



Circular 0011/2020

POLICY ON GAELTACHT EDUCATION 2017-2022

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

Ongoing Implementation of the Scheme (2020 - 2021)

TO BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT, PRINCIPALS AND TEACHING STAFF OF POST- PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN GAELTACHT LANGUAGE-PLANNING AREAS, AND TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARDS

1. Purpose of Circular

The purpose of this Circular is to inform school authorities of the next steps to be taken by the Department of Education and Skills (Department) and by post-primary schools in relation to the continuing implementation of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme (Scheme) in 2020/2021. This Circular follows on from Circulars 0034/2017, 0022/2018 and 0010/2019, which outlined the initial implementation phases of the Scheme covering the period from 2017 to 2020.

Summary of key points:

- Schools should continue to plan for the 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.
- Additional targeted resources will continue to be provided to support schools' participation in the Scheme including Irish-language support hours, a grant for Irish-medium resources, continuing professional development (CPD) and Inspectorate advisory visits.
- During the 2020/21 school year, the Inspectorate's advisory visits will place a particular focus on good practice relating to immersion education in schools participating in the Scheme.

Appendix attached to this Circular: Language-based criteria for recognition as a Gaeltacht post-primary school.

¹ In the context of a Gaeltacht post-primary school, immersion education refers to the practice of teaching all curriculum areas entirely through the medium of Irish, apart from the English and foreign language curricula.

2. Programme of supports for post-primary schools in the Scheme (2020 - 2021)

As provided for in previous (Circulars 0034/2017, 0022/2018 and 0010/2019), post-primary schools participating in the Scheme working to fulfil the language-based criteria (**Appendix 1**) are eligible to access additional resources and supports in order to fulfil the language-based criteria. These additional supports will continue to be made available to post-primary schools in the Scheme in the 2020/2021 school year, as outlined below:

- **Irish-language support hours:**

Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme – post-primary schools	
Post-primary school enrolment	Number of additional Irish-language support hours per school per week for the school year 2020-2021
< 150	7
150-300	9
>300	10

- The Irish-language support hours should be used solely to support the identified needs of native speakers and learners of Irish to develop and enrich their proficiency skills in Irish, particularly oral Irish. For guidance on the use of these Irish-language support hours, schools should consult the Department of Education and Skills' publication: *Inspectorate Advisory Visits 2020/2021: Guidelines for Primary and Post-Primary Schools in the Scheme*, which is available **HERE**. The use of these hours will be monitored during Inspectorate advisory visits.

The Irish-language support hours will be allocated to post-primary schools participating in the Scheme on the Staffing Schedule. Schools will be expected to manage the allocation of these Irish-language support hours effectively to ensure the maximum benefit for students' Irish-language learning.

As set out in circular 0010/2019, where a post-primary school is in a supernumerary position and a teacher is awarded a contract of indefinite duration (CID) as a result of the school's allocation for the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme, the CID hours will be offset against the Gaeltacht recognition allocation.

- **Grant allocation:** In May 2020, a grant of €1,200 will be paid to each post-primary school participating in the Scheme for the purchase of resources in Irish to support the provision of high-quality immersion education. A list of resources in Irish can be accessed on An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) website at www.cogg.ie.

Post-primary schools are required to retain all receipts and records of expenditure incurred for audit purposes in accordance with public procurement and financial procedures (see provisions of Department of Public Expenditure and Reform: Circular 0013/2014). School authorities must also ensure that the requirements of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Education and Skills are met in the public procurement, usage and disposal of assets.

- **Continuing Professional Development (CPD):** Post-primary schools participating in the Scheme will be provided with additional CPD, co-ordinated by COGG in conjunction with other support services and the Inspectorate. Where necessary, and as resources permit, substitution for attendance at seminars/workshops will be provided in 2020/21 through the

Online Claims System (OLCS) or under the management of the relevant Education and Training Board (ETB), up to a maximum of 2 days for 2 attendees in participating post-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*. It is intended that there will be one day school closure in Autumn 2020 for each post-primary school participating in the Scheme to enable all teaching staff attend the CPD provided. Details in relation to CPD plans for schools participating in the Scheme will be provided by COGG.

- **The E-hub pilot project:** The additional support provided for the implementation of the e-Hub pilot project in post-primary schools will continue in the 2020/2021 school year. The aim of the pilot project is to extend the range of subject options that are available through the medium of Irish for students in post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht. The focus of this online pilot project is currently on Leaving Certificate Physics. Additional funding for information and communications technology (ICT) resources and student supervision arrangements will be provided to any new receiver post-primary schools selected for the Leaving Certificate Physics e-Hub pilot from September 2020.

