



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Research and Evaluation Study on the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme

Report on Case-Study Schools participating
in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme

The Department of Education Inspectorate and the Educational Research Centre wish to thank the boards of management, in-school leaders, teachers, pupils/students, parents/guardians and representatives of Gaeltacht communities who participated in the case studies that were part of the Research and Evaluation Study on the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme.

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Executive Summary

This report presents and discusses the findings and recommendations from case studies conducted as one strand of a research and evaluation study on the implementation of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme (GSRS)¹. This ongoing study is being undertaken by the Department of Education and the Educational Research Centre (ERC).

The GSRS, launched in April 2017, is one of the key actions of the Policy for Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022. The Scheme provides primary and post-primary schools with an opportunity to achieve recognition as Gaeltacht schools. To gain this recognition, schools located in Gaeltacht language-planning areas are required to meet specific language-based criteria and to participate in the local language-planning processes provided for in the Gaeltacht Act, 2012. The language-based criteria are set out in the annual circulars issued by the Department of Education from 2017 onwards and in the updated *Guide for Gaeltacht Primary Schools: Indicators of Good Practice for Immersion Education* and *Guide for Gaeltacht Post-Primary Schools: Indicators of Good Practice for Immersion Education*,² published in 2020.

Schools participating in the Scheme receive a range of supports from the Department, including additional teaching hours, advisory visits from the Inspectorate of the Department of Education, additional professional development from An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) and funding for resources in Irish. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Education announced in March 2021 that schools would have an extension until the end of the 2023/24 school year to achieve recognition as a Gaeltacht school, and that the various supports would continue until then.

The case studies on which this report is based were conducted in twelve primary schools and seven post-primary schools. Each case-study involved three sections. The Inspectorate conducted an external evaluation of the work of the school with a particular emphasis on teaching and learning. The ERC researched the views of teachers, parents and the school community, and the school provided a self-reflection report on its experience of the Scheme to date. Excerpts from inspectors' evaluations, from research undertaken by ERC and from the self-evaluation of schools are incorporated throughout

¹ The adjusted timeframe for the implementation of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme is 2018 to 2024.

² The first version of the two Guides were published in draft format in 2018: *Draft Guide for Gaeltacht Primary Schools: Indicators of Good Practice for Immersion Education* and *Draft Guide for Gaeltacht Post-Primary Schools: Indicators of Good Practice for Immersion Education*.

this report. A report was issued to each school at the end of the research and evaluation activities. The report describes the outcomes of the evaluation work, research, and schools' self-reflections, respectively. There was a particular focus in the case studies on how school leadership, various partnerships and teaching and learning practices contributed to the use of Irish in the school.

Case-study reports were very positive in relation to the vision of both primary and post-primary schools on the use of Irish as the language of communication in the school. It was reported that the Scheme encouraged and enabled schools to prioritise the Irish language in their vision for education. It was stated that the positive impact of this vision was reflected in the practice and linguistic behaviour of boards of management, teachers, pupils/students, and parents. The use of Irish as the language of communication among pupils/students was very good in most case-study primary schools and in a significant minority of the case-study post-primary schools. It also highlighted that there were specific challenges at post-primary level in relation to the promotion of Irish as the language of socialisation among students.

In many schools, Irish was often spoken by pupils/students in lessons and in the playground. Incentive strategies and the Irish-language rule were used effectively to promote the use of Irish. The schools' co-curricular and extra-curricular programme of activities was particularly important in providing opportunities for pupils/students to speak Irish as the language of socialisation. Despite this, it was reported that work still needs to be done by schools, especially at post-primary level, to enable and encourage students to use Irish in social contexts. It was reported that it would be beneficial for post-primary schools to give students an active role in the promotion of Irish as the language of socialisation. It was also stated that a communication and advertising campaign was required, at system and individual school levels, to encourage and empower parents regarding the use of Irish as the language of the home.

It was reported that proficiency, fluency, and richness of language were evident in teachers' Irish in the majority of schools and this set a good example for the pupils/students. It was also stated that a great effort was made to promote local dialects. Boards of management were vigilant in terms of recruiting teachers proficient in Irish. It was reported that teachers were participating in the Masters in Irish-Medium and Gaeltacht Education programme in Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick and that the professional development, provided by COGG, was contributing to an understanding of and commitment to the Scheme. In a small number of post-primary schools, there was scope to strengthen the commitment of all staff to the vision of the Scheme. It was indicated that, for certain subjects, it was difficult to recruit post-primary teachers sufficiently competent in Irish and that, in some cases, teacher professional development was required for teachers who had little Irish.

In both primary and post-primary schools, Irish was the only language, or the main language, used at board of management meetings. All schools prioritised Irish when communicating with parents. As part of the good practice identified in the case-study schools, it was stated that terminology for curriculum subjects was shared with parents and that Irish speakers in the community were invited to talk to pupils/students. It was reported that schools in both sectors can do more to keep parents informed and to give them specific responsibilities in terms of the implementation of the school's action plan under the Scheme.

The quality of leadership and management in the implementation of immersion education was good or very good in most case-study primary and post-primary schools. A clear vision was shared and consolidated by boards of management and in-school leaders. In cases in both sectors, better communication with the local community was needed regarding the work of the school under the Scheme. Every school had an action plan, and this was being implemented effectively in a significant minority of schools. In other cases, there was a need to focus more attention on the implementation of this action plan. It was recommended, in particular, that the action plan include clear and measurable goals, that appropriate interventions be made to achieve those goals, and that the effectiveness of the various interventions be monitored and evaluated. It was also reported that teachers need to be encouraged and supported to undertake courses in special education. The need for staff to be further enabled in school self-evaluation and in the principles of content and language integrated learning (CLIL)³ in the context of immersion education was identified.

In terms of resource management, the use of the additional teaching hours responded to the needs of the school and was generally in line with the Department of Education guidance. In some cases, there was a need to ensure that the additional hours were focused on the target learners, including learners with the highest competence in Irish.

During the case-study evaluations, the quality of links being created by primary and post-primary schools with their local communities, was examined. It was reported that partnership with the school community and local language-planning officer was good or very good in almost all primary schools and in most post-primary schools. A lot of good practice was identified in this area. Schools convened meetings with parents to explain and illustrate the practice of immersion education. Parents in some schools were involved in designing and implementing the action plan. Irish classes were provided for parents.

³ Content and Language Integrated Learning is a language-learning approach that uses the target language (Irish) as the medium of instruction through which both the content and the language are taught through the target language.

Strong links were fostered with schools and early learning and care settings in the area. Practice was particularly effective when the principal and other staff members were involved in language planning locally and when good links were maintained with the language-planning officer. In some cases, more could be done to develop and improve parental awareness of the Scheme, to create better links with early learning and care settings, and to maintain mutually beneficial contact with the language-planning officer. In 2021, the Department of Education published a *Guide for Gaeltacht Schools: Partnership with the Community to Promote the Use of Irish* and a *Guide for Gaeltacht Primary Schools: Strengthening Links between Primary Schools and Early Learning and Care Settings*. It is hoped that these publications will be helpful for school communities and early learning and care settings as they develop partnerships to promote the use of Irish.

In the case-study primary schools, it was reported that there were certain strengths in teaching and learning. The two-year total immersion programme through Irish was clearly successful in all case-study primary schools and early intervention was supporting language acquisition. Teaching approaches were very good or good in most of the observed lessons. There was an appropriate focus on language input and effective use of resources, including digital technology. There was good support for pupils who had little Irish and effective co-teaching was used in the early-intervention programme. Further development opportunities in this area were also identified. In some cases, an agreed whole-school practice for the teaching and use of specific curriculum-subject terminology was required. It was stated that more appropriate challenges and expectations were needed for pupils who are highly competent in Irish. It was recommended in certain case-study primary schools that pupils' capacity for self-assessment be developed. Appendix A provides an analysis of pupil attainment in Irish reading, English reading and Mathematics in the case-study schools in spring 2018, immediately prior to the commencement of the Scheme.

In post-primary schools, the quality of learner outcomes was good or very good in the majority of lessons. Students' receptive language in Irish was generally of a good standard. There was an appropriate emphasis on the local dialect in teaching programmes and, in some cases, the local dialect was evident in students' spoken Irish. It was reported that there was an increase in the number of subjects available through the medium of Irish in the schools. It was stated that possibilities for improvement included the further development of expressive language by providing more opportunities for students, including those least proficient in the language, to speak during lessons. It was stated that higher expectations were required of students who were highly proficient in Irish and that they needed to be more appropriately challenged. It was also reported that students with little Irish needed more support, and that there should be appropriate planning for this. It was recommended that schools teach the specific terminology of the various subjects explicitly and that communicative opportunities be provided to support students in using

the Irish language terminology. It was recommended that the approach to assessment be developed at a whole-school level to provide clear guidance for students and staff. Appendix B of this report provides data on student performance in Leaving Certificate Irish (Higher Level) in 2019 in the three largest case-study post-primary schools.

The final chapter of the report acknowledges the major steps taken by case-study schools. This chapter also provides recommendations in order to build on the strengths identified in the report and to address opportunities for improvement. The areas in which interventions could be most beneficial include the extended use of Irish among pupils/students, catering for different ability levels, providing pupils/students with a more active role in learning, and in content and language integrated learning (CLIL). Recommendations are also made in relation to the recruitment, deployment and professional development of teachers, action planning, fostering partnerships with the community and Irish-language resources.

1 Introduction

1.1 This report

This is the first of a series of three reports to be published by the Department of Education in conjunction with the Educational Research Centre as part of the Research and Evaluation Study on the implementation of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme (GSRS) in primary and post-primary schools.

This composite report, based on case studies in twelve primary and seven post-primary schools, provides an overview of the progress schools in the GSRS have made in implementing the language-based criteria for immersion education. The report provides an analysis of good features of practice and the aspects of practice that need to be improved. It is hoped that this report will be helpful to Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools as they engage in the school self-evaluation process to strengthen teaching, learning and partnership with the community.

This introductory chapter of the report provides an insight into aspects of the context. It outlines the Gaeltacht context, the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme and the Research and Evaluation Study that forms the basis of this report.

Chapters 2 to 6 of the report are organised according to the research and evaluation fields of inquiry. One chapter is allocated to each of the following areas:

- The use of Irish among the school community and the schools' vision in that regard
- Leadership of learning, teaching and school development and the school's vision for the implementation of immersion education
- The impact of partnership with the school community and other parties in implementing the Scheme
- The quality of learning, teaching and assessment at primary level
- The quality of learning, teaching and assessment at post-primary level

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 discuss issues relating to both primary and post-primary schools and when the term 'schools' is used, the evidence or findings apply to both sectors.

It is hoped that the conclusion in chapter 7 will help schools and the education system to further develop and extend existing good practice.

1.2 The Gaeltacht

1.2.1 The Irish language

The Gaeltacht is a unique region. It is in Gaeltacht areas that the Irish language is heard on a daily basis as the language of the community. It is here that Irish has been used continuously as the language of the community for approximately two thousand years. Typically, it is not school Irish or grammar book Irish that is heard, but Irish that has been passed down from generation to generation and is polished and refined from use over hundreds of years. The structures we have in place in Ireland to preserve the Irish language, including state departments and the education system, are nurtured in one way or another by the living ebb and flow of the Gaeltacht.

Like many minority and lesser-used languages around the world, the Irish language is vulnerable and under pressure from all sides. Even though Irish is an official language in the European Union, threats to the language are many and varied, and a high level of cooperation between state departments and certain agencies and services is required to address these issues. Each Gaeltacht area and each Gaeltacht school has its own context and story. Each context is multidimensional. Social issues are often among the issues discussed. In general, the Gaeltacht areas are marginalised geographically and economically, leaving native communities threatened by poverty and emigration. There are questions in relation to Irish as a language. There are different dialects, each with its own rich heritage. Above all, probably, is the question of the English language, a major world language that is more prevalent than ever, particularly in social media and in the digital world, which is at the heart of the lives of people in the twenty-first century.

Due to the diversity of threats, the different parties addressing these issues must work together to promote the Irish language. Effective partnership is required between state departments, between education providers for the various age groups and between each school and the families and the wider community in which the pupils/students reside.

1.2.2 The role of Gaeltacht schools in the promotion of Irish

The Education Act, 1998, attaches a specific responsibility to Gaeltacht schools to ‘contribute to the maintenance of Irish as the primary community language’. This objective is the same as the language-planning process objective, which has a statutory basis under the Gaeltacht Act 2012, and which is now fully operational in the Gaeltacht language-planning areas. The overarching goal of the Policy for Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 is to ensure the availability of high quality and relevant education through the medium of Irish for all young people living in Gaeltacht areas. On that basis, the intention is to support the use of Irish as the primary language of Gaeltacht families and communities.

The actions in the Policy for Gaeltacht Education are based on the principle of partnership and cooperation with local school communities. The GSRS recognises that cooperation between schools and the lead language-planning organisations/committees at local level in the Gaeltacht are extremely important in terms of the operation of the Scheme, the fulfilment of the language-based criteria for immersion education, and the implementation of the local language plans.

1.2.3 Role of early learning services in the Gaeltacht in the promotion of Irish

Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta is the nationally recognised service that provides early learning and care services throughout the Gaeltacht. The organisation employs almost 200 early years practitioners and childcare workers to serve up to 2,000 children in the Gaeltacht. CNNG is funded by Údarás na Gaeltachta and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. Language development officers have been appointed by the organisation to provide assistance and language support for early years services in the Gaeltacht.

CNNG puts the infrastructure in place to provide early years services through Irish in the Gaeltacht, and provides administrative, support and training services for those services. CNNG has 118 early learning and care services under its remit including naíonraí, crèches, early care and after-school services. There are 66 naíonraí in operation currently in Gaeltacht language-planning areas.

The “*Borradh*” language planning scheme, developed by CNNG, is used to develop the language of children attending CNNG early years services in the Gaeltacht.

1.2.4 The Gaeltacht language-planning process

The Policy for Gaeltacht Education recognises the importance of the participation of schools in the language-planning process for the area, a process which aims to support, in a systematic, integrated manner, the daily use of Irish as a community and family language in Gaeltacht areas. This process is being coordinated by Údarás na Gaeltachta under the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (DTCAGSM).

In this process, as set out in the Gaeltacht Act 2012, twenty-six language-planning areas (LPAs) have been identified. Each LPA is given the opportunity to prepare and implement a language plan to gradually strengthen the position of Irish as a community and family language over the seven-year timeframe of the plans. The lead local language-planning organisations have employed language-planning officers. The language-planning officers have a key role in the implementation of the language plans. An aspect of the language-

planning officers' work is to provide practical support to schools to participate in the language-planning process.

1.2.5 The role of the board of management

Each school is managed by a board of management on behalf of the patron. The board of management has a duty to ensure that the operation of the school is in line with the provisions of the Education Act 1998 and the Policy for Gaeltacht Education. The board is also responsible for the implementation of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme. The board of management has a responsibility to ensure that a school development plan is devised in conjunction with the whole-school community, including the school patron, to meet the school's obligations under the Act and the Scheme. While the board of management oversees the implementation of the Scheme in the school, the ongoing review of the work of the school in conjunction with the school community is a collaborative, inclusive and reflective process. Having a close relationship between the language-planning officer and school management is key to the success of the partnership.

The board of management should ensure that the community is aware that the school is a Gaeltacht school, that Irish is the language used in all aspects of the school's work and that the school fosters worthwhile links with the community, with early learning and care settings and with other Gaeltacht/all-Irish schools. The principal and staff, under the direction of the board of management and in consultation with pupils/students and their parents/guardians, focus on action planning to provide excellent education through the medium of Irish for the community.

1.3 The Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme

The Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme (GSRS), one of the key actions of the Policy for Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022, was launched in April 2017. The Scheme provides primary and post-primary schools located in Gaeltacht language-planning areas with an opportunity to achieve recognition as Gaeltacht schools. To achieve this recognition, schools are required to meet specific language-based criteria, and to participate in the local language-planning processes provided for in the Gaeltacht Act, 2012.

There are 105 primary schools⁴ and 29 post-primary schools⁵ in the Scheme. Since September 2018, the following supports have been available to schools participating in the Scheme:

Supports for all schools in the Scheme since September 2018:

- an annual grant (€1200) to purchase teaching resources in Irish
- additional teaching hours for language support in Irish, based on school enrolment
- *Indicators of Good Practice in Immersion Education: Draft-Guide for Gaeltacht Primary Schools (2018)* and *Indicators of Good Practice in Immersion Education: Draft-Guide for Gaeltacht Post-Primary Schools (2018)*
- additional continuing professional development from An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)
- advisory visits from the Department of Education Inspectorate⁶, to support schools in fulfilling the language-based criteria.

Additional supports for post-primary schools in the Scheme from 2019:

- additional supports available to each of the five island post-primary schools
 - an additional teacher allocation for each island post-primary schools
 - an additional ring-fenced budget of € 15,000 a year for each school
- an opportunity for Gaeltacht post-primary schools to participate in an innovative e-hub project that uses online blended learning to provide Leaving Certificate Physics through the medium of Irish to students in other Gaeltacht post-primary schools who have not previously had access to the subject through the medium of Irish
- one-off funding (€5,000) to purchase technology equipment for each school participating in the e-hub project
- additional teaching hours for post-primary schools where the e-teachers are located and for schools where there are e-mentors to support the students participating in the e-hub project
- an Irish-language development pilot project (Forás) in two post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht with an additional teacher provided, on a temporary basis for both

⁴ 105 primary schools = 80% of primary schools located in the Gaeltacht language-planning areas

⁵ 29 post-primary schools = 100% of post-primary schools located in the Gaeltacht language- planning areas

⁶ Arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus of the work programme was changed in 2020 to support schools in implementing public health advice, in accordance with the Department of Health and Department of Education guidelines on creating a safe and secure learning and working environment for all (Circulars 0040/2020 and 0041/2020).

schools to assist junior cycle students who need help with the development of their Irish-language skills.

Language assistants are working on a part-time basis in Gaeltacht schools under the Language Assistants' Scheme funded by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.

In March 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Education announced a two-year extension to the period schools have to achieve recognition as a Gaeltacht school. Schools will now have until the end of the 2023/24 school year. The various supports will continue until the new deadline.

1.4 The Research and Evaluation Study

1.4.1 Planning

The Research and Evaluation Study on the Recognition Scheme, conducted by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) in conjunction with the Gaeltacht Education Unit and the Department of Education Inspectorate, commenced in 2019. As set out in the Policy for Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022, the purpose of the research study is to assess the impact of the Scheme on the provision of education through the medium of Irish. The study also focused on how schools are managing to fulfil the language-based criteria to achieve recognition as a Gaeltacht school.

The Gaeltacht Education Unit established a monitoring group in 2019 to plan, coordinate and oversee the study. This group included representatives from the ERC, the Gaeltacht Education Unit, and the Inspectorate. Opportunities were provided for the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (DTCAGSM) to attend planning meetings, as necessary. The Advisory Committee for the Policy on Gaeltacht Education, established in 2017, was also consulted. It was decided from the outset that the study would be carried out alongside the operation of the Scheme, to support its implementation and consolidation.

