

REVIEW OF EDUCATION IN THE GAELTACHT: REVIEW OF NATIONAL LITERATURE

Department of Education and Skills



INSPECTORATE

Review of Education in the Gaeltacht:
Review of National Literature

© 2015 Department of Education and Skills

Published by:
Department of Education and Skills
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1

This report and related reports may be accessed at
www.education.ie

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
GLOSSARY.....	iii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. THE APPROACH TO THE REVIEW OF NATIONAL LITERATURE	1
3. CHALLENGES FACING GAELTACHT SCHOOLS	2
4. PROPOSALS FOR ACTION IN GAELTACHT EDUCATION RESEARCH	5
4.1 Categorisation of Gaeltacht schools	5
4.2 Governance for Gaeltacht education	7
4.3 Definition of Gaeltacht schools	9
4.4 Educational models to support teaching through Irish	10
4.5 Language curriculum	14
4.6 Assessment	17
4.7 Quality assurance	18
4.8 School management and leadership	19
4.9 Admissions policy	22
4.10 Whole-school planning	23
4.11 Resources to support teaching and learning	24
4.12 Language supports	26
4.13 Provision for special educational needs (SEN)	28
4.14 Teacher education	31
4.15 Parental support and involvement	37
4.16 Early-years education	39
5. CONCLUSIONS	40
5.1 Overall messages	40
5.2 Models of education	40
5.3 Drivers and support for Gaeltacht education	41
5.4 Actions for consideration	46
REFERENCES	49

GLOSSARY

CCEA:	The Council for Curriculum, Evaluation and Assessment (Northern Ireland)
COGG:	An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta
CPD:	Continuing professional development
DAHG:	Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
DCYA:	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DES:	Department of Education and Skills
EBSCO:	Online research database
GLPA:	Gaeltacht language planning areas
IPPN:	Irish Primary Principals' Network
ITE:	Initial teacher education
NAPD:	National Association for Principals and Deputy Principals
NCCA:	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE:	National Council for Special Education
NEPS:	National Educational Psychological Service
PDST:	Professional Development Service for Teachers
SEN:	Special educational needs
SESS:	Special Education Support Service

1. INTRODUCTION

This report provides a review of the national research relating to educational provision at primary and post-primary levels in Gaeltacht areas. It constitutes one strand of a review of Gaeltacht education that has been carried out by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Other strands of the Department's review include an analysis of educational supply and demand in Gaeltacht areas, an analysis of relevant international literature, and case studies in a sample of Gaeltacht schools. The aim of the DES review of Gaeltacht education is to identify policy options for the delivery of education in primary and post-primary schools of various linguistic profiles and to clarify the policy of the DES with regard to teaching through Irish in such schools in the context of the Education Act, 1998, the Gaeltacht Act, 2012 and the *20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030*.

This report examines the potential of proposals and recommendations put forward by the national research on how to address the challenges facing Gaeltacht schools with a view to informing DES policy on educational provision in Gaeltacht areas.

2. THE APPROACH TO THE REVIEW OF NATIONAL LITERATURE

The review of national literature examined papers published since 2002. Research strategies used included word searches, reviews of relevant bibliographies, and the use of search engines including Google Scholar and EBSCO Information Services.

The search indicated that while there is a wide range of materials published on the Irish language and the teaching of Irish generally, there is a paucity of national studies in relation to Gaeltacht education provision. However, there are a number of significant pieces of empirical research that are particularly relevant from an educational policy and provision perspective in relation to primary and post-primary education. Much of this research (e.g., Mac Donnacha, 2004; Mac Donnacha et al. 2005; Ó Duibhir, 2006; Máirtín, 2006; Ó Flatharta, 2007; Ní Shéaghdha, 2010; Péterváry et al. 2014) has been commissioned by An Chomhairle Um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG). COGG has a particular remit with regard to conducting research on the provision and promotion of education through the medium of Irish in schools located in Gaeltacht areas. Other research has been published or commissioned by state bodies or state-funded agencies such as the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs¹ (e.g., Ó Giollagáin et al., 2007), the former Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann (e.g., Harris et al., 2006), the Educational Research Centre (e.g., Gilleece et al., 2012), and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (e.g., Ó Laoire & Harris, 2006).

The research on Gaeltacht education generally reports from the premise that continued use of the Irish language as the language of the community in Gaeltacht areas, is critical to the future of the Irish language. The research focuses in particular on language use, competence and behaviour in Gaeltacht areas (Ó Giollagáin et al., 2007), the competence levels of young speakers of Irish in Gaeltacht schools (Mac Donnacha et al., 2005; Harris et al., 2006; Péterváry et al., 2014), effective practice in relation to language acquisition and enrichment of young native speakers (Ní Shéaghdha, 2010), the achievement of pupils in Gaeltacht primary schools in English and Mathematics (Gilleece et al., 2012), issues relating to special education (COGG, 2010), and teacher education (Ó Duibhir, 2006; Máirtín, 2006). The

¹ Now the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG)

research also focuses on early years' educational provision and issues relating to early-years education settings in Gaeltacht or minority language contexts. While the volume of research is limited, the papers available (e.g., Hickey, 1999; Hickey, 1997) provide some interesting insights into provision in this area.

Methodologies used in the research on Gaeltacht education include analyses of census data and other language data, recording and analysis of young speakers' speech patterns, questionnaires and interviews with parties within and outside schools. There is a notable absence of research in relation to language pedagogy in Gaeltacht schools. Similarly, as pointed out by Harris and Ó Duibhir (2011), there is a lack of research elsewhere relating to language pedagogy that is directly relevant to the Gaeltacht context for first-language speakers of Irish.

3. THE CHALLENGES FACING GAELTACHT SCHOOLS

The challenges facing Gaeltacht schools are well documented in the national research. The challenges include a decline in the Irish-language competence and use among young people; an increase in the proportion of English speakers; an increase in the proportion of English speakers; diversity of pupils' language background; and a decline in teaching through Irish.

Decline in Irish-language competence and use among young people

There is strong evidence to suggest that the language competence in Irish of children enrolled in Gaeltacht schools continues to decline. This is reflective of the general decline in the use of Irish as a community language across Gaeltacht areas. Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) in their study based on questionnaire data completed by principals found that even in the strongest Irish-speaking Gaeltacht areas, only slightly above half the pupils commence primary school with fluent or good Irish. Native-speaking pupils also increasingly constitute a minority of the overall enrolment of an increasing number of Gaeltacht schools. Gilleece et al. (2012) found that just a fifth of second class pupils and a quarter of sixth class pupils spoke Irish as the first language at home. Ní Shéaghda (2010) found that in Gaeltacht communities where Irish is the most widespread language of the community, only 60% of pupils (less than 1000 pupils), attending primary schools speak Irish as their first language.

There is also evidence that young native speakers of Irish are not achieving native speaker norms or full acquisition and enrichment in the language. Pétarváry et al. (2014) found that young native speakers are achieving higher levels of accuracy and competence in English than in Irish and that their ability in Irish is much lower than would be expected of a monolingual. Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) found that there is a decline in the use of Irish by young people with their peers as they get older. For example, the level of use of Irish among young people in the age ranges 5-8 to 15-18 in the Gaeltacht was found to drop from 17% to 9%. Hence, Irish is only spoken regularly as the language of socialisation by less than 10% of young people between the ages of 15-18 in Gaeltacht areas. Ó Giollagáin et al. also found that there is a significant decline from 41% to 24% in the use of Irish between the age ranges 5-8 and 15-18 in Gaeltacht areas (Category A) where Irish is spoken most frequently.

There is a strong suggestion that the current educational provision in the Gaeltacht is not fully meeting the linguistic needs of students, particularly native speakers of the language. Harris et al. (2006) found that between 1985 and 2002, there was a significant drop in standards of oral Irish among sixth class

pupils in Gaeltacht primary schools. Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) found that a quarter of pupils in Gaeltacht schools completed their primary schooling with only a fair mastery of the Irish language, and 10% of pupils left primary school with little mastery of Irish. Even in the Gaeltacht areas where Irish is spoken regularly, 14% of sixth class pupils were found to have low levels of fluency in Irish. Mac Donnacha et al. found that almost one fifth (18%) of Leaving Certificate students in post-primary Gaeltacht schools had fair levels of fluency and another 10% had little or no Irish. Even in the Gaeltacht areas where Irish is spoken regularly, 7% of students in Leaving Certificate were reported as having low levels of fluency in Irish. Mac Donnacha et al. also found that pupils use more English than Irish as the normal language of communication in most of the Gaeltacht primary schools, even in the Gaeltacht regions where the use of Irish is most widespread. Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) conclude that the Gaeltacht education system is not succeeding in transforming those who come to school as English speakers into active Irish speakers. Pétarváry et al. (2014) also contend that neither the Gaeltacht education system nor Gaeltacht communities are succeeding in enabling young native speakers of Irish to attain full acquisition in Irish.

Increase in the proportion of English speakers

The evidence from research suggests that the increasing proportion of English speakers in Gaeltacht schools has an adverse effect on the Irish-language competence of students in Gaeltacht schools. Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) and Harris et al. (2006) identify the increase of pupils whose first language is English in Gaeltacht schools as a significant factor impacting on the standards of Irish among learners in Gaeltacht schools, especially in the context that proficiency in Irish is positively correlated with the use of Irish in the home context. Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) contend that the participation of English speakers in the education system in Gaeltacht schools is reinforcing the use of English among young native speakers of Irish and constraining their socialisation in Irish and ability to achieve native speaker norms. The evidence regarding social dynamics and demographic changes in Gaeltacht regions, as outlined by Ó Giollagáin et al., suggests that this will be an ongoing challenge in Gaeltacht schools.

Diversity of pupils' language background

The research (e.g., Mac Donnacha et al., 2005; Harris et al., 2006) identifies the diversity of the language background of children who are enrolled in Gaeltacht schools as another factor adversely impacting on achievement levels in Irish. Some children come from families where Irish is spoken frequently, others come from homes where Irish is not the main language of communication, while others come to school with little or no experience of spoken Irish. Schools and teachers also face a significant challenge in enriching the Irish of young native speakers, along with enabling the other learners to acquire Irish as a second language, teaching English as a second language to the native speakers of Irish, and enabling learners to engage as expected with the curriculum. The danger, as highlighted by Ní Shéaghda (2010), Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) and Pétarváry et al. (2014), is that the needs of learners of Irish, who are often in the majority, are prioritised over the needs of native speakers of Irish who are in the minority. Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) note how the challenge in managing the variation in the language ability of the pupils is heightened by the prevalence of multi-grade classes at primary level.

Decline in teaching through Irish

There is also a decline in the number of schools teaching through Irish in Gaeltacht areas. Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) and Harris et al. (2006) note how, on the one hand, this decline is reflective of

the linguistic backgrounds of the pupils in a class and the impact of the sociolinguistic context of the Gaeltacht community on the prevailing culture and language practices of the schools, and how on the other hand, this decline is contributing to lower achievement in Irish among students in Gaeltacht schools.

Role of education and schools

Despite the challenges and shortcomings outlined above, there is general acknowledgement of the critical role that the education system and schools play in supporting the maintenance and revitalisation of the Irish language in Gaeltacht areas. Ó Laoire and Harris (2006; p7) note that:

While it is true that languages can survive without schools, education systems, nevertheless, have become the cornerstone in the process of reversing language shift in cases of minorised or endangered languages.... The school has become one of the most critical sites for reversing language shift and for language revitalisation in minority/endangered language contexts. Of all domains, the school is perhaps the most crucial and often bears the entire burden of language planning implementation.

Likewise, Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) and Péterváry et al. (2014) observe that pupils' acquisition of Irish in the Gaeltacht would be much diminished without the contribution of schools.

However, while schools play a central role in supporting the promotion of language competence and confidence, it is clear that it is not enough in itself. Ferguson (2006: p47) notes in light of observations from other researchers that while minority language schooling is helpful, even necessary for language revitalisation, it is insufficient and likely to be ineffective in the absence of actions in other domains that reinforce the effects of teaching. Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) and Péterváry et al. (2014) also acknowledge that the Irish language in Gaeltacht areas cannot be saved by the formal education system alone.

It also clear that the role of schools in Gaeltacht areas is changing. Due to the ongoing shift in language usage from Irish to English in Gaeltacht areas, Mac Donnacha et al. (2005), Ó Laoire and Harris (2006), NCCA (2007) and Ní Shéaghdha (2010) all highlight that the role of Gaeltacht schools has evolved from mainly supporting the maintenance of the language to supporting the revitalisation of the Irish language as a community language in Gaeltacht areas.

Provision for native speakers

A clear message coming from the research on Gaeltacht education is the need to prioritise the language needs of young native speakers of Irish within the educational system to ensure that there is a greater emphasis on catering for the needs of all pupils attending Gaeltacht schools. Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007), Ní Shéaghdha (2010) and Péterváry et al. (2014) point out that the education system must be linguistically appropriate in order to promote the Irish-language socialisation of young native speakers and that differentiated support must be provided for these speakers.

4. PROPOSALS FOR ACTION IN GAELTACHT EDUCATION RESEARCH

The research on Gaeltacht education provides a wide range of recommendations on how to advance education in Gaeltacht areas and address the challenges outlined above. These recommendations relate to the following themes in particular:

- Categorisation of Gaeltacht schools
- Governance for Gaeltacht education
- Definition of Gaeltacht schools
- Educational models to support teaching through Irish
- Language curriculum
- Assessment
- Quality assurance
- School management and leadership
- Admissions policy
- Whole-school planning
- Resources to support teaching and learning
- Language supports
- Provision for special educational needs (SEN)
- Teacher education
- Parental support and involvement
- Early-years education

The following sections consider the recommendations put forward in the research under each of the themes with a view to exploring their potential for informing future measures within the education system in relation to Gaeltacht education.

4.1 Categorisation of Gaeltacht schools

Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) recommend that a statutory mechanism be put in place that categorises Gaeltacht areas in accordance with the language patterns of the local community and clarifies the planning criteria that would apply for an area to be recognised as a statutory Gaeltacht area. With this in mind, Ó Giollagáin et al. identify three distinct types of language community within the statutory limits of the Gaeltacht area as currently defined:

Category A: Gaeltacht districts which refer to electoral divisions where more than 67% of the total population (aged 3 years plus) are daily speakers of Irish. These electoral divisions evidence the broadest spectrum of Irish-language use and exhibit stable levels of Irish-language use, except in the language behaviour of the younger age groups.

Category B: Gaeltacht districts which refer to electoral divisions where between 44-66% of the total population (aged 3 years plus) are daily speakers of Irish. Although English is the predominant language, these areas still contain some relatively strong Irish-speaking networks.

Category C: Gaeltacht districts which refer to electoral divisions where less than 44% of the total population (aged 3 years plus) are daily speakers of Irish. Although Irish is used to a very limited extent

as a community or institutional language in some of the electoral divisions in this category, it may still be used in some social networks, and in community and educational institutions within some areas.

Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) recommend that targeted language interventions be provided for Gaeltacht communities and the Gaeltacht Education system in line with the sociolinguistic profiles for each of these categories.

Similarly, Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) identify three categories of Gaeltacht schools, namely for the purposes of reporting on the competence levels of students in schools within these categories:

Category A: 31% of Gaeltacht schools (in which there are 28% of pupils) are based in strong Gaeltacht regions i.e. those regions where 70% of the community are daily speakers of Irish.

Category B: 18% of Gaeltacht schools (in which there are 21% of pupils) are based in areas where English is much more widespread as the language of the home and the community and where a significant proportion of the community is still using Irish with their families and in other social contexts i.e. the communities in which between 40% and 69% of the community are daily speakers of Irish.

