát do thuismitheoirí maidir le cá háit ina bhfuil an naíonra is gaire dóibh.

Ina theannta sin, tá naíonraí fud fad na tíre ag dúnadh nó faoi bhrú le roinnt blianta anuas de bharr easpa tacaíochta agus géarchéim earcaíochta. Tá gá le tacaíocht ón Stát anois le cinntiú go mbeidh na naíonraí ann amach anseo. Bua éasca a bheadh ann don Stát cur le líon na gcainteoirí Gaeilge dá dtabharfaí tús maith do na leanaí agus iad ag glacadh a gcéad céimeanna ar a dturas teanga leis an nGaeilge.

Moltaí Gaeloideachas

- Go gcuirfear tús le scéim a thacaíonn le naíonraí a bhunú agus a bhuanú agus a chinntíonn go mbeidh rogha lán-Ghaeilge áitiúil ar fáil do gach páiste, agus go bhfuil fáil ag thuismitheoirí ar an eolas ina leith.
- Go gcuirfear infreastruchtúr agus scéimeanna tacaíochta ar fáil do shuíomhanna luath-óige a fheidhmíonn trí Ghaeilge lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht atá ar chomhchéim leis na tacaíochtaí cuimsitheacha atá ann dóibh siúd sa Ghaeltacht.
- Go ndéanfar infheistíocht straitéiseach sna luathbhlianta lán-Ghaeilge le scéim a chabhróidh le naíonraí múinteoirí a earcú, a chumasú agus a choinneáil agus oideachas luathbhlianta den scoth a chur ar fáil do pháistí óga.
- Go n-aithneofar na deacrachtaí faoi leith atá roimh naíonraí foireann a earcú atá cáilithe agus a bhfuil Gaeilge líofa acu, agus mar sin, go gcuirfear socrú eatramhach i bhfeidhm le gur féidir le naíonraí foireann faoi oiliúint a cheapadh má shásaíonn siad critéir na Gaeilge.

Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais

Freastalaíonn naíonraí agus scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge ar leanaí agus daltaí le riachtanais éagsúla go rialta, ina measc páistí agus daltaí le deacrachtaí radhairc agus/nó éisteachta, disléicse, páistí agus daltaí uathacha agus páistí agus daltaí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais eile acu. Tá ranganna uathachais ag go leor scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge anois freisin. Cuirtear na tacaíochtaí céanna ar fáil do na páistí agus daltaí seo a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta acu is a chuirtear ar fáil i réamhscoileanna agus scoileanna príomhshrutha ar bith eile.

Maítear nach ndéanann an t-oideachas dátheangach aon dochar do pháistí le riachtanais speisialta oideachais agus dearbhaítear an méid seo ina thaobh:

‘Bilingual education...does no harm and clearly does contribute to social-emotional and interpersonal growth’

Tuairisc NCSE, 2011

É sin ráite, níl na hacmhainní céanna ar fáil i nGaeilge is atá i mBéarla, agus mar sin bíonn sé níos deacra ar scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge teacht ar acmhainní cuí. Má tá acmhainní ar fáil i nGaeilge, go minic is aistriúcháin ar na leaganacha Béarla atá iontu, nach bhfuil curtha in oiriúint do shuíomhanna tumoideachais. Tá réimse acmhainní nua forbartha ag Gaeloideachas i bpáirt le Middletown Centre for Autism, Treoir Tacaíochta don Uathachas ina measc, a seoladh i mí Aibreán 2024.

Is léir go bhfuil gá le níos mó tacaíochtaí le cinntiú go mbeidh buntáistí an oideachais trí Ghaeilge ar fáil do gach páiste, cuma cén riachtanais atá acu.

Moltaí Gaeloideachas

- Go gcuirfear tacaíocht bhreise ar fáil don Ghaeilge mar ábhar bhreise do dhaltaí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais acu.
- Go gcinnteofar go bhfuil leithdháileadh cuí Múinteoirí Oideachais Speisialta do dhaltaí le riachtanais speisialta i scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge agus Ghaeltachta.
- Go gcuirfear acmhainní agus tacaíochtaí ar fáil do scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge agus Ghaeltachta atá ar chomhchéim leis na hacmhainní atá ar fáil do scoileanna a fheidhmíonn trí mheán an Bhéarla, agus atá in oiriúint don chóras tumoideachais.

