



Circular 0012/2021

TO: BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT, PRINCIPALS AND TEACHING STAFF OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND SPECIAL SCHOOL(S) IN GAELTACHT LANGUAGE-PLANNING AREAS

POLICY ON GAELTACHT EDUCATION 2017-2022

PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN GAELTACHT LANGUAGE-PLANNING AREAS PARTICIPATING IN THE GAELTACHT SCHOOL RECOGNITION SCHEME

Ongoing Implementation of the Scheme
(2021 - 2022)

1. Purpose of the Circular

The purpose of this Circular is to inform school authorities of the next steps to be taken by the Department of Education (Department) and by primary schools/special schools in relation to the continuing implementation of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme (Scheme) in 2021/2022. This Circular follows on from Circulars 0033/2017, 0021/2018, 0009/2019 and 0010/2020 which outlined the implementation phases of the Scheme covering the period from 2017 to 2020/21.

Summary of key points:

- Due to the impact of COVID-19, schools have been unable to implement the full range of Policy on Gaeltacht Education and Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme actions. Also arising from the pandemic, Inspectorate advisory visits, continuing professional development (CPD) provided by An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG), and Educational Research Centre (ERC) assessments in schools, were interrupted. Therefore, in order to allow schools the full opportunity to implement the range of actions which they had planned, **the timeframe of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme has been extended by two years i.e. to the end of the 2023/24 school year.** The additional supports provided for schools participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme will continue during this extended period, subject to the normal conditions set out in annual circulars related to the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme.
- Schools should plan for the continuing implementation of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme to improve the quality of immersion education¹ by reviewing existing targets, identifying new targets and actions, and monitoring progress to fulfil the language-based criteria (**Appendix 1**) in order to obtain recognition as a Gaeltacht school.

¹ In the context of a Gaeltacht primary school, immersion education refers to the practice of teaching all curriculum areas entirely through the medium of Irish, apart from the English curriculum. Early-immersion refers to the practice of implementing a two-year total immersion programme through Irish in infant classes, during which period English is not taught.



- Additional targeted resources, including language-support hours for Irish, a grant for Irish-medium resources, continuing professional development (CPD) and Inspectorate advisory visits/sessions, will continue to be provided to support schools' ongoing participation in the Scheme.
- During the 2021/22 school year, the Inspectorate's advisory sessions will focus, in particular, on gathering evidence on the progress made by schools in the implementation of the language-based criteria to strengthen immersion education. Examples of best practice will also be identified in collaboration with schools. Due to the unprecedented and unexpected circumstances arising from the global pandemic, online advisory sessions with schools will be facilitated, where it is not possible to carry out face-to-face visits.

Appendices attached to this Circular:

Appendix 1: Language-based criteria for recognition as a Gaeltacht primary school

Appendix 2: Guide on how to make the most effective use of the additional support hours for Irish

Appendix 3: *School Cluster Application Form:* This application form is provided for primary schools in the Scheme that wish to cluster or combine their Irish-language support hours and/or special education teaching hours to form shared full-time temporary teaching posts.

2. Programme of supports for primary/special schools in the Scheme (2021 - 2022)

As provided for in previous Circulars ([0033/2017](#), [0021/2018](#), [0009/2019](#) and [0010/2020](#)), primary schools participating in the Scheme working to fulfil the language-based criteria (Appendix 1) are eligible to access additional resources and supports to strengthen immersion education. These additional supports will continue to be made available to post-primary schools in the Scheme in the 2021/2022 school year, as outlined below:

- **Language-support hours for Irish:**

Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme – primary schools	
Primary school enrolment on 30/09/2020	Number of additional language-support hours for Irish per week per school for the school year 2021/22
<53	5
53-82	7.5
83-142	10
143-175	12.5
176-250	15
251-488	17.5
>488	25

- The language-support hours for Irish should be used solely to support the identified needs of native speakers and learners of Irish in order to develop and enrich their proficiency in Irish, and in particular, in oral Irish. **Appendix 2** provides additional guidance on how on how to make the most effective use of the additional support hours for Irish. The use of these hours will continue to be monitored during Inspectorate advisory visits/sessions.



