An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Towards a policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht

Policy framework

September 2024

Contents

1. Introduction 3
2. Policy context 4
3. Policy direction 7
3.1 High-quality education in Irish-medium schools 9
3.2 Meeting special educational needs 12
3.3 Supports for schools 15
3.4 Teaching and learning resources 18
3.5 Increasing the proportion of learners in Irish-medium education 20
3.6 Teacher supply (including initial teacher education) 23
3.7 Supports for parents and the wider community 26
4. Conclusion 29

1. Introduction

The Department of Education recognises that Irish-medium settings throughout the country have a vital role to play in preserving and strengthening the Irish language, and that specific supports need to be provided to support them in that role. Such supports have been made available to Gaeltacht schools through the Policy on Gaeltacht Education in recent years and significant progress has been made as a result.

The Department of Education is now progressing work on the development of a new policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht. To inform the development of this policy, the Department conducted a comprehensive consultation process to gather the views of the public and stakeholders. Sealbhú, a research centre in Dublin City University, prepared a series of reports on the public consultation that gave an overview of the proposals made to the Department. Additionally, a range of actions were taken to ensure that the policy is informed by current research. This included a review of international research, carried out by Sealbhú, on education through the medium of minority languages in various jurisdictions.

Stemming from the consultation process, the research undertaken and continued collaboration with stakeholders, the following policy framework has been drafted to outline the planned direction for the policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht. It is intended that this framework will form the basis for engagement with stakeholders at a consultation event in September 2024.

2. Policy context

In developing this multifaceted policy, it is essential to recognise the context in which it will be implemented. The new policy, and the actions arising from it, will go hand in hand with other policies and strategies that are in effect or being developed by the Department of Education, by other government departments, and by the Government.

The Department of Education established an intradepartmental working group as well as a steering committee to guide development of a policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht. The intradepartmental working group comprises nominees from relevant divisions within the Department, and the steering group comprises nominees from other relevant departments and agencies. These committees help to ensure integration between the policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht and the other relevant policies and strategies.

20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030

The education system is central to the implementation of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030. Much has been achieved under this strategy to date, particularly in relation to curriculum development, supports for Gaeltacht schools, and teacher training. The Strategy commits to providing ongoing support for Irish-medium education at all levels from early learning and care (ELC) settings, through primary to post-primary.

Policy on Gaeltacht Education

The primary aim of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education is to support and promote the use of Irish in Gaeltacht communities by strengthening the provision of Irish-medium education in Gaeltacht language-planning areas. Significant progress has been made in implementing this policy since its launch in 2016 – language-based criteria have been set out for Gaeltacht schools under the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme, and supports provided for them under that Scheme; the innovative e-Hub project has enabled students in Gaeltacht post-primary schools to access a wider range of subjects; and the Irish-medium B.Ed. and the M.Ed. in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht Education are going from strength to strength.

Indeed, some of the actions arising from the Policy on Gaeltacht Education support Irish-medium schools outside of the Gaeltacht – the provision of guidelines, the work of An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) in relation to teaching and learning resources (including the online portal, *An Tairseach*), and professional learning opportunities for teachers, for example. It would be expected that the actions of the new policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht would also be of benefit to Gaeltacht schools.

The new policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht will build on the achievements of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education and will be another important step towards developing a comprehensive policy on the Irish language in the education system.

National Plan for Irish language provision in Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare

Work is being progressed by an advisory group led by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) to develop an Irish language plan for the early learning and care sector and for school-age childcare. The Department of Education and the DCEDIY will continue to work closely together to ensure that both policies are consistent, and to ensure continuity in the Irish-medium education sector. DCEDIY are represented on the Steering Committee for the Policy on Irish-Medium Education outside of the Gaeltacht, and the Department of Education has nominees on the Advisory Group that is supporting the development of the National Plan on Irish in the ELC sector.

Department of Education policies and strategies

Under the Education Act 1998, the Department of Education has a responsibility to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education.

It is acknowledged that it is important that there is consistency between the Department's various policies and strategies and the policy for Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht, and that they are integrated in a meaningful way. In drafting the policy, the Department's intradepartmental working group will ensure that the relevant policies are taken into account, including, for example:

- Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)
- Revision of the EPSEN Act 2004
- Policy Statement on Initial Teacher Education
- Teacher Supply Action Plan
- SNA workforce development plan (in development)
- Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy.

In addition, the Department of Education continues to co-operate with other government departments in the development and implementation of various policies. The commitments made by the Department in the context of these other policies and strategies will be brought together and reinforced in the development of this new policy, for example The Digital Plan for the Irish Language, Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 (Our Rural Future) and The National Islands Policy 2023-2033 (Our Living Islands). The Department is also supporting the work underway to achieve the objective in the Official Languages Act (Amendment) 2021 – that 20% of new recruits to the public service and the civil service are competent in Irish.