Category C: 51% of Gaeltacht schools (in which there are 51% of the pupils) are based in areas where the use of Irish has declined significantly apart from a few exceptional home and social occasions i.e. those areas in which less than 40% of the community speak Irish on a daily basis.

Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) note that the language background of pupils differs greatly in the various school types, which has an adverse impact on their competence in Irish. For example, in Category A, 54% of children come to school with fluent or good Irish. In Category B, just 24% of children come to school with fluent or good Irish. Only 12% of pupils in Category C schools come to school with fluent or good Irish. Mac Donnacha et al. recommend that different language models of instruction should be provided in accordance with the category or language profile of the school.

Commentary

The language planning process being implemented in accordance with the Gaeltacht Act, 2012 incorporates much of the thinking and recommendations outlined in Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007). In the context of the Gaeltacht, the process will involve the preparation and implementation of language plans at community level for each of the 26 Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas, the geographic makeup of which has been agreed with Údarás na Gaeltachta. The language plan will be developed and implemented in accordance with prescribed criteria which centre on sociolinguistic indicators. The criteria include:

- the proportion of the population for which Irish is the spoken language
- the provision of Irish-medium services in the relevant area
- the provisions of the Education Act, 1998 being used, as appropriate, to support the Irish language in the relevant area
- the availability of Irish-medium primary and post-primary education in the relevant areas, in accordance with the policy of the Department of Education and Skills, including the availability of Irish-medium streams in English-medium schools and the teaching of a number of subjects through the Irish language in English-medium schools, as appropriate.

It is to be noted that the language planning criteria do not facilitate differentiated planning processes in accordance with the sociolinguistic profile of the different Gaeltacht areas. The complexity in delivering differentiated planning processes may have been a factor in determining the shape of the Gaeltacht planning processes that have commenced.

Mac Donnacha's (2005) categorisation of schools, in accordance with the sociolinguistic profile of Gaeltacht areas, is useful in terms of depicting the varying competence levels of students in Gaeltacht schools. However, it is unlikely that the provision of different language models of instruction using such categories would be feasible in light of the complexity involved in the delivery of such models, particularly in a context where the numbers of students in Gaeltacht areas is small and young native Irish speakers are dispersed widely for the most part. In the context of the planning processes taking place, as prescribed in the Gaeltacht Act, 2012, it would be preferable to focus on the provision of Irish-medium models of instruction to support those Gaeltacht communities that opt for official recognition as Gaeltacht language planning areas or Gaeltacht service towns.

4.2 Governance for Gaeltacht education

A recurring theme in some of the national research on Gaeltacht education is that the current arrangement of centralised responsibility for Gaeltacht education within the Department of Education and Skills (DES) is deficient in its capacity to support Irish-medium education in the Gaeltacht, and that there is a need to establish a separate structure and/or services to provide for Gaeltacht education. The research often refers to or envisages a central role for An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) in the administration of such a structure and in the co-ordination of bespoke support services for Gaeltacht schools.

Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) advise that education support services for the Gaeltacht should be integrated, and the Gaeltacht dealt with as a separate education sector comprising primary and post-primary Gaeltacht schools that teach through Irish along with the Irish-medium support and advisory services. They contend that such a proposal would ensure that existing expertise within the sectors is leveraged and built upon. To give effect to this recommendation, Mac Donnacha et al. recommend:

- the establishment of a dedicated Inspectorate for Gaeltacht education to function under the auspices of COGG but working with and reporting to the Inspectorate
- the establishment of designated units of the other major education support services currently providing support to Gaeltacht schools to function under the auspices of COGG, but to work with and report to the primary service to which they belong
- the establishment by COGG of a regional centre in each of the major Gaeltacht regions (with outreach centres in smaller Gaeltacht areas as appropriate) from which these support services and the Gaeltacht Inspectorate would operate.

Ó Flatharta (2007) recommends that a separate Gaeltacht Education Board be established with full responsibility for Gaeltacht education and the statutory powers and appropriate resources to enable it to implement those responsibilities. Ó Flatharta also advises that while a new statutory board established under the DES is the preferred option, the responsibility for a Gaeltacht board could be assigned to an existing statutory body, such as the Vocational Education Committees², COGG or Údarás na

² Now the Education and Training Boards

Gaeltachta. He also recommends that responsibility for Gaeltacht and Irish-medium education be assigned to a Minister of State in the Department of Education.

Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) recommend that COGG be established as a statutory body and that the DES delegate all policy considerations related to every aspect of the Gaeltacht education system to this new statutory body including many aspects of policy and provision not currently under its remit, such as pre- and in-service education of teachers, curriculum in Gaeltacht schools, teacher recruitment in Gaeltacht schools, inspection of Gaeltacht schools and the establishment of schools. Furthermore, they advocate that a Gaeltacht Education Authority or Board be established under the aegis of COGG which would be responsible for the delivery of the education system in the Gaeltacht.

Ní Shéaghda (2010) highlights the need for the establishment of a Gaeltacht Education Board, responsible for the administration of a new Gaeltacht education system that would provide the appropriate educational and linguistic supports to Gaeltacht pupils, particularly those whose first language is Irish.

Péterváry et al. (2014) advise that the administrative responsibilities of a system of additive minority-language education should be conferred on an independent patronage body that would be responsible for administering the system and that would work with government departments and agencies when necessary. Such a patronage system would be supported by a management structure, policy development structures for implementation review, a financial and capitation system, a newly reformed curriculum of high functional capacity, and systems for inspection, assessment and professional training. Alternatively, Péterváry et al. suggest that the DES or COGG could implement the proposals directly.

Commentary

The proposal to establish an education board for Gaeltacht education was given due consideration when the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* was being developed. A decision was made not to include this proposal as an action in the 20-Year Strategy in light of the fact that a clear policy position was reached in advance of the Education Act, 1998 not to proceed with proposals to develop decentralised educational structures. The establishment of a separate structure for Gaeltacht education would also have considerable resource implications at both national and local level and, in this regard, is not a viable option, particularly in the current fiscal climate. However, the concerns raised in the research do point to the need to ensure that there is appropriate leveraging and co-ordination of the resources and the supports that are currently available for Gaeltacht education provision.

The research on Gaeltacht education also envisages an enhanced role for COGG involving responsibilities for the co-ordination of areas that are not under its remit currently, including teacher education, inspection, establishment of Gaeltacht schools and curriculum development. It also envisages that COGG would be established as a statutory body. The current situation is that COGG is a non-statutory agency under the aegis of DES, whose functions are statutorily underpinned by Section 31, Education Act, 1998. These functions include planning and co-ordinating the provision of textbooks and resources for Irish-medium schools, advising the Minister on policies in relation to Irish-medium education, providing support services through Irish, and conducting research. These services will also be required to support aspects of the implementation of the Gaeltacht Act, 2012. Since July 2013, COGG has been co-located with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the

body responsible for advising the Minister for Education and Skills on curriculum and assessment for primary and post-primary schools, and early-years education.

The colocation of COGG with the NCCA has helped to consolidate the core work of COGG in relation to the provision of resources and to ensure that the timing and content of such resources are in accordance with curricular developments for Irish, as set out in the 2011 national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy, *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life 2011-2020*. It has also provided COGG with an opportunity to enhance its input into advising on curriculum development for Irish.

The proposal to extend COGG's role to co-ordinate existing supports and services, such as inspection, initial teacher education, teacher recruitment and the establishment of schools is not regarded as practical given the need for COGG to focus on its existing core functions related to the provision of teaching materials and supports, and in view of the need to avoid duplication of administrative, support and quality assurance systems.

However, it would be worthwhile to explore the potential for COGG to adopt a co-ordinating and possibly an additional liaising and funding role in relation to continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers in Gaeltacht schools, with a view to ensuring synergies and interactions between the potential CPD providers. COGG already funds the provision of seminars and CPD courses in relation to teaching through Irish and it provides bursaries to students engaged in post-graduate study related to Irish-medium education. The potential for such a co-ordination role would also need to be considered in light of the roles and responsibilities of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and other national services such as the Special Education Support Service (SESS).

4.3 Definition of Gaeltacht schools

A strong theme in the research is that the current definition of a Gaeltacht school is not sufficient (e.g., Mac Donnacha et al., 2005; Ní Thuairisg, 2014). In accordance with the provisions of the Education Act, 1998, a Gaeltacht school is defined as a school that is located within the boundaries of the official Gaeltacht areas, as laid down in the *Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act 1956*. Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) highlight that the definition of Gaeltacht schools needs to take cognisance of the fact that a number of educational models relating to the language of instruction, each with its own specific needs and requirements, will be functioning within the Gaeltacht, as it is currently configured. These models include:

- education through the first language with Irish as the medium
- immersion system with Irish as the medium
- education through the first language with English as the medium.

Mac Donnacha et al. recommend that once the new definition and the educational models that are acceptable within the parameters of the definition have been agreed, the definition should be the basis for the development of every education strategy and support service in the future. They also recommend that clear and objective guidelines, criteria and benchmarks are developed to demonstrate the educational, language planning and administrative best practice within each of the above education models. Mac Donnacha et al. advise that such criteria and benchmarks should be used as the basis for:

- the evaluation of Gaeltacht schools

- the pre-service and in-service training of teachers who teach in Gaeltacht schools
- the design and implementation of the primary and post-primary curriculum in the Gaeltacht
- the manner in which educational support services are delivered in Gaeltacht schools.

Commentary

There is merit in the proposal that a new definition of Gaeltacht schools is arrived at that will complement the language processes to be engaged in by local communities as part of the Gaeltacht Act, 2012. Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) envisages that the definition of a Gaeltacht school would be able to accommodate different linguistic models of educational provision. Such a definition, therefore, might take the form of an overarching statement that can accommodate different linguistic educational models in Gaeltacht schools. This might mean a formal recognition of different types of schools within the Gaeltacht. For example, arguments could be made that the different types of school might include Irish-medium schools, English-medium schools or English-medium schools in which substantial portions of the curriculum are taught through the medium of Irish. The feasibility of such an approach will be constrained by available resources and the small numbers of pupils overall and in particular, the small and scattered numbers of Irish-speaking pupils in Gaeltacht areas.

Alternatively, a definition of a Gaeltacht school might be framed in a manner that emphasises a particular linguistic model related to teaching through Irish, where the salient characteristics of such an entity are specified, and where particular attention and priority is given to the language and educational needs of young native speakers of Irish.

4.4 Educational models to support teaching through Irish

The research tends to differentiate between Irish-medium education in Gaeltacht areas where Irish is the first language of the learners and where Irish is the second language of the learners. For example, Ní Shéaghda (2010) points out that it is not appropriate to describe the education provided in Gaeltacht schools to children, whose first language is Irish, as immersion education, as is the case for gaelscoileanna, but rather as education in their native language, or as referred to in the research, heritage or maintenance education. This distinction between heritage or maintenance education and immersion education is reflected to varying degrees in the educational and linguistic models advocated by researchers on Gaeltacht education.

Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) recommend that a number of different models could be accommodated under an overarching definition of Gaeltacht schools including:

- education through the first language with Irish as the medium of instruction
- immersion education with Irish as the medium of instruction
- education through the first language with English as the medium of instruction.

Schools would select the educational model that they would employ in accordance with:

- the locality in which schools are situated
- the status of Irish in the locality
- the wishes of the parents regarding the language through which they want their children educated
- the attitude and experience of the teachers towards the models of education available

- the choice of education provision already available in the particular area.

Schools would show their commitment to the educational model that they have chosen through the development and implementation of a school plan and policy that is aligned with the model. Clear educational and language criteria would be provided for each of these language models that would support the assessment of educational and language needs of and the progress being made by pupils who are native speakers of Irish and pupils who come to school with little or no Irish.

Mac Donnacha et al. recommend that those Gaeltacht schools that opt to continue to teach through Irish should receive support and advice regarding the most effective way to implement the educational model that they have chosen. Such supports would include:

- advice for boards of management and principals
- advice and information for parents
- training of teachers
- development of the educational support services through Irish
- a continuous forum for teachers and principals teaching through Irish in Gaeltacht schools

Other researchers focus on the deployment of an educational and linguistic model which provides specifically for the needs of first speakers of Irish (i.e. a maintenance model).

In articulating potential planning assessment criteria for Gaeltacht communities of varying sociolinguistic profiles, Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) recommend that all instruction (except for English-language classes) at primary and post-primary level should be through the medium of Irish from the first day of school. In the case of schools in the strongest Irish speaking areas, they advocate a Gaeltacht immersion model which would be operationalised by language policies supporting the use of Irish as a social language outside classrooms, and admissions policies that restrict admissions to those with high levels of competence in the language, thus ensuring a high proportion of native speakers of Irish in the schools.

Similarly, Péterváry et al. (2014) highlight how the educational approach suitable to native speakers of Irish differs from that required by learners of Irish. Based on their findings that Irish-language competency is highest for those pupils attending schools with the highest density of Irish speakers, Péterváry et al. argue for the introduction of an additive minority language model that specifically provides for the needs of native speakers. Such a model would be delivered in a context where there is a high proportion of Irish speakers and the teaching of English is delayed for a substantial period, in order to allow the learner as a native speaker to be fully socialised through Irish and achieve the necessary competence and functionality in Irish. The researchers argue that this model has the potential to enhance the productive bilingualism among pupils and address the trend of language shift towards English in Gaeltacht communities. They also maintain that such a model would require the support of a large section of the Gaeltacht community to be successful.

Ni Shéaghdha (2010) proposes an immersion model for learners of Irish (L2) for delivery in primary schools in the strongest Irish speaking areas that includes key pedagogical practices characteristic of a model of education in the native language (L1 education). She contends that such native language practices would support the language enrichment, acquisition and socialisation of pupils whose first language is Irish, and would include:

- effective collaboration and communication with parents and the school community regarding the Irish policy of the school and their role in maintaining the Gaeltacht
- regular group work with children whose first language is Irish, involving the use of language assistants and engagement in school-related work with native speakers at school and at home
- ongoing attention to learners' language accuracy and enrichment
- conversation-focused activities, such as drama, storytelling, and puppetry, and activities involving proficient Irish-language speakers from the locality
- development of a policy that promotes the development of skills in the two languages to the same standard.

According to Ní Shéaghda, such a model would meet the needs of both native Irish speakers and learners of Irish. She suggests that two years of total early immersion is necessary for pupils in Gaeltacht schools to support the development of their literacy skills in Irish to a sufficient level before the commencement of instruction in English.

Ní Shéaghda also gives examples of how socialisation opportunities for speakers of Irish in primary schools can be extended through Irish-language networks and out-of-school supports such as:

- inter-school musical and sport festivals/events involving schools with strong Irish-language policies (e.g., use of Irish textbooks only)
- active parents' associations that organise Irish-language cultural events and fund-raising activities
- the creation of linkages with post-primary schools in organising Irish-language events
- youth clubs and Irish-language clubs organised in conjunction with community Irish-language associations
- linkages between students in other gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools via e-mail and social media.

Commentary

The language planning criteria for Gaeltacht language planning areas outlined in the Gaeltacht Act, 2012 includes provision for Irish-medium education at both primary and post-primary level as follows:

The availability of Irish-medium primary and post-primary education in the relevant area/town, in accordance with the policy of the Department of Education and Skills, including the availability of Irish-medium streams in English-medium schools and the teaching of a number of subjects through the Irish language in English-medium schools, as appropriate.

The application of this criterion is relevant only to schools in those Gaeltacht areas that decide to participate in the language planning processes for recognition as a Gaeltacht area.

The research highlights the need to make robust Irish-medium instruction available in Gaeltacht areas, but there is no consensus on how this will be delivered. The provision of different language models of education is advocated from which schools can select, in accordance with the sociolinguistic context of the school. Such models include:

- an Irish-medium model for native speakers (maintenance education)
- an Irish-medium model for learners of Irish (immersion model)

- an English-medium model.

