



Circular 0022/2024

To: Boards of management, principals and teaching staff of primary schools in the Gaeltacht not currently participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme

Policy on Gaeltacht Education

Invitation to Primary Schools in Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas to Consider Joining the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme

1. Purpose of the Circular

The purpose of this Circular is to provide information for school authorities located in Gaeltacht language planning areas and not currently participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme (Scheme) of the process required to join the Scheme. While schools will still have the option to join the Scheme in future, it is not planned to issue further circulars to invite schools to participate in the Scheme.

This Circular follows on from Circular 0016/2023 and previous circulars on the Scheme covering the period from 2017 to 2022/23.

Part A of the Circular sets out the steps involved in order to join the Scheme. **Part B** outlines the additional supports that will be provided at planning and implementation stages for new applicant schools.

2. Background

The [Policy on Gaeltacht Education](#) was launched in 2016 with the overarching goal of "ensuring that a high quality and relevant Irish-medium educational experience is available to all young people living in Gaeltacht areas". To support the implementation of this goal, the [Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme](#) was established, which gives schools in Gaeltacht language-planning areas the opportunity to seek recognition as Gaeltacht Schools. Schools must meet the specific language-based criteria (see Appendix 1) in order to achieve this recognition. Additional targeted supports are provided to schools to support them in implementing the Scheme.

Participation in the Scheme provides many advantages for the school and the pupils (see Part B). The Department is committed to providing additional resources for schools participating in the Scheme to support them in fulfilling the Irish language-based criteria to gain recognition as a Gaeltacht School.

The main aim of the Scheme is to strengthen immersion education experiences in Irish to support pupils' language acquisition and enrichment. Early-immersion gives the opportunity for pupils to acquire Irish as a natural means of communication through activity-based learning and play in infant classes to support them on their language-learning journey. Bilingual education greatly helps with the development of pupils' communicative and creative skills, and with their higher-order thinking.

The Department urges schools to consider the educational benefits of immersion education and the opportunity schools can provide to make a meaningful impact on addressing the challenges relating to the decline in the use of Irish as a living language in Gaeltacht communities.

3. Contents of this this Circular

Part A	The process to join the Scheme
Part B	The supports provided at the planning and implementation stages for new applicant schools
Appendix 1	Language-based criteria for recognition as a Gaeltacht primary school
Appendix 2	Expression of Interest Form for primary schools in Gaeltacht language-planning areas opting to join the Scheme
Appendix 3	Guide on how to make the most effective use of the additional support hours for Irish
Appendix 4	Sample Action-Planning Template: to assist schools in setting out targets and actions to fulfil the language-based criteria to strengthen immersion education.

Part A: Process to join the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme

4. Submission of Expression of Interest to join the Scheme

To join the Scheme, a school must complete the Expression of Interest Form attached to this Circular (Appendix 2) and return it electronically (signed and scanned) to aog@education.gov.ie.

Prior to completing the Expression of Interest Form, the decision to participate in the Scheme should be made following consultation with the school's patron, teaching staff, parents' association and local language-planning committee. The approval of the school's board of management must be obtained.

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

Schools joining the Scheme must develop an action plan for school improvement, based on the language-based criteria to strengthen immersion education¹, and taking

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, where English is not taught during this period.

account of the school's context. The language-based criteria for primary schools to gain recognition as a Gaeltacht School are set out in Appendix 1.

The school's action plan will set out how the school will fulfil the language-based criteria in a phased manner to improve immersion education. This includes planning for purposeful links with the school community and with local language-planning committees to extend the use of Irish in Gaeltacht communities.

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

Schools participating in the DEIS Programme (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) who join the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme identify targets and actions that satisfy both the criteria of the Scheme and the DEIS Programme. They must clearly identify, review, and register these goals and activities in their school improvement plan. Insofar as is possible, the priority SSE areas that support the implementation of immersion education should be included under the relevant headings in the DEIS action plan.

A sample action plan template is provided in Appendix 4. Schools may adapt this template to suit their own particular school context.

Following the review by the Department of action plans submitted, feedback will be provided by the Gaeltacht Education Unit and schools will have an opportunity to make any necessary amendments to the action plans. When the action plans have been approved, schools will be able to access the resources provided to schools participating in the Scheme to support the implementation of immersion education from the following September.