Introduction

We in Gaeloideachas believe that every child should be able to access the benefits of education through Irish, from naíonra to primary to post-primary level. Naíonraí are the cornerstone of immersion education, the place where many children living outside of the Gaeltacht learn Irish for the first time. They then continue with their educational journey in Irish-medium environments at primary level, and all children should have the option to continue their education through Irish at a post-primary school in their own area.

It is clear that there is significant demand for Irish-medium education, but this demand is not currently being met. In surveys commissioned by Conradh na Gaeilge in 2018 and 2023, almost 50% of those who took part said that they would choose an Irish-medium school for their children if there was one available locally – but in the 2022–23 school year, only 6.1% of the country's children were receiving their education through the medium of Irish, a figure that had fallen from 6.3% in 2019–20.

There are children and parents across the country who would like to receive their education through Irish, but who cannot access immersion education as there is no naíonra or post-primary school – or primary school, in some cases – teaching through Irish in their area. In addition, naíonraí outside of the Gaeltacht are at crisis point, Irish-medium schools are facing a recruitment crisis, and there is a lack of resources to support children with special educational needs in Irish-medium settings.

However, we can change this, if there is a will to do so.

In this document, we set out some of the challenges facing the Irish-medium education sector, and our recommendations to move towards addressing them. We are asking you to read them and to be a voice for the Irish-medium education community. We are happy to discuss any of these recommendations, and if you would like to organise a call or meeting, you can do so by emailing eolas@gaeloideachas.ie.

Supply of Irish-Medium Schools

There is a need for more Irish-medium schools, particularly at post-primary level, to adequately meet public demand, as shown in the consultation process for the Policy for Irish-Medium Education. As shown in the figures above, there is not currently adequate supply from naíonra to primary to post-primary level. Many parents have to make a choice between undertaking a long daily commute to an Irish-medium school, or setting aside their rights and will by choosing a more local English-medium school instead.

While there is demand for Irish-medium schools, it is now rare for new schools to be established, due to the current system for founding new schools. A system that is solely based on population growth does not address the development needs of the Irish-medium system, and there is no encouragement or support from the State for English-medium schools to change their language ethos. Additionally, the process for establishing new post-primary schools is competitive, resulting in opportunities for children attending Irish-medium primary schools to continue their education through Irish being blocked.

The State should be able to meet the demands of the public, who showed through the consultation process that they want to see a strong immersion education system, through adequate provision from naíonra to primary to post-primary level, without a long journey or toil. To achieve this for every child, we must ensure that a naíonra, Irish-medium primary school, and Irish-medium post-primary school are available within a reasonable travelling distance through planned development of supply, the establishment of new naíonraí and schools, and ensuring that provision for special educational needs is central to these plans.

Gaeloideachas Recommendations

- That a specific process for the establishment of Irish-medium primary schools based on demand and evidence of viability is established, outside of the current process set out by the Department of Education. The benefits of education through Irish should be available as a choice for every child.
- That a specific process for the establishment of Irish-medium post-primary schools based on demand and evidence of viability is established, outside of the current process set out by the Department of Education. Students should have the right to continue with Irish-medium education and to create a lifelong relationship with the language.
- That independent schools are established as opposed to units, as the Aonad lán-Ghaeilge model is not comparable to independent immersion education schools in terms of approach or experience of immersion education.

- That a policy is agreed for current Aonaid to facilitate the process for them to operate as independent schools without delay.

Teacher Supply in the Irish-Medium Sector

While there is a recruitment crisis in the education system generally, this crisis is even more acute in the Irish-medium and Gaeltacht sector for many years. It arises from a lack of teachers at both levels with the requisite language ability to teach in an Irish-medium or Gaeltacht school.