Other research does not countenance the provision of English-medium education in recognised Gaeltacht areas and advocates that Irish-medium instruction should be provided across all Gaeltacht areas, albeit with varying sociolinguistic profiles.

There are also varying views on how best to provide for the needs of native speakers of Irish. Some of the research argues for the delivery of a specific model for young native speakers that accommodates a high density of such speakers and involves the delayed introduction of English for a considerable period in the early years of primary school. Other research advocates the implementation of a model of immersion which includes the implementation of particular practices to support native speakers of the language. Such a model would accommodate both the needs of first-language (L1) speakers and second-language (L2) speakers of Irish.

There is agreement in the research that a sustained period of immersion in Irish is required in the infant classes in primary schools, both to support the ongoing development of the L1 of native Irish speakers and to enable the L2 speakers to develop their skills in Irish more effectively. The position advocated by the former Eagraíocht na Scoileanna Gaeltachta in its Irish-language policy template for Gaeltacht primary schools, is that total immersion in Irish should be practised during the infant cycle to allow for the development of children's Irish to a standard that enables them to benefit fully from the Irish-medium educational provision in the school. This position is also supported by some of the research (e.g., Ní Shéaghdha, 2010), although the findings of other research (e.g. Péterváry et al., 2014) suggest delaying the introduction of English for an even longer period.

Given the small population in Gaeltacht areas, the small numbers of students whose first language is Irish, and the scattered location of native speakers, it does not appear feasible to adopt, on a wide-scale basis, Irish-language education models that make entirely separate Irish-medium provision for learners whose first language is Irish and learners whose first language is English. Cognisance would have to be taken of the resource implications associated with differentiated provision of this nature, particularly in the current fiscal climate, and of the impact that such segregated provision might have on schools' inclusion policies, on the broader personal and social development of young native Irish-language speakers, and on their engagement with their non-native speaker peers in their community.

Nonetheless, in light of the cogent contentions in the research that the language needs of native speakers are not being met in the educational system, as currently structured, there is a need to differentiate language and educational provision for native speakers of Irish. The adoption of an immersion model for all students, that incorporates supports and practices specific to the needs of native speakers of Irish, merits further consideration in this regard. Such bespoke supports for native speakers might include the provision of additional Irish-language teaching resources to schools proportionate to the number of native speakers enrolled in the school.

An education immersion model with bespoke language supports for native speakers of Irish could usefully be deployed on a wider scale, allowing all learners in the community to be educated together, facilitate schools to clearly establish themselves as Gaeltacht schools, and in so doing, complement local language planning processes under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012.

Consideration also needs to be given to the needs of children who are being raised through English and more critically, to the needs of those children whose parents do not wish to access Irish-medium

education for their children, but have no choice as an English-medium option is not available locally. The enrolment of such children, even as a minority alongside native speakers, can lead to competing demands on the Gaeltacht school and adversely affect the capacity of the school to establish a clearly defined language identity to use Irish as the language of communication and socialisation among the pupils.

One potential solution is parallel provision of Irish-medium and English-medium education in a Gaeltacht language planning area. While issues of critical mass pertain regarding the feasibility of such parallel provision of Irish-medium and English-medium education, there are undoubtedly areas in the Gaeltacht, where the school population would be sufficiently dense to warrant a consolidation or reconfiguration of school provision that would allow for parallel provision of Irish-medium and English-medium education. In instances, where it is simply not feasible to provide English-medium as an alternative option, consideration should be given to how best support the young speakers of English to access the curriculum in the language of their local school and secure the support of their parents in doing so.

The question also arises as to what model is appropriate in those schools that have switched to English-medium instruction, and that are located in areas where there is a renewed interest as part of the Gaeltacht language planning processes in the promotion of Irish in the community and access to Irish-medium education in the local schools. While none of the research on Gaeltacht education advocates the use of partial immersion or a bilingual approach, allowing for the implementation of these approaches could be considered as an interim measure to facilitate an individual school's move from English-medium to Irish-medium instruction.

4.5 Language curriculum

Some commentators on Gaeltacht education point to the need to provide a separate or bespoke Irish-language curriculum that will meet the needs of Gaeltacht students, particularly those, whose first language is Irish.

Mac Donnacha (2005) advises that clear guidelines be provided regarding the aims and objectives of the Irish-language syllabus for native speakers of Irish. Ó Giollagáin and Mac Donnacha (2008) highlight the need to develop linguistically-literate educational policies that are capable of addressing and differentiating between the educational and linguistic requirements of native speakers, as opposed to the learner community of Irish in the Gaeltacht. Ó Laoire (2012), in referring to curriculum, examinations and structures, stresses the need to differentiate between the teaching of a language in the Gaeltacht and the teaching of Irish as a second language outside of the Gaeltacht. He advises that since the language is embedded in the history and local culture of the Gaeltacht, the curriculum should help Gaeltacht students to give expression to the contemporary importance of that heritage in their thoughts and in their creativity as a community of language users.

Gilleece et al. (2012) recommend that the NCCA should take the needs of Irish-medium schools, including Gaeltacht schools, into account as it prepares its new integrated language curriculum for primary schools.

A recurring message in Mac Donnacha's (2005) research, in relation to the language curriculum for Irish at primary level, is the need for clear direction at national level to guide practice on when English

and Irish reading should be formally introduced in Gaeltacht primary schools. The advice provided currently by the *Primary School Curriculum*, 1999 is that schools should not commence reading in English and Irish at the same time. Mac Donnacha et al. report that this lack of guidance has led to varying practices in Gaeltacht schools, even in schools that are located in Gaeltacht areas with similar sociolinguistic profiles. Ó Duibhir and Ní Bhaoill (2004) report similar variance in practice in gaelscoileanna.

Ó Laoire and Harris (2006) note that there is no conclusive research evidence available either nationally or internationally to indicate whether it is better to commence with literacy in English or in Irish in Gaeltacht schools and gaelscoileanna. They note that evidence from existing international research does not provide a conclusive basis upon which to decide on the reading sequencing issue in the context of Irish-language immersion, either in a general way or in particular schools, and that there is need for additional research on the acquisition of language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools. A report from the NCCA (2006) envisages that such research should:

- provide an analysis of the outcomes, impacts and effects of different approaches to introducing language and literacy on the language learning and development of children in Irish-medium primary schools.
- focus on dual literacy with particular reference to the effective transfer of literacy skills acquired in one language to another language.

Parson and Lyddy (2009) found in their study of the outcomes of reading practices in two Irish-medium schools, one of which introduced English reading first and the other of which introduced Irish reading first, that the scores of English-reading first-group and Irish-reading first-group could not be differentiated across English or Irish-task versions. Parson and Lyddy contend that such findings support the view that the language in which reading is formally introduced is not critical to later first-language word decoding skill or second-language word reading. However, they conclude that a larger scale comparison of English Reading First (ERF) and Irish Reading First (IRF) schools would be needed before definitive conclusions are reached.

Gileece et al. (2012) also advise that further research should be conducted into the impact of various approaches to beginning reading instruction in Irish-medium schools, including the effects of introducing English and Irish reading at the same time, and the extent to which early language work prepares children to access the full curriculum through Irish.

Ní Shéaghdha (2010) notes the lack of research or policy guidance on the commencement of reading in Gaeltacht schools. In light of the role that schools play in the maintenance of Irish as the language of the community, and the references to low standards of Irish-language literacy among Gaeltacht students, and the low competency in Irish compared to English, Ní Shéaghdha proposes that a literacy policy involving two years of total immersion in Irish-language literacy skills be adopted in schools in the strongest Irish-speaking areas.

It should be noted that advocates for the Gaeltacht primary sector have already established a clear position in relation to the commencement of reading. The draft Irish-language policy template prepared by the former Eagraíocht na Scoileanna Gaeltachta advises that schools should commence with literacy in Irish in infant classes. It advises that oral literacy skills related to nursery rhymes, pronunciation and storytelling in English should not be commenced before the final term in senior infants and that formal reading in English should not commence before first class.

Commentary

A number of commentators on Gaeltacht education have highlighted the need to ensure that the curriculum for Irish provides for the specific needs of learners in Gaeltacht schools.

The need to prioritise the specific needs of first-language users of Irish has been formally recognised already by the DES in its 2011 national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy, *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life 2011-2020*. The strategy highlights deficiencies at primary level and at junior cycle in Irish-language curriculum provision for learners in Irish-medium schools, including learners in Gaeltacht schools. Such deficiencies include the lack of attention to the development of learners' cognitive and higher-order thinking skills in the Irish language. These matters are currently being addressed in a number of actions, including the revision of Irish-language curriculums to include explicit learning outcomes and content that meets the needs of first and second-language speakers of Irish in Irish-medium schools, including those in Gaeltacht schools.

Much progress has been made in implementing the actions cited in the national literacy and numeracy strategy in relation to curriculum reform for Irish at primary and post-primary levels. Work is well advanced on the development of a new integrated primary language curriculum for English and Irish in the different language contexts. The new language curriculum will include provision for children in Gaeltacht schools and first-language speakers of Irish. The content of the new language curriculum for infants to second class will be published in 2015 for implementation by schools from September 2016. It is intended that the new language curriculum for third to sixth classes will be published in 2017 for implementation from September 2018.

It is expected that the new primary language curriculum will provide clarity regarding the commencement of the teaching of formal reading and writing in Irish and English in all schools including Irish-medium schools within and outside the Gaeltacht.

At junior cycle, work has commenced on the development of a new specification for Irish. The oral component will be a compulsory part of assessment in this new specification. It is also intended that an optional specialised short course will also be developed, which will allow students in Irish-medium schools, including those in Gaeltacht schools, to study and gain credit for an enriched engagement in Irish, with additional aspects of the language over and above that in the subject specification for Irish.

The question of differentiated provision in Irish for students in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools is more complex at senior cycle given the potential impact that any changes may have on entry processes to third level. Such differentiated provision at senior cycle will require consideration in light of the experiences of differentiated provision at junior cycle.

The expectation is that these curriculum developments will meet the needs of students' learning through Irish, including the needs of native speakers of Irish. However, the extent to which the proposed curriculum developments do so will require, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, ongoing monitoring of the development, implementation and content of such curriculums to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

4.6 Assessment

The lack of appropriate assessment tools through Irish for children in Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools has been a common theme of research, particularly research that has surveyed teachers. For example, the NCCA consultation with teachers in relation to language and literacy in Irish-medium schools (NCCA, 2007) highlighted the dearth of assessment tools and resources, including standardised tests for use in Irish-medium primary schools. Similarly, the COGG (2010) survey of teachers in relation to special educational needs in Irish-medium schools, including Gaeltacht schools, highlighted the provision of relevant assessment tools for the Irish-medium sector as a priority area of need. Harris et al. (2006) in their longitudinal study of learner achievement in Irish, pointed out the need for future surveys to develop suitable proficiency tests that are appropriate for pupils with high levels of fluency in the Irish language. This would help obtain an accurate picture of the attainment of pupils with widely varying levels of proficiency in Irish attending Gaeltacht schools. Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) recommends that clear guidance be provided in relation to the administration of ability tests to native Irish speakers in Gaeltacht schools in light of the fact that the tests being used are in English and based on norms for speakers of English.

The research also suggests that the range of assessment approaches used in classrooms in Gaeltacht schools is limited. For example, Gilleece et al. (2012) highlight how teachers in Irish-medium primary schools, including Gaeltacht schools, should implement a broader set of assessment tools on a more frequent basis in both English and Mathematics, including teacher-made checklists, documented observations, and learning portfolios.

COGG's (2010) research report on special educational needs in Irish-medium schools indicates that much progress has been made in developing assessment tools that are suitable for children who are bilingual in Irish and English and that attend to the particular needs of learners, whose mother tongue is Irish. Such tests include standardised tests in Irish. Nonetheless, the COGG report notes that the range of assessment material and tools available for English greatly surpasses those available for Irish, and that there is a need to monitor whether the assessment tools will meet the needs of the Gaeltacht school sector in future. This research report also highlights the importance of ensuring that stakeholders, including teachers, are aware of the Irish-language materials available and of ensuring that the Departments of Education, North and South, implement a co-ordinated approach to facilitate the leveraging of existing expertise and resources related to special educational needs.

Commentary

It is evident, that significant progress has been made in providing assessment materials relevant to the Irish-language needs of learners in Gaeltacht schools. The development of standardised tests that are normed for the population of Irish-medium primary schools, including Gaeltacht schools, is a significant advancement. As part of junior cycle reform, work on developing standardised tests in Irish for second year pupils is ongoing. . It is clear, however, that there is a need to ensure on an ongoing basis that the nature of tests available, at least those that are most critical, is appropriate to testing the competences of native speakers of Irish.

Nonetheless, consideration must be given to the practical difficulties associated with norming tests for native Irish speakers, such as the small numbers involved for the purposes of sampling, and the challenges with variation in dialect. With regard to supporting the provision of as wide a range of tests

as possible, it would be worthwhile to explore the potential for greater North / South co-ordination of the expertise and materials already available, involving relevant parties, such as the psychological services, curriculum agencies, and COGG.

4.7 Quality assurance

A number of research reports advocate the establishment of a separate Inspectorate or section of the Inspectorate for Gaeltacht schools. Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) recommend that a discrete dedicated branch of the Inspectorate be established to evaluate and advise on educational provision in Gaeltacht schools and on the dissemination of best practice in teaching Irish. The researchers propose that this new branch of the Inspectorate would conduct all of its business through Irish under the auspices of COGG, although continuing to work with and report to the Inspectorate of the DES. Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) also recommend that the Schools' Inspectorate Service for Gaeltacht schools be delegated to COGG as a newly established statutory body.

Commentary

Successive governments and Ministers for Education have not accepted arguments to establish a separate Inspectorate for Gaeltacht schools. In discussions on the formation of the 20-year strategy for Irish, for example, the DES pointed to the risk, that this would lead to a fragmentation of the existing evaluation and assessment framework in schools and militate against, rather than promote cohesion across the education system as a whole. A report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2013 highlights the importance of the integration of all elements of evaluation and assessment including system evaluation, external school evaluation, internal school evaluation, teacher appraisal and student assessment, in order to promote improvement at all levels of the educational system. In addition, the OECD Country Background Report for Ireland (DES, 2012) notes that there is already a comprehensive system of external evaluation in place to evaluate schools in Ireland.

As part of its inspection programme, the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills carries out inspections through Irish in all primary and post-primary schools in Gaeltacht areas, in accordance with local language preference to the extent that it has the capacity to do so. Inspections of Gaeltacht schools at primary level include whole-school evaluations, incidental inspections and follow-through inspections. Inspections at post-primary level include whole-school evaluations, subject inspections, incidental inspections and follow-through inspections. During 2013, for example, the Inspectorate provided school self-evaluation support visits through Irish in approximately four fifths of Gaeltacht or all-Irish schools at primary and post-primary level. During 2013 also, the Inspectorate carried out inspections in approximately one fifth of Gaeltacht or all-Irish primary schools, and in approximately two thirds of Gaeltacht or all-Irish post-primary schools.

The Inspectorate also continues to build its capacity to deliver services through Irish through its recruitment processes and the continuing professional development programme that it provides to inspectors. In fact, additional marks for high competence in Irish are awarded in the recruitment process for primary and post-primary inspectors. Up to €10,000 is invested annually on the provision of professional development opportunities in Irish to inspectors.

Nonetheless, having a spread of subject specialists with competence in Irish to carry out evaluations of provision through Irish continues to be a challenge for the Inspectorate at post-primary level. It is likely that this challenge would be further magnified if an Inspectorate specifically for the Gaeltacht was established. Alternative options for enhancing the capacity of the Inspectorate to evaluate provision across all subjects in Irish include the potential recruitment of associate evaluators on a needs basis from the Irish-medium education sector.

