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 (2022-2024)

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 2022/2023 and in 2023/2024. This Circular follows on from Circular 0012/2021 and previous circulars on the Scheme covering the period from 2017 to 2020/21.

Summary of key points:

- The process to validate the recognition of schools as Gaeltacht Schools under the terms of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme will be undertaken during the period from October 2022 to 2024. This process will be overseen by the Gaeltacht Education Unit in conjunction with the Department's Inspectorate and with the support of COGG. Further details on the operation of the process will be provided to schools in the Scheme after Easter 2022.

- Schools should continue to monitor and progress the implementation of immersion education[1] to meet the language-based criteria (Appendix 1) by reviewing existing targets as well as identifying new targets and actions in order to obtain recognition as a Gaeltacht school. Schools are also reminded to use the Guide for Gaeltacht Primary Schools: Indicators of Good Practice for Immersion Education to support the efforts of boards of management and school communities.

- 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. The 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 good practice in immersion education will be collected and shared in collaboration with individual schools.

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[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.

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 (2022 - 2024)

As provided for in previous circulars on the Scheme including Circular 0012/2021, 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 primary schools in the Scheme in the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 school years, as outlined below.

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

Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme – primary schools	
Primary school enrolment on 30 September 2021 for the 2022/23 school year and 30 September 2022 for the 2023/24 school year	**Number of additional language-support hours for Irish per week per school for the school years 2022/23 and 2023/24**
<50	5
51-80	7.5
81-140	10
141-173	12.5
174-242	15
243-464	17.5
>465	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 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. A School Cluster Application Form will need to be forwarded to aog@education.gov.ie by 9 May for each school year to which it applies.

- 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 are allocated separately due to administrative purposes, schools within the cluster can combine these hours to create temporary teaching posts in 2022/23 and in 2023/24. In such cases, schools must ensure that the teachers selected for these posts are registered with the Teaching Council and have a high level of proficiency in Irish and a good understanding of immersion education.

- **Grant allocation:** An annual grant of €1,200 will be paid in 2022 and 2023 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 [COGG website](#).

  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.

- **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.

- **Continuing Professional Development (CPD) support:** Primary schools participating in the Scheme will be provided with CPD support by COGG, and other nationally-provided CPD is accessed as normal by these schools. A combination of distance-learning webinars and face-to-face sessions (when possible in accordance with the public health guidelines) will continue to be provided to support the evolving CPD needs of schools in implementing immersion education. COGG will continue to facilitate opportunities for the development of principal and teacher online networks to enable the identification and sharing of good practice. Every effort will be made to ensure the safety and protection 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 2022/23 and 2023/24 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 don 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](#) (PDST) for customised school support in all areas of teaching, learning and school self-evaluation.

- **COGG Web Portal:** Language resources for the Gaeltacht and Irish-medium sectors will continue to be developed. The COGG web portal, [An Tairseach](#), which will be launched during 2022, 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 on the portal.

- **Links between early learning and care settings and primary schools:** A [Guide for Gaeltacht Primary Schools: Strengthening links between primary schools and early learning and care (ELC) settings](#), commissioned by COGG, was published in June 2021 to support the implementation of immersion education. This evidence-based guide provides practical advice, and exemplars of good practice, to ensure that transition from the naíonra to the primary school is a positive experience for children in the Gaeltacht.

- **Links with the language-planning process:** A [Guide for Gaeltacht Schools: Partnership with the community in promoting the use of Irish](#) has been 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. This guide, published in June 2021, provides practical advice on how best to strengthen links, engagement and participation between the school management, wider school community and the local language-planning committee.

- **Special Education in Immersion Settings:** A Guide for Gaeltacht schools on special education in Irish-medium immersion education settings will be developed in collaboration with COGG in 2022 to support the implementation of the Department's *Guidelines for Primary Schools Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* (Appendix 5).

- **Dissemination of examples of good practice:** Plans will progress in 2022-2024 to identify and share examples of innovative practice in immersion education in schools participating in the Scheme. Further details 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 themes[2] 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 and Evaluation Study on the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme

The Educational Research Centre (ERC) will continue with the Research and Evaluation Study of the Scheme, in conjunction with the Gaeltacht Education Unit and the Inspectorate of the Department of Education, in 2022-2024. The purpose of the research study is to assess the impact of the Scheme on the provision of education through the medium of Irish and to establish how schools are managing to fulfil the language-based criteria to achieve recognition as a Gaeltacht school. 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.

An initial [Report on Case-Study Schools participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme](#) was published in September 2021. These case-studies, which were carried out in twelve primary schools and seven post-primary schools, provide a comprehensive insight into the schools' own innovations and good practices, and on their learnings to date. The ongoing collaboration and participation of schools in this research is acknowledged.

The ERC is undertaking research on student attainment and on the views of parents, students, teachers and principals of schools participating in the Scheme. A report on these research findings will be published by in 2022/23.

5. Validation process for Gaeltacht School recognition

A validation process for granting recognition as a Gaeltacht school will be carried out in the period from October 2022 to 2024. The process will be overseen by the Gaeltacht Education Unit in conjunction with the Department's Inspectorate and with the support of COGG. The validation process implemented will take account of feedback received from relevant organisations, including the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (DTCAGSM), Údarás na Gaeltachta, An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) and other members of the Gaeltacht Education Policy Advisory Committee. Further details on the operation of this process will be provided in a Guide for Primary Schools, which will issue to schools after Easter 2022.

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

6. Further Information/FAQs

The continuing participation of schools in the Scheme will be contingent on satisfying the conditions of this Circular and 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.

Additional information on the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme and on the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 is available on gov.ie.

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**

Muireann Tóibín
Gaeltacht Education Unit / An tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta
Department of Education / An Roinn Oideachais

26 April 2022

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/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 www.gov.ie.

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 to be implemented	2 progress made	3 being implemented	4 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	a)			
	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)	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** (*naíonraí*)				

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[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 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 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.

School Cluster Application Form 2022/23 and 2023/24

Application Form to create a temporary full-time teaching post through school clusters for the 2022/23 and 2023/2024 school years.

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 9 May of the school year to which it applies.**

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**	

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					
2nd school					
3rd school					
Total cluster hours:					

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

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.

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 2022/23 and 2023/24 school years 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.