Since the allowance for teaching through Irish was ended in 2011, there is no incentive or adequate recognition given to the significant additional responsibilities for teachers who teach in Irish-medium settings where immersion education is in place. Among these responsibilities, teachers in the immersion education sector must:

- Create contemporary materials quickly through Irish to keep up with current events around the world, from scratch, or by repurposing or translating materials in English;
- Create assessment tools in Irish, particularly to provide adequate support to students with particular support needs, tools that are not provided as standard by State agencies;
- Provide learning support in both languages, according to the needs of the child;
- Develop a range of linguistic skills and knowledge and keep their linguistic proficiency at a high level;
- Promote Irish as the school's language of communication and socialisation, as well as organise events and trips to the Gaeltacht;
- Carry out standardised testing for Irish which is required in 2nd, 4th, and 6th class, and carried out annually as best practice, where there is no requirement to do so in English-medium schools;
- Find the right balance between teaching specific subjects and placing enough emphasis on language acquisition; and
- Communicate with parents bilingually.

We in Gaeloideachas believe that this work should be genuinely valued, that recognition should be given to the teachers who do it, and that teachers should be supported to teach in Irish-medium schools. It is essential to address the recruitment crisis urgently to ensure that there will be enough teachers in the system.

Gaeloideachas Recommendations

- That the allowance for teaching through Irish is restored to give recognition to the additional work being done by teachers in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools.
- That language support schemes are made available to enable teachers to build on their ability in Irish.
- That additional places and scholarships are provided on training courses through Irish, to ensure that more newly-qualified teachers will be available to begin their teaching careers in Irish-medium education in the future.
- That teachers are provided with every support to provide an inclusive education through the medium of Irish for every child.

Early Years Education

For hundreds of children, opportunities for language acquisition are missed at the beginning of their educational journeys as a naíonra is not available to them, and the number of naíonraí outside of the Gaeltacht has been in decline for several years.

According to a survey undertaken by the Department of Children and published in 2023, there are now only 53 naíonraí outside of the Gaeltacht that operate entirely through Irish. Still, the State has no system to recognise naíonraí as a specific type of service, one in which immersion education is practiced and which has particular support needs for its community as a result. The State does not even provide a public directory to enable parents to find the naíonra closest to them.

In addition to that, naíonraí across the country are closing or under pressure for some time as a result of a lack of support and recruitment crisis. The State needs to provide support now to ensure that naíonraí can continue to operate into the future. It would be an easy win for the State to add to the number of Irish speakers if children were offered a strong start while taking their first steps on their language journey with Irish.

Gaeloideachas Recommendations

- That a scheme is provided to support the establishment and retention of naíonraí and to ensure that the option of local Irish-medium education is available for every child, and that parents are entitled to information in respect of these options.
- That infrastructure and support schemes are provided for early-years settings operating through Irish outside of the Gaeltacht, that are of equal value to the comprehensive supports that are available to those based in the Gaeltacht.
- That strategic investment is made into Irish-medium early-years services with a scheme to assist naíonraí in hiring, empowering, and retaining teachers and to provide top-class early-years education to young children.
- That the specific challenges facing naíonraí in respect of hiring a qualified team with fluent Irish are acknowledged, and therefore, that interim measures are introduced to allow naíonraí to hire staff members undergoing training if they satisfy the criteria of fluency in Irish.

Special Educational Needs

Naíonraí and Irish-medium schools regularly cater for children and students with different needs, including students with sight and/or hearing difficulties, dyslexia, autistic students, and students with other special educational needs. Many Irish-medium schools now have autism classes too. The same supports are provided for these children and students with special educational needs as are provided in any other mainstream schools and preschools.

Bilingual education does not do any harm to children with special educational needs and the following is confirmed by the NCSE:

‘Bilingual education...does no harm and clearly does contribute to social-emotional and interpersonal growth’

NCSE Report, 2011

With that being said, the same resources are not available in Irish as in English, and as a result it is more difficult for Irish-medium schools to access suitable resources to support their students. If resources are available in Irish, they are often direct translations of the English versions, which have not been tailored to immersion education settings.

Gaeloideachas has developed a range of new resources in partnership with Middletown Centre for Autism, including a new Support Guide for Autism, published in April 2024.

It is clear that there is a need for more supports to ensure that the benefits of Irish-medium education are available to every child, regardless of their support needs.

Gaeloideachas Recommendations

- That additional support is provided for Irish as an additional subject for students with special educational needs.
- That it is ensured that there is an appropriate allocation of Special Education Teachers to students with special educational needs in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools.
- That resources and supports are provided to Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools that are equal to those that are available to schools operating through English, and that are tailored for the immersion education system.