An evaluation of the e-Hub pilot project will be carried out in 2020/21 to consider its merits and impact.

- **Forás:** The implementation of the pilot Irish-language development programme (*Forás*) will continue in the 2020/2021 school year in the two post-primary schools already selected. This pilot programme involves the allocation of one additional whole-time equivalent teacher to each of the two selected post-primary schools. The objective of the project is to support junior cycle students who have an evident need to develop their Irish-language skills to do so over a transitional period so that they can beneficially engage with the curriculum through the medium of Irish. An evaluation of the Forás pilot programme to measure its impact will be carried out in 2020/21.
- **A revised version of Good-Practice Guidelines on Immersion Education for Post-Primary Schools will be published in 2020** to provide practical support for schools in implementing high quality immersion education. The Guide will support schools in:
 - identifying targets and actions to fulfil the language-based criteria for immersion education
 - reflecting on effective teaching and learning practices through the medium of Irish
 - engaging in professional dialogue on learning, teaching, management and leadership in the implementation of immersion education
 - identifying developing and extending good practice in immersion education.
- **Inspectorate Support:** Inspectors will conduct advisory visits to provide support to schools in implementing the language-based criteria and to provide information on progress being made by schools to the Department of Education and Skills.

In addition to the advice provided to schools, inspectors will observe examples of good innovative practice, identified by schools, relating to the provision of high-quality immersion education.

- **Event to celebrate and share good practice:** A shared-learning event will be organised in Quarter 4, 2020 to celebrate and share good 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. The action-planning 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 Irish-medium education.

Schools participating in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme are required to develop and implement action plans for improvement under the DEIS plan 2017 on specific themes.² Targets and actions in respect of the DEIS themes as well as those linked to language-based criteria related to immersion education, and/or any other priority area(s), should be incorporated, under relevant sections, into **one clearly-labelled action-planning document**. Schools should create a short summary of the self-evaluation report and school improvement plan and share it with their school community annually.

4. Evaluation of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme

The Scheme is based on the ongoing development and enhancement of immersion education whereby the school self-evaluation (SSE) process is effectively used to guide the identification and implementation of targets and actions, and to foster 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 Educational Research Centre (ERC) and Inspectorate to evaluate the impact of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme to inform future policy and practice. The findings from the evaluation study will identify the strengths of the Scheme and inform further improvement in the provision of high quality Irish-medium education to gain recognition as a Gaeltacht school. An Interim Composite Report on the initial findings from this research and evaluation study will be published in 2020.

5. Further Information/FAQs

The continuing participation of post-primary 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 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.

The Gaeltacht Education Unit in the Department of Education and Skills 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 will continue to be updated.

² DEIS Plan 2017 themes: attendance, retention, progression, literacy and numeracy, leadership, wellbeing, continuing professional development (CPD), transitions, partnership with parents and examination attainment.

Queries in relation to the operation of the Scheme or the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* should be emailed to aog@education.gov.ie or addressed to: **An tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta, An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna, Sráid Maoilbhríde, Baile Átha Cliath 1, DO1 RC96**

Treasa Kirk

Ceannasaí, An tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta/*Head of Gaeltacht Education Unit*
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna/*Department of Education and Skills*

February 2020

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 Boards, 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 post-primary school

1.	Extend the availability of a full curriculum through Irish, apart from the English and other language curricula, as the Gaeltacht school moves towards a total-immersion approach.
2.	Deliver high quality educational experiences through Irish to all students focusing particular attention on the differentiated language needs of native Irish speakers ³ as well as learners of Irish.
3.	Develop a whole-school action plan for improvement that will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set out how the school will ensure the use of Irish as the language of communication, instruction and socialisation within the school and • communicate and promote the benefits of learning Irish and learning through Irish to the school community (principal, staff, students, parents and board of management).
4.	Review the quality of educational provision through Irish to ensure continuous improvement through the school self-evaluation (SSE) process.
5.	Implement L1 specification for Irish at Junior Cycle.
6.	Use Irish-language resources to support the teaching of all curricular areas through Irish, apart from the English curriculum.
7.	Deliver curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities (where provided) through Irish.
8.	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.
9.	Prioritise the use of Irish in communicating with parents, the local community and other parties.
10.	Establish useful and mutually-beneficial language and cultural links with local Irish-medium post-primary schools and other Irish-medium primary schools.
11.	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.

³ 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)