- The language-support hours for Irish will be allocated as part-time hours to primary schools participating in the Scheme. Schools will be expected to manage the allocation of these language-support hours for Irish effectively to ensure the maximum benefit for pupils' learning through the medium of Irish. A group of primary schools may form a cluster to create a temporary *full-time* teaching post by combining the part-time language-support hours for Irish allocated to each primary school in the cluster. A School Cluster Application Form is available in **Appendix 3** and on the Department's website [HERE](#).
- While the additional language-support hours for Irish under the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme and the hours under the Special Education Teaching Allocation for school support and school support plus stages of the continuum will be allocated separately for administrative purposes, schools can combine these hours to create temporary teaching posts for the 2021/2022 school year. In such cases, schools must ensure that the teachers selected for these posts have a high level of proficiency in Irish and a good understanding of immersion education.
- **Grant allocation:** In May 2021, a grant of €1200 will be paid to each primary school and special school in the Scheme for the purchase of Irish-medium teaching resources to support the provision of high-quality immersion education. A list of resources in Irish can be accessed on the website of COGG at www.cogg.ie
- For audit purposes, in accordance with public procurement and financial procedures (see provisions of Department of Public Expenditure and Reform: Circular 0013/2014), schools are required to retain all receipts and records of expenditure incurred. School authorities must also ensure that the requirements of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Education are met in the public procurement, usage and disposal of assets.
- **Continuing Professional Development (CPD):** Primary schools participating in the *Scheme* will be provided with additional CPD by COGG in collaboration with other national support services, as appropriate. A combination of distance-learning webinars and face-to-face sessions (when possible) will continue to be provided to support the evolving CPD needs of schools in implementing immersion education. COGG will facilitate opportunities for the development of principal and teacher online networks to enable the identification and sharing of good practice. CPD will be delivered in accordance with the public health guidelines pertaining at that time. Every effort will be made to protect the safety of participants and to minimise disruption to pupil-teacher contact time.

Where necessary, and as resources permit, substitute cover for attendance at seminars/workshops will be provided in 2021/22 through the Online Claims System (OLCS) or under the management of the relevant Education and Training Board (ETB), up to a maximum of two days for two teachers in participating primary schools. These days may be claimed from the OLCS by selecting the following options: *Continuing Professional Development/Professional Activities - Gaeltacht Education Policy/Polasaí um Oideachas Gaeltachta*.

Details in relation to CPD plans for schools participating in the Scheme will be provided by COGG. In addition, all schools in the Scheme can apply to the Professional Development Service for Teachers for customised school support in all areas of teaching, learning and school self-evaluation at this [LINK](#)

- **The Guide for Gaeltacht Primary Schools: Indicators of Good Practice for Immersion Education**, published in December 2020, will provide practical support for boards of managements/education and training boards and schools on how best to implement high quality immersion education.



The Guide can be used by schools to:

- reflect on teaching and learning practices through the medium of Irish in the Gaeltacht school
 - guide professional discussion on learning, teaching, management and leadership to support the implementation of immersion education
 - identify, develop and extend good practice in immersion education
 - identify targets and actions to fulfil the language-based criteria for immersion education
 - reflect on good governance practice in relation to the implementation of immersion education.
- **COGG Web Portal:** Language resources for the Gaeltacht and Irish-medium sectors will continue to be developed in 2021/22. The COGG web portal will be linked to Scoilnet and relevant websites and will support whole-school planning, teaching, learning and assessment. All Gaeltacht schools will be informed of the range of Irish-language teaching and learning resources available on the portal. Support will be provided to schools on how to access and use the online resources, and on how their own resources can be developed and shared.
 - **Links between Early-years settings and Primary Schools:** A Guide for Gaeltacht and Irish-medium Primary Schools: Strengthening Links between Early-Years Settings and Primary Schools, commissioned by COGG, will be published in 2021, to support the implementation of immersion education. The Guide will include exemplars of good practice.
 - **Special Education in Immersion Settings:** Research commissioned by COGG is underway to inform the development of a Guide for Gaeltacht schools on special education in Irish-medium immersion education settings to support the implementation of the Department's *Guidelines for Primary Schools Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* (Appendix 5).
 - **Links with the language-planning process:** A guide for schools will be developed by the Department of Education in collaboration with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Údarás na Gaeltachta, COGG, Gaeloideachas and other relevant agencies, to provide information on how best to strengthen links, engagement and participation between the school management, wider school community and the local language-planning committee.
 - **Inspectorate Support:** Inspectors will carry out advisory visits/sessions to provide support for schools in implementing the language-based criteria to achieve Gaeltacht school recognition. They will also provide information on progress being made by schools to the Department of Education. In collaboration with schools, inspectors will assist in the identification of examples of innovative practice in the provision of high-quality immersion education. Due to the exceptional circumstances arising from the global pandemic, online advisory sessions will be provided for schools, where it is not possible to carry out face-to-face visits.
 - **Event to celebrate and share good practice:** Depending on circumstances relating to COVID-19, a shared-learning event, originally planned for late 2020, will be organised in 2022 to celebrate and share examples of innovative practice in immersion education in schools participating in the Scheme. Further details about this event will be circulated to schools in the Scheme in due course.