4.8 School management and leadership

The research highlights the pivotal role that school management and leadership plays in the delivery of educational provision through Irish in Gaeltacht areas.

Ní Shéaghdha (2010) advocates that in the absence of a clear policy and guidance from the state, the principals of Gaeltacht primary schools need to be proactive in relation to Irish-medium provision. She recommends that principals of schools in the Gaeltacht areas where Irish is most frequently spoken should:

- in consultation with the school staff and the board of management, draft policy and clear aims that focus on the best practices regarding language enrichment, language acquisition, and socialisation for children whose first language is Irish and for pupils who are learning Irish as a second language
- come together to agree on best practice regarding language enrichment, language acquisition and socialisation with a view to advising parents and local communities
- hold information meetings for parents to explain the language ethos of the school and the responsibility of the school to attend to the needs of both native speakers and learners of Irish
- request support and advice from local language organisations, from national educational institutions, from boards of management and parents' associations in their schools with regard to the implementation of recognised best practice.

Other research focuses on how the capacity of school management and leadership should be enhanced in support of the delivery of educational provision in Gaeltacht areas. The recommendations relate mainly to structural changes and to the upskilling of principals.

Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) highlight the challenges relating to the management and facilitation of learning that arise due to the small size and multi-class configuration of most Gaeltacht schools at primary level. They also suggest that the manner in which primary school education provision is structured is no longer fit for purpose, as it does not take account of the changes that have occurred in Gaeltacht areas, such as lower population density, improved road infrastructure and access to transport. In the interest of more effective administration of the schools, and ensuring that the optimum education through Irish be provided for Gaeltacht pupils, Mac Donnacha et al. recommend that COGG, in consultation with the principals and boards of management of the schools, would engage in a process of reviewing the future of the schools in light of a number of options as follows:

- amalgamation of schools
- use of hub schools which would provide services and particular lessons to schools in the locality
- clustering of schools where schools in particular areas would collaborate to share resources, an administrative manager, and secretarial services

- confederation of schools, where a number of small schools in an area would be administered by one senior manager/principal.

Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) suggest that the clustering of primary schools merits particular consideration in the case of schools that have four or more teachers. They also suggest that schools that have 1-3 teachers should be encouraged to amalgamate where possible to school units of four or more teachers, notwithstanding that this will not be feasible in the case of some schools for geographical reasons. Mac Donnacha et al. also recommend that consideration be given to the appointment of an administrative principal to amalgamated schools on the appointment of the fourth class teacher.

Similarly, Mac Donnacha (2005) recommends streamlining the administrative and management arrangements for second-level Gaeltacht schools, where the language of instruction is Irish, in light of the challenges faced by these schools in accessing appropriate Irish-language teaching resources and teachers capable of teaching through Irish. In particular, it is recommended that second-level Gaeltacht schools committed to teaching through Irish be placed under one administrative and management structure.

Mac Donnacha highlights the need to upskill principals, particularly with regard to language policy and planning in Gaeltacht schools and their understanding of immersion education. He recommends that COGG commissions an induction course for principals in Gaeltacht schools to include:

- the role and functions of the principal
- school leadership skills
- immersion principles and best practice
- school planning and language planning in Gaeltacht schools.

Mac Donnacha (2005) also proposes that a national network for Gaeltacht primary and second-level principals be developed. Máirtín (2006) recommends that COGG would liaise with the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and the support services for principals with regard to discussing the specific planning, development and support needs of newly appointed principals of gaelscoileanna and to ensure that they have access through Irish to the professional development necessary to carry out their role effectively. This could also be usefully extended to principals of Gaeltacht schools.

The research also highlights the need for the upskilling of boards of management in light of the particular educational requirements relating to Gaeltacht schools. Mac Donnacha (2005) recommends that boards of management receive specific training on their role in language policies and planning in Gaeltacht schools, and on immersion education principles, through courses organised by COGG.

Commentary

There is considerable evidence in educational research generally that the quality of school leadership has a significant impact on the quality of teaching and learning in schools (e.g., Leithwood et al., 2004; Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Robinson et al., 2008). The research on Gaeltacht education would also suggest that in light of the myriad of challenges facing Gaeltacht schools, effective school leadership is essential to establish a clear vision of the language and education goals of each school, to drive the implementation of those goals, and to win the support necessary from all members of the school community.

The national research demonstrates that the pro-active engagement of principals plays an essential role in the successful delivery of high-quality Irish-medium education. This points to the need for principals of Gaeltacht schools to have the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the particular demands of leading and managing a Gaeltacht school. In particular, it is important that principals are enabled to engage in the development of language policies and plans for their schools, and that they are fully abreast of the research on pedagogical practice relating to education through a minority language and immersion education. Similarly, it is important that boards of management are supported in the realisation of their leadership role in the Gaeltacht school context.

The research on Gaeltacht education highlights the need for bespoke induction and CPD provision for principals in Gaeltacht schools. It also emphasises the establishment of discrete professional networks for principals of Gaeltacht schools. Principals of Gaeltacht schools already have access to the induction and CPD support for principals provided by national support agencies under the aegis of the Department, the professional organisations representing principals, and advocacy groups, such as Gaelscoileanna Teoranta and Eagraíocht na Scoileanna Gaeltachta. They also will have access to mentoring and coaching services provided through the National Centre for School Leadership established in 2015. While this provision will meet the leadership and management needs of principals in a general sense, there is need to ensure, as highlighted by the research on Gaeltacht education, that the specific needs relating to management and leadership in a Gaeltacht school context, are addressed in a coherent and co-ordinated manner. The research on Gaeltacht education points to the value of having a specific agency, such as COGG, to advise on CPD requirements for principals, to co-ordinate supports for principals of Gaeltacht schools, and to liaise with existing CPD providers. Such a suggestion merits exploration, but with due regard to the roles and responsibilities of the parties already directly or indirectly involved in such provision.

The research on Gaeltacht education also suggests the streamlining of administrative and management structures in Gaeltacht schools. One recommendation, particularly worthy of consideration, relates to the clustering or confederation of small primary schools to facilitate the sharing of resources, an administrative manager and secretarial services. A clustering arrangement might also facilitate the sharing of additional teaching resources and expertise to support the minority of native speakers of Irish spread across schools. Another recommendation relates to the amalgamation of one to three teacher primary schools, where geographically appropriate, to ensure that individual school units have at least four mainstream teachers. The reconfiguration of schools in this manner has advantages, in terms of ensuring greater access by teachers and pupils to appropriate resources and allowing potential access to parallel Irish-medium and English-medium provision within an individual Gaeltacht area. However, consideration of the potential of this option would need to take account of announcements made in February 2015 regarding the future of small schools.

At post-primary level, the recommendation that second-level Irish-medium Gaeltacht schools be placed under one administrative and management structure would, in principle, have the potential to facilitate greater cohesion, consistency and collegiality in the post-primary sector. However, given the geographical spread of the schools it would likely be costly and difficult to operate, and may not achieve the desired effect.

4.9 Admissions Policy

Some of the research on Gaeltacht education adopts a radical position on entry or admission policies with a view to supporting Irish-language socialisation and use among native speakers of Irish, and enabling them to achieve native-like competence in the language.

In the interest of more effective provision of Irish-medium education, Mac Donnacha (2005) advises that the admission policies of second-level Gaeltacht schools that are teaching through Irish and that accept students from primary schools outside the Gaeltacht, be reviewed. According to Mac Donnacha, enrolment in such post-primary schools should be conditional on the applicant pupils having received Irish-medium primary education, a high level of competence in Irish, and a demonstrable commitment to the use of Irish as the language of communication in the school environment.

Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) recommend that an entry policy should be devised for schools in Gaeltacht areas with the highest proportion of native speakers of Irish, which ensures that children who register for school, are competent Irish speakers. They also recommend that at post-primary, the entry policy be limited to children who speak Irish at home and to children who have received an Irish-medium primary education. Ó Giollagáin et al. also envisage that an entry policy for Gaeltacht schools would be one of the policy considerations delegated to COGG.

Commentary

Some of the research on Gaeltacht education recommends the development of admission policies for schools located in Gaeltacht areas with the highest proportion of Irish speakers that would only allow access to those with the necessary competence in Irish or a commitment to Irish.

Such a proposal is not in accordance with the regulatory framework for school admissions, as outlined in the *Draft General Scheme for an Education (Admission to Schools) Bill* and the draft regulations published in September 2013, that will be put in place to ensure that there is consistency, fairness and transparency in the admission policies of all schools and in the service that they provide to parents.

The framework provides that schools must accept all applicants unless they are oversubscribed, in which case, they can prioritise based on over-subscription criteria, provided that such criteria are not unlawful. The draft regulations, which were published with the draft general scheme do not prohibit the use of feeder schools as an over-subscription criterion. Therefore Irish-medium post-primary schools will be able to prioritise applicants from Irish-medium primary schools, if they wish. However, the legislative proposals prohibit the use of interviews prior to enrolment, including interviews to establish that an applicant or their parents meets a language criterion. Priority on the basis of an applicant's academic ability is also prohibited.

The draft general scheme and draft regulations were referred to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection to allow for a full public discussion. The Committee's report made the following two conclusions in relation to Irish-medium schools:

- Consideration could be given to the specific linguistic needs and status of schools within Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas (GLPAs), as defined in the Gaeltacht Act, 2012, and the language planning process which is being rolled out under the auspices of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

- The proposed legislation needs to take account of the need to protect the integrity of Irish-medium schools, while ensuring that no discrimination takes place in relation to admissions. The proposed legislation could take into account the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language*, by allowing a high priority in their enrolment policies to the small percentage of school children who are native speakers of Irish (outside of the Gaeltacht).

With regard to the conclusions above, the legislative proposals will have regard to the provisions of the Gaeltacht Act, 2012 and the language planning process underway.

4.10 Whole-school planning

The importance of whole-school language plans in giving effect to the delivery of an immersion approach, the development of Irish-language literacy skills, and the Irish-language socialisation of learners, is highlighted in research carried out by Mac Donnacha (2005) and Ni Shéaghdha (2010). These researchers advise that provision of such language policies, with the agreement of boards of management, demonstrates a commitment by schools to the use of Irish as the language of communication and instruction in the school environment, and should be shared with parents.

Mac Donnacha (2005) advises that the development of Irish-language policies in Gaeltacht schools should be supported by the development of a sample policy template and provision of guidance on how to develop and implement such a policy.

Commentary

The evidence would suggest that whole-school plans can play an indispensable role in promoting the language and the delivery of Irish-medium education in Gaeltacht schools.

To assist schools in the development of whole-school language plans, the former Eagraíocht na Scoileanna Gaeltachta with support from COGG, has developed a whole-school policy template for Gaeltacht primary schools, *Teimpléad do Pholasáí Gaeilge do Bhunscoil Ghaeltachta*. This document encourages schools to clarify their commitment to education through Irish by attending to a number of aspects including:

- the implementation of a total immersion approach for the infant cycle
- introduction of literacy skills in Irish in infant classes and a delay in the introduction of formal reading in English until first class
- ensuring the development of children's competence in English
- promotion of an Irish-language environment
- promotion of Irish as the language of communication among learners
- making parents aware of the importance of Irish, informing parents of the school's policy and supporting parents in their use of Irish
- clarifying expectations in relation to the recruitment of staff members
- clarifying expectations for staff members in relation to the Irish-language ethos of the school
- using Irish-language resources, including *Séideán Sí*
- using Irish-language assessment materials, where available
- provision of learning-support for Irish, where necessary
- the delivery of inputs through Irish by school visitors

- the delivery of curricular and extra-curricular activities through Irish
- using Irish as the language of communication in all meetings and correspondence.

The development of a similar policy and planning template that is customised to the needs of the post-primary school should now be considered. The role that COGG could play in co-ordinating the development of such a planning template in collaboration with relevant agencies, such as the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) should also be considered.

4.11 Resources to support teaching and learning

The need for a full range of high-quality resources to support teaching and learning through Irish is frequently cited in the research on Gaeltacht education. Research by Mac Donnacha (2005) and Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) stress how the lack of Irish-language teaching resources and the consequent use of English-language materials can undermine the provision of a total immersion experience in Irish for learners and the development of students' proficiency in Irish. Mac Donnacha et al. note that the challenge is not just with ensuring that appropriate resources are available, but ensuring that once available, they are used by schools and teachers. A critical factor in this regard is ensuring that the language content of the Irish-language materials provided is accessible to the learners (NCCA, 2006a; Mac Donnacha, 2005). These researchers also highlight the importance of ensuring that teachers are made aware of the resources available.

Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) recommend that teachers should have a key role in advising on priorities in relation to resource provision for teaching through Irish, and that a structure be developed that gives teachers a professional role in the development of teaching materials. For example, these researchers suggest that facilitation and training for the publication of support materials might be provided for groups of teachers who come together to develop such teaching materials for their classes. They also recommend that an information, marketing and distribution service be established in relation to educational materials available in Irish, and that Gaeltacht schools should be required to confirm their commitment to the use of Irish-language material in their school plan and Irish-language policy.

Ní Thuairisg (2014) found that one of the significant challenges for teachers in post-primary Gaeltacht schools was the unsuitability of teaching and learning resources. She concludes that it is a challenge that is mainly rooted in a lack of training for teachers on the use and design of resources, rather than in the lack of suitable resources for the education system in the Gaeltacht.

The research on Gaeltacht education also highlights the need to improve the provision of reading materials in Irish, namely to ensure that a sufficient range of age-appropriate reading material in the language is available (NCCA, 2006a), and also that reading material based on the local literature of Gaeltacht areas is provided (Mac Donnacha, 2005). He recommends that a catalogue of reading material be provided for the various age groups in Gaeltacht schools.

Research published by Ní Shéaghdha (2010) refers to how the teaching of Irish in many Gaeltacht schools is being supported by the use of *Séideán Sí*, the integrated language programme for Irish-medium primary schools, that was developed and published in a collaborative endeavour involving the Department of Education and Skills, Foras na Gaeilge, COGG and Donegal Education Centre. The role of *Séideán Sí*, in supporting the language enrichment and language acquisition of native Irish speakers and in clarifying the standard of Irish to be taught in Gaeltacht schools, was widely acknowledged by

the schools participating in Ní Shéaghda's study. *Séideán Sí* was used fully in over half of the schools participating in her study and partially used in the remainder. Issues raised by schools include the level of challenge in the content of the programme for learners with little Irish, the challenge associated with the delivery of the programme in multi-grade contexts, the inadequacy of the programme in supporting the development of phonological awareness, and the lack of guidance on the teaching of Irish as a first and second language in Gaeltacht classrooms.

Commentary

Since the earlier research referred to above was published, significant progress has been made in providing Irish-language materials for Irish-medium schools. COGG, which has a statutory mandate in accordance with Section 31, Education Act, 1998, to plan for and co-ordinate provision of textbooks and resources for Irish-medium schools, has played a central role in co-ordinating this enhanced provision. Many of the proposals cited in the national research in relation to improving provision and access to Irish-medium resources have been incorporated into the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language, 2011-2020* and in many respects, have been and continue to be addressed. Indeed, COGG has provided a resource directory online that outlines the wide range of materials available to support the teaching of Irish and the teaching of other subjects through Irish in primary and post-primary schools.

An Gúm has ensured that there is an ever expanding reservoir of Irish-language reading materials available for young speakers and learners of Irish. An Gúm has also contributed to the provision of textbooks in areas such as Mathematics, Science and History. An Gúm's *Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge* has included initiatives targeted at supporting Irish-language publishers and the promotion of reading and writing in the Irish language.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland and An tÁisaonad (*Resource Centre*), St Mary's University College, Belfast are other potential sources of Irish-medium language materials for Gaeltacht schools and teachers. Examples include *Cleite*, the early reading programme that was collaboratively developed by COGG and An tÁisaonad.