PART B

6. Supports available to primary schools in the Gaeltacht new to the Scheme during the action-planning phase

During the action-planning development phase, the following additional supports will be provided for primary schools joining the Scheme:

- **For primary schools with teaching principals:** two additional principal release/administrative days with substitute cover will be provided for teaching principals to support the development of an action plan.
- **For primary schools with administrative principals:** one additional release/administrative day with substitute cover will be provided for one member of the teaching staff to support the administrative principal in the action-planning process.
- Advisory visits from the Inspectorate will provide support and feedback to schools on the school improvement action-planning process.
- Additional CPD will be provided by COGG.

7. Additional resources and supports available to primary schools in the Gaeltacht new to the Scheme during the first phase of implementation

Following the approval of schools' action-plans, schools new to the Scheme will be eligible to access additional resources and supports to assist them in the implementation of their action plans. These include:

- Language support hours for Irish based on school enrolment
- Annual grant (€1,200) to purchase Irish language teaching resources
- Support from the Department of Education's Inspectorate
- Continuing professional development
- Guidance for schools
- Sharing of best practice.

Irish-language support hours

From the September following approval of the school's action plan, Irish-language support hours will be allocated to the school. Details of the language support hours are provided in the annual circulars issued by AOG. The hours allocated are based on the school's enrollment from the 30 September in the previous school year.

The language-support hours for Irish should be used 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 3 provides guidance on how to make the most effective use of the additional support hours for Irish. The use of these hours will be monitored during Inspectorate advisory visits.

The Irish-language support hours will be allocated as part-time hours to primary schools participating in the Scheme. A group of schools may form a cluster to create a permanent full-time teaching post² by combining the part-time Irish-language support hours allocated to each school in the cluster. A School Cluster Application Form and further detail on the clusters are available AOG's circular issued to primary schools participating in the Scheme.

Grant allocation

A grant of €1,200 will be paid to schools participating in the Scheme for the purchase of Irish-medium teaching resources. Schools should adhere to all relevant procedures, including in respect of public procurement and financial management in respect of this grant, including the retention of all receipts and records of expenditure.

Inspectorate Support

Inspectors will carry out advisory visits to provide support to schools in implementing the language-based criteria to achieve Gaeltacht school recognition. They will also provide information to the Department of Education on the progress being made by schools.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Primary schools participating in the Scheme will be provided with CPD support by COGG. Each school in the Scheme may also apply to the support service for teachers and school leaders, [Oide](#), for customized school support in all areas of teaching, learning and school self-evaluation. This can be sought through the usual contact channels for support or by sending an email to eolas@oide.ie. As part of their duties, the newly established GaelAonad in Oide together with other Divisions of

² Schools must ensure that the teachers selected for these posts are appropriately qualified and registered with the Teaching Council in accordance with the relevant recruitment circular, and that they have a high level of proficiency in Irish and a good understanding of immersion education.

Oide attends to the specific needs of schools that operate through the medium of Irish.

Where necessary, and as resources permit, substitute cover for attendance at seminars/workshops will be provided for through the Online Claims System (OLCS) up to a maximum of two days for two teachers. These days may be claimed from the OLCS by selecting the following: *Continuing Professional Development/Professional Activities – Gaeltacht Education Policy*.

8. Validation Process for Recognition as a Gaeltacht School

The [validation process](#) for schools already participating in the Scheme commenced in October 2022. The purpose of the validation process is to ensure that Schools are implementing the language-based criteria set out for the Scheme. In this process, the school's entitlement to recognition as a Gaeltacht School is validated through an evaluation visit from the Inspectorate. Schools joining the Scheme after 2023/24 will be given sufficient time – commensurate with that available to other schools in the Scheme – to progress the implementation of the language-based criteria before being included in the validation process.

9. Further Information

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. In the case of 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.

Additional information on the Scheme is available on gov.ie. Queries in relation to the Scheme should be emailed to aog@education.gov.ie.