3. Whole-school action-planning to strengthen immersion education

School self-evaluation facilitates schools to engage in a cyclical action-planning process that includes regular review to improve quality of provision in schools. The action-planning for improvement process should involve gathering evidence, making judgements, setting specific targets, implementing actions, monitoring and reviewing progress against targets and setting new targets to strengthen the quality of immersion education in schools.

Schools participating in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme and in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme are required to continue to identify and review targets and actions for improvement, and to record these in a **single clearly-labelled action-planning document**. The DEIS themes² and language-based criteria for immersion education, and/or any other SSE priority area(s), should be included under relevant headings in the action plan to facilitate the monitoring of progress and development.

Schools should share a short summary of the school's self-evaluation report and school-improvement plan with their school community annually.

4. Research on and Evaluation of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme: Phase 2

The Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme is based on the ongoing development and enhancement of immersion education through the school self-evaluation (SSE) process, which guides the identification, implementation and ongoing review of targets and actions. Participation in the Scheme also encourages the fostering of purposeful links between the school community and local language-planning committees to extend the use of Irish in Gaeltacht communities.

A three-year Research and Evaluation Study plan has been developed by the Gaeltacht Education Unit in collaboration with the ERC and the Inspectorate to evaluate the impact and outcomes of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme in order to inform future policy and practice in schools. The findings from the research and evaluation study will identify the strengths of the Scheme and the areas requiring further development in order to fulfil the language-based criteria to gain recognition as a Gaeltacht school. An Interim Composite Report on the initial findings from the research and evaluation study will be published on the Department's website in spring 2021. The Research and Evaluation study will continue during 2021/22.

5. Further Information/FAQs

The continuing participation of schools in the Scheme will be contingent on satisfying the conditions of this Circular and any other circulars relating to the Scheme. Where the Department, at any time, determines that the conditions of the Scheme are not being fulfilled, the right is reserved to remove a school from the Scheme. If there is dissatisfaction with the Department's decision regarding any specific aspect of the administration of the Scheme, an appeal will be considered by an independent panel.

The Gaeltacht Education Unit in the Department of Education will continue to oversee, manage and support the implementation of the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017- 2022* and the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme in this next implementation phase.

Additional information and updates on the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme and on the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 are published regularly on the Department's website. A frequently-asked questions (FAQs) document is also available on the Department's website and these will continue to be updated.

² DEIS Plan 2017 - Themes: attendance, retention, literacy and numeracy, leadership, wellbeing continuing professional development (CPD), transitions, partnership with parents and others.



Queries in relation to the operation of the Scheme or the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 should be emailed to aog@education.gov.ie

Issued by: Treasa Kirk, Gaeltacht Education Unit / An tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta
Date Issued: March 2021

Principals of post-primary schools in Gaeltacht language-planning areas are asked to please bring this Circular to the attention of each member of the board of management/education and training board, teachers (including those on leave of absence), the school patron, ancillary staff, parents/guardians, and the local school community.