In order to ensure that the sample of schools selected for the research study were as representative as possible, every effort was made to ensure that

- schools in the study were from a range of Gaeltacht areas
- a range of large and small schools were included
- a range of sociolinguistic profiles in school communities were included, in particular the extent to which Irish was used as the language of the community outside the education system.

Post-primary schools participating in the Forás pilot programme and the Leaving Certificate Physics e-hub project formed part of the case-study sample. A separate independent evaluation was carried out by the Education and Training Inspectorate on the e-Hub pilot project. The evaluation report can be accessed **HERE**.

Case-study visits to schools commenced at the end of 2019. Each case study consisted of an evaluation visit from the Inspectorate, a research visit from the ERC and a self-reflection activity by schools themselves. In September 2019, the Gaeltacht Education Unit contacted the schools initially, on behalf of the Inspectorate and the ERC, to invite them to participate in the study and to explain the aims of the case studies. All schools accepted the invitation, and preliminary notice and guidance on the evaluation and research procedures were sent to schools. Schools were also provided with a letter for parents, seeking parental consent for focus groups with pupils/students. Pilot case studies were conducted to trial the evaluation and research instruments.

1.4.2 The Inspectorate evaluation meetings

Prior to the school visit, contextual information was collected on the school. The inspectors then made appropriate arrangements with the school regarding the evaluation timetable, the focus groups with pupils/students and meetings with the board of management, in-school leaders and teachers.

The evaluation activities included a review of in-school documentation, pupils'/students' work, assessment data, and observations of teaching and learning across a range of curricular subjects, class levels and year groups.

The Inspectorate evaluated the quality of educational provision pertaining to the use of Irish, including teaching, learning and assessment. The quality of school leadership and management in relation to the implementation of immersion education, and the quality of partnerships with the school community and other parties, were also evaluated. During the evaluation visits, lessons in Irish, lessons in other subjects through the medium of Irish, support lessons for Irish, and lessons for pupils/students with special educational needs, were observed. The inspectors used the quality levels in the Inspectorate's quality continuum and the associated terms when describing the quality of provision. The Inspectorate's quality continuum is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: The Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

Level	Description
Very Good	Very good applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.
Good	Good applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.
Satisfactory	Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact, they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.
Fair	Fair applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.
Weak	Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.

1.4.3 The ERC research visits

By organising focus groups in the school, the ERC conducted research on the attitudes and participation of teachers, parents and the school community in relation to the Scheme. Two ERC officers visited each case-study school. The purpose of the focus groups was to give teachers and parents an opportunity to express their opinions on the Recognition Scheme and to provide recommendations on the progress of the Scheme. The focus groups were recorded, so that they could be reviewed and responses analysed. Irish was the language used during the interviews except when participants did not have Irish.

The issues discussed with the parents related to the context of the school and the implementation of the Scheme in general, the implementation of immersion education in terms of catering for the learning needs of all pupils/students, and the use of Irish as the language of socialisation. The same issues were discussed with the teachers, as well as

additional issues relating to aspects of teachers' practice, including differentiation strategies, preparedness for teaching, resources and other related issues. Comments on other relevant topics were also welcomed from both groups.

The ERC continues to conduct research through the use of questionnaires issued to all schools in the Scheme including principal teachers, class/subject teachers, support teachers, pupils/students and their parents. The ERC also monitors attainment in schools in the Scheme. The findings of that research are not included in this report.

1.4.4 Schools' self-reflections

All schools were asked to self-reflect on their experience with the Scheme to date in the following areas:

- The best aspects of immersion education that have been achieved to date
- The greatest challenges to be overcome
- The benefits to date for pupils/students from the immersion education experience.

1.4.5 The case-study reports

The Inspectorate evaluation visits and the ERC research visits were carried out in advance of school closures in March 2020, due to COVID-19. The schools provided their self-reflection reports on the Scheme in autumn 2020 when they reopened. A report was issued to each school in the study. Each report provided an overview of the evaluation and research findings. The report also included a statement, based on the school's self-reflection, on the impact of the Scheme on the school's language practices, including both strengths and challenges. Extracts providing evidence from case-study reports on individual schools are interspersed throughout this report, providing a rich overview of the observations of inspectors, the ERC and school leaders on practices in the case-study schools. The quantitative terms used in this report are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The quantitative terms used in this report

Quantitative term	Percentage occurrence
Almost all	> 90%
Most	75% – 90%
Majority/more than half	51% – 74%
Half	50%
Less than half/a significant minority	25% – 49%
A small number/less than a quarter	16% – 24%
A few	Up to 15%

1.5 Context of schools

1.5.1 Primary schools

All primary schools in the study are co-educational schools and all are under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of the diocese in which they are located. There were between 23 and 208 pupils enrolled in these schools. Ten schools had teaching principals and the other two schools had administrative principals. One school had a special class for pupils with autism spectrum disorder. Five primary schools were participating in the rural Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme, the Department's action plan for educational inclusion.

1.5.2 Post-primary schools

The seven post-primary schools in the study are also co-educational schools. Five of these are under the patronage of the Education and Training Boards. One school is under the joint patronage of the Bishop of the diocese and the Minister for Education, and the seventh school is under the joint patronage of the Bishop of the diocese and the Education and Training Board. The sample varied in terms of student numbers. There were 40 students enrolled in the smallest school and 451 students in the largest school in the sample. Three post-primary schools were participating in the DEIS programme. Six of the post-primary schools in the sample were operating fully through Irish. In the remaining school, a good start had been made in relation to the teaching of some subjects through Irish and it was the school's aim to increase its provision through Irish over time.

2 The Use of Irish

2.1 Introduction

The use of Irish as the language of communication underpins the work of schools in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme. The use of Irish in teaching and learning will be discussed in other chapters of this report. In this chapter, however, the focus is on what was learned from the case-study evaluations in terms of progressing Irish as the language of communication in schools. This chapter also refers to the opinions of teachers and parents as gathered in the focus group interviews organised by the Educational Research Centre (ERC).

The use of Irish as the language of communication at whole-school level was reported to be very good in most primary schools and in a significant minority of post-primary schools. This finding was consistent with the commentary in the evaluation and research reports, which showed that progressing the language at post-primary level presented specific challenges.

Figure 1: Irish as the language of whole-school communication in primary schools

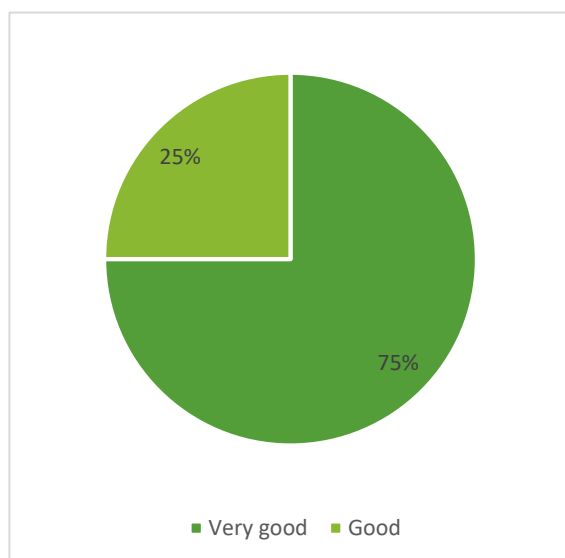
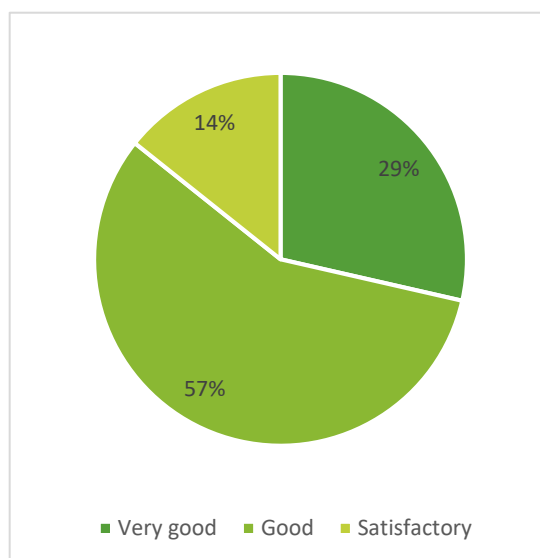


Figure 2: Irish as the language of whole-school communication in post-primary schools



2.2 The schools' vision for the use of Irish in the school

The case-study reports were very positive about the vision that both primary and post-primary schools had in relation to the use of Irish as the language of communication in the school.

The reports indicated that there was now a much greater and sharper focus on the language issue, arising from the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme. It was clear from the evaluation reports, however, that all schools were doing their best, whether they were schools with a strong tradition of spoken Irish or schools that did not have many native speakers. There was evidence that participation in the Scheme had encouraged and enabled schools to prioritise the language issue and to develop practices accordingly. It was reported that the Scheme's vision for the language was impacting on the practices and language behaviour of boards of management, teachers, pupils/students and parents. The reports revealed that schools were re-energised regarding their vision for the language and that there was renewed hope for the future of Irish as the language of the Gaeltacht community.

Table 3: Findings on schools' vision

Strengths
<p>It was reported that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ there was a much greater and sharper focus on the Irish-language issue ✓ schools were being encouraged and enabled to prioritise the language issue ✓ schools were re-energised in terms of their vision for the language ✓ the Scheme's vision was impacting on the practices and language behaviour of boards of management, teachers, pupils/students and parents

2.3 The use of Irish amongst pupils/students

2.3.1 Spoken Irish outside lessons in primary school

The evaluation reports at both primary and post-primary level mentioned that there was an improvement in pupils'/students' awareness of the importance of Irish and the reasons why they should use the language among themselves.

In the focus groups with the ERC, teachers from many primary schools reported a drop in recent years in the number of native speakers in infant classes and noted that the majority of pupils in many Gaeltacht schools were not native speakers. The Inspectorate's evaluation reports indicated that primary schools were implementing a variety of interventions to promote the use of Irish outside the classroom. In respect of some primary schools, it was stated that Irish was the language of socialisation for pupils in the playground and that they were at ease using the language, pupils in senior classes in particular. Pupils in other primary schools were using a mixture of Irish and English in the

playground. Some teachers were clearly disappointed that not enough Irish was spoken or heard in the community to support the school's work in promoting the language.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

The parents provided an insight into the pupils' social language. In primary school, the pupils speak Irish with other pupils who have Irish, although they turn to English if there is a mixed language group. (Primary School 1)

The teachers were satisfied that Irish was being spoken by pupils in classrooms and in the playground (although pupils occasionally had to be reminded to speak the language), but they were disappointed that Irish was not widely spoken beyond the school gates. There was concern also that more parents were not confident enough to raise their children through Irish. (Primary School 1)

The parents believe that things will improve in five years because the language-planning process is taking place along with the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme. It was stated, however, that a lot needed to be done to encourage young parents to speak Irish at home. It was stated that the Irish language might disappear altogether, that the Policy on Gaeltacht Education (and the Scheme) was the last chance – that this was the only chance left for the Irish language and the Gaeltacht. Parents were satisfied that the Policy was now in place, that the Scheme was being implemented and that the school was continuing with it. However, they felt that parents needed to promote Irish at home if the Scheme was to be successful. (Primary School 3)

It was stated that it is a pity that Scéim Labhairt na Gaeilge has ceased, because the Scheme gave parents confidence and encouragement. It seems some parents stopped speaking Irish with their children when the Scheme was discontinued. The parents present felt that parents in general do not understand the benefits of raising families through the medium of Irish. (Post-Primary School 6)

Teachers are hopeful that matters will improve when the action plan for the language-planning area is implemented in the area. They were concerned, however, that the school might be considered the only place where Irish could be learned.

(Primary School 11)

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

At break time, only Irish was heard being spoken as the language of socialisation among older pupils. A very small amount of English was heard being spoken by the youngest pupils. (Primary School 1)

In the self-reflection accounts from primary schools, reference was made to the additional opportunities for communication through Irish being provided in both curricular and extra-curricular activities. It was stated that this experience was enhancing pupils' ability to socialise in Irish. Teachers in some primary schools referred to the negative impact of COVID-19 on language acquisition, particularly in infant classes. It was stated that many pupils had little contact with spoken Irish during the period of school closure.

In the Inspectorate's evaluation reports, it was stated that many primary schools were using incentive strategies to encourage pupils to speak Irish. For example, playground games and other activities were organised for infant classes to practice Irish as the language of socialisation. Schools were celebrating pupils' efforts and awarding them prizes. It was reported that the Irish rule is being implemented in some primary schools. It was clear in those schools that pupils had a good understanding of the Irish rule and the reasons for it. It was clear that pupils felt that the rule was applied in a positive and supportive manner.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The school has the Irish rule in place to encourage pupils to use Irish. When the pupils in the focus group spoke about this, they said that they understood the rule system and why it was in place. It was clear that the rule did not interfere with ease of communication among pupils and that they did not feel it was unfair.

(Primary School 1)

In many primary schools, the duties of the language assistant included supporting the use of Irish as the language of socialisation in the playground.

It was indicated that language use among primary school pupils had improved since the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme was implemented. It was reported that there could be further development in terms of empowering and encouraging pupils to use the language in informal social contexts.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

It would be worthwhile for the school to consult with pupils to agree strategies with them to further progress the use of the language within the school and in the playground. It would help pupils to play together in Irish at break times through placing greater emphasis on using the language in playground games. (Primary School 3)

During the Inspectorate focus-group interviews, pupils in some primary schools reported that it was natural and easy for them to speak Irish. Other pupils, however, said that it was difficult to use Irish continuously, although they understood the importance of using it. According to the primary school pupils, it was the good example of teachers and other pupils, as well as the incentive strategies, which inspired them to speak Irish.

2.3.2 Spoken Irish outside lessons in post-primary school

It was reported that promoting Irish as a language of communication becomes more challenging as learners get older. It was clear from the evaluation and research reports that this is an ongoing challenge and a complex issue for post-primary schools.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

The parents stated that pupils' social language behaviour changes from Irish to English 'overnight' when they start post-primary school. It was explained that there are not enough students with Irish in post-primary school and that English comes more naturally to students who are not being brought up with Irish, despite having spent years in an Irish-medium primary school. (Primary School 8)

According to the parents, teenagers do not use Irish on social media or on technology devices because 'it is easier in English'. It was stated that sending text messages in Irish is frustrating. It was explained that students turn to English, even with someone with whom they would otherwise communicate in Irish, due to the ease of the predictive text in English. (Primary School 9)

Parents felt that the situation regarding Irish was improving – in terms of both the standard and the willingness of people to speak the language. According to one parent, who has lived in the area for many years, there is an improvement evident in the extent to which Irish is now heard, and people are now confident in speaking it. (Primary School 9)

The language-planning officer is trying to encourage parents to be involved in the activities that are organised for children rather than leaving immediately once the children had been brought to the door. (Post-Primary School 3)

In some of the self-reflection accounts provided by post-primary schools, it was reported that using Irish as the language of socialisation among students presented a great challenge. It was stated that it was very difficult to maintain and retain students' interest and participation in using Irish socially. It was stated, in many cases, that Irish is not the language students speak at home and the use of social media in English was cited as a significant obstacle.

The Inspectorate's evaluation reports stated that the experience of post-primary schools in terms of students' willingness to speak Irish amongst themselves varied. In some post-primary schools, where Irish as the language of the community was very strong, it was reported that the use of Irish in general had declined in recent years, although Irish was still spoken in a natural manner among a certain cohort of students.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

Irish was to the fore as the language of communication and interaction among the pupils themselves in the classes and at break times during the evaluation. It was

reported in the interview with senior management that there is no difficulty in encouraging pupils to speak Irish to each other of their own accord.

(Post-Primary School 2)

Irish was the language heard when students were socialising at break times during the evaluation. It was reported, however, that there is a need for ongoing supervision of language behaviour at these times. (Post-Primary School 3)

In other post-primary schools, in Gaeltacht areas where Irish had declined as the daily language of the community, progress and improvement was reported as a result of the Scheme. It was stated that students' language awareness had been developed and their attitudes towards using Irish with each other as the language of socialisation had improved.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

Despite their communicative skills being well developed, it was reported that students usually did not, and still do not, speak Irish among themselves on informal occasions during the school day.... However, it was reported that, since the Scheme began, students have spoken more Irish among themselves than ever before, and that this is encouraging. (Post-Primary School 5)

In some cases, it was clear that students and teachers did not always have a shared understanding in relation to the use of Irish among students.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The students displayed a very positive attitude towards Irish during the interview and they were of the opinion that the Irish rule was not required as it is mostly in Irish that they speak to each other. (Post-Primary School 1)

In the focus groups with the ERC, post-primary teachers reported that, since the Scheme began, first-year students were now speaking more Irish than previously, and that the greatest progress was evident in schools located in the fringes of Gaeltacht areas.

2.3.3 Extra-curricular and co-curricular activities

Both primary and post-primary case-study reports indicated that a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities were being provided to support students' holistic development and to provide opportunities for them to speak Irish. In the ERC focus groups, it was noted that many teachers contribute to this work after school hours.

It was clear that learners were benefiting from and enjoying these Irish-language activities. At post-primary level in particular, such events provided students with the opportunity to speak Irish freely among themselves and not to feel pressure from other students to revert to English.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The wide range of opportunities for students to participate in music, drama, sports, debate, poetry composition and other aspects of Gaeltacht and Irish language heritage is a school strength The Irish rule is applied in these events, an approach that was said to be successful because students themselves choose to participate in these events and they accept that they are organised through the medium of Irish. (Post-Primary School 6)

In the case-study reports on post-primary schools, many references were made to the range of events and activities available. Some were organised in school, but many were also provided by cultural organisations outside school. Post-primary schools were participating in debating, quizzes and creative prose, poetry and singing competitions. It was reported that students' understanding of Irish as a living language was being developed through these events and that the importance of its preservation as the language of the community was highlighted for them.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

Students' participation in a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities is a school strength.... They (the students) also said that their participation

in these events enriches their language ability and their understanding of local and national traditions. (Post-Primary School 2)

Primary school pupils were also participating in events that raised their awareness of Irish language and culture, including drama, poetry and singing competitions. Among the co-curricular and extra-curricular activities noted in primary schools, it was reported that the oral arts in particular were being used very effectively. Events such as *agallamh beirte* (spoken poetic dialogue), *lúibíní* (rhymes/ditties) and drama added greatly to pupils' interest in the language and to the use of Irish among them.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

It is commendable that oral arts are very much promoted, which helps the use of Irish among pupils in the school. (Primary School 6)

In the ERC focus groups, primary school parents reported that pupils' participation in singing competitions, for example, had increased in the last few years.

2.3.4 Giving ownership to the learners

In the ERC focus groups, some post-primary teachers stated that students' own attitudes had a significant impact on the standard of Irish. It was stated that there was support for Irish among students, with some seeking more opportunities to speak the language socially. In the self-reflection accounts on the implementation of the Scheme provided by post-primary school management, it was stated that students were gaining more confidence in speaking Irish and that their voice was emerging as they took ownership of their learning. Teachers reported great progress in relation to students' participation in interactive communicative tasks. In certain cases, the student leadership team had a role in promoting the use of Irish in the school.