The publication of *Séideán Sí* has also greatly supported Gaeltacht schools. Plans are well in train to digitise the reading materials currently available in hard copy for this integrated language programme so as to make them available on a dedicated website³. This will help to ensure greater ease of access by schools and teachers to these materials. Notwithstanding the positive feedback from Gaeltacht schools in relation to *Séideán Sí*, it is clear that schools require further guidance on how to use this resource in the multi-class context, and on how to differentiate the delivery of the programme to meet the particular needs of native speakers of Irish and learners of Irish, including those with little or no Irish, within individual classrooms. Indeed, such difficulties may be restricting the use of *Séideán Sí* in Gaeltacht schools, such as those schools in Ní Shéaghda's (2010) study that were only partially using the programme. *The Chief Inspectors' Report 2010-2012* (DES 2013) also highlights that many primary schools need to make greater use of the programme to support the development of pupils' linguistic skills in Irish. Hence, it would be worthwhile to explore the provision of additional guidance or indeed CPD to support teachers on the use of *Séideán Sí* in the interest of addressing the issues identified.

³ This initiative is a collaborative partnership involving *Foras na Gaeilge* and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland as key partners, and assisted by DES, COGG and others. The Department of Education and Skills has provided €250,000 for the development of these materials.

It is evident that, despite the progress made, there is a need for sustained investment for the development and updating of the resources that are available to the Irish-medium sector, to ensure that the quality of the materials available are comparable in quality to those available in English. The processes for updating materials should allow for input from practitioners in the development of bespoke teaching and learning resources for Irish-medium schools. It would also be worth investigating how the materials that are designed by teachers for use in their classrooms could be shared more generally in the Irish-medium sector, for example through a dedicated website for Irish-medium education or teacher networks. COGG, together with the national support services, such as the PDST, could play a valuable role in co-ordinating and supporting such initiatives.

4.12 Language supports

Reference is made in some of the research on Gaeltacht education to the provision of specific language supports, namely language acquisition centres and the Language Assistants Scheme (*Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga*).

Language acquisition centres

Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) advise that language acquisition centres be established in Gaeltacht areas with the highest proportion of native speakers of Irish. The aim of such centres would be to enable learners from pre-school up to post-primary, who do not speak Irish, to acquire a level of Irish, which enables them to participate in Irish-medium instruction. O Giollagáin et al. contend that such an intervention would ensure that each learner in Gaeltacht areas would have sufficient fluency in the language before enrolment in the Gaeltacht education system from pre-school through to post-primary level.

Ní Thuairisg (2012) examined the provision of such acquisition units in Wales with a view to assessing their suitability to the Gaeltacht context. The objective of the units in Wales is to provide intensive input in Welsh to pupils between seven and fourteen years of age with little or no proficiency in Welsh who transferred into Welsh-speaking districts and who wished to attend schools where Welsh is the medium of instruction. Eligible primary school pupils normally attend such units for a full school term, and for one week in the local school, at the beginning and end of the term. Eligible post-primary students spend a shorter period of time in the unit, normally of eight weeks duration. In general, each language unit, which is accommodated on a site on a local Welsh-medium school, accepts sixteen pupils each term, and two instructors are assigned to each unit. Instructors are required to have recognised teaching qualifications but are not required to have a qualification in the teaching of Welsh or any other language. At the time of Ní Thuairisg's research, there were six primary or junior language units and one post-primary language unit in Welsh-speaking areas in Wales.

It is evident from Ní Thuairisg's research that while placement in the units benefits pupils in terms of their Welsh language acquisition, there are a number of shortcomings, due in part to the short length of time spent by pupils in the units and the non-integration of unit education provision with the structures necessary to attend to other challenges in the system. It was highlighted that pupils in the units only attain a basic level of competence in the target language and on graduation from the units, are challenged in communicating fluently with Welsh speakers, or in accessing curriculum subjects through Welsh. Pupils' coverage of the curriculum more generally also seems to be adversely affected, both during the

time they spend in the unit and for a period afterwards. In assessing the suitability of the units in the context of the Gaeltacht, Ní Thuairisg concludes that the language acquisition units will only be successful in a context where structures are put in place to address other challenges in the system, such as shortcomings in curriculum provision, the training of teachers and the assessment of pupils' Irish-language competence.

Language Assistants Scheme (Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga)

Gaeltacht stakeholders are generally positive about the Language Assistants Scheme (*Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga*), a particular support available to Gaeltacht schools since 1999, where local native Irish-language speakers are employed to strengthen the use of Irish as a spoken language among Gaeltacht pupils and students in primary and post-primary schools, and to further its usage on a daily basis. The scheme was originally targeted at students with little Irish or no Irish to enable them to access the curriculum through Irish in Gaeltacht schools.

The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht funds the scheme which is administered by Muintearas in the Galway, Mayo, Meath and Donegal Gaeltacht areas and by Comharchumann Chorca Dhuibhne in the Gaeltacht areas in Kerry, Cork and Waterford. In 2014, a total of 85 Language Assistants were employed on a part-time basis throughout the Gaeltacht under the scheme, which operates for part of the school year. The DAHG provides funding of over €500,000 a year for the initiative.

A review of the language assistant' scheme by de Faoite (2003) on behalf of the then Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs⁴, that involved engagement with language assistants and principals of schools participating in the scheme, identified a number of strengths and shortcomings. In terms of strengths, there were high levels of satisfaction among principals with the scheme. Pupils with little or no Irish were deemed to benefit from the scheme and the additional language support helped to extend pupils' vocabulary, cultivate positive attitudes, and expose pupils to the local dialect. Challenges to the delivery of the scheme identified by de Faoite's review include the need to:

- upskill the assistants to ensure that they can manage pupils from different language backgrounds
- address timetabling issues, such as inclusion of the assistants in the school timetable at the commencement of the school year and ensure that the scheme runs for the full school year
- put a process in place to monitor the demands on the scheme and the extent to which pupils benefit from the scheme.

De Faoite's report envisages that the scheme would be overseen by an interdepartmental committee comprising officials from the Department of Education and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, but that the Department of Education would have the main role in operating and funding the scheme. It also envisages that COGG would have a central role in the provision of advice to the interdepartmental committee with regard to all aspects of the scheme, including the provision of in-service courses. The report also highlights the need to streamline the provision of accredited training courses for the classroom assistants.

Principals and teachers participating in Mac Donnacha's (2005) study expressed satisfaction with the language assistant scheme and strongly advocated that the scheme would be further developed to ensure

⁴ Now the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

the assistants' availability throughout the school year and in a permanent capacity. Other studies (Ó Giollagáin, 2007; Ní Chionnaith, 2008; Ní Shéaghda, 2010) all advocate that the scheme be further developed to ensure that it not just supports children with low ability in Irish but supports the language enrichment of young native speakers.

Commentary

One of the measures mentioned in the *20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language* is the development of a language acquisition centre in each of the three main Gaeltacht regions. To date, no action has been taken with regard to the establishment of such centres. Such centres have been established in Wales to support the acquisition of Welsh by pupils with little or no Welsh who wish to enrol in Welsh-medium schools located in Welsh-speaking areas. The research evidence is that such units have a modicum of success in that they give the pupils some fluency in the language, but that the level of competence acquired by the pupils is not sufficient to allow them to engage fully through Welsh with Welsh native speakers, or to access the curriculum through Welsh. Reasons for this include insufficient time in the language acquisition unit and lack of integration of the units with other potential supports. Given the scattered nature of Gaeltacht areas and communities, it is not clear that the provision of such centres or units in Gaeltacht areas would be feasible or useful. Children might have to travel long distances to access the units and this aligned with the fact that only an extended period in such a centre would deliver the desired Irish-language acquisition by pupils, would imply that provision of such may not attract sufficient demand from parents. Nonetheless, it might be worthwhile to consider piloting the provision of such a centre in light of the learning gained from the Welsh experience.

The research on Gaeltacht education is broadly positive about the language assistants scheme (*Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga*), but identifies a number of issues with the scheme, namely that it does not attend sufficiently to the language needs of native speakers of Irish and it is not available throughout the full school year. This first issue has now been addressed in the context of the annual review of the scheme by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) and the scheme has been developed to include provision for the language enrichment of native speakers of Irish. The annual review carried out by the DAHG has also led to the provision of specific training courses and additional supports to language assistants.

The *20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2011-2020* makes provision for the strengthening of the language assistants' scheme by the DAHG in consultation with the DES. While researchers and relevant stakeholders are positive about the scheme and a number of measures have been put in place to enhance the delivery of the scheme, consideration should be given to the provision of an external objective evaluation of the impact of the scheme on the language development of target pupils and their ability to access the curriculum through Irish. Such an evaluation would help to determine how the scheme could be further enhanced from an Irish language and educational perspective, and the potential for extending the scheme to support native speakers of Irish and learners of Irish in Gaeltacht areas. Such an evaluation could also consider matters, such as the training and qualifications of language assistants and the value associated with the extension of the scheme compared with the provision of dedicated language support teachers in Gaeltacht schools.

4.13 Provision for Special Educational Needs (SEN)

A key issue in the research on Gaeltacht education relates to the lack of guidance and clarity in the educational system on the language through which support for learners with special educational needs

(SEN) is provided. As noted by Ní Shéaghda (2010), learning support is delivered through English in most of the schools in Gaeltacht areas where Irish is spoken most frequently. Mac Donnacha (2005) advises that guidance be provided by COGG, with the authorisation of the DES, on the implementation of policy regarding resources and learning-support teaching in Irish and through Irish for SEN learners in Gaeltacht schools.

The research also expresses concern about advice reportedly provided by professionals, such as psychologists that advocates provision of additional support solely through English. Mac Donnacha (2005) advises that clear guidance should be provided to schools on the implementation of policy with regard to meeting the needs of children with SEN in instances where schools have been advised by psychologists that instruction through English only should be provided. Mac Donnacha also recommends that COGG employ a senior expert in the educational psychology and speech therapy domains who will be able to:

- advise the psychological service, the health services and principals regarding the particular needs of children with special educational needs, who are being reared through Irish and/or who are receiving Irish-medium education
- provide a 'second opinion' for principals in cases where they may have doubts about advice received in relation to particular students from experts, who are working with students who are native speakers and/or are receiving Irish-medium education, or in cases where they have a doubt about the suitability of the approach being used in assessing students of this kind
- act as a facilitator to bring together the learning-support teachers and resource teachers that are working in Gaeltacht schools, and provide them with in-service courses and keep them informed of the latest research in that field.

The research on Gaeltacht education stresses the need to extend the availability of supports and services through Irish to learners with SEN. For example, Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) highlight the lack of access that Gaeltacht learners at primary and post-primary levels have to psychological and speech therapy services through Irish. This concern was also expressed by respondents participating in the NCCA's (NCCA, 2007) consultation on language and literacy in Irish-medium schools.

Another key theme in the research regarding SEN in the Irish-medium sector is that there is need for greater coordination of services relating to SEN. The COGG (2010) report on SEN highlights the need for collaboration between the Departments of Education, north and south, in terms of research and in co-ordinating the leveraging of existing expertise and resources available in both jurisdictions in relation to SEN and Irish-medium education.

The need to develop teachers' knowledge and skills relevant to special education in the context of the Gaeltacht school is also highlighted in the research on Gaeltacht education. Mac Donnacha (2005) recommends that a post-graduate course in learning-support teaching be provided, which would serve as a specific qualification for those teachers interested in teaching as resource teachers and learning-support teachers in Gaeltacht schools or all-Irish schools. It is envisaged that such a course would be initiated by COGG in collaboration with a third-level institute. Mac Donnacha also suggests that existing expertise in relation to SEN in Gaeltacht schools could be leveraged through the establishment of a national network of Gaeltacht learning-support and resource teachers.

Commentary

The research identifies a number of key issues in relation to special education in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht contexts that merit consideration and clarification within the educational system including:

- the extent to which priority should be given in learning-support provision to support for Irish-language literacy skills in Gaeltacht schools
- the extent to which Irish should be the medium of instruction in SEN contexts in Gaeltacht schools, for example in Mathematics
- the extent to which the support services provide support through Irish to schools.

Currently, the guidance available to schools is that additional supports are provided on the basis of the learners' needs. The *Learning-Support Guidelines (2000)* for primary schools focus on the provision of learning-support in English and Mathematics but gives recognition to the possibility of learning support provision for Irish literacy skills by advising that the terms 'English' and 'literacy' may denote Gaeilge in cases in which Gaeilge is the first language. However, it is not clear whether Irish, as the first language of the learner, or as the first language of the school is in question. Neither is there guidance provided on whether learning-support for Mathematics in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools should be provided in Irish or English.

The guidelines at post-primary level *Inclusion of Pupils with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines (2007)* do not make any reference to support for Irish literacy skills or provide guidance on the language through which support for special needs students in Irish-medium or Gaeltacht contexts will be provided.

It is evident that either the existing learning-support guidelines should be revised or that guidelines specific to the Irish-medium sector should be provided. Such revised or new guidelines would not only provide guidance on the specific issues highlighted above in relation to support for literacy skills and clarification of the language of supports, but would also give recognition to the specific context factors that relate to education in a minority language.

It is evident that some progress has been made with regard to the provision of support services through Irish to schools. For example, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has identified staff competent in Irish for assignment to Gaeltacht schools. However, it should be noted that there are practical difficulties relating mainly to critical mass that constrain the ability of the education sector to deliver the services in Irish in the SEN context. For example, it is challenging to produce test instruments appropriate for first-language speakers of Irish, when the population within individual Gaeltacht areas and across areas is so small. The low numbers of SEN students combined with their dispersed population across the wide Gaeltacht geographical entity presents challenges in ensuring access to specialists with capacity in Irish for low-incidence SEN.

Nonetheless, there is a need to ensure that there is awareness among professional and para-professional staff of the literature supporting the intellectual, speech and career benefits of bilingualism and the specific bilingual needs of pupils with SEN in Gaeltacht contexts. COGG, NEPS, and the Special Education Support Service (SESS) could play a role in providing guidance on support for the bilingual needs of children with SEN in Gaeltacht areas.

4.14 Teacher Education

Teacher supply is a key issue highlighted in the research on Gaeltacht education. The research also highlights how the specific needs of teachers in Irish-medium contexts, both Gaeltacht schools and gaelscoileanna, are not being met at present in the pre-service education, induction and professional development of teachers.

Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) concluded on the basis of feedback from school stakeholders that there are three main difficulties in relation to teacher supply and education, the impact of which requires further research:

- there are not enough teachers interested in working in the Gaeltacht
- there are not enough teachers who have sufficient mastery in the language to teach through Irish in the Gaeltacht
- pre-service courses do not prepare teachers for teaching through Irish and/or the second language, or for teaching in contexts characteristic of Gaeltacht schools i.e. small schools with multi-grade classes.

Ó Duibhir (2006) also highlights the need to ensure that teachers receive the support necessary to enable them to deal with the particular classroom management and pedagogical challenges of teaching in Gaeltacht schools, for example, managing the variation in the Irish-language ability of pupils in multi-grade classes, enriching the Irish of competent speakers while others are acquiring Irish as a second language, and teaching English as a second language to the native speakers of Irish.

Máirtín (2006) describes the difficulties around teacher provision for Irish-medium schools, including gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools, in relation to the availability of teachers with sufficient Irish to teach through Irish, and the lack of attention in pre-service provision to teaching through Irish.