Current context of the education system

The education environment has changed dramatically in recent years, driven by societal, economic and pedagogical needs. In addition, the education system is adapting to new challenges, for example, catering for a wider range of learners, the implementation of new curricula and the growth and development of digital media. The new policy on Irish-medium education must be based within the changes that have already been made and with a view to the changes that are to come, including

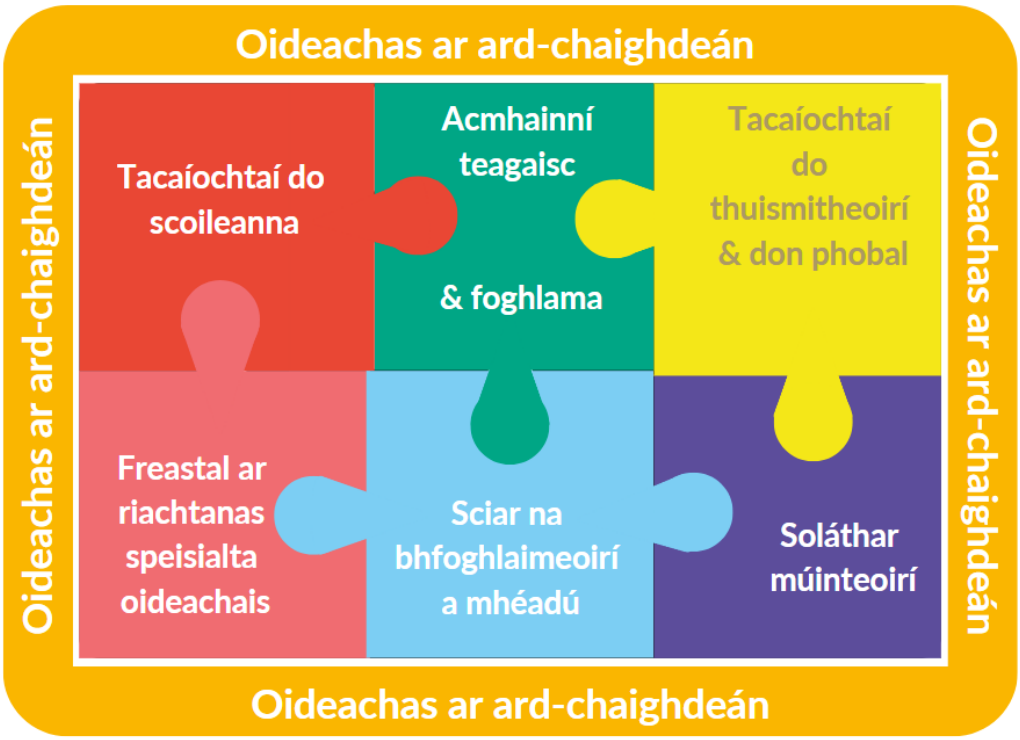
Senior Cycle Redevelopment and the new Primary Curriculum Framework. The introduction of separate subject specifications for Irish L1 and L2 is, of course, particularly relevant in this context also.

3. Policy direction

The overarching, central aim of the policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht will be to provide high-quality education in Irish-medium settings throughout the country. An additional six key areas of focus also emerged during the policy development process and each of these areas will play a role in supporting the above overarching aim.

This framework document outlines the areas in which the Department of Education, in conjunction with its partners in the Irish-medium and education sectors, can support Irish-medium schools outside of the Gaeltacht. The document will be divided as follows:

- High-quality education in Irish-medium schools
- Meeting special educational needs (SEN)
- Supports for Irish-medium schools (including supports for teachers and school leaders)
- Teaching and learning resources
- Increasing the proportion of learners in Irish-medium education (IME)
- Teacher supply (including initial teacher education)
- Supports for parents and the wider community.



It is evident that all of these areas are interconnected, and that they impact upon each other.

Each of these themes are discussed in detail in the following sections. Each section will be laid out as follows:

Current position	At the beginning of each section, the current context will be set out in relation to the area being discussed.
Messages from the consultation and research	A summary will then be provided of the messages and recommendations that emerged from the public consultation, from the research and from bilateral meetings.
Policy direction	Finally, an overview of the direction of the policy in relation to each area will be presented.

3.1 High-quality education in Irish-medium schools

Current position

Irish-medium education has been in existence in Ireland for over 100 years. Looking back at the success of the various approaches and policies, it is clear that there have been highs and lows in that time. Since the 1980s, there has been a renewed interest in Irish-medium education and a strengthening of the Irish-medium education movement. It is clear that Irish-medium schools have a central role to play in promoting the use of the language and in fostering the pride of their school communities in their Irish heritage.

The children and young people attending these Irish-medium schools are being enabled and encouraged, through immersion experiences in the language, to respond confidently through Irish to the opportunities and challenges of the twenty-first century. This has been achieved through the vision of school leaders, the commitment of teachers, the active involvement of parents, the encouragement of the Irish language community and the support of the Department of Education.