Issued by: Muireann Tóibín, An tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta, The Department of Education

Date: 26 February 2024

Principals of 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 and 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 gov.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
		to be implemented	progress made	being implemented
1	Implement a two-year total-immersion programme³ 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			

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*, p 11)

	the L1⁵ learning outcomes in the <i>Primary Language Curriculum for Gaeltacht</i> 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>)			
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.			

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.

**Appendix 2:
Expression of Interest Form**

**To be completed by the management of primary schools expressing an interest
in participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme**

Please return your completed Expression of Interest Form to the [Gaeltacht Education Unit](#) electronically (signed and scanned).

School name: _____ **Roll number:** _____

School address:

Phone number: _____ **E-mail:** _____

I wish to confirm that the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme and the content of Circular 0022/2024 was discussed at meetings with the teaching staff, the parents' association, and the board of management.

	Signature	Date
Principal of school		
Chairperson of the board of management		

I wish to confirm that the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme and the content of Circular 0022/2024 was discussed with the Chairperson of the local Gaeltacht language-planning committee.

	Signature	Date
Chairperson of the Gaeltacht language-planning committee		

3) In expressing interest in joining the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme, please provide a short account on the following (max 200 words):

- The school’s decision with regard to participation in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme
- The steps which were taken, including consultation with the school community, to come to the decision to participate in the Scheme
- Any initiatives in which the school is currently involved to promote the Irish language in the community
- The contact the school has made with the committee responsible for the language plan in its Gaeltacht language-planning area to ensure that the committee is aware of the school’s interest in participating in the Scheme to achieve Gaeltacht school status.

It is possible that the information provided by you in this form may become the subject of a request under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2014, and this may lead to some or all of it being released to a requester. We are therefore requesting you, as part of your reply, to identify any information in your reply which you deem to be sensitive and exempt from release under the FOI Act. This will assist the Department of Education in the decision-making process if an FOI request is received. Please note that information contained in this form may also be provided to COGG to facilitate their role in the implementation of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education.

I wish to REGISTER OUR SCHOOL’S EXPRESSION OF INTEREST in participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme

	Signature	Date
Principal of school		
Chairperson of the board of management		

Appendix 3: 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 support teacher and 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 of 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 L1 all-Irish schools.

Appendix 4:

Teimpléad Samplach do Phlean Gníomhaíochta do chur i bhfeidhm na gcritéar teanga don tumoideachas

Ainm na scoile		Uimhir rolla	
Dáta		Dáta athbhreithnithe	
Comhthéacs na scoile	<p>Tabhair cuntas achomair soiléir le pointí urchair de réir mar atá ábhartha (<i>m.sh. líon foirne agus rollúchán; stádas DEIS; comhthéacs teangeolaíochta na scoile; cleachtas reatha maidir leis an teagasc trí Ghaeilge; tacaíochtaí don Ghaeilge ar fáil sa scoil/sa phobal scoile; comhpháirtíocht le tuismitheoirí; nasc leis an gcoiste pleanála teanga áitiúil; naisc le scoileanna eile/naíonraí &rl</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • 		

Seo a leanas sampla de theimpléad a d'fhéadfaí a úsáid chun plean a dhearadh do chritéar teanga amháin a chur i bhfeidhm. D'fhéadfadh sprioc amháin nó níos mó a bheadh ag an scoil don chritéar sin. Is féidir an teimpléad a chóipeáil de réir mar is gá, ag brath ar líon na gcritéar teanga agus líon na spriocanna atá á chur i bhfeidhm sa tréimhse ama ar leith. Moltar plean a dhearadh do bhliain amháin ar dtús le go bhfeicfead an dul chun cinn atá déanta taobh istigh den tréimhse ama sin.

Critéar Teanga						
Spriocanna feabhsúcháin	Gníomhartha riachtanacha	Fráma ama	Ba(i)ll foirne atá freagrach	Monatóireacht agus Athbhreithniú		
				Dáta	Gnéithe atá bainte amach	Forbairt le déanamh
1				Dáta	Gnéithe atá bainte amach	Forbairt le déanamh
2				Dáta	Gnéithe atá bainte amach	Forbairt le déanamh
3				Dáta	Gnéithe atá bainte amach	Forbairt le déanamh