This Circular can be accessed on the Department's website at the following LINK:
www.education.ie



Appendix 1

Language-based criteria for recognition as a Gaeltacht primary school: Self-monitoring the school's progress in fulfilling the language-based criteria to strengthen immersion education

	The language-based criteria for a Gaeltacht primary school	1	2	3	4
		to be implemented	progress made	being implemented	implemented
1	Implement a two-year total-immersion programme ³ through Irish in infant classes, during which no English will be taught				
2	Implement a total-immersion approach , where all areas of learning, apart from English, will be taught through Irish				
3	Deliver high-quality educational experiences through Irish to all pupils focusing particular attention on the differentiated language needs of native Irish speakers ⁴ as well as learners of Irish				
4	Develop a whole-school action plan for improvement that will: a) set out how the school will ensure the use of Irish as the language of communication, instruction and socialisation within the school and b) communicate and promote the benefits of learning Irish and learning through Irish to the school community (principal, staff, pupils, parents and board of management)	a)			
		b)			
5	Review the quality of educational provision through Irish to ensure continuous improvement through the school self-evaluation (SSE) process				
6	Provide Irish-language learning experiences in accordance with the L1 ⁵ learning outcomes in the Primary Language Curriculum for Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools				
7	Use Irish-language resources to support the teaching of all curricular areas through Irish, apart from the English curriculum				
8	Deliver curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities (where provided) through Irish				
9	Support their school community in the language-planning process (under the Gaeltacht Act 2012) by contributing to the use and maintenance of Irish in the school and local Gaeltacht community				
10	Prioritise the use of Irish in communicating with parents, the local community and other parties				
11	Establish useful and mutually-beneficial language and cultural links with local Irish-medium early-years settings (<i>naíonraí</i>)				

³ A total-immersion programme in infant classes means that the learning environment operates solely through Irish and the teaching of English will commence from first class. This enables the fuller development of children's Irish-language capacities in infant classes.

⁴ A native speaker of Irish is defined as a child who is raised through Irish in an Irish-language community and whose parents speak Irish as the main language of communication in the home, such being declared at the point of enrolment for school (*Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022*, p 11)

⁵ L1 refers to Irish as the main language of the school in relation to teaching and learning, and communication in official, administrative and recreational affairs.



12	Establish useful and mutually-beneficial language and cultural links with local Irish-medium post-primary schools and other Irish-medium primary schools				
13	Make every effort to recruit teaching and ancillary staff who are proficient in Irish and have a knowledge and understanding of pedagogical practice relevant to teaching through Irish as well as an understanding of the language and cultural dynamics of the Gaeltacht.				



Appendix 2

Guide on how to make the most effective use of the additional support hours for Irish

At school management level

- The school's board of management and senior management team should monitor continuously how successfully the additional support hours for Irish are implemented to improve pupils' learning. The effectiveness of provision should be reviewed regularly through the school self-evaluation process.
- Collaboration at whole-school and class levels is required so that the role and responsibilities of mainstream teachers, the special education teacher, the support teacher for Irish and the language assistant are agreed in order to provide differentiated language support for pupils.

Planning for teaching and assessment in collaboration with mainstream teachers

- Both formative and summative assessments of the pupils' language competence in Irish should be carried out to monitor their progress, and this should be done in collaboration with other relevant teachers and with the language assistant.
- As part of the school-improvement planning process, schools should make use of recent assessment results to identify the language-learning needs of pupils. This will assist all teachers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the language needs of pupils, and to plan interventions accordingly to address the priority language competences of pupils.
- Clear records of the progress of all learners in Irish should be maintained to inform the teaching and learning process, and the relevant information should be shared with parents, as appropriate.
- It is particularly important that pupils' self-awareness as language learners be developed through the assessment process and it would be beneficial to develop pupils' self-assessment and peer-assessment skills.
- It is recommended that pupils be enabled to develop a language diary/learning log to demonstrate their language competence and progress and help them monitor and self-evaluate their learning journey. This diary/log could be designed in a manner that would show pupils' learning goals, their learning goals attained, and the learning experiences that proved challenging on their language-learning journey.

At class level

- Pupils need to be taught the academic language and terminology associated with the various curricular areas. Regular opportunities should be provided to enable pupils to practise and acquire the new terminology in creative and innovative ways.
- Pupils' early experience of language learning is an important starting point for further language development. In infant classes, an early intervention Irish-language literacy programme, based on the principles of Aistear, should be implemented in collaboration with the class teacher, with a particular focus on the specific language needs of both native speakers and learners with limited Irish.
- The native speaker of Irish provides a rich source for the language development of all pupils. Their language competence should also be developed and further enriched through group activities and team teaching.
- The use of differentiated teaching strategies, questioning, games and communication tasks is recommended. Enriched language input from the teacher and participation in interactive tasks, such as project work, role-play, drama, discussion, and cooperative learning, help pupils to identify and manipulate target structures in the language. This greatly enhances their self-confidence in speaking Irish.