O'Grádaigh (2015) shows that the same difficulties highlighted by the above researchers continue to exist in relation to teacher provision for the Irish language education sector at post-primary level. In general, Gaelcholáistí and post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht have significant difficulties in recruiting subject teachers who are sufficiently capable to teach through the medium of Irish or prepared to do so, particularly in the modern European languages, in Science and in Mathematics. The main challenges cited by Ó Grádaigh in relation to recruitment and supply are as follows:

- Schools often have to re-advertise posts as no qualified applicants apply for the advertised posts.
- More often than not, principals don't have a choice of applicants when filling a post.
- Schools regularly accept any qualified candidate who shows an interest in the post.
- The majority of principals in this sector have had to make an appointment even though they were not satisfied with the applicant's standard of Irish.
- Certain subjects are being taught in English in some schools because subject teachers with Irish are not available.

Ó Grádaigh notes that the Professional Master of Education (PME), National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG) is the only initial teacher education course serving the Irish language sector at post-primary level.

A recurring message in the research relates to the need to ensure that teachers in Gaeltacht schools have knowledge and understanding of Irish-medium education, particularly as it applies to the Gaeltacht context. Ní Shéaghda (2010) notes the lack of use and understanding of international research and best

practice relating to language immersion approaches that is evident in some Gaeltacht schools. Ní Thuairisg (2014) highlights that there is a lack of awareness among post-primary teachers in Gaeltacht schools on the rationale underpinning Irish-medium instruction, other than continuing with the traditional practice of teaching through Irish and supporting the maintenance of Irish as the language of the community. Ní Thuairisg also notes that there is a lack of knowledge and understanding among Gaeltacht teachers of the Gaeltacht, as a distinct sociolinguistic entity, of the pedagogical approaches necessary for teaching in a mixed language context and their responsibilities regarding the educational and language needs of the students. Due to these factors, combined with the lack of a valid definition of the Gaeltacht school, and the unsuitability of CPD approaches (e.g., knowledge-focused, lack of consideration of Gaeltacht educational context), post-primary teachers in Gaeltacht schools do not appear to have established a distinct professional identity as Gaeltacht teachers, either as a group or at the level of the individual.

The research highlights the need for strategic planning in relation to teacher supply in Irish-medium schools, including Gaeltacht schools. Máirtín (2006) recommends that a statistical database be established on the annual demand for teachers in gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools, and that not less than the minimum number of students with *gaelscolaíocht* or Gaeltacht backgrounds be registered annually on the pre-service courses in the Colleges of Education⁵.

In light of the perceived inadequacy of current initial teacher education and CPD provision for teachers in Gaeltacht areas (and Irish-medium schools), a recurring recommendation relates to the establishment of a centre or the nomination of one agency to co-ordinate teacher education provision for Gaeltacht schools.

Ó Duibhir (2006) highlights that there is insufficient attention being given to the needs of the Irish-medium sector by the existing teacher education services for two reasons: it is only a small part of their work; and those working in the services do not have the required expertise in relation to immersion education. Ó Duibhir recommends that a separate national support structure be established to attend to and prioritise the specific professional development needs of teachers in Gaeltacht schools and gaelscoileanna. Such a centre would:

- pioneer the development of teaching of Irish and teaching through Irish
- assess the needs of Gaeltacht and gaelscoileanna teachers and develop a strategic plan to attend to those needs
- organise courses as required to attend to the recognised needs
- establish an accreditation system in collaboration with third-level institutions that would give recognition to the professional development of teachers
- co-ordinate the work of the support services in relation to Gaeltacht schools and gaelscoileanna
- encourage the development of communities of learning and facilitate the sharing of inter-school experience
- promote research in this area and disseminate the outcomes of such research.

On the other hand, Ó Duibhir envisages that COGG would play a key co-ordination role in all matters relating to Irish-medium education in teacher education including:

⁵ Colleges of Education are now referred to as Higher Education Institutions

- consulting with the initial teacher providers at primary and post-primary level, the Teaching Council, and the HEA in order to assess the current provision for immersion education and teaching through Irish, with a view to exploring options to improve provision
- liaising with the coordinators of teacher induction programmes to discuss the needs of newly qualified teachers in Gaeltacht and all-Irish schools
- liaising with the support services with regard to ensuring that the specific needs of teachers in Gaeltacht and all-Irish schools are catered for
- initiating a broad CPD programme for teachers, principals, inspectors, and other experts who work with or provide support services for Gaeltacht schools, such a programme to include a post graduate training programme and a school exchange programme.

Initial teacher education

The research (e.g., Mac Donnacha et al., 2005) highlights the need to provide initial teacher education courses that are fully through Irish, immerse the student teachers in an Irish-language environment, and attend to the specific areas of expertise required to teach effectively in a Gaeltacht school. However, the views of the research on how this might be done varies and a range of options are presented varying from making specific provision for Irish-medium education within existing teacher education structures and provision to the establishment of entirely separate structures.

Ó Duibhir (2006) identifies options within existing provision such as:

- the provision of extra modules and new courses in teaching through Irish in the colleges of education
- increasing the number of H.Dip. courses, similar to the *Ardteastas san Oideachas* course⁶ in NUIG
- including a module on teaching through Irish and through a second language on the H.Dip. courses
- allowing student teachers the opportunity to spend a year of their course in the Gaeltacht in a scheme akin to an Erasmus scheme.

Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) recommend that a college of education be established in the Gaeltacht to provide training courses through the medium of Irish to primary and post-primary teachers, to cover the specific professional requirements of teachers working in the immersion education system of Gaeltacht schools. Ó Duibhir (2006) recommends that an independent college of education be established to educate teachers to teach in primary and secondary Gaeltacht schools and Gaelscoileanna.

Alternatively, Máirtín (2006) advises that consideration should be given to the establishment of a Post-Graduate Diploma in Primary Education and Irish-medium education that provides for the specific needs of Irish-medium education as well as attending to the needs of other school types. Máirtín also advises that the option be explored of an Irish-medium pre-service course that would bring student teachers from the Gaeltacht and gaelscoileanna together to meet the specific needs of Irish-medium education and that would raise the standard of Irish in all schools, but particularly in gaelscoileanna.

Ní Thuairisg (2014) advises that a separate bespoke initial teacher training course should be provided for teachers intending to teach in the Irish-medium sector at post-primary level. Such a course would not just be delivered through Irish, but would focus on the particular needs relating to teaching in the Irish-medium context, including a knowledge and understanding of the Gaeltacht as a discrete sociolinguistic entity.

⁶ *Ardteastas san Oideachas* is now known as *An Teastas Gaeilge do Mhúinteoirí Iarbhunskoile (TGMI)*

Ó Grádaigh (2015) makes a number of recommendations as to how the provision for initial teacher education could be expanded to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of teachers to teach through Irish at post-primary level including:

- increase the number of places on the PME in the National University, Galway (NUIG)
- introduce a quota of places per subject in the PME to meet the demand of the all-Irish post-primary schools and Gaeltacht schools
- offer a bursary to certain graduates, who have a good standard of Irish and a subject degree that is in demand in the Irish language education sector, to undertake the PME in the NUIG
- carry out a review of the Postgraduate Application Centre (PAC) entry system and discuss the possibility of retaining a number of places for those who are interested in teaching through the medium of Irish.
- investigate the potential for setting up a four year education degree through Irish for second level.

In addition, Ó Grádaigh recommends that annual strategic planning with input from schools should take place and that a database be set up accordingly to ensure that the supply of teachers meets the demand from schools.

Continuing professional development

The research on Gaeltacht education highlights the need to provide CPD for teachers that is tailored to the needs of teachers in Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools.

One particular option that appears frequently in research (Mac Donnacha, 2005; Máirtín, 2006; Ó Duibhir, 2006) is the provision of a post-graduate course, either post-graduate diploma or to Masters level in Irish-medium education. Ó Duibhir (2006) and Mac Donnacha (2005) envisage that COGG would have a role in either consulting with the relevant third level institution about the possibilities of providing such post-graduate courses or indeed initiating such courses. Mac Donnacha envisages that such a post-graduate course would be extended to principals, inspectors, and other experts who are providing support services for Gaeltacht schools and focus on areas such as:

- immersion education: founding principles and best practices
- language policies and language planning for Gaeltacht and all-Irish schools
- the primary and post-primary curriculum in Gaeltacht schools
- the needs of students with SEN in Gaeltacht and all-Irish schools
- the history of the education system in the Gaeltacht.

The national research also calls for ongoing provision of professional development courses specific to the needs of teachers in the Gaeltacht. Ó Duibhir (2006) advises that in-service courses be organised for teachers in Gaeltacht and all-Irish schools that did not receive pre-service education in this area and that in-service courses be organised for qualified teachers who would be interested in transferring to a Gaeltacht or all-Irish school. He also advises that opportunities and incentives would be provided for teachers in Gaeltacht and all-Irish schools to improve their standard of Irish. Máirtín (2006) advises that bespoke short courses in oral and written accuracy in the language be designed for teachers in Irish-medium schools and that these courses be available in a manner that facilitates ease of access by teachers. Ní Thuairisg (2014) suggests that specific CPD provision be made for Gaeltacht post-primary teachers across the full range of subjects which would be a forum for teachers to share their experience of post-primary education in the Gaeltacht, to develop new understandings of the context, and develop

their expertise. She recommends that COGG should be responsible for the administration of the CPD given its status as a national organisation and the legitimacy of its involvement in Gaeltacht education.

Other options include:

- the establishment of a separate support structure for the professional development needs of teachers in Gaeltacht and all-Irish schools (Ó Duibhir, 2006)
- the initiation of a school exchange programme that will enable principals and teachers in Gaeltacht schools and in all-Irish schools to exchange with principals and teachers in other schools for a period of one month (Mac Donnacha, 2005)
- the establishment of a professional association for teachers who teach through the medium of Irish led by COGG in consultation with existing teacher groups, such as Eagraíocht na Scoileanna Gaeltachta, Gaelscoileanna, Comhar na Múinteoirí Gaeilge, and the teacher unions. Such an association would facilitate teachers in taking responsibility for their own learning and professional development needs. It would also encourage research in this area and the dissemination and sharing of good practice (Ó Duibhir, 2006).

Mac Donnacha (2005) also suggests the appointment of subject co-ordinators to tackle the problems of teaching the various subjects through Irish at post-primary level. Such subject co-ordinators would:

- participate in seminars related to the subject and include teaching methods in the subject through the medium of Irish
- discuss new developments in the subject and new teaching aids in the subject
- develop teaching aids in the various subjects
- provide in-service programmes for the subject teachers
- oversee a panel of substitute teachers available for substitution work in schools that are teaching through Irish.

In addition to the provision of a Gaeltacht board responsible for Gaeltacht education, Ní Shéaghdha (2010) recommends a range of supports that will enable Gaeltacht schools to develop their understanding of immersion education and deliver a model of education that will meet the needs of children whose first language is Irish. These include:

- the provision of a continuous series of appropriate seminars for schools in Category A in each major Gaeltacht area to train principals, teachers, and members of boards of management in relation to Gaeltacht immersion education
- the provision of an advisory service for Gaeltacht schools that would advise them on how to use the effective practices that Ní Sheághdha has identified in her research
- the commissioning by COGG of a scheme that would be a support to infant teachers of immersion and Gaeltacht education with regard to the teaching of pre-reading skills.

Commentary

The research provides a wide range of suggestions on how the supply of teachers available to teach in Gaeltacht schools can be enhanced through strengthening the provision for Irish-medium education during all phases of the teacher education continuum - initial teacher education, induction and continuing professional development.

Since the publication of the reports above, a large number of teacher education measures relating to Irish and Irish-medium education have been put in place or are planned as part of the implementation of the *20-Year Strategy for Irish* and indeed are reflective of many of the proposals outlined above.

These measures include:

- research by the Teaching Council on proposals to raise the entry requirement in Irish in initial teacher education (ITE). The Teaching Council is expected to advise the Minister in 2015.
- provision of pedagogical options on Irish-medium and immersion education as part of their programmes by a number of ITE providers at primary level.
- the continuing supply of teachers for post-primary Irish-medium schools via the post-graduate Professional Master of Education (PME) for teaching through Irish in the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG)
- ongoing support for teachers by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) in the delivery of Irish curriculums at both primary and post-primary levels, with a particular emphasis on in-school support and provision of materials online. A range of relevant CPD events (seminars and workshops) are offered based on national education priorities. These events are made available through Irish for Irish-medium schools. In addition, the *Tionól Teagaisc* event is held annually for post-primary teachers.
- differentiation of CPD for Irish-medium and English-medium schools, as appropriate, in the context of the new junior cycle specification for Irish
- provision of support by COGG to providers of courses specific to the needs of teachers in Irish-medium schools.
- provision of opportunities to teachers in primary and post-primary schools to advance their competence to function in Irish-medium education contexts through participation on relevant post-graduate programmes at Master's level.
- collaboration by the DES with the Department of Education, Northern Ireland in a north/south initiative that provides for the promotion of blended learning activities for teachers in Irish-medium schools including Gaeltacht schools, and the sharing of best practice examples and resources in relation to literacy and numeracy.

In addition to the above, many of the ITE providers at primary level provide pedagogical options on Irish-medium education to their students. Some of the ITE providers also deliver aspects of their programmes through Irish.

At least one College of Education has expressed interest regarding the provision of ITE courses fully through Irish at primary level. At post-primary level, NUIG wishes to expand the numbers (currently 40) on its ITE programme, which is delivered through Irish. The Department is supportive, in principle, of such proposals. However, in exploring the feasibility of same, account must be taken of any consequent implications, such as on resources and teacher supply.

In light of this, the Department has asked the Teaching Council to carry out research on teacher supply with a view to developing a teacher supply forecasting model. Teacher supply for the Irish-medium sector will be considered as part of that research. The Teaching Council is expected to provide a report of its research by summer 2015.

The national research on Gaeltacht education highlights the need to ensure that provision for the professional needs of teachers is co-ordinated to ensure that it does not become lost within general provision. Various options are provided for such co-ordination including the establishment of a dedicated support structure for the professional development needs of teachers in Gaeltacht and all-Irish schools. One of the measures in the *20-Year Strategy for Irish* is that a National Centre for Irish-medium Teacher Professional Development will be established in an existing educational institution. However, delivery of this is unlikely to be feasible in the short to medium term, at least due to the potential costs involved.

Another co-ordination option suggested in the research is that the roles and responsibilities of COGG be extended to include supporting Gaeltacht schools in the area of teacher education. While many of these suggestions are beyond the remit of COGG, as provided for under Section 31 of the Education Act, 1998, there is need to ensure that the elements of CPD provision are co-ordinated to leverage existing resources and avoid potential duplication in provision. In light of the fact that COGG already provides funding to providers of courses in the Irish-medium sector and is supporting teacher engagement with post-graduate studies of Irish-medium education, the potential for COGG to have a co-ordinating and liaison role in relation to teacher professional development might be explored. However, any consideration of this would need to take account of the roles and responsibilities of COGG as currently prescribed, as well as the roles and responsibility of the national support services such as PDST and the Special Education Support Service (SESS), and other parties in relation to the professional development of teachers.

The research on Gaeltacht education suggests that a separate college of education be established in the Gaeltacht to facilitate the training of teachers for Irish-medium education and particularly for Gaeltacht schools. Such a proposal is unlikely to be feasible in light of the fact that the college would be small, isolated, lacking in research and resource capabilities, and would therefore not be in line with what is considered to work in terms of initial teacher education. A more feasible option, as outlined above, would be the provision of a discrete ITE course through the medium of Irish in one or more existing ITE providers. Other proposals outlined in the Gaeltacht education research such as the establishment of a separate panel of substitute teachers for the Gaeltacht are unlikely to be feasible in light of the dispersed nature of Gaeltacht schools and the potential costs involved.