It is also understood, however, that in the absence of consistent standards being set for the sector, there is a variety of practices and standards in relation to the provision of aspects of Irish-medium education. A review of inspection reports on Irish-medium primary schools published from 2017 to 2020 indicated that, for example, there was a need to reinforce immersion education in the junior classes and to avoid translation as a method of teaching. In the review of the inspection reports for post-primary schools for the same period, the need to strengthen Irish as the language of socialisation – formally and informally – was recognised.

Messages from the consultation and research

The international research recognised that significant growth was achieved in Basque-medium education over a 40-year period. One of the key factors that aided that growth was ensuring that a high-standard of education would be provided in Basque-medium schools, and that these would therefore be parents' first choice for their children.

Internationally, in the jurisdictions where immersion education is well established, there are frameworks in place that set out the approach to immersion education, which helps to provide clarity to parents about the type of education involved.

In Wales, for example, schools need to be very clear about the percentage of the curriculum being taught through Welsh, the language of communication in the school and the language in which extra-curricular activities are organised. A framework is set out with different models and standards. For example, in Category 3 schools (similar to Irish-medium schools) there is early total immersion, 80% of subjects are then taught through Welsh from age 7 and there is a strong Welsh-medium ethos in schools.

In the Toronto School District Board area of Canada, there is early total immersion in French starting in Kindergarten and continuing until the end of grade 3. Formal study of English begins in grade 4 and continues until the end of grade 8 with 50% of the curriculum taught through French and 50% through English.

Participants in the consultation suggested that it would be beneficial for the system to set out standards and a quality framework in relation to immersion education for Irish-medium schools.

Policy direction

When the Policy on Gaeltacht Education was published in 2016, particular emphasis was placed on the role of schools in providing high-quality Irish-medium education and in fostering the use of Irish in the wider community. In order to fulfil this role, it was clear that criteria needed to be set out for Gaeltacht schools to ensure the provision of a high standard of education through the medium of Irish for young people in the Gaeltacht. While the language context outside of the Gaeltacht is not the same, the important role played by Irish-medium schools in providing high quality Irish-medium education is recognised. While it is not intended that there would be a recognition scheme for Irish-medium schools under the new policy, the importance of setting out standards that will support schools in achieving their aims to provide high-quality Irish-medium education is recognised.

In aiming to achieve a consistent approach to immersion education in our Irish-medium schools, we can draw on what has been learned from the implementation of the language-based criteria for immersion education by the schools participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme and take advantage of the effective practice and innovative approaches seen in many of these schools.

Indicators of good practice will be set out, as have been provided for Gaeltacht schools, which will provide guidance and a benchmark for Irish-medium schools to achieve high standards of practice. The school self-evaluation process will be emphasised in the implementation of the new policy, as a reliable model that enables schools to achieve excellence.

During school evaluations, the Inspectorate will assess the effectiveness and quality of Irish-medium education provision. The context of each school will be taken into account when carrying out assessments of the implementation of immersion education. Best practice will be recognised and recommendations made for improvement, as appropriate.

The Department's Inspectorate published composite reports in 2021 on inspection visits to Irish-medium schools outside of the Gaeltacht. A number of areas of improvement have been identified which can be addressed when developing guidance and best practice indicators for Irish-medium schools. These include:

- Best practice in the implementation of early total immersion education
- Promoting Irish as the language of socialisation

- Developing and reinforcing successful assessment approaches for the Irish-medium education context
- Effectively meeting special educational needs in the context of Irish-medium education.

3.2 Meeting special educational needs

Current position

Research published by Nic Aindriú *et al* in 2020[1] confirmed that Irish-medium education is suitable for learners with special educational needs. Irish-medium schools throughout the country are effectively catering for students with SEN at present.

The support services – The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in particular – provide support to schools through Irish to the extent possible, although they recognise that there are challenges in doing so comprehensively. NEPS, for example, has published guidance in Irish for Irish-medium schools on supporting autistic learners.

Gaeloideachas has held conferences in conjunction with COGG in recent years focused on SEN in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools, which supports the sharing of best practice in this area. COGG, with input from NEPS, the NCSE and other experts, is developing research-based guidance on meeting the needs of learners with SEN in Gaeltacht primary schools. This is due to be published by the end of 2024.

Innovative work is continually being carried out by researchers in relation to the use of technology to support learners with SEN. Particularly useful resources have been developed by the ABAIR.ie project in Trinity College Dublin that uses speech and language technologies for Irish to support people with dyslexia and autistic people, for example.

In relation to the identification of SEN, it is acknowledged that there is a need to develop more assessment tools, and to that end, the Educational Research Centre is working to develop further assessment resources and to update current resources.

Messages from the consultation and research

Based on the international research, it was recommended that an inclusive approach should be taken in Irish-medium schools in relation to meeting the needs of children and young people with SEN. It was recommended that schools be enabled to meet the needs of all students, and that appropriate supports be made available to them, in line with the Department of Education's approach to SEN generally.