In the case-study reports, inspectors reported that students in some post-primary schools had been given a particular role in promoting the use of Irish and encouraging their fellow students in this regard. In some schools, mentors or language heroes were appointed, or to be appointed, to improve students' language behaviour. This good practice encouraged students and gave them responsibility for taking ownership of this very important aspect of the work in order to achieve recognition as a Gaeltacht school. Some schools had established an Irish-language committee, which gave students a further opportunity to

understand the importance of the language and to promote that understanding among all students.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

The mentors have a role in promoting the language among first year students and in the school in general. The mentor status is lost if the student is heard speaking English. During the focus group, students themselves reported that the Irish rule is being implemented systematically, that the use of Irish in school has improved and that they are satisfied with that approach. (Post-Primary School 7)

During a discussion with one focus group, students on Coiste na Gaeilge demonstrated exemplary dedication and commitment to Irish... It was reported that the students on Coiste na Gaeilge avail of every opportunity to speak the language and that they create opportunities for the school's students to speak Irish through participation in social and cultural events. (Post-Primary School 4)

Table 4: Findings on the use of Irish amongst pupils/students

Strengths	Areas for development
<p>It was reported that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ opportunities to speak Irish during lessons were created on a regular basis ✓ Irish was the main playground language in many schools ✓ incentive strategies and the Irish rule were being used effectively ✓ effective support was available from the language assistant ✓ co-curricular and extra-curricular activities were being provided ✓ ownership of the Scheme was being fostered amongst the students 	<p>It was reported that there was a need to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ focus on accuracy in the language ○ enable and encourage pupils/students to use the language in informal social contexts ○ give students in every school an active role in promoting the use of the language among their fellow students ○ organise a communication and advertising campaign at system level, and at individual school level, to encourage and empower parents in the use of Irish as the language of the home

2.4 The use of Irish amongst teachers

2.4.1 Primary teachers

In all case-study primary schools, Irish was the language of teaching, learning and assessment. In the majority of primary schools, teachers were competent and fluent in the language and they modelled the use of rich Irish-language vocabulary for pupils. The use of Irish as the language of teaching, learning and assessment was very good in the majority of schools, good in one quarter of schools and satisfactory in a few schools.

In some primary schools, staff were making a great effort to reinforce and promote the local dialect in the school and the surrounding area.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

All teachers and assistants are from the area or the surrounding areas. Consequently, pupils hear the rich dialect of the area being used naturally every day. During the evaluation, it was evident that pupils themselves were gradually acquiring, enriching and extending the use of the dialect in their own spoken language. (Primary School 3)

It was observed in one primary school that the school had designed a booklet of vocabulary and phrases from the locality in collaboration with parents and that this was being used in school and in the home. This was recognised as good practice as it fostered community involvement in the conservation of the local heritage.

2.4.2 Post-primary teachers

A small number of reports on case-study post-primary schools identified scope for strengthening the commitment of all staff to the vision of the Scheme. Inspectors also identified the need, in certain cases, to support teachers to develop their competence in using Irish as the usual language of communication language when teaching.

The recruitment of teachers who are native Irish speakers or highly proficient in Irish was reported as an ongoing challenge for schools in the Gaeltacht. It was stated that this created difficulties for a school, especially as there was an onus on the school to employ teachers with sufficient proficiency in Irish to fulfil its vision as a Gaeltacht school and meet the expectations of school management and its local community.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The staff have a high standard of Irish and the majority are native speakers, apart from a very small number of teachers currently on the staff, who are not fully proficient in the language. The board and senior management have a strong recruitment policy regarding the employment of teachers with a high standard of Irish but sometimes they fail to find teachers for certain subjects.

(Post-Primary School 6)

It was stated in the majority of the reports that post-primary schools sometimes had to employ teachers who had little Irish, and then gradually upskill them in the language. It was stated in a small number of reports that these new teachers received assistance from their colleagues and that they also attended Irish classes locally to help them attain the appropriate standard in the language.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

When the school expressed interest in the Scheme two years ago there were two members of staff who had no Irish. Both teachers are now teaching entirely through Irish and continue to develop their proficiency in the language school management and staff are to be commended for the leadership displayed regarding the expectation that staff who were not competent in Irish should be empowered and guided towards immersion education. (Post-Primary School 7)

In a small number of reports, inspectors recommended that schools implement a formal mentoring system to upskill teachers in the language and to facilitate them in learning Irish. In one report, it was recommended that a definite timeframe be established by which the teacher would be expected to have an appropriate standard in Irish to begin teaching entirely through the medium of Irish.

Table 5: Findings on the use of Irish among teachers

Strengths	Areas for development
<p>It was reported that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ in the majority of schools, teachers were competent, fluent and modelled the use of rich vocabulary for pupils/students ✓ the teachers' Irish was a rich source of language enrichment for pupils/students ✓ a great effort was being made to strengthen local dialects 	<p>It was reported that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ there was scope, in a small number of post-primary schools, to strengthen the whole staff's positivity towards the Scheme ○ it was difficult to source post-primary teachers suitably competent in Irish to teach certain subjects ○ professional development for teachers with little Irish presented significant challenges in some cases

2.5 The use of Irish at board of management level

Irish was the language used by boards of management when conducting business in almost half of the case-study primary schools, and Irish was used predominantly in the other primary schools. All boards of management were very supportive in relation to the promotion of Irish in primary schools.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

It was reported that Irish is the language used predominantly by the board of management when conducting its business. Native speakers are serving as members of the board and they are very supportive of the use of Irish in school and among themselves. (Primary School 5)

At post-primary level, it was reported that five of the seven boards of management operated entirely through the medium of Irish, one school board of management was operating bilingually and another board was operating through English because all members of the board did not have Irish.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

*It was reported that the board of management operates entirely through the medium of Irish. Many board members are active in community and language organisations and the board is very conscious of the language issue.
(Post-Primary School 5)*

Table 6: Findings on the use of Irish by boards of management

Strengths
<p>It was reported that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ in primary schools, the working language of boards of management was Irish only or mainly through Irish ✓ in post-primary schools, the working language of five of the seven boards of management was Irish only and one board was operating bilingually ✓ many board members were actively involved in community and Irish-language organisations and were very aware of language issues

2.6 The use of Irish in partnership with the community and with parents

It was reported that Irish was the main language of communication used by primary schools with their school communities. In almost all schools, correspondence was bilingual to cater for those with little Irish. In some cases, a glossary of Irish terms for curricular subjects was sent home to parents. It was indicated that parents' association meetings were generally bilingual and communication between the principal and parents' association representatives was usually in Irish.

In post-primary schools, four schools indicated that all correspondence with parents was in Irish only, and special arrangements were made for parents with little Irish. In the other post-primary schools, both Irish and English were used when communicating with parents.

One post-primary school indicated that every effort was being made to bring members of the community into the school to talk to students about various aspects of Irish language and Gaeltacht life.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

Senior management emphasises active partnership with the Gaeltacht community and prioritises inviting speakers to show the many opportunities for people with Irish, especially in terms of employment and leadership opportunities.
(Post-Primary School 1)

In one post-primary school, it was reported that a youth club was organised by the parents' association to provide meaningful opportunities for students to use Irish socially outside of school. Two post-primary schools had not formed a parents' association and the inspectors recommended that this be rectified as a matter of urgency. It was suggested to some post-primary schools that they outline clear procedures in school policies on the role of parents in using and promoting the language. It was suggested also, in the case of some post-primary schools, that parents need to be given more information on the Recognition Scheme and on the school improvement action plan.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

It is recommended that more information be provided to parents about the school's background, as a Gaeltacht school, the school's participation in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme, and the advantages in general of bilingualism.
(Post-Primary School 7)

Table 7: Findings on the use of Irish in partnership with the community

Strengths	Areas for development
<p>It was reported that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Irish was given priority when communicating with the school community ✓ the terminology for curriculum subjects was made available to parents ✓ members of the community were coming in to speak to the students 	<p>It was reported that there was a need to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ establish a parents' committee in every post-primary school ○ agree procedures in terms of the role of parents in progressing the language ○ inform parents of the Scheme and on the implementation of the action plan

3 Leading Learning, Teaching and School Development

3.1 Introduction

In primary and post-primary schools, inspectors evaluated the quality of leadership and management under the following areas:

- The school's vision for implementing immersion education
- Leading policy development, action planning and the implementation of the school's action plan for education through Irish
- The school's policy and approaches regarding the recruitment, deployment and professional development of teachers to implement immersion education
- The effective management of supports for the Scheme.

The quality of leadership and management in the implementation of immersion education was reported to be good or very good in most schools.

Figure 3: Leading policy development, action planning and the implementation of immersion education in primary schools

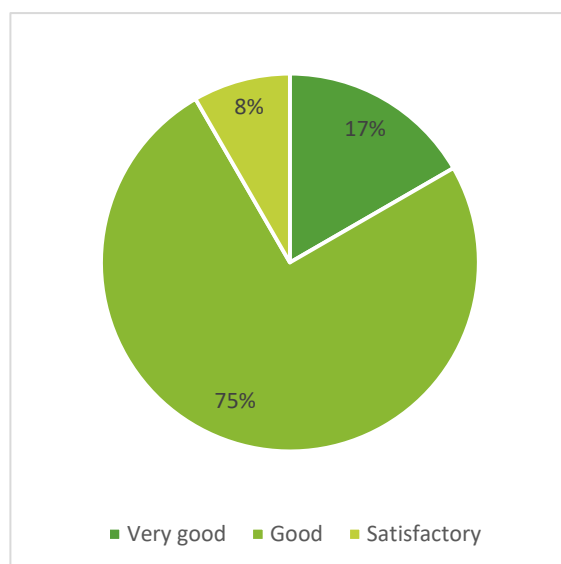
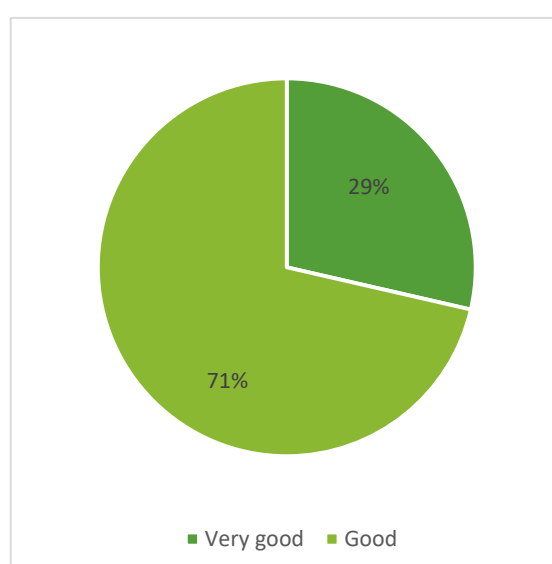


Figure 4: Leading policy development, action planning and the implementation of immersion education in post-primary schools



3.2 The school's vision for the implementation of immersion education

It was reported that all primary and post-primary schools had a clear vision for the implementation of immersion education. Boards of management and in-school leaders were highly commended for disseminating and consolidating a shared vision for immersion education and for the development of the schools as Gaeltacht schools. This vision was being promoted in schools at the level of board of management, senior management and other leaders in schools.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The principal has a clear vision for the school and he works diligently with the school community to achieve that vision. (Primary School 12)

In the majority of schools, the use of Irish as a language of communication at whole-school level was said to be good or very good. The commitment of staff to the strengthening of the Irish language was acknowledged as a key strength in the successful implementation of immersion education. Reference was also made to the way in which schools tried to foster a lifelong positive attitude to the language among students.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The school's vision is to instil in pupils a sense of pride in Irish so that they will speak it throughout their lives... There is a very strong emphasis on preserving and perpetuating the rich Irish heritage in the school. (Primary School 6)

It was reported that there were areas for development, including leading on the development of literacy and assessment. It was also reported that in some cases better links needed to be created with the local community regarding the school's vision, and the need to direct the community's attention to the benefits of Gaeltacht education, immersion education and bilingualism in general.

Table 8: Findings on the school's vision in terms of immersion education

Strengths	Areas for development
<p>It was reported that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ there was a clear vision for immersion education and for the development of Gaeltacht schools ✓ a shared vision was being extended and consolidated by boards of management and in-school leaders ✓ staff were committed to strengthening the Irish language ✓ a lifelong positive attitude towards Irish was being fostered 	<p>It was reported that there was a need for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ better communication in some cases with the local community in relation to the school's vision and the Scheme ○ a renewed focus in the development of literacy and assessment through the school self-evaluation process

3.3 Leading policy development, action planning and the implementation of the school plan for education through Irish

It was reported that every primary and post-primary school in which a case study had been conducted had an action plan for education through the medium of Irish. It was indicated that those plans were being implemented effectively in a significant minority of the schools.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The school had developed an appropriate school-improvement action plan. There was evidence in the classrooms and throughout the school that the action plan was being implemented systematically. (Primary School 1)

In schools where very effective practice was identified, it was reported that the improvement targets in the plans were appropriate to the language needs of the pupils. It was stated also that these goals had been agreed by the school community through open discussion under the leadership of the principal. The targets were being implemented gradually and were being carefully and regularly monitored on a whole-school basis. In these schools, the responsibility for the goals at whole-school level was delegated to

members of the in-school management team. In the majority of post-primary schools, a committee was established to support the implementation of the Scheme and inspectors often mentioned that the Scheme was an item on the agenda of every staff meeting.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

Targeted responsibilities for the use of Irish and timeframes were set out in the action plan and the implementation of the actions was carefully monitored. The teachers provided monthly reports in which there was evidence that the language curriculum goals and objectives were being realised as well as a record of the teaching practices specific to immersion education at a whole-school level. (Primary School 9)

In cases where leadership was very effective, it was reported that the *Draft-Indicators of Good Practice for Immersion Education (2018)*⁷ were used continuously to support the self-evaluation process and that the impact of the action plan was clearly recorded in teachers' monthly accounts and in minutes of staff meetings.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The staff used the Draft-Indicators of Good Practice in Immersion Education 2018 as a means of assessing progress and planning for school improvements. It was clear from minutes of staff meetings that there had been professional dialogue about the implementation of the indicators on a whole-school basis. (Primary School 9)

It was clear from the reports that schools were making worthwhile efforts to implement the language-based criteria for recognition as a Gaeltacht school. However, in the majority of primary and post-primary schools, scope for development was identified in the design and implementation of action plans and recommendations were made to schools in this regard. At both levels, most recommendations related to schools' practice in setting goals and evaluating progress. The recommendation most commonly made in the case-study reports was the setting of specific, measurable targets for the language-based criteria and the continuous monitoring of progress towards those goals.

⁷ *Draft-Guide for Gaeltacht Primary/Post-Primary Schools: Indicators of Good Practice for Immersion Education (2018)*. A revised version was published on the Department of Education's website in 2020.

In the post-primary case studies, the non-profiling of students' competencies in the language early on in their post-primary education was reported as a notable omission. Consequently, schools did not have sufficient information about students' language needs, which would be very important as a reference for goal setting and for monitoring the effectiveness of teaching interventions, such as the additional language support hours for Irish.

In three of the post-primary schools, baseline information was being collected on students' competency levels in Irish. However, only one school had critically analysed this baseline information. In this school, it was noted that students' progress was being monitored effectively, particularly in the case of students who were being provided with additional support. In the majority of schools at both levels, language improvement goals need to be clearly outlined for all pupils/students in the school, progress needs to be continuously monitored and pupils'/students' achievements need to be acknowledged in a variety of ways.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

A standardised Irish test was administered to first and second year students for the first time in the current year. This baseline information should be critically analysed and these results, together with results from other standardised tests, should be used to set language targets for all students, and for groups of students.
(Post-Primary School 3)

The case-study reports on primary schools also identified some weaknesses in practice with regard to goal setting. Greater focus was placed, however, in the reports on primary schools on ways in which the implementation of the action plan could be improved.

In the reports on some primary schools, it was stated that relevant actions needed to be identified on a whole-school basis to achieve the agreed goals. It was reported that agreed whole-school practice was also required to monitor and evaluate progress towards the goals. It was reported that it was important that the goals and action plan be specified in the individual teacher's planning and records. It was stated that appropriate evaluation strategies needed to be agreed and used to regularly monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the action plan. In the majority of the reports, the inspectors recommended that the school share a summary report on the progress of the action plan with the school community on a regular basis.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

Although the school has a school improvement action plan in place, it needs to be reviewed and discussed more regularly. The goals of the plan need to be discussed in detail with the teachers and methods to achieve these goals need to be agreed and implemented systematically. The school plan for Irish should be developed to clarify the learning expectations for oral language, reading and writing at each level class. To this end, it is recommended that the duties of the in-school leadership team be reviewed, and that responsibilities for coordinating whole-school implementation of the language criteria of the Scheme be assigned to members. (Primary School 12)

Table 9: Findings on leading development and implementation of the school action plan

Strengths	Areas for development
It was reported that <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ every school had an action plan✓ the plans were being implemented effectively in a significant minority of schools✓ clear, measurable goals had been identified and agreed where practice was very effective✓ appropriate interventions were being implemented✓ pupils' progress was being monitored and assessed✓ leadership was delegated effectively	It was reported that there was a need to <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ set specific, measurable targets in the school action plan○ gather baseline data regarding students' language proficiency at the beginning of their post-primary education○ make more effective use of assessment data in target setting○ monitor the effectiveness of teaching interventions○ acknowledge and celebrate achievements○ focus more attention on the implementation of the action plan

3.4 The school's policy and approaches on recruitment, deployment and professional development of teachers in the implementation of immersion education

The case-study reports indicated that effective policies regarding the recruitment, deployment and professional development of teachers in relation to immersion education were implemented for the most part in Gaeltacht schools. It was reported that the management of human and material resources was good or very good in almost all primary schools and in most post-primary schools.

Figure 5: The management of human and material resources for immersion education in primary school

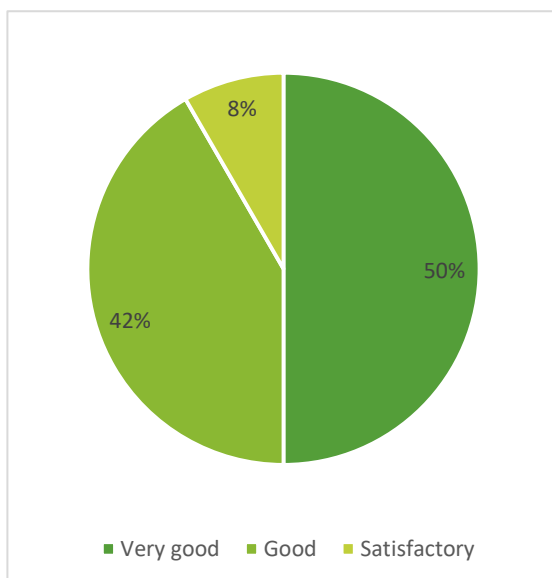


Figure 6: The management of human and material resources for immersion education in post-primary school



The following extract from one of the case-study reports provides an overview of the work undertaken by schools in this area.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The board has a strong policy of recruiting staff and external trainers who are very proficient in Irish. Furthermore, only trainee teachers who are fluent in Irish are accepted for teaching placements. The board fully supports the principal and the

teachers in the implementation of immersion education. It supports them in attending ongoing professional development courses related to immersion education. (Primary School 8)

The post-primary reports stated that staff, because of their participation in the Scheme, had a greater understanding now of the value of acting systematically and collaboratively to improve the language practices of the school community. Despite these efforts, the reports highlight difficulties in employing teachers with the appropriate qualifications and language competence, for part-time roles in particular, a problem that is quite common in Gaeltacht schools at primary and post-primary level.