4.15 Parental support and involvement

Much of the research on Gaeltacht education highlights the concerns of Gaeltacht parents who are raising their children through Irish, about the lack of support from the educational system. Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) notes the views of Gaeltacht parents on how the educational system can undermine their efforts to transmit Irish language and Gaeltacht culture to their children and embed a personal commitment to the language. They also note the difficulties associated with convincing parents to make a decision to raise their family through Irish in the absence of an assurance that the educational system and other support structures will support them in the implementation of that decision. Mac Donnacha (2005) and Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) note how it is of concern to many parents raising their children through Irish that their children are not attaining the enriched language competence that would be expected from native speakers of the language.

The research also highlights the important role that schools in Gaeltacht areas can play in supporting parents who are raising their children through Irish and in encouraging parental support for the work of the school.

Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) contend that a priority for language planning in the Gaeltacht is to ensure that educational institutions in Gaeltacht areas demonstrate that they are supporting the Irish-language choice made by parents and that young people are being socialised through Irish as they participate in the educational system. Ní Shéaghdha (2010) highlights the importance of schools communicating with parents and securing their co-operation for the work of the school with regard to the promotion of Irish and instruction through Irish. She recommends that Gaeltacht schools hold information meetings with parents to explain the ethos and language policy of the school and to articulate the obligations on the school to meet the needs of native Irish speakers as well as the needs of learners of Irish. The NCCA consultation with stakeholders on language and literacy in Irish-medium schools (NCCA, 2006b) also highlights the importance of parental involvement in relation to:

- the implementation of a schools' language and literacy policy
- ensuring that an understanding of immersion is communicated to and understood by the whole school population including members of staff, boards of management, parents and children.

Nonetheless, research makes it clear that the school alone cannot be expected to support parents. Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) advise that language-centred support and advisory services (external to the educational system) should be provided to parents who are raising their children through Irish to encourage them to establish the language patterns and behaviour, which are likely to result in the successful linguistic outcomes they envisage when they choose to raise their children through Irish. Ó Giollagáin et al. also envisage such support services would make special arrangements for children who are native speakers of Irish and for children who do not speak Irish at home.

Mac Donnacha (2005) makes recommendations on the introduction of schemes that will help to strengthen the role of Gaeltacht parents in their children's education. He envisages that separate schemes would be provided for parents who are rearing their children through Irish and parents who are rearing their children through English. Such schemes would include:

- information to parents on the school's language policy and their role in their child's education and in enhancing their children's capacity in Irish
- an advisory service on the use of Irish as the language of the home and how to manage language questions when their children are mixing with other children who are not speaking Irish
- information on the audio-visual and reading material that is available in Irish for various age-groups
- provision of Irish classes for parents with little Irish.

Commentary

The research on Gaeltacht education highlights the need for schools to support the endeavours of parents who are raising their children through Irish. Such support can come through differentiated provision and additional supports that attend to the needs of native speakers. The research also highlights the importance of involving parents on two counts: engaging their support for the work and language policy of the school and enabling them to support and participate in their child's learning and language development. It is clear that there is a role for the educational system and schools in supporting parents in their language choice and enabling them to support their child's educational and language development, but such support also needs to come from agencies external to the educational system.

It is important that schools have the confidence to engage and support parents in the manner described above. The provision of guidance to schools based on existing effective practice and information materials for parents, possibly through a joint endeavour between COGG and NCCA, would support schools in this regard.

4.16 Early-years education

There is little research that relates directly to Irish-medium provision in the early-years education context in Gaeltacht areas. The research that is available (e.g., Hickey, 1997; Hickey, 1999) highlights the important contribution that attendance in Irish-medium early childhood playgroup settings (*naíonraí*) can make to the development of pre-school children's competence in Irish. It also notes how attendance by children in the local *naíonra* can have a positive impact on the use of the language in the home as parents endeavour to help their children acquire Irish. Hickey & de Mejía (2014) highlight the importance of parental engagement with pre-school provision and advise that the preschool immersion programme includes ways to help parents to develop home practices and activities that support their children's oral and pre-literacy skills.

Hickey and de Mejía (2014) also identify issues relating to early-years education provision in minority language contexts that echo many of the challenges facing Gaeltacht schools and merit consideration in the *naíonra* context in the Gaeltacht. Some of the issues resonate well with challenges facing early-years education more generally in Ireland. Hickey and de Mejía (2014: 141) contend that:

.....the most significant challenge for the future of this sector centres on training and retaining effective and experienced educators with qualifications in early years' education as well as access to effective ongoing training in immersion methodology, accompanied by fluency in the target language and the empathy and personal qualities required for working successfully with very young children.

Hickey and de Mejía note in particular how early-years educators in minority language contexts need training on how to adopt a differentiated approach to the diverse needs of learners that provides for the needs of L1 speakers, L2 speakers, and children with language impairment. The need to adapt pre-school pedagogical practices to the immersion context is also highlighted. A high level of competence is therefore required of the educator in the early-years immersion setting and will require, not just pre-service qualifications but ongoing specialist training, setting up of career development structures as well as appropriate remuneration.

The difficulty in accessing appropriate resources for language teaching and assessment in minority language settings is also highlighted although in the Irish context groups such as Comhar na Naíonraí Gaeltachta ensure that there is a good supply of resources available for use in *naíonraí* in Gaeltacht areas.

Commentary

The research relating to early-years educational settings including the *naíonraí* in Gaeltacht areas highlights the importance of provision at this level for the development of children's competence in the minority language. It also highlights the importance of minority language provision at this level in harnessing the support of parents for use of the language and the role of the early-years educational setting in harnessing this support.

Due to the important role that early-years educational provision can play in establishing language usage patterns and developing competence in the language, the strengthening of *naíonra* provision in the Gaeltacht would appear to be a priority. The key message from the research is that early-years educators need training and ongoing professional development, particularly in relation to immersion education and differentiating for diverse language and learning needs.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The research on Gaeltacht education provides a wide range of proposals on how education through Irish in Gaeltacht schools can be strengthened in light of the challenges facing the schools. In particular, the research makes a number of suggestions in relation to differentiated provision for native speakers of Irish within the educational system. While some of the research is over ten years old, many of the proposals are still relevant in light of the challenges facing Gaeltacht schools and the provision of education in Gaeltacht areas, and when taken together, provide a useful steer for strengthening education in Gaeltacht areas.

In some instances, the proposals, such as those relating to curriculum and assessment, are already being either realised or partially realised as part of the implementation of the *20-Year Strategy for Irish* and the national literacy and numeracy strategy. In other instances, the proposals, particularly those relating to governance, admissions, and quality assurance, are simply not feasible because of factors such as the structure of the educational system, legislative constraints, and resource constraints, particularly in light of the lack of critical mass in most areas and the dispersed population of native speakers in the Gaeltacht.

In the context of those proposals that are deemed to have potential, this concluding section endeavours to highlight the key messages for the development of a policy for Gaeltacht education, the potential models of education that can potentially be delivered in Gaeltacht areas, and the actions that merit particular consideration in relation to key drivers of provision.

5.1 Overall messages

The research provides some key messages on how the educational system should proceed with regard to supporting schools in Gaeltacht areas. For example, it is clear that the approach should be two-pronged, where central policy and supports complement local initiatives. It is also clear that the approach adopted needs to support the use of Irish in the community, secure the support and confidence of the local community, including parents, and complement action in domains other than education. In addition, language policies in schools need to reflect the language planning processes that are occurring in their communities under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012. A recurring message in the research is that there is need for the educational system in Gaeltacht areas to prioritise the needs of native Irish speakers in both primary and post-primary schools.

5.2 Models of education

The national research favours the provision of a robust Irish-medium education in Gaeltacht areas via a model that is clearly defined and supported. Views differ, however, with regard to how Irish-medium education might be delivered with some researchers advocating separate Irish-medium models for native speakers of Irish and learners of the language. These researchers argue strongly for the provision

of schooling strictly for native speakers of Irish and for the implementation of admission policies to support same with a view to ensuring that these speakers continue and extend their socialisation in the Irish language and achieve native speaker norms. However, the provision of separate Irish-medium models does not appear to be practicable given the dispersed nature of native speakers, the resources that would be required for same, and the potential adverse impact personally and socially of separating children in a given locality from their peers, because of the languages that they speak.

The model that appears to be most feasible, and yet potentially beneficial to the needs of both native speakers and learners of Irish, is the provision of an immersion model where differentiated supports are provided to enrich the Irish-language proficiency of native speakers in accordance with the proportion of such speakers in the school. It is clear, however, that such additional supports need to be comprehensive and integrated. Options include the implementation of particular management and pedagogical approaches at the level of the school, and the central provision of dedicated language supports. Such language supports may include a strengthened Language Assistants' (*Cúntóirí Teanga*) scheme, the introduction of language support teachers, as well as the establishment of language acquisition centres or units for learners with little or no Irish.

As suggested in the national research, pedagogical approaches at primary level would include the provision of an extended period of total early-immersion education in infant classes. The research suggests that such an extended period of total immersion would greatly support the Irish-language interaction and socialisation of native speakers of Irish in particular.

However, there will be schools located in Gaeltacht areas, particularly those that over time have moved to teaching through English or a partial immersion approach or a bilingual approach, and where there is now a desire to be recognised as a Gaeltacht school in line with the local language planning processes, where the adoption of an immersion model, as described above, will not be practicable in the short term at least. In that regard, there will be need to provide supports in a transitional phase to enable such schools to move to full instruction through Irish. A phased model would therefore need to be developed to support schools in this context.

The question also arises whether English-medium provision should be made available where there is sufficient demand for such. The national research on Gaeltacht education is largely silent on the matter. However, one piece of research on Gaeltacht education suggests that English-medium provision should only be available where the demand for same reflects the sociolinguistic profile of the community. While the research does not suggest that Irish-medium schools and English-medium schools should be provided as options within individual Gaeltacht communities, the provision of parallel provision merits serious consideration in Gaeltacht areas where there is a high density of population and sufficient demand to support both language school types. In less populated areas, parallel provision may be feasible where there is demand for both Irish-medium and English-medium instruction and where there is potential for reconfiguring existing school provision in that area.

5.3 Drivers and supports for Gaeltacht education

The research on Gaeltacht education identifies a wide range of drivers and associated supports that have the potential to enhance the provision of Irish-medium education in Gaeltacht areas, both within mainstream and SEN settings, which merit consideration in light of the delivery of the desired model of education described above.

Definition of a Gaeltacht school

The research envisages that a key driver of future Irish-medium provision in Gaeltacht areas is that a clear definition of a Gaeltacht school be established within a central policy framework. It is expected that such a definition would articulate expectations in relation to the most appropriate and effective model of immersion and Irish-medium education as well as aspects of educational and language practice including:

- Management and leadership
- Enrolment
- Parental involvement
- Language of instruction
- Language of communication
- Language planning
- Curricular provision and school policies
- Self-evaluation
- Use of resources (Irish-language materials)
- Provision for native speakers and learners of the language
- Assessment
- SEN provision
- Recruitment of principals and teachers and other staff.

Arising from the discussion above regarding the most appropriate Irish-medium model for Gaeltacht schools, the preferred option appears to be that the definition of a Gaeltacht school be based on an immersion model, where differentiated supports are provided to support the language enrichment of native speakers in accordance with the proportion of such speakers in the school. It is envisaged that schools that are in transition in terms of Irish-medium education would be working towards realising this model within a specific timeframe. It is also envisaged that the necessary infrastructure and supports would be provided to support the realisation of the definition and model in practice. Details of such supports are outlined below.

Such an approach would potentially allow schools in tandem with the language planning processes in their local areas and in consultation with school stakeholders, to clarify their status as a Gaeltacht school in unequivocal terms and to advise the DES accordingly. The provision of additional supports and resources would be contingent on this declaration of status and on the implementation of the stated practice in the school.

Leadership and teacher development

Another critical driver is that principals of Gaeltacht schools have the necessary vision, knowledge and skills, including an understanding of immersion education and an ability to engage in whole-school language planning, to meet the particular demands of leading and managing in a Gaeltacht school. Boards of management also need to have a knowledge and understanding of the important role that they can play in supporting and planning for the delivery of Irish-medium education.

Similarly, it is essential that teachers have the language competence, and pedagogical knowledge and skill to deliver Irish-medium instruction in the complex context that characterises Gaeltacht schools,

such as providing for learners of diverse language backgrounds including native speakers, providing for children with special educational needs whose first language is either Irish or English, and managing multi-grade classes.

In light of this, a strong argument can be made to ensure that bespoke initial teacher education, induction and CPD opportunities are provided for principals and teachers in Gaeltacht schools. It is very important that such provision for teachers and principals in Gaeltacht schools, particularly in relation to CPD, is co-ordinated and does not become lost in general teacher education provision. The potential for a nominated organisation, such as COGG, to have a co-ordination, advisory or liaison role in relation to teacher professional development might be explored in light of its current roles and responsibilities and those of national teacher education support services, such as PDST and SESS.

Planning, teaching, learning and assessment resources

Another key driver for Irish-medium education is to ensure that the necessary resources and supports are provided to assist with the core educational activities in Gaeltacht schools, such as whole-school planning, teaching, learning and assessment in both mainstream and SEN contexts. Considerable progress has been made under the aegis of COGG in making Irish-language educational materials available, mainly in support of teaching and learning through Irish but also in support of planning. Such progress is particularly visible in the comprehensive directory of materials available online on the COGG website and in the planning template for primary schools that Eagraíocht na Scoileanna Gaeltachta produced with the support of COGG.

However, there is no doubt but that the provision of such resources and supports in the minority language context will continue to require positive discriminatory measures and sustained investment. The challenge will be to ensure that the quality of the materials available for Gaeltacht schools and Irish-medium education is akin to the quality of the materials available for English-medium schools and that materials are available for the full range of educational activity, both mainstream and SEN in terms of planning, curriculum and assessment to the extent that it is practicable to do so.

It is also clear from the research that there is a need to create new synergies in order to leverage the knowledge and resources already available and ensure that the educational community in Gaeltacht areas, including teachers, is fully aware of and has access to what is available. It is also important that teachers and others are encouraged to add to the bank of resources available to schools. This may take place in a number of ways including:

- the sharing of resources on an all-Island basis, including those related to SEN and assessment
- the leveraging of the expertise and involvement of teachers and co-ordinating the sharing of materials designed by teachers
- the provision of additional guidance with regard to the use of existing resources and the further development of such resources where necessary e.g. *Séideán Sí* Irish-language programme for primary schools
- the sharing of planning, management, pedagogical and assessment practice, as reflected in the research and practice in Gaeltacht schools.

One option for realising the creation of new synergies and leveraging of resources with regard to Irish-language resource provision includes the establishment of a dedicated support site for Gaeltacht

education or Irish-medium provision more generally, akin to what is available for the new junior cycle and what is intended for the early-years educational practice guide being developed by the NCCA. It would be important that one agency has responsibility for management of the site on an ongoing basis. Given its remit for co-ordinating the provision of resources for the Irish-medium sector, the potential for COGG to assume this role should be explored on the understanding that the necessary resources would be made available to COGG to do so. Alternatively, the potential for the PDST to host such a site could also be explored.

Another option for the leveraging of knowledge and resources with regard to Gaeltacht education includes the provision of guidelines on planning, management, pedagogical and assessment practice in Gaeltacht schools that builds on the materials produced to date from various groups and incorporates the understandings and best practice described in national and international research and observed in Gaeltacht classrooms.

This review of Gaeltacht education identifies a range of practices that should be widely disseminated as well as important pedagogical issues that need to be clarified in the form of guidelines. For example, it is expected that such guidelines would advise on effective pedagogical practice in the mainstream classroom and SEN context in relation to important questions such as the starting point for reading, and the status of Irish as a priority and language of instruction in the SEN context. The guidelines could also articulate how a school can promote and support parental involvement in the work of the school, in their children's learning, and in their use of Irish. It is envisaged that such guidelines would be developed in a collaborative endeavour involving all relevant stakeholders including the DES, COGG, NCCA, NEPS, and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and representatives of teachers in Gaeltacht areas. The option of making these guidelines available in an online interface to the system should be explored particularly as this would facilitate ongoing development and revision of the Guidelines.