A focus group was held as part of the consultation to discuss SEN specifically. A wide range of recommendations were made by the participants in this discussion, in

[1] Nic Aindriú, S., Ó Duibhir, P., & Travers, J. (2020). The prevalence and types of special educational needs in Irish immersion primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. European Journal of Special Needs Education, 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2020.1732109

line with the recommendations that were shared in the other phases of the consultation. It was recommended, for example:

- That more professional learning opportunities be made available for teachers and student teachers in relation to meeting the needs of children and young people with SEN in immersion education settings
- That more diagnostic tests in Irish be developed
- That more guidance be provided to schools on best practice in relation to supporting learners with SEN
- That further research into SEN be carried out in immersion education settings.

While research nationally and internationally shows that immersion education is suitable for children and young people with special educational needs, it was clear from the responses to the questionnaires that there is a lack of information in this regard. Only 52% of respondents to the questionnaire agreed with the statement "Irish-medium education can effectively cater for children and young people with special educational needs", and some parents indicated that they did not choose Irish-medium education for their children because they had special educational needs. It also appears that parents are still sometimes advised not to choose Irish-medium education for their children if they have SEN. Stakeholders recommended that an awareness campaign be run to address these misunderstandings.

Policy direction

To ensure that a high standard of inclusive education is being provided, it is necessary to meet the needs of all learners. Under the policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht, efforts will be stepped up across the sector to support Irish-medium schools in meeting the needs of learners with special educational needs.

A communications and facilitation strategy will be launched to communicate the suitability of Irish-medium education for learners with special educational needs. This strategy will build on the work currently being done by organisations such as Gaeloideachas and COGG in this area. The strategy will focus on families of children and young people with SEN, as well as on educational and medical professionals who advise these families.

Other ways to ensure that teachers and student teachers are aware of the best approaches to cater for learners with special educational needs will be explored. In response, a range of actions will be taken to address this, in conjunction with the relevant services and institutes.

Gaps in assessment tools and support resources for SEN will be explored; the most effective ways to fill these gaps will be identified, and actions will be implemented accordingly. Cross-border co-operation will be leveraged to progress the development of these resources.

The guidance developed by COGG for primary schools in the Gaeltacht will be adapted to the context of Irish-medium schools outside of the Gaeltacht, and

additional TPL opportunities will be made available to teachers, based on that guidance and on guidance from the Inspectorate and the appropriate policy teams. Guidance for post-primary schools will be developed on the same model.

3.3 Supports for schools

Current position

Supports are available for Irish-medium schools, for teachers, and for school leaders from a wide range of organisations including COGG, Oide, NCSE, NEPS, Gaeloideachas, education support centres, patron bodies, and management organisations.

COGG was founded to establish a structure to cater for the educational needs of Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools. It also has a remit in relation to the teaching of Irish in the country's other schools. COGG provides a wide range of supports for Irish-medium schools, including resources, workshops, conferences and Irish courses for teachers.

Oide – the new support service for teachers and school leaders – offers a wide range of professional learning opportunities for school leaders and teachers at primary and post-primary level. A GaelAonad has been established as a new and distinct division in Oide's organisational structure to support the professional learning needs specific to the Irish-medium context, as well as the curricular area of Irish.

The education support centres provide a range of professional learning opportunities for teachers throughout the country, including Irish language courses and courses on various subjects through the medium of Irish. The support centres collaborate with other bodies to facilitate professional learning opportunities.

An M.Ed. programme in Irish-Medium and Gaeltacht Education is being run by Trinity College Dublin. The programme was delivered in Mary Immaculate College from 2018-2024. This programme, which is aimed at practising teachers and principals in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools, was established under the Policy on Gaeltacht Education, and is funded by the Department under that policy.

It is felt that there is a lack of awareness, in some cases, of the opportunities that are available that would enable teachers to develop their Irish language competence and their understanding of immersion education.

The Department of Education provides specific supports to Irish-medium schools in a variety of ways, including a higher capitation rate for Irish-medium primary schools outside of the Gaeltacht, and Irish and Bilingual Grants for voluntary secondary schools (although this is not currently available to community, comprehensive or ETB schools).

The Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (DTCAGSM) provides supports to the Irish-medium education sector, primarily through the provision of funding to Foras na Gaeilge and, through them, to the Irish-language lead organisations. Gaeloideachas has a particular responsibility in this area as the designated lead organisation with responsibility for Irish-medium education.

Messages from the consultation and research

A number of different models were identified in the international research that are in place to support schools that teach through a minority language, for example:

- Sabbatical opportunities that are available for teachers in Wales and in the Basque Region to develop their language competence
- Initiatives such as *Ulibarri* in the Basque Region that promotes language planning and normalisation in schools and fosters networks between schools
- Guidance and supports provided to schools in *Fryslân* in the Netherlands that wish to transition to trilingual schools (Friesian, Dutch and English).

A wide range of recommendations emerged from the consultation in relation to the supports considered by stakeholders that would be beneficial for Irish-medium schools, for example:

- Extending the Irish and Bilingual Grants to community schools, comprehensive schools and ETB schools
- Providing the supports available to Gaeltacht schools under the Policy on Gaeltacht Education to Irish-medium schools outside of the Gaeltacht
- Developing standards for immersion education in Irish-medium schools outside of the Gaeltacht that would be based on best practice.