In the self-reflection accounts provided by school management at both primary and post-primary level, it was acknowledged that teachers need to be highly proficient in Irish to cater appropriately for native speakers, for all subjects in the *Primary School Curriculum*, and for post-primary subjects where there is specialised terminology. Teachers indicated, in these accounts, that it was very difficult for Gaeltacht schools to recruit teachers who had the necessary proficiency in Irish.

Extracts from schools' reflections on the implementation of the Scheme

The board of management seeks to employ teachers with a high standard of Irish but sometimes does not succeed. The teacher employment panels are a constraint for Gaeltacht schools. Schools are obliged to accept teachers from the teaching panel, regardless of their standard of Irish. (Primary School 5)

Employing a suitable person as a language teacher – that is an ongoing challenge in a small Gaeltacht. Regarding the standard of teachers' Irish, it is necessary to help them to improve, to recommend courses, to provide good example and to discuss common errors. (Primary School 12)

We are fortunate in this school in that, so far, we are managing to recruit a high percentage of native Irish speakers. This contributes greatly to the characteristic spirit of the school and to the preservation of the richness of the language in the context of learning and Gaeltacht education. (Post-Primary School 1)

There was reference to this issue also in Inspectorate evaluation reports.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

*The board of management makes every effort to employ people who are highly proficient in Irish but, despite its efforts, it is difficult to find people with the appropriate qualifications and Irish language proficiency for the posts.
(Primary School 12)*

As a result of the teacher supply challenge, school management give particular attention to teacher deployment and professional development. Many Gaeltacht schools, particularly post-primary schools, had different in-school arrangements to address this challenge. It was reported that it was encouraging that the Masters in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht Education was now available in Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. Two teachers in one primary school had commenced this postgraduate course. The professional development opportunities provided by An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) were also acknowledged in the reports.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

It is commendable that two teachers have started the Masters in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht Education programme in Mary Immaculate College in the current year. These teachers' expertise will greatly assist in the implementation of the Scheme in the future. (Primary School 12)

It is said that there is now a positive attitude among the staff and that the whole-school continuing professional development course, provided by COGG, greatly helped to clarify the staff's understanding of the Scheme. (Post-Primary School 4)

In some cases, the need for schools to be involved in professional development in relation to special education was identified. In post-primary school reports it was stated that individual teachers were engaged in continuing professional development but that this should be a core part of teachers' collective and collaborative practice. It was also recommended that staff training be provided on content and language integrated learning (CLIL) in the context of immersion education.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

It is recommended that a CPD programme for the implementation of immersion education be drafted in consultation with the staff. Training in teaching methods that link language teaching and subject teaching should to be included as part of the staff CPD programme. (Post-Primary School 3)

Issues regarding professional development were raised also in schools' self-reflection reports. As highlighted in the following extracts, reference was made to professional development needs in language proficiency and pedagogy.

Extracts from schools' reflections on the implementation of the Scheme

There is an emphasis on the Cois Fharraige Irish-language dialect amongst the staff in terms of its characteristics, pronunciation and vocabulary. Staff awareness of the dialect is being raised through the use of guest speakers. (Primary School 1)

There is a high standard of Irish overall among the staff, and some staff, who began with little Irish some years ago, have made great progress and are now very proficient in the language. (Post-Primary School 7)

Another challenge felt by the teachers is the lack of training available in relation to the teaching of English literacy in first class as immersion education is being implemented in the infant classes. The context of Gaeltacht schools is different and it would be very helpful if there was a professional development course on literacy available again for teachers in Gaeltacht schools. (Primary School 7)

The first class to receive early-immersion education in the school is now in first class. The staff has received no training in terms of how to approach the teaching of English in first class, particularly regarding the transfer of skills and assessment. The school needs training in this area soon. (Primary School 4)

Table 10: Findings on recruitment and deployment of teachers, and on professional development

Strengths	Areas for development
<p>It was reported that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ boards of management are attentive regarding the recruitment of teachers who are competent in Irish ✓ teachers are participating in the Masters in Irish-Medium and Gaeltacht Education programme ✓ the CPD provided by COGG is promoting awareness and commitment to the Scheme 	<p>It was reported that there was a need to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ continue with efforts to resolve teacher supply issues ○ encourage and support teachers to undertake special education courses ○ further enable staff in terms of school self-evaluation ○ upskill teachers in using content and language integrated learning (CLIL) in the context of immersion education

3.5 The management of supports for the Scheme

The case-study reports indicated that the management of supports for the Scheme, in terms of funding and human resources, was good or very good in almost all primary schools. It was reported that the funding that was available from the Department of Education was used for the provision of suitable Irish language resources, including Irish language books, educational charts, mathematics materials and teaching aids for the other subjects. At both levels, most of the recommendations in the reports related to the management of the human resources for the provision of language support for Irish.

As part of the supports given to schools in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme, a certain amount of additional support hours for Irish are allocated to each school, with the number of hours based on the school's enrolment. The *Guidance Note* for schools, published in 2018, and Circulars 0012/2021 (primary schools) and 0013/2021 (post-primary schools), outline ways in which the additional hours can be used. The support hours must be used to support students with identified needs in Irish, from the least competent student in Irish to the most proficient native Irish speakers.

In the case-study reports on both primary and post-primary schools, some good practices were reported and recommendations for improvement were made in terms of other practices. The good practices included preparing students for language and cultural competitions.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

Good work is taking place in preparing some students for language and cultural competitions and this is entirely in line with the aims of the Scheme.

(Post-Primary School 1)

The innovative and creative learning programme that has been developed for the Irish language support classes was of particular note. These classes focus on providing students with an experience of the tradition and heritage of the Gaeltacht.

(Post-Primary School 2)

It was reported that additional support for Irish was being provided for primary school pupils through in-class interventions in some cases and through the provision of support outside the classroom in other cases. Support was being provided for both native speakers and for pupils with little Irish. There was an emphasis on language enrichment in the support provided for native speakers. In the work with pupils who had little Irish, there was a focus on fluency and accuracy, and on facilitating learning through the medium of Irish in the other subjects.

In primary schools, the additional hours have been particularly effective in the implementation of early immersion and early-literacy intervention programmes. It was reported that the additional hours were used in one primary school to develop pupils' writing skills, guided by improvement goals identified through the school self-evaluation (SSE) process. It was reported in a few cases that there was very effective co-operation between mainstream teachers and the support teachers for Irish.

The additional support for Irish required improvement in the case of some primary schools. It was stated that a range of assessment data should be used to greater effect to identify pupils' language needs, agree a targeted language plan and gather and review evidence of progress. In some cases, schools were advised to use the extra hours to teach and practice terminology specific to other subjects so that pupils' cognitive language could be improved and their learning facilitated.

There were recommendations made also in terms of the additional hours in post-primary schools. Many of the recommendations related to a more targeted scheduling of the hours.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

Almost half of the support hours for Irish are used for co-curricular and cross-curricular work. The majority of these hours should now be used for scheduled classes to ensure that students with identified Irish-language needs are receiving the support they are due as native speakers and as learners. (Post-Primary School 1)

In some cases, the inspectors mentioned the importance of supporting native speakers to improve and develop their language skills in line with the local dialect.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

... It would be worth considering ways of supporting the most proficient students so that they are adept at using the accurate dialectal Irish they have acquired with others in their own language community, both now and in the future. (Post-Primary School 7)

This issue was also mentioned in schools' self-reflections, as may be seen in the following extract.

Extract from a school's reflection on the implementation of the Scheme

One of the greatest challenges to be overcome is ensuring that there is continuous, appropriate language development for native speakers as they move up through the classes. (Primary School 3)

Table 11: Findings regarding the management of resources

Strengths	Areas for development
<p>It was reported that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ funding was being used to good effect ✓ the use of additional language-support hours was in accordance with the overall guidance provided by the Department of Education ✓ students were being prepared for language and cultural competitions 	<p>It was reported that there was a need to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ensure that the timetabling of additional hours is focused on the target learners ○ have more support directed towards the learners who are most proficient in Irish ○ make more effective use of assessment data ○ use the additional hours to develop learners' academic language

4 Partnership with the School Community and Other Parties in the Implementation of the Scheme

4.1 Introduction

During the case-study evaluations, the quality of the links being created by primary and post-primary schools with their local communities was explored. This issue was examined through the following areas.

- The impact of partnership between the school community and the local community
- The impact and benefit of links created with other educational settings that operate through Irish
- The impact of interventions with other local and national Irish/cultural organisations.

4.2 The impact of partnership between the school community and the local community

4.2.1 Partnership with parents/guardians and the school community

In the focus groups with the ERC, it was clear that both teachers and parents understood that families, school communities and the wider community would have to work together if Irish was to survive in the Gaeltacht. It was highlighted that schools and the wider community needed to have shared expectations in terms of language behaviour. Some parents stated they were not convinced that the Recognition Scheme, or any school-based intervention, could change the language behaviour of the community. A number of parents reported that Irish as a living language in the community was 'gone completely' in their own Gaeltacht areas. However, other parents stated that the Gaeltacht communities were being encouraged by the participation of schools in the Scheme and that it was now clearer what needed to be done to promote the Irish language.

Primary and post-primary teachers in the focus groups reported that there had been more contact and co-operation between teachers and parents since the Scheme began and that the work of schools was encouraging parents to make intensive efforts to use and learn the language. It was stated that it was now clearer to all that the school, the home and the wider community were working towards a common goal.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

Information about the Scheme and about Irish language and cultural events in the area must be disseminated to parents regularly and advice provided to those who are trying to use Irish at home. (Primary School 1)

While the parents understood the value of immersion education, more information could be provided to them regarding the Scheme's specific language criteria. (Primary School 9)

Although parents were aware that it would be good for students who are native Irish speakers to have the opportunity to receive additional support from the support teacher for Irish, they were not aware that this support was available in the school. (Post-Primary School 5)

It was said that more advice in terms of how best to progress the language, could be provided for families where one parent speaks Irish. (Post-Primary School 6)

In their self-reflection accounts, the management of both primary and post-primary schools reported that it was challenging to encourage pupils/students and their parents to use Irish as a social language at home and in the community. They were of the opinion that there was a need to develop and expand the school's and local community's awareness of education through the medium of Irish. For those with little knowledge of immersion education, it was stated that they needed to be made aware of the benefits and advantages of the new approach, and of their own crucial role in the process. Teachers recognised that it is an ongoing challenge to strengthen Irish in the community and to reinforce its status. This perspective is evident in the following extracts from one school's self-reflection, in which there is reference also to the impact of the school closure as a result of COVID-19.

Extracts from a school's reflection on the implementation of the Scheme

The greatest challenge the staff face as a Gaeltacht school is to convince some of the school's parents that Irish is a living language and that support is needed from the home also. Its use should not stop when the school day finishes. (Primary School 6)

The school's greatest challenge currently is to encourage pupils to speak Irish to each other while they are playing outside, as it has been six months since some of the school's pupils spoke Irish to one another. (Primary School 6)

In the Inspectorate's case-study reports, it was stated that partnership between the school and local community was good or very good in almost all primary schools and in most post-primary schools.

Figure 7: Partnership with the school community and with the local language planning in primary schools

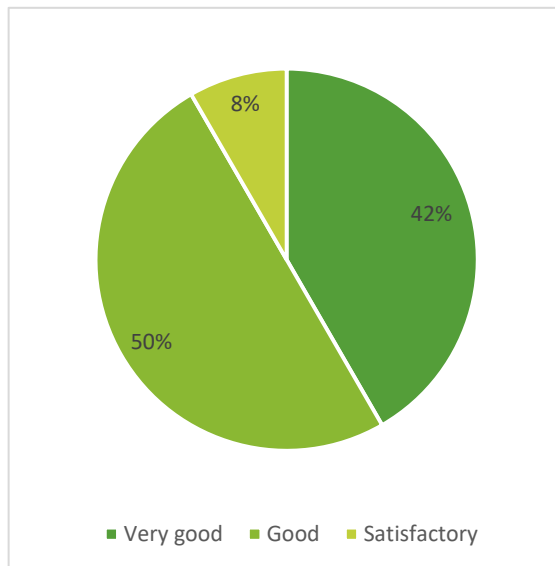
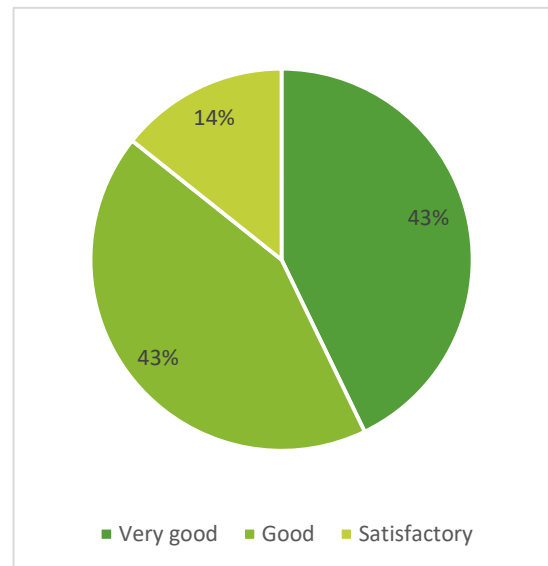


Figure 8: Partnership with the school community and with the local language planning in post-primary schools



In all primary school case-study reports, it was stated that there was regular contact and good communication between the school and pupils' parents/guardians. In those primary schools where very good practice was identified, parents had an input into the formulation and implementation of school improvement action plans under the Scheme. Meetings were organised with parents to explain the practice of immersion education, the early-immersion programme in particular, and various resources were provided to help them to support their children's learning through the medium of Irish at home.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

The school provided opportunities for stakeholders to have an input into the action plan for immersion education in the school and there was a meeting with parents at the beginning of the school year to explain to them in detail the early-immersion programme and immersion practices. Parental involvement in School Self-Evaluation was good and parents were provided with a report at the end of the school year. (Primary School 9)

There is a support scheme, Teanga Tí, aimed at encouraging and supporting families to use Irish in the home. (Primary School 6)

There was very positive reporting at post-primary level on communication with parents and the local community. In post-primary schools where the partnership with the school community was good or very good, the strength of the staff's active participation in Irish-language activities and in local organisations was mentioned. It was considered that this participation set a good example for the community and for students in terms of respecting Irish and promoting the use of the language as a community language.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

Many of the staff in the school are language leaders in their own locality. They are involved in language committees, community committees, and theatre workshops that are central in the life of the Irish language and the Gaeltacht, and in music, cultural and sporting matters. The majority of staff provide a good example to the community and to the students in terms of having respect for the language and its use as the language of the community. (Post-Primary School 6)

In another post-primary school where the level of partnership was good, long-established links with local football clubs and with the Irish college located in the building during the summer were mentioned. It was also reported that social events were being organised in

the school and that any community, language or cultural events were supported. It was reported, in the case of two post-primary schools, that Irish-language classes organised for parents and for the community were in great demand and this was also mentioned in the case of one primary school. It was a source of joy and hope for those school communities that so many parents and others from the community were attending Irish classes at various levels.

It was stated that there was scope for improvement in some schools at both levels in terms of establishing a parents' committee. This was the case in a minority of schools, two primary schools and one post-primary school.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

As part of the action planning, it is recommended that links be further developed with parents to strengthen their role in the school and to consolidate their support for the Scheme. Key to this is to support parents in establishing a parents' committee. (Primary School 4)

Recommendations were made at both levels with regard to keeping parents informed about immersion education, the Scheme, the school-improvement action plan and the school's progress in the attainment of language-based criteria. In the case of one post-primary school, it was recommended that clear procedures be set out in school policies regarding the role of parents in using and promoting the language.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

It would be worth.... formulating a whole-school Irish language policy to develop a common understanding, amongst all members of the school community, of their roles and responsibilities regarding the implementation of the policy. Particular attention should be given to the language-based criteria during this process. (Post-Primary School 5)

It is recommended that parents be provided with more information on the school's background as a Gaeltacht school, the school's participation in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme, and the benefits of bilingualism in general. (Primary School 7)

A report should be shared with the school's parents on what has been achieved in immersion education and further planned improvements. (Primary School 8)

In another post-primary school where partnership was at a satisfactory level, good efforts were being made to inform parents about new lessons that were being organised through the medium of Irish and to encourage them to enroll their children in these lessons. It was mentioned, however, that there was a need to further publicise the work of the school under the Scheme.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

Work remains to be done on a more extensive publicity campaign for the wider community with a view to informing it as to what is being done in terms of enhancing the status of the Irish language in the school, providing more lessons through the medium of Irish and publicising the benefits of bilingualism and immersion education. (Post-Primary School 4)

4.2.2 Partnership with the local language-planning committee/officer

During the focus group meetings convened by the ERC, a number of teachers and parents referred to the importance of the local language plan and the role of the language-planning officer. They felt that this role had particular potential in fostering links between the school context and other language contexts in the community. In the self-reflection accounts from primary and post-primary schools, it was reported that schools were developing stronger links with the language-planning committee. It was stated that these links encouraged young people to participate in extra-curricular activities at local and national level, while using Irish as a living language.

In the case-study reports, it was stated that worthwhile links had been fostered between the majority of primary schools and the local language-planning committees, although a language-planning officer had not been appointed in all areas at the time of the study. In

some primary schools, school staff were also members of the local language-planning committee, and it was reported that this supported partnership between the school and the community.

In some primary schools, it was evident that the school was receiving great support from the language-planning committee.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

It was reported that the language-planning officer provides great support to the school and that events are organised through the medium of Irish, for example, a puppet workshop, sean-nós dancing, and activities in a local Coláiste Gaeilge with the other schools in the Scheme, to give students opportunities to use Irish in another setting outside the school. (Primary School 5)

In those post-primary schools where there was very good partnership with the language-planning officers, these links were beneficial to both students and the community and this was reported on positively.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The language-planning officer comes to the school three times a year for meetings where planning-related matters for language actions that benefit students and the community are discussed. (Post-Primary School 6)

This positive attitude was evident also in schools' self-reflections, as may be seen in the following extract.