- Pupils' participation can be encouraged and their language skills developed through the use of digital technology and Irish-language digital links, whether pupils are in school or at home.
- Literature should be used to develop pupils' writing and reading skills as well as to develop their language enrichment, accuracy, awareness and creativity in an integrated manner, as laid down in the Primary Language Curriculum.
- It is especially important that pupils be provided with a wide range of reading and literary material in Irish covering a wide range of genres, including local and oral literature, which is suited to their interests, age and ability in the language.
- Pupils should be made aware of celebrated speakers of Irish in the local community and further afield, who are a source of Irish-language enrichment and wisdom. The school should avail of opportunities to invite such guest speakers to stimulate pupils' pride in Irish language and culture.

Outside the class

- It is through participation in language and cultural events that pupils' motivation, language competency and identity as Irish speakers in their own community and beyond are strengthened. Such activities include literary competitions or festivals, entrepreneurship, reporting, debating, arts and sports as well as participation in Irish-language movements and in networks with pupils in other Irish-medium schools.



Appendix 3

School Cluster Application Form 2021/22

Application Form to create a temporary full-time teaching post through school clusters for the 2021/22 school year

Schools must ensure that the teacher selected for the post has a high level of proficiency in the Irish language and can fulfil the roles, as appropriate.

	Cluster options	Please tick one option
A	Irish-language support hours combined between schools	
B	Combine Irish-language support hours and special education teaching hours between schools	
C	Combine Irish-language support hours and special education teaching hours in the same school	

This form must be completed and an electronic copy (scanned with signatures) returned by email aog@education.gov.ie to the Gaeltacht Education Unit **by 20 April 2021**.

Details of the Base School for the new full-time temporary post created by clustering hours (1 post = 25 hours)

Name of the Base School: (The base school must be participating in the Scheme)	
Roll Number:	
School Address:	
Email Address:	
Phone Number:	

Details of partner schools for the new full-time temporary post created by clustering hours (partner schools must be in the Scheme) (1 post = 25 hours)

	School Name	Roll Number	Total no. of Irish-language support hours allocated to the school under the Scheme	No. of Irish-language support hours in the cluster	No. of special education teaching hours in the cluster
Base school					
2 nd school					
3 rd school					
Total cluster hours:					

Details of part-time Irish-language support hours not used in this cluster (i.e. total Irish-language support hours minus the Irish-language support hours in the cluster). These hours will be approved as part-time hours on the OLCs.



	School Name	Roll Number	Number of Irish-language support hours NOT used in cluster
Base school			
2 nd school			
3 rd school			
Total:			

All cluster arrangements **relating to the creation of new full-time temporary posts arising from the combination of Irish-language support hours will be for the 2021/22 school year only.**

Please note: In the exceptional case that a school is involved in more than one cluster arrangement, the appropriate form must be submitted for each cluster.

Declaration

I declare that the above information is correct and that I agree with the proposed cluster arrangements for this post as outlined above.

BASE SCHOOL: School name: _____ Roll No: _____

Signature of principal of base school

Signature of chairperson of base school

Date: _____ Contact Number: _____

2nd SCHOOL: School name: _____ Roll No: _____

Signature of principal of 2nd school

Signature of chairperson of 2nd school

Date: _____ Contact Number: _____

3rd SCHOOL: School name: _____ Roll No: _____

Signature of principal of 3rd school

Signature of chairperson of 3rd school

Date: _____ Contact Number: _____

Relevant sections of the Department will be provided with the information in this form, as required. The Department's Teacher Allocation Section will also be provided with a copy of this form for its records.

The main purpose for which the Department requires the personal data provided by you is for the arrangement of school clusters for the creation of temporary shared teaching posts in the school year 2021/22. This on the basis of the additional hours allocated to schools under the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme. The personal data provided may be exchanged with other sections within the Department of Education and with other schools involved in the clustering arrangement. Full details of the Department's data protection policy setting out how we will use your personal data, as well as information regarding your rights as a data subject, are available at this **LINK**.