In relation to professional learning opportunities, it was recommended that opportunities be provided to facilitate teachers and members of staff in Irish-medium schools to improve their language competence. It was also recommended that further opportunities be provided for teachers to deepen their understanding of the pedagogy of immersion education. It was requested that teacher professional learning (TPL) be provided in Irish contemporaneously with English. It is significant that it was reported during the consultation that there does not tend to be great demand for TPL courses conducted through Irish in the local education support centres.

Concerns about the limited choice of subjects in Irish-medium post-primary schools were identified as a reason why students did not choose to attend an Irish-medium post-primary school (after attending an Irish-medium primary school), a concern also raised by parents. It was recommended that the e-hub project, which is available to Gaeltacht schools, be explored to enhance subject choice.

Policy direction

The policy will have as an overarching goal the provision of quality education for children and young people who attend Irish-medium education settings. To achieve this, a support scheme will be made available for Irish-medium schools, which will provide them with relevant supports, as is the case for Gaeltacht schools under the Policy on Gaeltacht Education. In designing this scheme, it will be possible to draw upon the expertise that has been developed in the sector in relation to Gaeltacht

schools and on the supports being provided to those schools, for example guidance and support in implementing immersion education and the e-Hub project

A range of actions will be implemented to support teachers in Irish-medium schools to develop the necessary skills and competencies to empower them to deliver high-quality education through the medium of Irish to their pupils and students. These will include the provision of professional learning opportunities by Oide and the provision of targeted supports by COGG. COGG, the new GaelAonad in Oide, and the other support organisations (including, for example, NCSE, NEPS, ETBI, and the education support centres) will be supported to identify and meet the needs of the Irish-medium sector.

The Department of Education currently provides Irish and Bilingual Grants to schools in the voluntary secondary sector. The policy will explore the possibility of extending this to all Irish-medium post-primary schools.

The transitions from early learning and care to primary school and from primary on to post-primary are important steps on the learning journey. In the case of Irish-medium education, specific preparations are needed to make the transition as positive as possible. Guidance will be provided which will focus on the specific language context of Irish-medium schools, in order to support schools in facilitating these transition periods for their pupils and students.

3.4 Teaching and learning resources

Current position

COGG is the largest funder and developer of resources for Irish-medium and Gaeltacht education in the country. COGG works closely with An Gúm, with CCEA (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment, Northern Ireland) and An tÁisaonad in St Mary's University College, Belfast, as well as other publishers. COGG has made tremendous progress in this area, in cooperation with the publishers, over the last 20 years, although the range and scope of resources still need to be expanded.

Over the last number of years, COGG has progressed the development of digital resources, and over 2,000 resources are now available on the online portal *An Tairseach*. Work is underway to increase the number of resources available and to publicise *An Tairseach*.

TG4 Foghlaim is a very rich resource, with educational material available in Irish for children and young people. A link is being fostered between TG4 and COGG to ensure co-operation and integration in the development of these resources for use in schools.

Messages from the consultation and research

The review of the international literature recognised the importance of providing resources for immersion education settings. This applies to digital resources as well as textbooks. Apps, digital games, e-books and language programmes were mentioned as potentially beneficial resources. It was also suggested that there was a need to research the use of technology in the immersion setting.

Approximately half of the participants in the online questionnaire agreed that sufficient teaching resources were not available, while 58% of participants agreed that sufficient digital resources were not available. Based on broader discussions in focus groups and bilateral meetings, there appear to be two factors to consider here. There is certainly a need to develop the number of teaching and learning resources available, but it is also clear that there is a need to raise awareness of existing resources.

Teaching and learning resources were often referenced in the focus groups with post-primary students, where the majority of participants mentioned issues with the resources available. Among the points mentioned, it was noted that:

- textbooks in Irish were not available for all subjects
- more online resources were needed in Irish
- some of the textbooks in Irish were not up to date

- terminology in the textbooks was very difficult, and sometimes there were differences between terminology in the textbooks and terminology in the state examinations
- sample examination papers or papers for the mock examinations were not available in Irish in all subjects.

Policy direction

It is intended, subject to budgetary constraints, that additional resources would be provided to COGG under the policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht, which will enable them to maximise their work in relation to the provision of textbooks and resources, including digital resources. This will be particularly important in the coming years with the revision of Leaving Certificate subject specifications, Senior Cycle Redevelopment, and the introduction of new curriculum specifications under the Primary Curriculum Framework.

COGG's staffing will be expanded to facilitate them to further develop *An Tairseach*, and to launch a marketing campaign to ensure that there is awareness in the sector of the resources available, both print and digital. COGG will strengthen the links they have developed with An Gúm, CCEA, An tÁisaonad, TG4, and educational publishers so that the most effective use possible is made of the available resources.