Extract from one school's self-reflection on the implementation of the Scheme

Unfortunately, the students of this school are not native speakers, as Irish is not spoken as the language of everyday communication in the household and this greatly affects students' standard of spoken Irish. The school is working alongside the language-planning committee to encourage families to conduct activities through the medium of Irish outside of school. (Post-Primary School 4)

In one post-primary school, where the quality of partnership was good, it was mentioned that it was an advantage for the school to be involved in the drafting of the community language plan. In the case of a small number of primary schools and two post-primary schools, however, it was mentioned that the link with the local language-planning officer needed to be developed. Schools were advised to contact the language-planning officer immediately so that they could work together on an appropriate agenda to inform the community at large about immersion education and its benefits.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The school is in contact with the local language-planning committee and a process has begun to identify the language needs of the community. The school has an opportunity to put its priorities forward with regard to the supports and facilities that are required by pupils and their parents. It would be worthwhile for the school to agree strategies with the language-planning committee to gather the information required, within a defined timeframe, to support the committee in formulating and implementing policies accordingly. (Primary School 3)

4.3 The impact and benefit of links created with other educational settings that operate through the medium of Irish

In the focus groups convened by the ERC, primary school teachers reported that the work of the Irish-medium *naíonraí* was contributing significantly to the development of the language and that the *naíonraí* were preparing pupils effectively for early-immersion education in primary school. Primary school parents also referred to the local *naíonraí* on

a few occasions in the focus groups. Some felt that more information about the advantages of bilingualism should be provided for parents of pre-school children. In the accounts provided on teachers' self-reflection, it was stated that it was extremely important that primary schools create worthwhile links with the local *naíonraí* in order to support continuity in the pupil's immersion journey.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

There is a sense of continuity between the local naíonra, the Irish-medium primary and post-primary school which fosters and facilitates the pupil's educational journey through the medium of Irish. (Primary School 12)

Parents reported that children are ready to learn Irish at school having spent time in the naíonra. According to the parents, all pupils have a good experience of Irish when they start school. (Primary School 11)

It would be worth developing stronger links between the school and the local naíonra to facilitate the transition to primary school for children – something in which teachers have an interest. (Primary School 2)

In one school at the edge of the Gaeltacht, post-primary teachers referred to the link with the primary schools in the area, in terms of attracting sixth class pupils to the Gaeltacht post-primary schools, and a language-planning officer mentioned his efforts to bring various schools together to discuss the supports that were available.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

It is clear that the pupils who come from Gaeltacht primary schools in the area have a strong influence on the standard of Irish in the school. It would be worth seeing if more of them could be enticed to the Gaeltacht post-primary school, for example, by fostering stronger links with the local community, with parents of children in primary schools, Irish speakers, and with people who are heavily involved with Irish culture. (Post-Primary School 7)

The officer stated that she has established an Irish language committee, taskforce or group for local primary schools operating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme,

and that she meets with the principals once a term to identify the supports available and the gaps that can be filled. (Post-Primary School 3)

This issue featured also in schools' self-reflections, as may be seen in the following extract.

Extract from one school's self-reflection on the implementation of the Scheme

The language profile and the link created with the primary schools from which our students come give teachers an opportunity to plan for the future in order to identify at an early stage the challenges and difficulties that some students experience. Teachers have noticed in the last few years that this planning is working well and it enables the students to participate fully in the educational life of the community school from first year onwards. (Post-Primary School 6)

Some parents indicated that they were disappointed that there were not many courses available through the medium of Irish in the universities. They considered that there was a need to foster greater continuity throughout the education system, from early learning and care to third level.

It was stated in the case-study reports that the links between the school and other educational settings and Irish-language organisations were good or very good in each of the primary schools and in more than half of the post-primary schools.

It was evident from the interviews with the boards of management and principals that worthwhile links had been created between the primary schools and other local education settings. In some areas, the primary schools have developed supportive, successful networks with local *naíonraí* (Irish-medium early learning and care settings), other primary schools in the Scheme, post-primary schools in the area and third level institutions.

Figure 9: Links between primary schools and educational settings and cultural organisations that operate through Irish

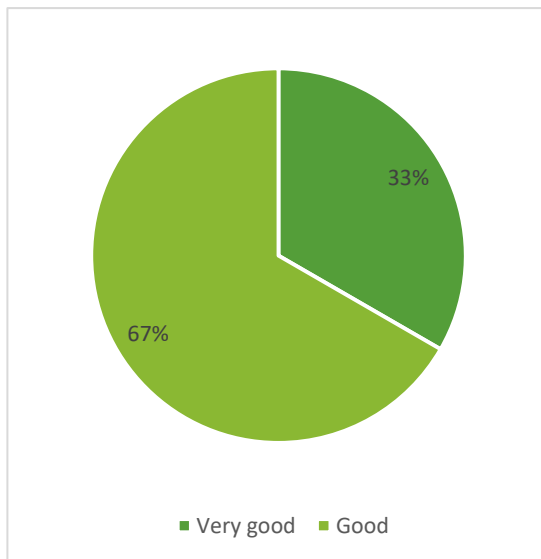
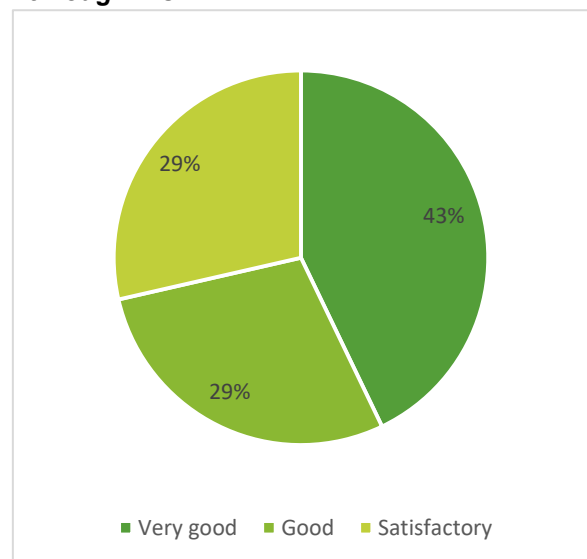


Figure 10: Links between post-primary schools and educational settings and cultural organisations that operate through Irish



In a significant minority of case-study primary schools, while links were good overall, scope for development was identified in terms of strengthening links between the local primary schools and *naíonraí*. It was mentioned that it was challenging for primary schools to cater for the language needs of infants who had little Irish. Consequently, there was an understanding of the importance of fostering links with the *naíonraí*.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

The school has a strong relationship with the local naíonra and secondary school and worthwhile strategies are in place to facilitate the transition of pupils at all stages of their educational journey. (Primary School 12)

A worthwhile link is being fostered between the school and the local naíonra; it was reported that children in the naíonra participate in school plays. (Primary School 5)

A relationship and means of communication must be fostered with the local naíonra to clarify the starting points for children's language learning and to develop effective supports for children's transition. (Primary School 9)

Links with third level institutions or local businesses were developed in a small number of primary schools. It was reported that such networks could foster opportunities for the promotion of education through the medium of Irish in all primary schools.

Beneficial links were created by the majority of post-primary schools with other educational settings operating through the medium of Irish. In these cases, it was stated that there were strong links between the school and the associated Gaeltacht primary schools. In one case, where best practice was evident, it was reported that beneficial educational, cultural and social links had been created between the local post-primary and primary school and consequently each school's language experience was being enriched.

In one report, it was stated that appropriate information regarding students' attainment in Irish was shared with relevant teachers with a view to supporting a successful transition from primary to post-primary school. It was stated that this provided helpful information for the post-primary school. In yet another area, it was reported that there had always been a link between the primary and post-primary schools but that this link had been strengthened since the Scheme began. In this case, it was stated that joint staff meetings were held and that guest speakers were shared between the two schools for the benefit of the students. It was indicated in the case of one post-primary school, however, that the link with the community needed to be strengthened.

A worthwhile link was established with third-level institutions in the case of two post-primary schools where such institutions were nearby. It was stated that in the case of other post-primary schools, opinions and suggestions might be sought from Irish-language scholars in the area. As an aspect of development, it was recommended that in one case where the quality of partnership was very good that these links could be enhanced and students' understanding of the work of these third level institutions could be developed, for the benefit of the students themselves.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

Contact is maintained with the third-level outreach institution located in the immediate Gaeltacht area and opinions and suggestions are sought from Irish language scholars in the area. (Post-Primary School 1)

Links have been fostered with many of the educational and cultural institutions in the area. It is recommended that these links be extended and that students' understanding of the work of these institutions be developed by organising work experience in them for Transition Year students, to awaken and nurture students' interest in the issue of the preservation of the language. (Post-Primary School 6)

4.4 The impact of interaction with local and national Irish-language/cultural organisations

The case-study reports indicated that there were productive links between schools and Irish language, sporting and cultural organisations. It was clear that these links were contributing to the use of Irish among pupils/students outside the classroom.

It was stated in three case studies at post-primary level, where the quality was very good or good, that the schools had links with local organisations that were promoting aspects of the Gaeltacht's historical and contemporary heritage. It was reported in one case that valuable work was being done to prepare students for competitions, debates and community events. It was reported that the students' participation in such events was helping with their self-motivation regarding the use of Irish in the community. In one school where the quality was satisfactory, it was stated that the link, which for the first time ever, had been created with Údarás na Gaeltachta, was a source of inspiration for the school. The students of that school participated in a business competition organised by Údarás na Gaeltachta. It was acknowledged that there was merit in providing the opportunity for students to participate in a competition which was entirely through the medium of Irish.

Links between schools and Irish language/cultural organisations were described in the ERC focus groups also. The support provided for schools was noted in particular.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

The good advice on immersion education provided by a representative of Gaeloideachas to parents of pupils starting school for the first time was mentioned.

(Primary School 1)

Teachers highlighted the importance of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) in the locality as an organisation that places an emphasis on the Irish language. It was stated that the football pitch was the only place outside school where Irish was heard.

(Primary School 12)

4.5 Summary of the impact of partnership

Table 12: Findings on partnership with the school community and other parties

Strengths	Areas for development
<p>It was reported that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ meetings were convened by organisations outside of school to explain and demonstrate the practice of total immersion ✓ there was involvement of relevant personnel in the formulation and implementation of the action plan ✓ additional resources were available to support children with spoken Irish in the home ✓ people from the community were invited to come to the school to speak to students about the benefits of Irish and bilingualism ✓ Irish classes were available for parents, and they were in great demand ✓ strong links were fostered between local schools and early learning and care settings 	<p>It was reported that there was a need to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ strengthen the role of parents, in a small number of schools, by establishing a parents' committee ○ develop and improve parental awareness of the Scheme ○ create better links with early learning and care settings in a small number of primary schools ○ address shortcomings of links with other educational settings in a significant minority of post-primary schools ○ foster better communication with the local language-planning committee

- ✓ principals and other staff members were involved in local language-planning
- ✓ in some cases, good links had been fostered with the local language-planning committee, an arrangement that is very beneficial for schools

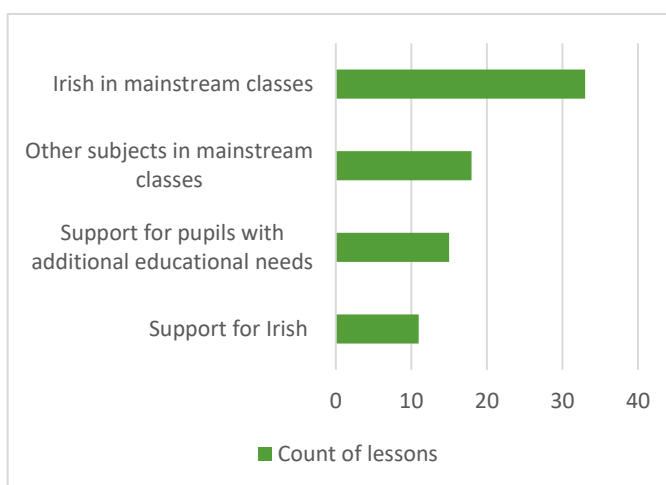
5 The Quality of Learning and Teaching at Primary Level

5.1 Introduction

During the case-study evaluations in primary schools, inspectors observed seventy-seven lessons, including lessons in mainstream classes (in Irish and other subjects), support lessons for Irish and support lessons for pupils with additional educational needs. The details are provided in Figure 11.

The commentary in this chapter is based on findings of these evaluations and on the opinions of teachers and parents as gathered in the focus-group meetings convened by the Educational Research Centre (ERC).

Figure 11: The learning settings and subjects observed in primary schools



5.2 The quality of learning

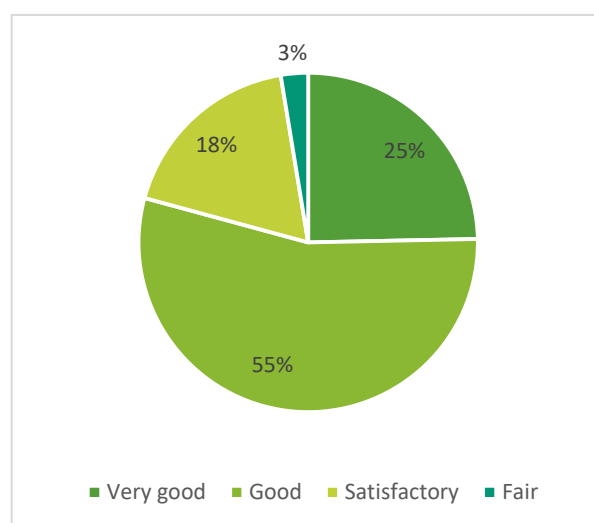
5.2.1 Pupils' learning outcomes

In the focus groups with the ERC, primary school teachers reported a significant improvement in the standard of pupils' spoken Irish since the Recognition Scheme began. In the Irish lessons observed in the evaluations conducted by the Inspectorate, it was reported that pupils' learning outcomes were very good or good in the majority of lessons and at a satisfactory or fair level in a significant minority of lessons.

Oral language

In focus groups organised by the ERC, teachers in some primary schools reported that pupils were speaking Irish more fluently and naturally because of early-immersion education, even when Irish was not widely spoken outside of school. They stated that pupils were now speaking Irish more

Figure 12: The quality of learning outcomes in primary schools



accurately and that they had more confidence in using their Irish. Teachers in some schools felt that pupils also now had a wider range of vocabulary. The views expressed by parents to the ERC were similar to those of the teachers.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

The parents are satisfied overall with the improvement in their children's Irish since the Scheme began, particularly children's fluency and range of vocabulary. (Primary School 11)

Teachers have seen an improvement in the standard of spoken Irish amongst pupils. They have more confidence when speaking Irish since the Scheme began, and particularly since early-immersion education began. (Primary School 10).

The teachers stated that there are opportunities to differentiate in the context of Aistear, because the Language Support-Teacher for Irish can enrich the language of the native Irish speakers or provide support in the foundations of the language to learners of Irish. (Primary School 3)

The teachers have a strong understanding of the importance of promoting oral Irish in an enjoyable way so that pupils are positively disposed towards the language in the future. (Primary School 5)

In the lessons where inspectors considered the quality of learning to be very good or good, it was stated that pupils were able to express themselves clearly and confidently.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

Most pupils speak fluently; they can recount in coherent sentences, converse naturally and express their opinions confidently. (Primary School 6)

Although students spoke with some fluency and were able to express themselves and their views clearly, inspectors found that, in some cases, their skills and understanding of the syntax and grammar of the language were deficient.

The use of Irish as the language of communication and interaction was very good in the majority of lessons observed, good in a significant minority and fair or satisfactory in a small number of lessons. It was evident that the language was often used by primary school pupils as they engaged in interactive activities during lessons. It was reported, however, that in some lessons, pupils were not given sufficient opportunities to communicate in Irish. Overall, spoken fluency was being developed effectively in the majority of primary schools but accuracy in spoken language needed to be further developed.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

Although teachers provided a rich language input in the majority of the lessons observed, in half of these a greater emphasis on the use of the language amongst pupils was needed ... To this end, it is recommended that teachers discuss and implement approaches to make the communicative phase an integral part of every Irish lesson, in every learning setting. (Primary School 3)

In some cases, inspectors reported a need to focus language input on the various learning needs of pupils and to further emphasise communication during Irish lessons to improve pupils' oral language skills.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

In those lessons where scope for development was identified, improved differentiation of language goals and learning activities was needed to cater for the range of pupils' abilities. The need to place further emphasis on pupils' communication in these lessons was also recognised. (Primary School 3)

In one school, it was noted that a whole-school approach was needed to ensure continuity and progression in pupils' language development as they progress from class to class.

Reading in Irish

Teachers in some primary schools reported to the ERC that the pupils had a greater understanding of phonics in Irish because of the Recognition Scheme. It was also stated that pupils in first class, the first group to have experienced total early-immersion education, had made great progress in Irish reading. In their self-reflection reports, the management of primary schools reported that reading and writing skills were improving in all classes because of the emphasis on phonics and pronunciation from infant classes onwards. They referred to significant progress in the development of pupils' literacy skills in Irish in first class and in their ability to transfer those skills to English. Evidence of this view is provided in the extracts below from the ERC research and the schools' self-reflections.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

It was stated that reading was better in first class than before, because pupils have a wider range of vocabulary. The first-class teacher needs to use the second-class textbook, and Séideán Sí is now used more often. (Primary School 2)

The teachers explained that they use resources from the Áisaonad in Belfast to support them to teach Irish. It was stated that the one early-reading programme available is not used in its entirety, because it is too easy. The infant teacher also needs to use other programmes to provide an appropriate learning challenge for pupils. (Primary School 10)

Excerpts from schools' self-reflections on the implementation of the Scheme

The transfer of reading and writing skills from Irish is really supporting the progression of English literacy from first class onwards. (Primary School 2)

Phonics work has improved as we are only focusing on one language in early-immersion education. This is done through co-teaching. Repetition and differentiation are very important to ensure and assess this development. (Primary School 11).

The parents in one school indicated that the pupils were more interested in reading in Irish as a result of the Scheme. That said, some parents felt that there were not enough modern

books translated into Irish for children. They felt more would be required to broaden pupils' interest in Irish reading as a hobby and to achieve a balance between reading in Irish and in English.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

According to the parents, their children are not choosing Irish language books to read in their spare time. It was considered that there are not enough Irish books available and that the standard of books in Irish is not good enough to stimulate pupils' interest. Furthermore, pupils' frustrations were described when the Irish in the books did not conform to the local Irish ('it's not our Irish'), for example, when 'madra' is written instead of 'madadh'. (Primary School 9)

Inspectors reported that, overall, there was a good standard of reading in the case-study primary schools. Pupils generally read with good comprehension, expression and fluency. It was noted in a very small number of cases that pupils were not reading at the level appropriate to their ability. In a small number of other cases, differentiated reading programmes were implemented in some classes. It was recommended that this be extended as a whole-school approach. It was felt that it would be worth providing more interesting books for pupils to stimulate their interest in reading in Irish.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

It would be worth providing more interesting books in Irish in the school and encouraging pupils to read them as a pastime. (Primary School 4)

Appendix A provides an analysis of pupil attainment in Irish reading, English reading and Mathematics in the case-study primary schools in spring 2018, immediately prior to the commencement of the Recognition Scheme. Pupils in second, fourth and sixth classes completed *Triail Ghaeilge Dhroim Conrach* in Irish reading. The attainment of pupils in the case-study schools was higher than expected according to the test norms. With reference to test norms based on Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools, the number of pupils in the case-study schools whose attainment was well above average was greater than expected and the number whose attainment was well below average was smaller than expected.

was well below average was smaller than expected and the proportion whose attainment was well above average was greater than expected. It was noted that there were significant differences in attainment in Irish reading between schools as well as a wide range of attainment among pupils attending the same school. This indicates how important it is that school provision addresses different levels of ability in Irish reading. As these data were gathered prior to the commencement of the Recognition Scheme, the impact of factors such as total immersion education in infant classes is not yet evident.