Language supports

The national research highlights the need for the provision of differentiated language support for native speakers of Irish and for learners of Irish with little or no Irish who intend enrolling in Gaeltacht schools. A number of options which merit consideration are mentioned in the research.

One option for supporting both native speakers and learners of Irish is the enhancement of the Language Assistants' Scheme (*Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga*) operated and funded by the Department of the Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. While it is obvious that the scheme has strengths, any enhancement of the scheme should be informed by an external objective evaluation of the impact of the scheme on the language development of target pupils and their ability to access the curriculum through Irish. Such an evaluation would help to determine, how the scheme could be further enhanced from a language and educational perspective, and the potential for extending it in support of native speakers of Irish and learners of Irish in Gaeltacht areas. Such an evaluation could also consider the value associated with extension of the scheme compared with the provision of dedicated language-support teachers in Gaeltacht schools akin to the provision previously made for English as an additional language (EAL) learners, and the cost/benefits associated with either option, or indeed, a combination of both. The training and qualifications of language assistants are matters that would warrant consideration in any such evaluation.

Another option for consideration is the provision of language acquisition centres for learners of Irish. The experience of such centres in Wales indicates a modicum of success mainly due to the short period of time that pupils spend in the centres and the lack of integration of the support with other necessary system elements, such as curriculum provision. There is also a question of whether such language acquisition units would work in the Irish context, given the scattered nature of Gaeltacht areas geographically, and whether there would be sufficient demand from parents. Nonetheless, it would be an option worth exploring on a pilot basis in one or more of the main Gaeltacht areas.

As indicated in the research, early-years immersion provision through the *naíonraí* has the potential to promote language development among children and activate language usage patterns among parents. It would be worthwhile looking at opportunities to strengthen provision such as by enhancing the links between it and the primary schools and facilitating the sharing of resources.

Language Curriculum

The content of language curriculums is deemed in the research on Gaeltacht education to have a central role in supporting the development of Irish-language competence among both learners and native speakers in Gaeltacht schools. The research is particularly critical of current language curriculum provision for native speakers of Irish. While action is already being taken in the course of the development of new curriculums at primary and junior cycle to meet the particular language needs of Gaeltacht pupils, including native speakers of Irish, there should be ongoing review of the development, implementation and the content of such curriculums to ensure that they are fit for purpose and that strengthened Irish-language curricular provision is made available, as necessary.

Structure and management of schools

Some of the research on Gaeltacht education acknowledges that the configuration of schools in Gaeltacht areas and the lack of a critical mass, present considerable challenges in terms of meeting the diverse language and education needs of the learners in Gaeltacht schools. In the interest of more effective administration of the schools, the leveraging of resources, and the strengthening of Irish-medium provision, a number of options for restructuring school provision are presented including:

- the amalgamation of small primary schools
- the clustering of small primary schools where schools in particular areas collaborate to share resources, an administrative manager and secretarial services
- confederation of schools, whereby a number of small schools in an area would be administered by one senior manager/principal.

Such options merit serious consideration in light of the implementation of other measures to support Gaeltacht schools, including the provision of differentiated language supports and parallel provision of Irish-medium and English-medium provision.

Parental involvement

The national research on Gaeltacht education highlights the role that parents can play in supporting the language policy of schools in Gaeltacht areas and in supporting their children's learning. The national research also highlights the role that schools and other external agencies can play in supporting parents

to develop their language competence, to capture their support for the language policy of the school and to support their children's learning. The provision of guidance to schools based on existing effective practice and information materials for parents, possibly through a joint endeavour between COGG and NCCA, would support schools in this regard.

Co-ordination of supports

The research on Gaeltacht education highlights the necessity of having a specific agency, namely COGG, to co-ordinate the different aspects of provision and supports for Gaeltacht education to ensure that there is integration of services and that provision is not lost within general educational provision. As highlighted in the body of this report, many of the proposals put forward in the research in relation to this are not feasible or desirable.

However, there is a potential value of having a specific agency, such as COGG, to co-ordinate CPD supports for principals and teachers of Gaeltacht schools and to liaise with existing providers. In particular, such co-ordination would assist with the leveraging of existing resources and with avoiding potential duplication in provision. In light of the fact that COGG is already supporting the provision of CPD for the Irish-medium sector through its funding of providers and the provision of bursaries to post-graduate students, the potential for COGG to assume such a co-ordinating role merits consideration. In doing so, account will need to be taken of factors, such as the capacity of COGG to assume such a role in addition to its other work, and the roles and responsibilities of the parties already directly or indirectly involved in CPD provision for teachers and principals.

There will also be a need to have a nominated agency in place to manage the content and maintenance of the proposed dedicated website and/or guidelines for Gaeltacht schools. Again, the potential for COGG or alternatively the PDST, the national support service for teachers, to assume such a role merits consideration.

5.4 Actions for consideration

Definition of a Gaeltacht school

- Development of a definition of a Gaeltacht school with clear criteria that is based on an immersion model of provision, where differentiated supports are provided to support the language enrichment of native speakers in accordance with the proportion of such speakers in the school.
- Consideration of provision of an extended period of early total immersion (up to two years) in the infant cycle in primary schools to support the stated model of immersion
- Consideration of options to support schools or units that are in transition from English-medium or partial immersion or bilingual approach towards meeting the requirements of the definition of a Gaeltacht school within a specific timeframe.
- Development of the necessary infrastructure and supports to enable the realisation of the definition and model in practice to include the following:

Teacher education

- Consideration of options to support the delivery of bespoke initial teacher education, induction and CPD provision for teachers in Gaeltacht schools to include:

- provision by one or more initial teacher education (ITE) providers of a bespoke Irish-medium course for primary teachers
- the extension of supply on the ITE course that currently prepares post-primary teachers for Irish-medium teaching
- dedicated provision for teachers in Gaeltacht schools by the national support services
- the establishment of networks of teachers involving PDST in consultation with COGG.

Support for principals

- Consideration of options to support the delivery of bespoke induction and CPD provision for principals in Gaeltacht schools to include:
 - the establishment of networks of principals involving the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN), The National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) and the Centre for School Leadership in consultation with COGG
 - dedicated provision for principals of Gaeltacht schools by the national support services.

Resources

- Consideration of options to enhance the provision of resources and supports to support whole-school planning, teaching, learning and assessment in both mainstream and SEN contexts to include:
 - sustained investment in the provision and updating of Irish-medium materials for all aspects of the curriculum and in the SEN context including, where possible, the development of additional assessment tools specific to the needs of native speakers and the Irish-medium context
 - development of online guidelines that outline best management and pedagogical practice regarding the delivery of effective Irish-medium education to meet the needs of all students
 - establishment of a dedicated support site for Gaeltacht education or Irish-medium provision more generally in mainstream and SEN contexts to facilitate access to resources, the sharing of resources, access to best management and pedagogical practice guidelines, and the sharing of practice
 - exploring the potential for the sharing of resources on an all-Ireland basis.

Language supports

- Consideration of options to support the language development of native speakers and learners of Irish to include:
 - establishment of a language acquisition centre for learners with little or no Irish on a pilot basis
 - a review of the effectiveness of the Language Assistants Scheme (*Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga*) and its potential for expansion
 - potential provision of language -support or language-enrichment teachers
 - building links between primary school and the local *naíonraí* e.g. through sharing of resources, location of the *naíonraí* on the site of the school.

Curriculum

- Ongoing review of the development, implementation and the content of Irish-language curriculums to ensure that they meet the needs of pupils in Gaeltacht schools, particularly native speakers of Irish.

Structure and management of schools

- Consideration of options for restructuring school provision including:
 - the amalgamation of small primary schools
 - the clustering of small primary schools, where schools in particular areas collaborate to share resources, an administrative manager and secretarial services
 - confederation of schools, whereby a number of small schools in an area would be administered by one senior manager or principal.

Parental involvement

- Provision of guidance to schools on the promotion of parental involvement and support based on existing effective practice and information materials, possibly through a joint endeavour between COGG and NCCA.

Co-ordination of CPD and online support materials

- Consideration of the potential for COGG or another agency to co-ordinate CPD provision and online support materials for Gaeltacht schools and provide the necessary resources and staffing to implement such a role.

Costings

- Implementation of a cost analysis on the delivery of the support outlined above.

REFERENCES

An Chomhairle Um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (2010). *Special Educational Needs in Irish Medium Schools: All Island Research on the Support and Training Needs of the Sector*.

Department of Education and Skills (2012). *OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes: Country Background Report for Ireland*.

Department of Education and Skills (2011). *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020*.

Department of Education and Skills (2007). *Inclusion of Pupils with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines*. Dublin: Government Publications.

Department of Education and Skills (2000). *Learning-Support Guidelines*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

De Faoite, G (2003). *Athbhreithniú ar: Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga, Scéim na gCampáí Samhraidh trí Ghaeilge d'Aos Óg na Gaeltachta, Scéim na bhFoghlaimoirí Gaeilge & Cuairteoirí Baile, Na Féidearthachtaí*. An Roinn Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta

Eagraíocht na Scoileanna Gaeltachta (2013). *Teimpléad do Pholasáí Gaeilge do Bhunscoil Ghaeltachta*. Available at: <http://www.gaelport.com/uploads/documents/Bileog%20ESG.pdf>

Ferguson, G. (2006). *Language Planning and Education*. Edinburgh University Press.

Gilleece, L., Shiel, G., Clerkin, A., & Millar, D. (2012). *The 2010 National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics in Irish-Medium Schools. Main report*. Dublin: Educational Research Centre. Available at: http://www.erc.ie/documents/naims_priomhthuarascail.pdf (bilingual report)

Government of Ireland. *Gaeltacht Act (2012)*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Government of Ireland. *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Government of Ireland. *Education Act (1998)*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Hargreaves, A. and Fink, D. (2006) Sustainable Leadership. *Volume 6 of Jossey-Bass Leadership Library in Education*. Wiley

Harris, J. & O Duibhir, P. (2011). *Effective Language Teaching: A Synthesis of Research: Research Report No. 13*. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

Harris, J.; Forde, P.; Archer, P.; Nic Fhearaile, S. & O' Gorman, M. (2006). *Irish in Primary Schools: Long-Term National Trends in Achievements*. Department of Education and Science (bilingual report).

Hickey, T. (1999). *Luathoideachas trí Ghaeilge sa Ghaeltacht*. Údarás na Gaeltachta.

Hickey, T. (1997). *Early Immersion Education in Ireland: Na Naíonraí*. Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann.

Hickey, T. & de Mejía, A. M. (2014). 'Immersion Education in the Early Years: A Special Issue' In *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. Vol. 17, No. 2, 131–143. Routledge.

Leithwood, K.; Seashore Louis, K.; Anderson, S. and Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*. Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, University of Minnesota, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at The University of Toronto, The Wallace Foundation.

Mac Donnacha, S. (2004). *Staid Reatha na Scoileanna Gaeltachta 2004: Léargas ó na Príomhoidí, na Múinteoirí agus na Tuismitheoirí*. An Chomhairle Um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG).

Mac Donnacha, S.; Ní Chualáin, F.; Ní Shéaghdha, A. & Ní Mhainín, T. (2005). *A Study of Gaeltacht Schools 2004*, An Chomhairle Um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta. Available at: <http://www.cogg.ie/wp-content/uploads/Staid-Reatha-na-Scoileanna-Gaeltachta-2004.pdf>

Máirtín, C. (2006). *Soláthar Múinteoirí do na Bunscoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge: Bunachar Sonraí agus Tuairimí Príomhoidí i leith Gnéithe den Staid Reatha sa Ghaelscolaíocht*. An Chomhairle Um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG).

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2007). *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools: Supporting School Policy and Practice*.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2006a). *Language and Literacy in Irish Primary Schools: Descriptions of Practice*.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2006b). *Language and Literacy in Irish Primary Schools: Report on Consultation and Seminar*.

Ní Chionnaith, P. (2008). 'Léargas ar Dhearcadh agus Tuairimí i dtaobh an Chórais Oideachais Gaeltachta ag Tuismitheoirí Gaeltachta atá ag tógaint a gcuid Páistí le Gaeilge,' *Tráchtas Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge*. OÉG: An Chomhairle Um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG).

Ní Shéaghdha, A. (2010). *Taighde ar Dhea-Chleachtais Bhunscoile i dtaca le Saibhriú / Sealbhú agus Sóisialú Teanga do Dhaltaí arb í an Ghaeilge a gCéad Teanga*. An Chomhairle Um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG).

Ní Thuairisg, L. (2012). 'Ionaid Sealbhaithe Teanga na Breataine Bige: Eiseamláir don Ghaeltacht'. In C. Lenoach, C. Ó Giollagáin & B. Ó Curnáin (Eag.). *An Chonair Chaoch: An Mionteangachas sa Dátteangachas* (pp. 171-192). Gaillimh: Leabhar Breac.

Ní Thuairisg, L. (2014). *Léargas ar thaithí mhúinteoirí Iar-bhunscoileanna na Gaeltachta: Dúshláin Ghairmiúla agus Riachtanais Oiliúna*. Coláiste Phádraig, Droim Conrach: Tráchtas do chéim PhD san Oideachas Neamhfhoilsithe,

Ó Duibhir, P. (2006). *Oideachas na Múinteoirí agus Forbairt Ghairmiúil Leanúnach i Scoileanna Gaeltachta agus Lán-Ghaeilge*. An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (bilingual report).

Ó Duibhir, P. & Ní Bhaoill, M. (2004) *Tús na Léitheoireachta i Scoileanna Gaeltachta agus Lán-Ghaeilge*. BÁC: An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG).

Ó Flatharta, P. (2007). *Struchtúr Oideachais na Gaeltachta*. An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (bilingual report).

Ó Giollagáin, C.; Mac Donnacha, S.; Ní Chualáin, F.; Ní Shéaghdha, A. & O' Brien, M. (2007). *Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht: Principal Findings and Recommendations*. Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (bilingual report).

Ó Giollagáin, C. & Mac Donnacha, S. (2008). 'The Gaeltacht Today', In Nic Pháidín, C. & Ó Cearnaigh, S. (2008). *A New View of the Irish Language*. Cois Life Teoranta.

Ó Grádaigh, S., (2015). *Soláthar Múinteoirí Ábhar do na hIarbhunscoileanna LánGhaeilge & Gaeltachta*. Ollscoil Éireann Gaillimh: An Chomhairle Um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta

O Laoire, M. (2012). 'Teagasc na Gaeilge: Cúiseanna agus Curaclam ar Strae?' In Mac Cárthaigh & Uhlich, J. *Féilscríbhinn do Chathal Ó Háinle*. Indreabhán: An Clóchomhar Cló Iar-Chonnacht.

O Laoire, M. & Harris, J. (2006). *Language and Literacy in Irish Primary Schools: Review of Literature*. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2013). 'Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment' In *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education*. OECD Publishing, Paris.

Péterváry, T.; Ó Curnáin, B.; Ó Giollagáin, C. & Sheahan, J. (2014). *Iniúchadh ar an gCumas Dáttheangach: An Sealbhú Teanga i measc Ghluín Óg na Gaeltachta*. An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (bilingual report).

Robinson, V. M. J.; Lloyd, C.A. & Rowe, K. J. (2008). 'The Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes: An Analysis of the Differential Effects of Leadership Types' In *Educational Administration Quarterly December 2008 44: 635-674*. (2008).

The Teaching Council (2011). *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education*, Ireland: The Teaching Council.