COGG will be asked to work with the NCCA, State Examinations Commission and translators to put in place a structure to ensure that the same terminology is used in subject specifications, examination papers and textbooks.

The *Séideán Sí* programme has been used effectively by Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools. To ensure that it will continue to be a valuable resource for schools into the future, it will be reviewed and updated in light of the curriculum and digital changes that have taken place since it was first published.

The Digital Plan for the Irish Language, published by DTCAGSM in 2024, states in relation to the development of resources, that "collaboration with educational organisations, teaching bodies and networks is vital" to ensure that world class teaching materials are provided, and that these facilities will be widely used. Arising from the international research undertaken by Sealbhú to inform this policy, it was recommended that research be carried out on the use of digital resources in immersion education settings. It would be intended to provide funding under the policy to carry out this research, action research in particular, which will support the implementation of the Digital Plan's aims.

3.5 Increasing the proportion of learners in Irish-medium education

Current position

The Department of Education published a comprehensive overview of the provision of Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht in a report published in 2022 as part of the consultation process.

According to figures for the 2023/24 school year, 6% of students are receiving their education through the medium of Irish in Irish-medium schools across the country. Further details are set out in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

	Gaeltacht schools	Irish-medium schools outside of the Gaeltacht	Total in Irish-medium schools	Total in all schools
Primary	6,962	36,467	43,429	546,787
Post-primary	3,770	10,466	14,236	416,631
Total	**10,732**	**46,933**	**57,665**	**963,418**

Table 1 – Number of students in Irish-medium schools in the 2023/24 school year

	Gaeltacht schools	Irish-medium schools outside of the Gaeltacht	Total in Irish-medium schools	Total in English-medium schools
Primary	1.3%	6.7%	7.9%	92.1%
Post-primary	0.9%	2.5%	3.4%	96.6%
Total	**1.1%**	**4.9%**	**6.0%**	**94.0%**

Table 2 - Percentage of students in Irish-medium schools in the 2023/24 school year

There are 152 Irish-medium primary schools and 29 Irish-medium post-primary schools outside of the Gaeltacht.

Irish-medium units or streams are currently providing some education through the medium of Irish in a number of English-medium post-primary schools across the country. There is a lack of consistency in how these models are being implemented in schools and in the supports provided to them by the Department. A new model – a satellite model – is currently being piloted in Gaelcholáiste Dhún Dealgan in Dundalk, which is linked to Coláiste Ghlór na Mara in Balbriggan. It is hoped that

there will be learnings from this new model which will influence decisions regarding the future provision of Irish-medium education.

While a certain number of Irish-medium schools outside of the Gaeltacht were oversubscribed in the 2023/24 school year, a smaller proportion of Irish-medium schools were oversubscribed than comparable English-medium schools. At primary level, approximately 18% of Irish-medium schools outside of the Gaeltacht were oversubscribed. The majority of Irish-medium primary schools outside of the Gaeltacht are in urban settings, and over 20% of English-medium schools in urban settings reported being oversubscribed. At post primary level, approximately 17% of Irish-medium schools outside of the Gaeltacht (5 schools) reported being oversubscribed in 2023/24, compared with over 40% of English-medium schools.

Messages from the consultation and research

Recommendations emerged from each period of the consultation process regarding the provision of Irish-medium schools. These included, among other things, that:

- the different models for the supply of Irish-medium education be defined
- concrete standards for the provision of Irish-medium education be set out
- the number of places available in Irish-medium schools be significantly increased
- priority be given to building independent Irish-medium post-primary schools rather than focusing on aonaid (units)
- clear supports and guidance be provided to English-medium schools with aonaid, to ensure that they are sustainable and that they provide a high-quality immersion experience
- supports and guidance be provided to English-medium schools who wish to transition to Irish-medium education.

The participants in the consultation suggested that participation in Irish-medium education could be increased by launching an awareness campaign so that parents could understand the benefits of bilingualism, and understand that they do not need to have Irish themselves for Irish-medium education to be suitable for their children.

It emerged in the consultation that some students do not progress from Irish-medium primary to Irish-medium post-primary school because their parents think that Irish-medium post-primary schools would not prepare them for courses in English at third level. It was suggested that such issues could be dealt with as part of an awareness campaign about the benefits of Irish-medium education.

Policy direction

In order to increase the number of students receiving their education through the medium of Irish, it is acknowledged that parents will need to be encouraged and

empowered to make that choice for their children. COGG, in conjunction with the relevant stakeholders, will be asked to develop and implement a communications and facilitation strategy that will share the benefits of Irish-medium education and encourage families to choose Irish-medium education for their children.

Various ways will be examined under the policy to provide more opportunities for children and young people to receive education through the medium of Irish. This will be progressed through engagement with key stakeholders to consider the appropriate solutions in varying contexts (for example, differing levels of demand and capacity in existing schools) in a way that will take account of the various constraints that exist.

Ways will be considered for the Department of Education to support the growth and development of the Irish-medium sector, and the appropriate governance structures in that regard.