Writing in Irish

In the focus groups conducted by the ERC, teachers indicated that there were not as many errors in pupils' writing currently as there were a number of years ago. Teachers felt that early-immersion education and the emphasis on oral Irish in early years were providing a very effective foundation for the development of writing in the middle classes.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

When they were referring to pupils' writing the teachers recognised that pupils are more confident writing an Irish piece, and that their grammatical structure is better, since the Scheme began. (Primary School 9)

It was mentioned that the school participates in the Write a Book Project and that a Book Creator App is used to write through the medium of Irish. (Primary School 9)

The school placed a particular emphasis on grammar and writing, and every effort was made to teach the various genres. (Primary School 10)

According to the teachers, pupils are not making as many errors in writing because they are not translating from English as they used to do. Now they were thinking in Irish, writing with full sentences, and writing more. It was said that this helps their reading and that the pupils are better able to decipher words. (Primary School 11)

During the evaluations, inspectors noted that pupils' writing skills were being developed appropriately and that they were making progress in both functional and creative writing.

It was reported in a small number of cases that there was an appropriate emphasis on spelling and on writing accurately. Some schools identified pupils' needs in writing, including spelling and grammar skills, as part of the school self-evaluation process and there were improvement plans in place. However, in a significant minority of schools, it was recommended that this aspect of practice be developed.

It was recommended also that formative feedback be provided to pupils to help them reflect on their learning as this would improve their writing skills greatly.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

It is recommended that an editorial code be used by pupils to help them to critically analyse their own work and to promote the self-improvement writing process on a whole-school basis. (Primary School 6)

Learning outcomes in the other subjects taught through Irish

Inspectors reported that the quality of attainment across curriculum subjects was very good or good in the majority of lessons observed in primary schools. It was demonstrated that pupils, in general, were developing their understanding and skills through the medium of Irish in the various subjects. It was noted that there should be a greater emphasis on collaborative learning and on adapting the level of the challenge in lessons to pupils' ability levels.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The majority of pupils displayed good competence in conceptual understanding and in using the language of Mathematics and Science. Increased functional collaborative learning and independent challenging activity would enhance their skills development. (Primary School 5)

In general, the specific terminology associated with other curricular subjects was taught explicitly to pupils during lessons, although there was scope for development in a few cases. In one report, the importance of whole-school planning to develop pupils' vocabulary appropriately, was emphasised.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

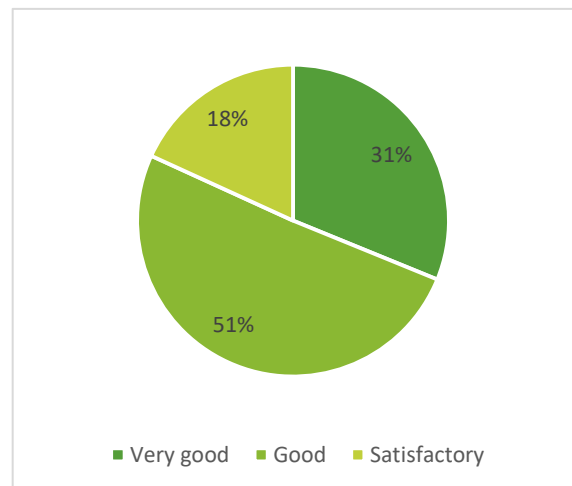
It would be worth teaching the language of the subject explicitly at the beginning and during each lesson and to provide pupils with opportunities to manipulate the language through active collaborative learning and functional problem-solving to assist their understanding and ability. (Primary School 2)

Planning for pupils' language needs in the various curricular areas is required to enable them to access all other subjects through the medium of Irish. (Primary School 5)

5.2.2 Pupils' learning experiences

Inspectors reported that pupils' learning experiences were very good in more than half of the lessons observed in primary schools, good in a significant minority and satisfactory in a small number of lessons. The majority of evaluations indicated that positive learning experiences in Irish and in learning through the medium of Irish had been created for pupils. It was observed during the evaluations that pupils communicated in Irish with their teachers or with each other using various levels of fluency. These positive learning experiences helped develop pupils' fluency and self-confidence in speaking the language.

Figure 13: The quality of learning experiences in primary schools



Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

Pupils' ease with the language was more apparent in the junior classes, as they had no experience of any system other than immersion education. (Primary School 4)

In some primary schools, it was reported that additional opportunities had been created for pupils to work collaboratively, pupils displayed a strong interest in learning and they engaged enthusiastically with the work.

In the focus groups with pupils, convened by inspectors during the school visits, the pupils were able to describe the learning methodologies that they enjoyed and to discuss ways in which their language ability could be improved. They were clearly proud of their ability in the language.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The pupils who participated in a focus group showed pride in their Irish and stated that they enjoy learning through Irish, particularly drama, storytelling and music. They mentioned that they would like further opportunities to use digital content while learning. (Primary School 2)

5.2.3 Summary of the quality of learning in primary schools

Table 13: Findings on the quality of learning in primary schools

Strengths	Areas for development
<p>It was reported that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ the twelve primary schools had a successful two-year Irish-language immersion programme in the infant classes ✓ a positive learning experience was being provided ✓ early-intervention was supporting language acquisition ✓ pupils' fluency and confidence were promoted effectively 	<p>It was reported that there was a need</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ for a whole-school approach in some cases, to ensure continuity and progression in learning ○ for a greater emphasis on language accuracy in some cases ○ for more communicative activities for pupils in some cases ○ to consolidate specific Irish-language terminology

- ✓ comprehension, expression and fluency were evident in pupils' reading
- ✓ there was appropriate progress in pupils' writing
- to extend differentiated reading programmes in Irish
- to provide pupils with formative feedback

5.3 The quality of teaching

5.3.1 Teaching approaches

The communicative approach

Reporting on their self-reflection on the progress of the Scheme, the management of primary schools reported that pupils and their parents had a positive attitude to Irish and were proud of the progress they were making. It was stated that pupils were developing a deeper awareness of the culture of the Irish language and the importance of local heritage and dialect. It was felt that singing, poetry and drama were contributing to this positivity and that a range of digital materials was helpful in making the learning of Irish fun for pupils. The teachers also mentioned the positive impact of the total immersion programme, from infants onwards and the particular emphasis being placed on oral language in Irish. It was stated that communication was now a priority in Irish lessons, which was supporting continuity in the development of oral language and enhancing pupils' speaking ability and language enrichment. Here is a description from one school about its practice.

Extract from a school's reflection on the implementation of the Scheme

The school has its own system for the implementation of Aistear, which emphasises the teaching of specific phrases at each play station and this is working very well for the school. (Primary School 8)

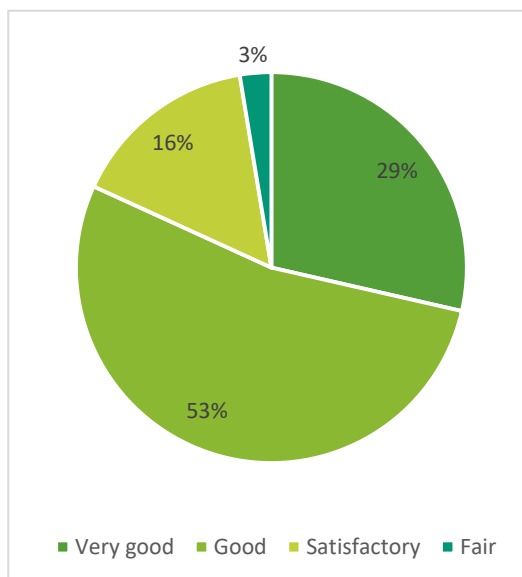
In their evaluation reports, inspectors stated that the quality of teaching was very good or good in most of the lessons observed in primary schools. Inspectors reported that the learning environments were welcoming and that a beneficial relationship was fostered between teachers and pupils. It was reported that the communicative approach was implemented effectively in some lessons. In those lessons, the three phases, which form the communicative approach, were applied effectively: the pre-communicative, communicative and post-communicative phases.

In lessons where the communicative approach was used effectively, it was reported that language input, both vocabulary and structures, were attended to in the pre-communicative phase. New words and phrases were explicitly taught and practised with pupils prior to engaging in the communicative phase. In some cases, it was reported that in infant classes *Aistear: The Early-Childhood Curriculum Framework* was used constructively to teach and consolidate the language. Poetry, singing, storytelling and drama were used effectively to consolidate the acquisition of the target language. It was stated that, in some cases, there was effective input from the language assistant.

In the lessons where the communicative phase was implemented effectively, the target language was used as the language for communication and pupils were encouraged and enabled to communicate naturally and independently. Pupils were given suitable opportunities to practise, use and consolidate the new language. In some lessons, active, functional shared learning was organised to achieve higher levels of language use. In some lessons, there was a need to provide additional opportunities for communication and collaborative learning during lessons.

Where the post-communicative phase was good, pupils' attention was focused on grammatical points from the communicative phase and pupils' awareness of that aspect of Irish was developed effectively. It was stated that, in one primary school, commendable attention was given to aspects of the local dialect.

Figure 14: Quality of teaching approaches in primary schools



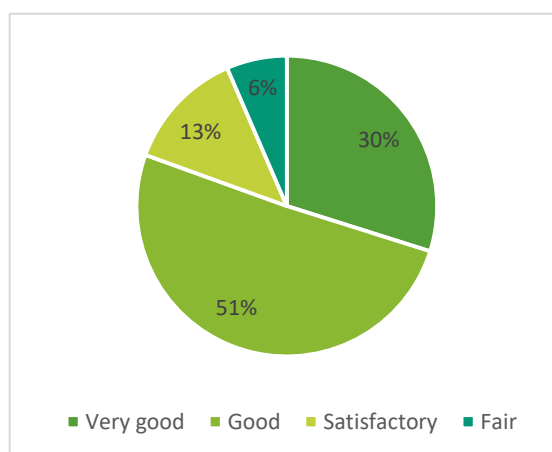
Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The pre-communicative, communicative and post-communicative phase in the lessons were implemented effectively with regular opportunities for pupils to converse with each other in pairs and groups. They were appropriately challenged during lessons. In every lesson observed, the emphasis on local Irish songs, rhymes and poems fostered pupils' understanding of cultural and language awareness.
(Primary School 7)

The use of resources and digital technology for teaching and learning

In the lessons observed by inspectors, a suitable range of resources was used for teaching and learning. It was reported that the quality of practice in this aspect was very good in almost a third of the lessons, good in half and satisfactory in a few cases. Digital technology, concrete materials, illustrative materials, and authentic resources were used to good effect to support the teaching of Irish and the other curricular subjects.

Figure 15: The quality of use of resources in primary schools



Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The integration of pupils' listening, reading and writing skills in Irish in a structured manner, using appropriate technological resources, is commendable..... The pupils participate in Science Week events each year as well as digital technology workshops in the University of Limerick. (Primary School 7)

The use made by staff and pupils of digital technology to support the teaching and learning process through the medium of Irish was commendable. Innovative digital

games were used to support pupils in revising content learnt in Science in a fun way and this resulted in positive learning outcomes. (Primary School 9)

In the focus groups convened by the ERC, primary school teachers were satisfied in general with the resources for Irish and other subjects, provided by organisations such as COGG. Notwithstanding that, it was felt that organisations preparing textbooks and tests should engage with teachers to improve the quality of translation, especially in Mathematics, and to discuss the issue of different dialects.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

Teachers felt that it is great that they are 'drowning in resources'. They suggested that many new resources are being created because of the impact of the Policy, which could eventually extend to Gaelscoileanna and English-medium schools. (Primary School 12)

Parents agreed that the standard of Irish in the textbooks is not satisfactory and that pupils do not understand the written Irish in the textbooks. The mathematics textbook was specifically mentioned. It was explained that the mathematics textbook is not standardised and that different dialects are used throughout the textbooks. (Primary School 7)

Although there is a range of Irish language resources available, teachers felt there could be more, particularly in terms of Irish language genres, textbooks that are not direct translations, websites, and enjoyable material that stimulates pupils' interest. (Primary School 6)

It was evident that very good use was made of resources associated with the heritage of the locality, where these were available. The following extracts from one school's self-reflection provides an example.

Extracts from one school's self-reflection on the implementation of the Scheme

Two books of poetry are used in the school, 'Na Buataisí Buí' and 'Mo Ghúna Síoda Buí', written in the Corca Dhuibhne dialect, so that the expressions and words of the dialect are maintained. (Primary School 7)

The school places a great emphasis on learning sean-nós songs, particularly those associated with the area. They have learned many songs that they sing at school recitals. These songs have a richness of language and expression in the local dialect and the pupils have been learning them for some years and this was further emphasised over the past two years. (Primary School 7)

Inspectors reported that the learning environments created in classrooms and other learning settings were very good in a third of the lessons observed and good in half of the lessons. Pupils' work was on display and a range of other visuals were used to facilitate pupils' understanding and recall of lesson content. It was indicated that, in a small number of schools, the range of language on display needed to be expanded, particularly language relating to exemplars being taught at that time.

Teaching the other curriculum subjects through Irish

In primary schools, the inspectors observed eighteen lessons in curricular subjects other than Irish. It was reported that a small number of those lessons were very good, half the lessons were good, almost a quarter were satisfactory and a very small number were fair. The use of Irish was very good in the majority of those lessons, good in a small number and satisfactory or fair in a few cases. The following table shows the number of lessons observed in curricular subjects other than Irish.

Figure 16: The quality of learning environments in primary schools

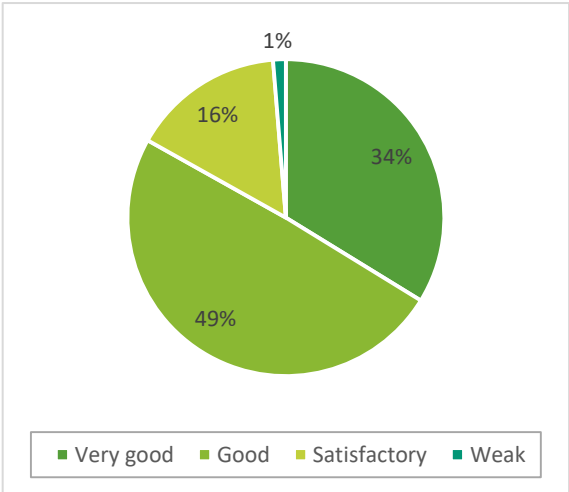
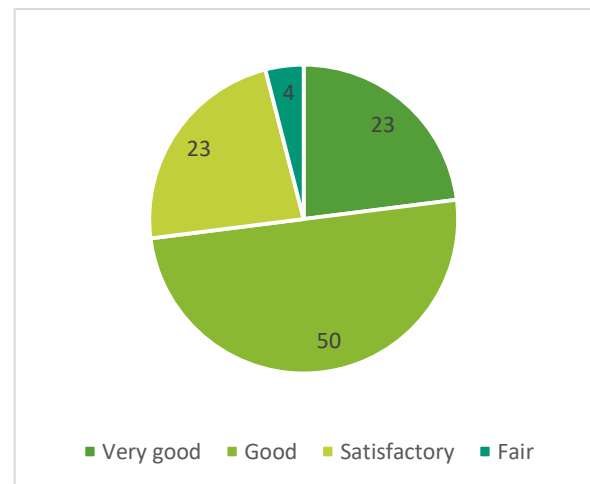


Table 14: The number of subject lessons, other than Irish, observed in primary schools

Subjects	Number of lessons
Mathematics	7
Science	4
Music	2
Social Personal and Health Education	2
Drama	1
Geography	1
History	1
Total	18

Of the good practices observed in primary schools, it was stated that attention was focused appropriately on subject-specific terminology. This terminology was explicitly taught in the majority of lessons observed. There was strong input from the teacher and appropriate activities and resources were used to facilitate pupils' understanding and use of the terminology. The inspectors referred to the important support available to pupils from the language assistant, the special needs assistant and the support teacher for Irish.

Figure 17: The quality of teaching in curriculum subjects other than Irish in primary schools

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

The terminology of the curriculum subject, particularly the nouns associated with the topic, was taught effectively during the subject lessons in Irish that were observed. (Primary School 6)

Teachers provided valuable opportunities for pupils to give complete answers in context, and the way in which teachers taught the correct sentence structures, based on pupils' responses, was commendable. (Primary School 9)

Although individual teachers' practice was good in many lessons, inspectors reported that improvements were needed in teachers' collective/collaborative practice. The inspectors recommended that a whole-school plan be agreed and implemented to ensure continuity and progression in the teaching and acquisition of specific terminology. It was stated that planning and assessment issues would be an important part of that work.

In the ERC focus groups, primary school teachers identified the importance of teaching terminology in all subjects and it was clear in some cases that school staff were working to address this challenge on a whole-school basis.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

Teachers agreed that most pupils are ready to undertake the full curriculum through Irish after completing the early-immersion period. They do not expect to do any subject through English, other than English itself. Teachers considered that they had acquired the Irish terminology in subjects such as science and history. (Primary School 3)

It was reported that difficulties arise when pupils in senior classes are asked to undertake projects through the medium of Irish. Pupils have to use information books in English and translate the texts into Irish, because appropriate resources are not available in Irish. It was stated that this takes twice as long. (Primary School 2)

The school aims to implement an integrated approach linking language and content, based on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). It was shown that the impact of the Scheme has resulted in every lesson being taught as a language lesson.

Accordingly, teachers reinforce the vocabulary and explain new vocabulary at the beginning of the lessons. (Primary School 9)

5.3.2 Planning and assessment

It was reported that preparation for teaching was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed by inspectors in primary schools. It was mentioned that lesson preparation could be improved in a small number of cases.

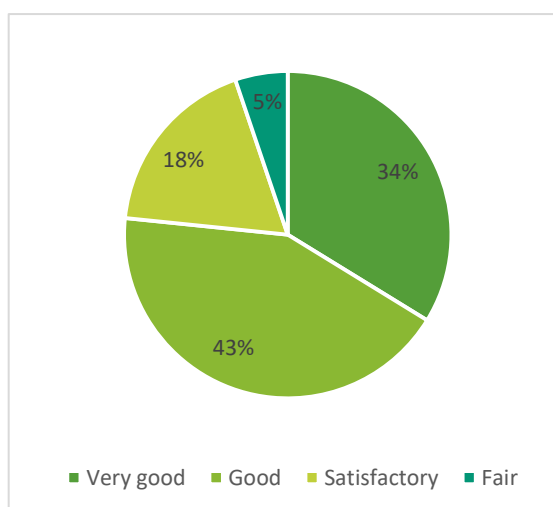
Specific examples of good practice were mentioned in the case-study reports. This included reference to materials and learning tasks being tailored to the needs and interests of pupils.

It was also indicated that the objectives of the lessons were in line with goals identified in the school improvement action plan under the Scheme. The learning outcomes in the *Primary Language Curriculum* were used as a guide and as a measure to identify learning goals as a reference point for differentiated planning. It was also reported that effective planning was in place in many primary schools for early-immersion education, including activities related to *Aistear: The Early-Childhood Curriculum Framework*.

It was clear from inspectors' reports that agreed whole-school practice was required in some cases, so that the planning by the class teacher, the support teacher for Irish and the special education teacher would correspond, and that this planning would align with the school improvement action plan. It was also recommended that teachers outline language-based, differentiated goals in class planning and that differentiated tasks be based on these.

The quality of assessment in primary schools was very good in a few lessons, good or satisfactory in a significant minority of the lessons, and fair in a small number of lessons observed.