Actions will be progressed on a phased basis to ensure that the appropriate resources are available and that high quality education can be provided to the additional students in the system.

3.6 Teacher supply (including initial teacher education)

Current position

Almost 3,000 teachers (whole time equivalents) are currently teaching in Irish-medium schools outside of the Gaeltacht (approximately 2,200 primary teachers and 760 post-primary teachers).

No additional qualification is required to teach in an Irish-medium school at primary level. All primary school teachers are supposed to be trained to teach through the medium of Irish. A B.Ed. (primary teaching) programme through the medium of Irish is available in Marino Institute of Education, which was established under the Policy on Gaeltacht Education and is funded under that policy by the Department of Education.

At primary level, while all teachers are qualified to teach in Irish-medium schools, it is clear that a significant proportion of teachers do not feel they have a sufficiently high level of competence in Irish to do so. This is despite the fact that an entry standard in Irish is set for the B.Ed. or PME for primary teaching, and despite the supports (including Gaeltacht periods) provided for the language during those programmes.

At post-primary level, it is required that teachers in Irish-medium schools have the Teastas Gaeilge do Mhúinteoirí Iarbhunscoile[2] (Certificate in Irish for Post-Primary Teachers – TGMI), as well as an initial teacher education qualification. It is not clear, however, whether this requirement is being consistently implemented in all schools, and it seems that there is a lack of awareness of the requirement. There is one consecutive initial teacher education programme for post-primary teachers available through the medium of Irish – the Máistir Gairmiúil san Oideachas (MGO) in the University of Galway. COGG provides bursaries to students undertaking this programme. Concurrent programmes are available in other institutions which train teachers as teachers of Irish with another subject.

There are difficulties at post-primary level in terms of teachers' competence and confidence in the language, and additional challenges in terms of the high level of competence required in subject-specific language to teach subjects at Leaving Certificate level.

Messages from the consultation and research

It is clear from the review of international research that there are challenges to be faced in relation to the provision of appropriate teachers in almost all countries where

[2] Exemption from the examination for the TGMI applies to candidates who hold a degree in Irish or who have passed the Oral Irish Examination for registration as a Secondary Teacher for the Certificate for Teaching Irish or for the Vocational Certificate for Irish.

immersion education through the medium of a minority language is being provided. These challenges come in addition to current challenges being experienced in relation to teacher supply across all sectors in many countries.

The international research found that initial teacher education programmes are provided through the minority language, and that incentives are provided in some jurisdictions to attract students to undertake them.

Messages emerged from the consultation on two aspects of teacher education – the need to increase teachers' competence and confidence in the language, and the additional needs that teachers have in immersion education contexts (developing pedagogical strategies for immersion, designing effective approaches to language and subject teaching on an integrated basis, encouraging the social use of Irish amongst children and young people, etc.).

In relation to teacher supply and initial teacher education, it was recommended, among other things that:

- Further opportunities be provided for student teachers to develop their competence and confidence in Irish
- Student teachers be given the opportunity to gain experience in Irish-medium settings
- Additional ITE programmes through Irish be established
- The additional allowance be reinstated for teachers in Irish-medium schools[3]
- The TGMI be reviewed and revised.

Policy direction

It is recognised that there are challenges nationally – and internationally – at present with teacher supply, and that there are additional challenges for Irish-medium schools in this regard. In order to address the challenges in this area, a range of actions will be implemented under the policy that will complement the Teacher Supply Action Plan.

Actions will be implemented under the policy to support teachers and student teachers in developing their competence and confidence in Irish. The existing supports will be networked, publicised, and further developed.

[3] A 'Teaching through Irish' allowance had been available to teachers in Irish-medium schools. Along with a number of other role-based allowances, this allowance was withdrawn for new entrants from 1 February 2012 as a result of a review of allowances and premium payments by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The allowance continues to be paid to teachers who were eligible for it before 2012 and are still in the same work role.

The higher education institutions, the Teaching Council, and other relevant stakeholders will be consulted to identify ways to develop teachers' competence and confidence in Irish as part of ITE programmes. Ways of including the immersion education context in these programmes will be considered, and partnerships between Irish-medium schools and higher education institutions will be emphasised. The possibilities for the provision of further Irish-medium ITE programmes will be examined.

The TGMI will be reviewed in the context of developments since its design in 1999 (including CEFR). The standards set out for Irish-medium schools and the supports that will be provided for teachers to increase their language competence will also form part of the context for that review.

3.7 Supports for parents and the wider community

Current position

Parental influence is closely linked to children's progress in language learning, and the role of schools in helping parents to provide maximum support to their children in school work and language learning is recognised. Some Irish-medium schools are already providing valuable supports including, for example, Irish classes for adult learners, homework support, information sessions on immersion education and the benefits of bilingualism, facilitating links with Irish language networks and organising Irish language events for the school community. These supports need to be strengthened and expanded across the Irish-medium education sector.

The Irish language organisations have, and will continue to have, a very important role in fostering the Irish language and its heritage. The Irish language lead organisations, who are recognised and funded by Foras na Gaeilge, will have a particular role to play in this space.

- Gael-Linn supports schools and families alike in creating an Irish language atmosphere by providing targeted resources that support the use of the language in practical and enjoyable ways.

- Glór na nGael provides a wide range of schemes and supports to support the promotion of the Irish language. Valuable practical support is provided to parents raising children through Irish, for example, the *Teanga Tí* resource, which provides opportunities to use the language at Irish-language events. They provide advice to families who wish to raise their children through Irish.

- Conradh na Gaeilge fulfils an important role in encouraging the use of Irish as an every-day spoken language. To this end, they continually work to emphasise the importance and preservation of the language and heritage. One aspect of their work is to provide Irish classes for all levels of learner and to encourage participation in “ciorcail chomhrá” (conversation circles) throughout the country.

- Cumann na bhFiann is a valuable resource for providing networks for young people who are interested in the language. The Cumann organises various clubs locally throughout the country and virtually, giving young people the opportunity to speak Irish socially outside of the school setting.

While children and young people from all backgrounds are welcome in Irish-medium schools, students with a nationality other than Irish are more likely to attend English-medium schools. Only 1% of students in Irish-medium schools had a non-Irish nationality in the 2020 school year. Additionally, fewer than 0.25% of student in Irish-medium schools were from the Traveller and Roma communities in the 2022/23 school year.

Messages from the consultation and research

In the online questionnaire that formed part of the consultation process, participants were asked what priorities the Department should focus upon in order to maximise the impact on Irish-medium education. Respondents were provided with a range of options. The area chosen by the highest number of participants in the research was "Supports for parents who do not speak Irish but who wish to choose an Irish-medium education for their children". This area was chosen across all categories of participants – parents, educators and students.

The central role parents play in their children's education was recognised in the consultation, and the importance of providing appropriate supports to assist them. The international research gave a comprehensive description of the supports provided to parents in Wales to encourage them to speak Welsh to their children from birth, and to create a community of Welsh speakers.

The valuable role parents could play in supporting the creation of an Irish language community in and around the school was mentioned in the consultation. A number of supports that would be helpful to parents were identified, for example:

- Providing Irish language classes for parents
- Providing supports for parents on how to help with homework
- Developing resources to support parents to learn Irish so that they can support their children's learning
- Providing family classes/activities so that parents and children can use Irish with each other.

The consultation, and recommendations from international research, highlighted the importance of supporting the use of Irish – both in the school and in the wider community. It was recommended that it would be important that this task not be placed solely on school staff, and that wider campaigns in this area would be needed to bring school communities on board.

It was suggested that an awareness campaign could demonstrate that Irish-medium schools are welcoming and suitable for everyone, no matter what their socio-economic background, language, ethnicity, religion or ability. It was noted that parents from different cultures should be encouraged to send their children to Irish-medium settings. It was identified that information and publicity material would need to be available in different languages.

Policy direction

To ensure the success of the policy, it will be crucial to strengthen the use of Irish in Irish-medium schools, and in their communities. The Department of Education will work with the DTCAGSM and the relevant lead organisations, to provide supports to schools and their communities, building on what is currently being achieved. To support the use of Irish as a living language, it would be beneficial for schools to

create and strengthen links with the Gaeltacht; ways to support schools in developing those links will be considered.

Actions will be implemented under the policy to build on the resources that have been developed by various organisations for parents, to support them in helping their children with homework and in using Irish in the family.

Irish language classes for parents are often offered in Irish-medium schools, and there is a wide range of Irish language classes available throughout the country – through the Education and Training Boards and through the Irish-language lead organisations, among others. Parents with children in Irish-medium schools often attend these classes. Actions will be taken in partnership with the relevant Irish language lead organisations and ETBs to link parents to classes suitable for them.

It is acknowledged that ensuring inclusive, multilingual, multicultural and welcoming educational settings in the sector is of particular importance for all. Ways will be identified under the policy to support schools in growing and developing in that mould.

In order to ensure inclusion in Irish-medium schools, inclusion should be ensured in the staff rooms in those schools. Ways of attracting teachers, SNAs and other staff from diverse backgrounds to Irish-medium education will be explored, for example through the use of the Department's annual "*Teaching Transforms*" campaign. Actions will be implemented under the policy to address this issue.

4. Conclusion

The policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht will keep the learner at its core and will strive to ensure that high-quality education is provided to all children and young people attending Irish-medium educational settings outside of the Gaeltacht.

The critical role of teachers, school leaders and other school staff in supporting pupils and students on their learning journeys in Irish-medium educational settings will be emphasised. Appropriate supports will be made available, by the relevant education stakeholders, to assist schools in achieving the policy's central aim. In addition, ongoing co-operation with the school communities (including parents) and Irish language organisations will be required to build an Irish-speaking community around the Irish-medium schools so that the policy can be implemented effectively.

The support and co-operation of all stakeholders and the wider community will be crucial in achieving the policy's goals. As the saying goes, *ní neart go cur le chéile*.