Figure 18: The quality of preparation for teaching in primary schools

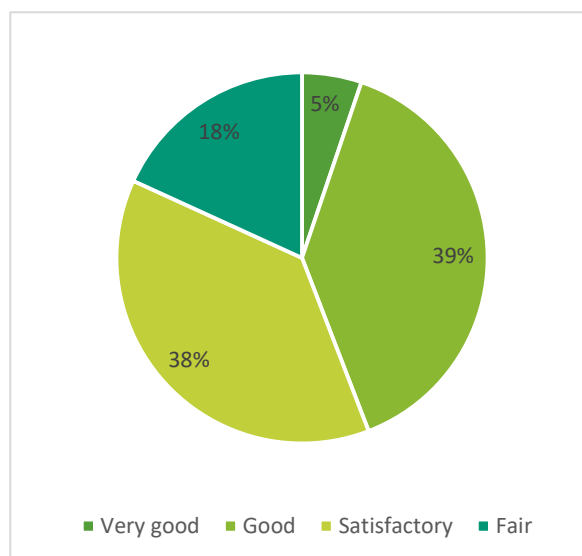


Inspectors described many good assessment practices that were evident in primary schools. One school was using language profiles to assess pupils' ability and language needs in Irish. Running records were kept of the common errors made by pupils and of the language needs that arose when they were communicating with each other. These records were used to plan and provide additional support for both native speakers and learners of the language. It was reported that a range of assessment tools were used to assess pupils' progress in learning. Self-evaluation strategies had been introduced in a small number of schools.

Inspectors reported that assessment strategies needed to be developed in more than half of the lessons observed. There was a particular need for a stronger connection between assessment, planning and teaching. It was recommended that there was a need to track and analyse learners' attainment outcomes in a more systematic way from year to year in order to identify pupils' learning and language needs and thereby set out differentiated teaching programmes.

It was clear that there was a need to agree whole-school strategies for assessment, in the interests of consistency in teachers' practice and continuity and progression in pupils' learning. To progress pupils' capacity for self-assessment, it was recommended that greater emphasis be placed on formative feedback from teachers and that each pupil have an age-appropriate involvement in analysing his/her own assessment results and language needs.

Figure 19: The quality of assessment in primary schools



Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

Further analysis of pupils' learning outcomes is required to identify their language needs and to design and implement an appropriate language profile and programme for pupils with different language abilities. A regular record must also be kept of pupils' progress in the language. (Primary School 2)

In their self-reflections, schools referred to challenges to be overcome and to the progress made with regard to assessment.

Extracts from schools' self-reflections on the implementation of the Scheme

One of the greatest challenges is the gathering of evidence on the quality of learning and teaching, at both class level and school level. (Primary School 1)

We implement a continuous assessment system in the school, in order to monitor pupils' progression as they move from one class to another. The pupils have experience of developing their comprehension skills and understanding in Irish with the support of self-evaluation. (Primary School 10)

In the focus groups convened by the ERC, teachers in one primary school mentioned that they were using the English version of the standardised Mathematics' tests. They felt the Irish versions were too wordy. Teachers in another school reported difficulties with the terminology in the Irish versions of the Mathematics tests. Other teachers reported that there is still a need to design diagnostic tests for Mathematics in Irish. It was also stated that a suitable standardised test was not available to assess the standard of Irish of native speakers in the senior classes.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

It was stated that spoken Irish is assessed fortnightly through Aistear when the teacher checks the pupils' ability to use the new phrases. (Primary School 8)

In relation to the senior classes, it was explained that writing extracts are collected at the beginning of the school year and again at the end of the year to assess progress. Furthermore, it was stated that pupils are self-evaluating in the Irish lessons. (Primary School 3)

Teachers are currently discussing assessment for Irish. It would be worth focusing on oral Irish as part of that work and implementing appropriate assessments to assess pupils' fluency and language enrichment regularly. (Primary School 5)

According to the teachers, the tests for Irish are not of the same standard as tests for English and they are not appropriately challenging for high-ability pupils. (Primary School 7)

5.3.3 Catering for the different ability levels

In the focus groups convened by the ERC, teachers in all primary schools mentioned pupils with learning difficulties and additional educational needs. Teachers in some primary schools reported that many pupils start school with little Irish, especially those who did not attend a *naíonra*. Teachers described the strategies they were using to provide additional support for these pupils. Support from the support teacher for Irish, the use of learning stations and opportunities to work with pupils who were very competent in Irish, were mentioned. Teachers in some schools reported using standardised tests and profiles to identify pupils who need help.

Some primary teachers also referred to the needs of pupils who have a high standard of Irish and indicated that in some primary schools, native speakers are placed together to give them an opportunity to learn from each other. Teachers in a few primary schools also reported that the support teacher for Irish helps pupils who have a high standard of Irish. That help is focused on language enrichment in Irish. Teachers in some primary schools stated that they help the highly competent pupils to participate in poetry and storytelling competitions in the community. Teachers in one primary school also stated that *Séideán Sí* provides additional challenges for the most able pupils. The following extracts from schools' self-reflections indicate the challenges involved.

Extracts from schools' self-reflections on the implementation of the Scheme

Pupils are coming to the school, especially into the middle classes during the year, with no experience of immersion education in Irish, which is challenging for them. (Primary School 9)

One of the greatest challenges that a Gaeltacht school must overcome is how to cater for all pupils when some are competent speakers and other pupils have only a basic understanding of the language. Pupils in infant classes start school with a range of abilities in the language, as native speakers and language learners are in the same class, often with a higher number of language learners in the infant class. The teacher has to focus on differentiating the teaching and sometimes a simple rhyme is taught to all pupils, but longer Irish poems with richer language are taught to extend the vocabulary of native speakers. (Primary School 7)

Teachers in one primary school stated that it would be difficult for a school in the Scheme to cater for a pupil with autism spectrum disorder if Irish was not that pupil's first language. Teachers in some primary schools indicated that speech and language therapy or a psychological service was not available through Irish in their areas. The issues raised in schools' self-reflection accounts were much the same as those gathered in the ERC focus groups.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

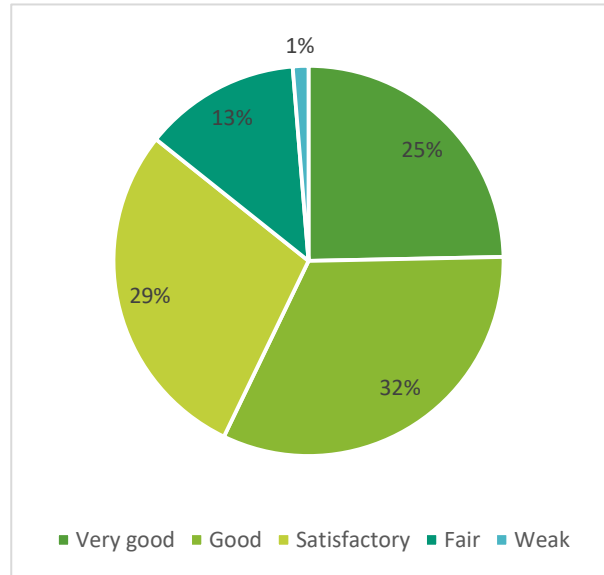
It was reported that there are difficulties for pupils who have speech problems, as the speech and language therapy service is available in English only. This creates difficulties as teachers and parents must decide whether speech and language activities will be conducted through English or Irish with pupils in infant classes. (Primary School 5)

It was noted that, as a Gaeltacht school, it is difficult to cater for pupils with autism if English is their first language, particularly in senior classes, but that the pupil's socialisation must be attended to in a context where Irish is the language of the class. (Primary School 9)

The inspectors reported that provision for the different ability levels was very good in a quarter of the lessons observed in the primary school case studies, good or satisfactory in almost a third, fair in a few cases and weak in one lesson.

In those lessons where the provision was very good, the teacher had adapted the goals and learning activities to pupils' ability and language levels. This was often apparent when there was co-teaching, particularly in early intervention situations.

Figure 20: The quality of differentiated provision in primary schools



Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

In the best practice that was observed, lesson objectives were clear, there was appropriate language input from the teacher, there was differentiation for the various ability levels and pupils were active in their learning. (Primary School 6)

Although there was some differentiation in the majority of lessons observed, inspectors recommended that this practice be applied more extensively. It was also indicated that more opportunities were needed for pupils to engage in differentiated tasks in pairs or groups. It was stated that there was a need to ensure that all pupils were given tasks that were sufficiently challenging and that there were higher expectations for pupil attainment in some cases.

Inspectors recommended that primary schools organise the provision of supports for pupils with special educational needs in line with the continuum of support guidance published by the Department of Education available **HERE**. They also recommended that

an agreed whole-school approach be followed in terms of maintaining and using support files, and in designing and reviewing learning programmes for individual pupils or for groups of pupils. It was recommended specifically that the goals in the learning programmes be specific, measurable and responsive to the needs of pupils, as identified by the appropriate professionals.

5.3.4 Co-teaching

The inspectors reported that the quality of co-teaching was very good in a small number of primary schools and good in half the schools, with areas for development in a third of schools. Twelve lessons were observed, which included co-teaching and the provision of early-intervention for early-immersion education as well as support for the teaching of Irish or for other subjects within the classroom.

In the early immersion intervention observed, it was reported that a valuable early immersion intervention programme was provided for oral language, early-reading and writing. It was stated that the co-teaching was very well structured and all teachers had a clear understanding of their role. In lessons where co-teaching was very effective, the responsibilities of the various staff members were outlined in short-term planning. There was appropriate differentiation in teaching and learning to cater for the various language needs of pupils.

In one primary school, it was reported that co-teaching was being used effectively to revise key aspects of the topic and to reinforce newly-learned terminology. In another primary school, the objectives of co-teaching were linked to the school's improvement goals.

It was stated that the shortcomings identified in co-teaching in primary schools included the need to use assessment data to a greater extent so that teaching and learning would be more targeted. Recommendations were also made regarding the monitoring of pupils' progress. In particular, it was recommended that in-class intervention would be regularly reviewed, to ensure that the appropriate learning outcomes were achieved. It was also recommended that greater use be made of co-teaching in senior classes.

5.3.5 Summary of the quality of teaching in primary schools

Table 15: Findings on the quality of teaching in primary schools

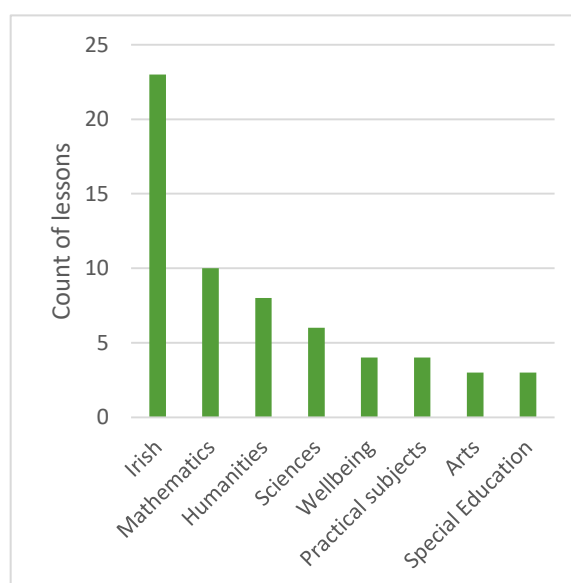
Strengths	Areas for development
<p>It was reported that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ very good or good teaching approaches were observed in most lessons ✓ resources, including digital technology, were used efficiently ✓ poetry, story and drama were used to good effect ✓ appropriate attention was focused on language input ✓ there was good support for pupils with little Irish ✓ language profiles were being used ✓ a start had been made on self-assessment strategies ✓ there was effective co-teaching in the early-intervention programme 	<p>It was reported that there was a need to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ provide more opportunities for interaction and communication, in some cases ○ develop language-based goals for the various ability levels as a basis for teaching and assessment ○ have an agreed whole-school practice in relation to the teaching and use of specific terminology for curriculum subjects ○ create a close link between classroom planning and the goals of the action plan for the implementation of immersion education ○ provide greater challenges and expectations for pupils who are highly competent in Irish ○ develop pupils' ability in self-assessment ○ engage in more co-teaching in senior classes ○ do more at education system level to adapt learning and assessment materials to the language contexts of the Gaeltacht

6 The Quality of Learning and Teaching at Post-Primary Level

6.1 Introduction

During the case-study evaluations, inspectors observed sixty-one lessons in seven post-primary schools participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme. These seven schools represented one quarter of the post-primary schools in the Scheme. Post-primary schools were randomly selected from each Gaeltacht area. All Gaeltacht schools were operating through the medium of Irish for many years, apart from one school in which teaching of some subjects through Irish to first year students commenced in September 2018. In that school, inspectors visited lessons in subjects taught through Irish only. About a third of the observed lessons across the seven schools were Irish lessons. Figure 21 shows the number of lessons observed in various subjects.

Figure 21: The subjects in which lessons were observed in post-primary schools



The commentary in this chapter is also based also on the research reports provided by the Educational Research Centre (ERC), based on the opinions expressed by post-primary teachers and parents in the focus groups.

6.2 The Quality of Learning

6.2.1 Students' learning outcomes

Appendix B of this report provides data on student performance in Leaving Certificate Irish (Higher-Level) in three case-study post-primary schools in 2019. The attainment of students in the three largest case-study schools was analysed, as part of the research into the standard of Irish in these schools⁸. Every student in these schools sat Higher-Level Irish for the Leaving Certificate. Approximately one quarter of the students achieved

⁸ A more comprehensive analysis of student attainment in the Gaeltacht schools will form part of a report on attainment in the schools participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme to be published by the ERC in 2022.

the highest grade (H1) compared to 5% of students at this level nationally. 90% of the students in the case-study schools achieved grades in the range H1-H3, in comparison with 45% of Higher-Level students nationally, and 22% of all students (the total number of students who sat Irish at any level in the Leaving Certificate in 2019). Only 2% of the students in the three largest case-study schools achieved a grade H5 or lower, grades that were achieved by 31% of students taking higher level nationally. Therefore, the students in the Gaeltacht post-primary schools achieved a higher level than students nationally in the Irish examination at higher level.

The positive impact of immersion education on student learning outcomes was mentioned in post-primary schools' self-reflection accounts of the Recognition Scheme. It was stated that the standard of Irish, both spoken and written, had improved. Teachers felt that the students were more confident in Irish and had a better understanding of grammar. It was reported also that the impact of immersion education in Irish was having a positive impact on the learning of other languages, as illustrated in the following extract from one school's self-reflection.

Extract from a school's reflection on the implementation of the Scheme

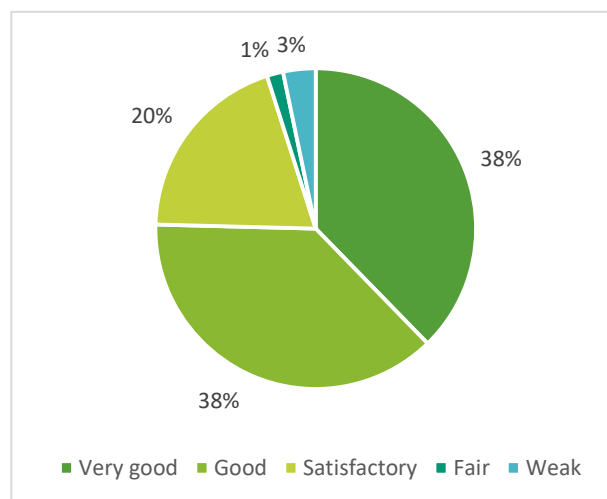
*Immersion education enables students to make connections between languages and to identify patterns themselves, and that helps their ability in other languages. They have a better mastery of grammar rules, word formation and sentence order and from this they generate transferable skills to learn other languages.
(Post-Primary School 3)*

In the focus groups convened by the ERC, teachers in each of the seven post-primary schools were optimistic about the future of Irish in their own schools and in the surrounding Gaeltacht areas, which they credited to the Recognition Scheme. Teachers in post-schools in the heart of the Gaeltacht areas explained that the situation was not as good as it was five years ago in relation to Irish. Although it was agreed that most students had an excellent standard of Irish, the richness of the language itself, in terms of linguistic structures and vocabulary, was said to be declining. It was stated that the implementation of immersion education as part of the Scheme in primary schools would be very beneficial for the promotion of Irish in post-primary schools, but progress would not be evident for some years.

In the case-study evaluation reports on post-primary schools, inspectors noted that the quality of students' learning outcomes was good or very good in the majority of lessons. The quality of learning outcomes was at a satisfactory level or lower in a significant minority of lessons.

In the lessons in post-primary schools that were highly commended, students were well able to express themselves in Irish, whether they were explaining, seeking clarification or expressing an opinion. It was mentioned that, in some cases, the rich local dialect was apparent in students' Irish, even in areas where the use of Irish as the language of the community was in decline for some years.

Figure 22: The quality of learning outcomes in post-primary schools



Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

*A strength in terms of students' Irish is their pronunciation and the use of local Irish.
(Post-Primary School 6)*

In these lessons, students' knowledge of the local dialect and their own competence in Irish were recognised. (Post-Primary School 1)

In almost half of the schools, it was reported that students needed to be encouraged in terms of their presentation and language production skills. It was clear that students' receptive language ability in Irish was at a good standard generally but that further development was required in their productive language ability. Inspectors stated that students should be given more opportunities to communicate and present in lessons, to encourage them and improve their self-confidence. Such an approach would be in line with the core principles of Junior Cycle and the expectations for students' learning outcomes in relation to actively participating in conversations and being able to interact confidently in different contexts.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

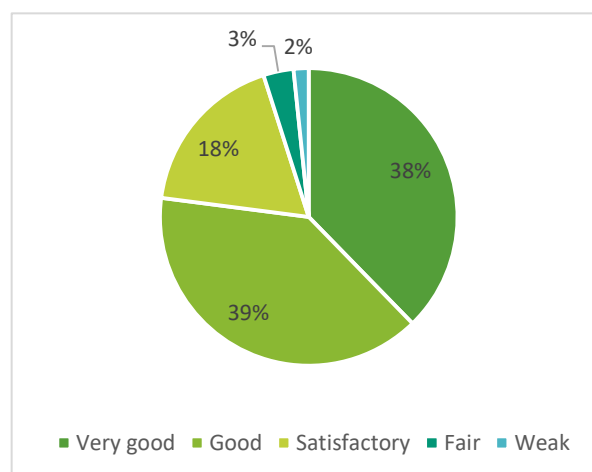
It is strongly recommended that there be a focus on creating opportunities for real communication and interaction in all lessons to facilitate students' learning and enable them to express their views and develop their oral literacy skills. Although students have excellent Irish, this does not necessarily equate to them having good presentation and self-expression skills. (Post-Primary School 1)

6.2.2 Students' learning experience

The case-study evaluations reported students' learning experiences to be good or very good in the majority of lessons.

In all case-study reports, inspectors noted that opportunities were created in the majority of lessons for active and interactive learning. It was stated that this was the approach that had the greatest impact on students' learning and interest levels. The positive effect that active engagement had on students' self-motivation and participation in learning was mentioned.

Figure 23: The quality of learning experiences in post-primary schools



Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

In the most effective lessons in terms of learning, students were given opportunities to work together, to share and express opinions and, in one very effective case, to help each other to solve problems. (Post-Primary School 7)

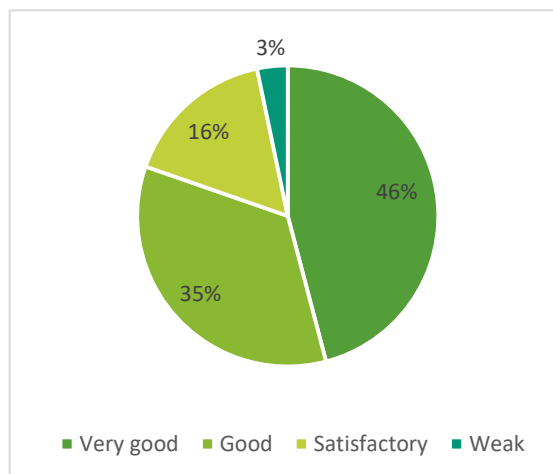
In almost half of the evaluation reports on post-primary schools, the link created in class between lesson content and students' experience outside school was referenced, an approach that greatly helped to stimulate students' interest and motivate them to work. Reference was made to the importance of ensuring that students had knowledge of the area, the dialect, local terminology, and different aspects of Irish and Gaeltacht life.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

Students' attention was directed towards local history, the various traditions associated with it and their own experiences of those traditions. This learning was linked in a very enjoyable and interesting way to local songs, an approach that aligns entirely with what is being promoted in the Junior Cycle Specification for L1 Irish. (Post-Primary School 1)

The majority of evaluation reports on post-primary schools identified the learning environment as being good or very good. In one post-primary school where the learning environment was excellent, the school was encouraged to contact COGG, with a view to publishing and sharing with other schools the material the school had created. Reference was made to the good relationship between students and teachers, which contributed greatly to the stimulating atmosphere and learning environment created for students. In some focus groups, the pleasant atmosphere in the school was also mentioned by students as a positive aspect of practice.

Figure 24: The quality of learning environments in post-primary schools



Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

To support learning through Irish, a rich, stimulating and relevant print environment was created in almost every classroom, and on the walls in the school. There was

excellent work done on a series of modern posters on Irish proverbs and Irish literature. (Post-Primary School 2)

In less than a quarter of the lessons observed in post-primary schools, the learning experience needed improvement. In these lessons, students were generally not given sufficient communicative opportunities to express themselves through interactive learning. Although they were listening to the teacher, the students were quiet, silent and sometimes inactive. In almost all reports, inspectors made strong recommendations in relation to this practice. Even in post-primary schools where there was good practice in this aspect of learning, there were still some lessons with scope for improvement. The active participation of students would be required to improve their expressive language skills and to enrich their language.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

Students' participation in their own learning was lacking and, in a significant number of lessons, it was the teacher's voice that was to the fore. (Post-Primary School 1)

Teachers are advised to make sure that their voice is not always to the fore in class. The appropriate time needs to be also given to facilitation, a time when the teacher is the facilitator of learning and of active engagement between students. (Post-Primary School 6)

6.2.3 Summary of the quality of learning in post-primary schools

Table 16: Findings on the quality of learning in post-primary schools

Strengths	Areas for development
<p>It was reported that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ students' learning outcomes were good or very good in the majority of lessons ✓ the standard of students' receptive language ability in Irish was good generally 	<p>It was reported that there was a need to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ further develop students' productive language ○ give students more opportunities to talk, communicate and present in classes

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ use of the local dialect was evident in students' Irish, in some cases ✓ students' learning experience was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed ✓ students were actively engaged and enjoying their learning, in some cases ✓ there was a link between the lesson content and students' contemporary life ✓ a stimulating learning environment was provided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ foster students' confidence in presentation and expressive skills ○ challenge every student appropriately in their learning ○ provide additional help for students who need it
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6.3 The quality of teaching

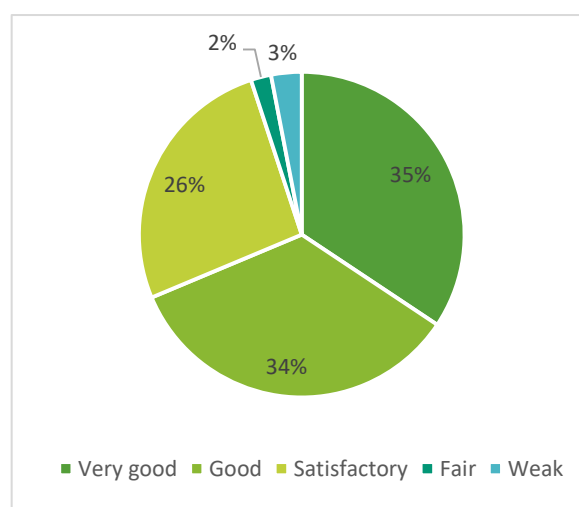
6.3.1 Teaching approaches

Teaching approaches were good or very good in over two-thirds of the lessons observed in post-primary schools. However, there was a significant minority where improvement was needed.

The use of Irish in lessons

The majority of evaluation reports on post-primary schools referred to the excellent quality of teachers' Irish and the importance of their language input. It was indicated that it was extremely important for students to listen to high quality Irish so they could recognise and replicate native expressions and phrases, as well as acquire a rich vocabulary.

Figure 25: The quality of teaching approaches in post-primary schools



Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

The teachers' Irish was of a high standard and they made clever use of the language to broaden students' knowledge of the lesson content and to extend and develop their knowledge of the language. (Post-Primary School 6)

These teachers are valuable exemplars of good use of Irish and their expertise should be availed of in projects where literacy skills and language awareness are being developed. (Post-Primary School 7)

The focus groups convened by the ERC reported that post-primary teachers who were not fluent were participating in a wide range of courses to improve their Irish. It was stated that some of the courses were provided by the post-primary schools themselves and some by other providers, including local groups, COGG and Gaelchultúr.

It was also mentioned that post-primary teachers were interested in taking additional courses, such as those provided by Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge or courses to prepare for the European Certificate in Irish. It was stated that these courses were costly in terms of time and money but that costs had now been reduced due to the additional opportunities that were available online, as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Not all post-primary teachers in the ERC focus groups were aware of additional supports available, such as bursaries for the Professional Masters in Education at NUI Galway and the support provided for the Masters in Irish-Medium and Gaeltacht Education in Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

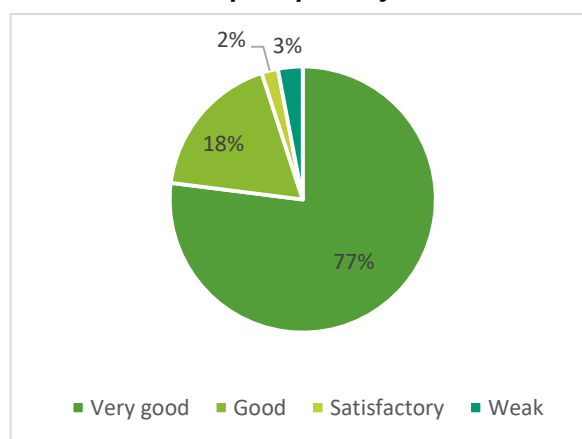
The school does not always have teachers who are proficient in Irish available for all subjects. Two teachers are studying Irish and will sit the European Certificate in Irish (TEG) examinations this year, and other teachers in the school are helping them to use Irish. (Post-Primary School 7)

Support is provided in the form of a workshop for teachers who come to the school without much Irish. Teachers of other subjects were aware that all the responsibility for promoting Irish could not fall on the teachers of Irish – that all teachers must be responsible for promoting Irish. (Post-Primary School 5)

In the case-study reports, inspectors reported that the use of Irish as the language of instruction was very good in the majority of lessons observed in post-primary schools and good in a small number of lessons. Amongst the aspects of best practice observed, inspectors mentioned the use of Irish at classroom level, the use of Irish textbooks and other resources, the appropriate emphasis placed on the local dialect and, in over half of the reports, reference was made to students' high standard of Irish.

Irish was the language of instruction and communication in all post-primary lessons observed. However, students in one post-primary school mentioned that English was used in some classes as teachers themselves were still learning the language. In two reports, inspectors recommended that translation from Irish to English should be avoided and that difficult terms or concepts should be explained using more accessible Irish. Students would thus become accustomed to developing their own Irish language skills. It was stated that it would benefit students' learning experience if this language immersion practice was implemented at a whole-school level, and if this was specified in the school's Irish policy, to ensure a total immersion learning experience. Inspectors referred in their reports to the importance of directing students towards the local dialect and of fostering and developing students' language enrichment.

Figure 26: The use of Irish as the language of instruction in post-primary schools



Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

There should be a focus on the pronunciation and use of the local Irish and native phrases and expressions from the area should be taught and used naturally in lessons to foster and recall that richness of local language. A focus on regularly expanding and enriching students' Irish in lessons so that they acquire different ways of expressing themselves is also recommended. (Post-Primary School 6)

In the focus groups with post-primary teachers organised by the ERC, it was stated that post-primary schools should make time available for teachers of Irish to collect and prepare the local literature so that it is available in the context of the Junior Cycle L1 specification for Irish. The focus groups also stated that the Ulster dialect had been overlooked on official book lists for the L1 specification for Irish. Post-primary teachers in the focus groups often referred to the Junior Cycle L1 specification for Irish.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

In relation to the Junior Cycle L1 Irish Specification, teachers felt that there were opportunities to further develop students' skills in Irish. They agreed that the Specification creates a link between traditional Irish and the Irish spoken at home. Teachers said that there was a greater emphasis now on authentic Gaeltacht materials, on local literature, and on other dialects (which did not exist previously). (Post-Primary School 1)

Although teachers feel that the vision and theory in the L1 Specification are correct, and they are happy with opportunities regarding local literature, they are concerned about assessment. They are not happy that the oral examination (as it was) has been discontinued. (Post-Primary School 2)

Teachers suggested that COGG might work with local people to compile a booklet on local literature for L1. Although the teachers have gathered many notes, they said that it was worth arranging them properly, so that local literature and phrases would be easily accessible. It was stated that texts based on local literature were needed for reading tasks. It was reported that students were more interested in the local literature. (Post-Primary School 5)

The inspectors cited good practice in providing opportunities for post-primary students to work together and to speak Irish naturally during lessons.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The most effective lessons were those in which students had the opportunity to be active in their learning and in which they were given the opportunity to express and discuss their views. (Post-Primary School 4)

Inspectors also recommended that post-primary teachers should ensure that students, including those who are least proficient in the language, have plenty of opportunities to speak in class. This recommendation regarding teaching aligned with what was reported in relation to student learning outcomes and student learning experiences. It was stated that it was necessary to enable students to communicate confidently in Irish with other students outside class so that they would not feel discouraged by not being native Irish speakers. The reports often mentioned that students should be encouraged to articulate full sentences when answering questions rather than accepting one-word answers or answers from the most able and confident students only. This approach is extremely important, as it is essential to create numerous communicative opportunities during lessons for students who are not fully competent in Irish.

The highly effective or effective teaching approaches observed in lessons across all subject areas in post-primary schools included active learning where students were given the opportunity to interact in pairs, express their opinions and participate fully in their learning.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

*In the most productive lessons, students were given the opportunity to work in pairs, to express their opinions and to participate in their learning.
(Post-Primary School 1)*

In some cases, it was recommended that more opportunities be provided for students to be active in their learning to avoid being too preoccupied with taking notes from the

whiteboard. Active learning involves developing a range of skills, in line with the principles and learning outcomes of Junior Cycle Irish, such as speaking skills, interaction, self-awareness as a learner and the development of autonomous learning.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

In a significant minority of lessons, there was too much emphasis on teacher-centred methodologies where students were taking notes from the board. It is recommended that opportunities be created in every lesson for students to actively engage with the content of the lesson. (Post-Primary School 2)

It was also recommended that greater focus be placed on encouraging students to use a broader range of language and to extend and develop their Irish-language skills. Excellent work has been undertaken by post-primary schools in the preparation of students for language and writing competitions in Irish.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

In these lessons lower-order questions were mainly used and open-ended questions were used occasionally; it was the students who were most proficient in the language who answered these questions, and one-word answers were often accepted. (Post-Primary School 2)

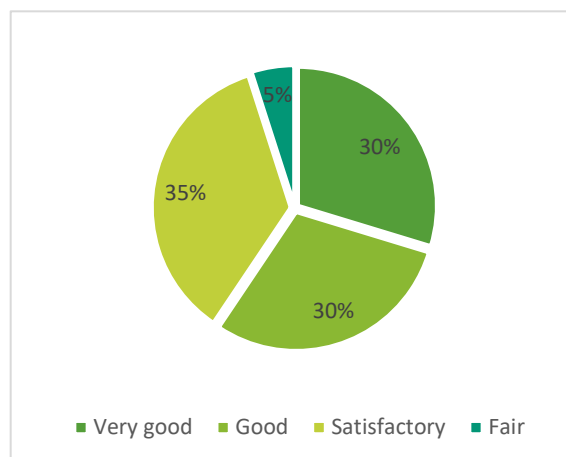
In teaching and learning Irish, a variety of methodologies is recommended when implementing the communicative approach, to encourage all students to achieve a higher level of language and cognitive use. (Post-Primary School 3)

Inspectors identified other aspects of good teaching practice in post-primary schools, including the attention given by teachers to focusing students' attention on the accurate writing of Irish and in developing and reinforcing their understanding of Irish grammar.

Using resources and digital technology for teaching and learning

The quality of use of resources to support student learning in post-primary schools was good or very good in over half of the lessons. Locating and using digital resources, internet sources and video clips were identified as being among the best practices observed across all subject areas.

Figure 27: The quality of use of resources in post-primary lessons



Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The teachers' work in locating and adapting resources and equipment was commendable. In one lesson video clips and internet sources were used effectively. (Post-Primary School 3)

According to some post-primary teachers who participated in the focus groups with the ERC, textbooks and other materials available from organisations such as COGG were very good, although there were not enough of them. It was noted that suitable resources would be more easily accessible through the portal being developed by COGG and the Professional Development Service for Teachers. It was also stated that there was a need to review the standard of Irish in resources for the Junior Cycle L1 specification for Irish in terms of richness of vocabulary and to encourage schools and teachers to use local literature.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

Teachers recommended that other teachers translate the textbooks into Irish, rather than professional translators with no experience of students' Irish. (Post-Primary School 1)

Teachers have difficulty accessing relevant learning resources in Irish for some subjects, but they are clearly willing to share resources among themselves and with teachers in other schools. (Post-Primary School 5)

In relation to Geography, it was stated that the textbook was translated directly from English, and that teachers have to re-translate the questions for students so that they can understand them. (Post-Primary School 5)

Schools' self-reflections highlighted the challenges that exist regarding the provision of resources as well as examples of good practice, as may be seen in the following extracts.

Extracts from schools' reflections on the implementation of the Scheme

One of the challenges is a lack of resources, particularly textbooks, in the various subjects. A broad range of textbooks is not available in Irish for many subjects. While those that have been published are commendable, unfortunately they are not in the Ulster dialect, easy to read or easy to understand by the intended age groups. (Post-Primary School 6)

The staff has compiled a wide range of resources in the school, of which the school is proud, for example, modern posters on the school's walls, with statements to support learning. It is clear to the students that Irish is a living language in this school setting. (Post-Primary School 2)

Inspectors reported that the use of resources to support the teaching and learning of Irish needed to be improved in almost half of the lessons observed. There were many suggestions for improvement, including the need to use a wider range of resources such as photographs, mind maps, video clips, charts, songs and games. It was stated that this practice would encourage more interaction and would foster self-confidence among students, particularly students of lower language ability.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

Apart from the whiteboard, textbook and additional handouts, teachers made limited use of other resources that supported their teaching methodology.

(Post-Primary School 5)

There is scope for improvement in identifying and using a wider range of teaching resources in lessons to broaden students' interest and understanding of the content of lessons. (Post-Primary School 7)

In all but one of the post-primary schools, inspectors mentioned specifically the lack of use of digital resources as an area on which the school should focus. These recommendations were made to encourage schools to make more effective use of this valuable resource in which the Department of Education and the schools themselves have invested heavily in recent years.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

The productive use of digital technologies is an area for improvement on a whole-school basis. The Digital Strategy for Schools 2015 – 2020 and the Learning and Assessment Guidelines will be helpful in this regard. (Post-Primary School 3)

The use of digital technologies is an area for development. Apart from one lesson where slides and a video clip were used to encourage student views and responses to a case study, this valuable resource was hardly used at all. (Post-Primary School 1)

Digital technologies were used well in one lesson to support teaching and learning but these opportunities were not availed of in any other lesson. It is recommended that a range of stimulating contemporary teaching materials and resources be used to support students' interest in Irish and in their learning in general.

(Post-Primary School 2)

In the focus groups with the ERC, it emerged that, in some schools, access to computers for teaching and learning was sometimes problematic.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

Teachers indicated that there is limited access to computers for some subjects because they are very much in demand for practical subjects such as engineering and drawing. Teachers felt that more could be done with digital technology if the facilities were available. (Post-Primary School 1)

It would be worth providing students with more opportunities for using digital technology to encourage them to express and share their own views during the teaching and learning process in the various subjects. (Post-Primary School 1)

While teachers understand the potential of digital technology to support teaching and learning, it seems more use could be made of this. There is an awareness that it will take some time to extend the use of technology across the curriculum, but it would be worth focusing on one subject at first and planning lessons to give students further opportunities to use the technology. (Post-Primary School 3)

In the focus groups with the ERC, post-primary teachers stated that schools, especially in remote locations, could make greater use of digital technology to provide opportunities for students and teachers to meet guest speakers.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

It was reported that it is often difficult to find guest speakers as the school is in a remote location. This can now be overcome by using technology. (Post-Primary School 3)

Although parents were aware that the Scheme encouraged schools to invite local people with Irish or music to visit the school as guest speakers, this presented difficulties because of child protection legislation restrictions. It was stated that local native speakers are

reluctant to go through the gardaí vetting process repeatedly. Technology could assist in this regard. (Post-Primary School 5)

The teaching of other subjects through Irish

About two-thirds of the lessons observed in post-primary schools were in subjects other than Irish. In those lessons, subject-specific objectives were usually prioritised. Nevertheless, language learning was involved when a new concept was being learned. Students needed some vocabulary and terminology to demonstrate what they had learned and to discuss new concepts get a better understanding of them.

In the ERC focus groups and in the self-reflection accounts provided by the management of post-primary schools, it was reported that teachers in Gaeltacht post-primary schools saw themselves as language teachers, as well as subject teachers. It was stated that the various subject teachers were aware that the Irish teachers could not shoulder all of the responsibility for promoting the language in post-primary schools. An example of good practice implemented in one school on a whole-school basis, involved the use of a small whiteboard placed next to the large whiteboard where new terminology for lessons was recorded. It was reported that in another school students were provided with glossaries of the most common Irish-language terminology at the beginning of each term. It was stated that it would be very worthwhile for schools to ensure that teachers of Irish, teachers of other subjects, and the support teacher for Irish meet regularly to discuss the needs of the students and to share resources.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

Teachers said that the terminology, whether Irish or English, in the various subjects is difficult for students. They were concerned that the books sometimes have three or four terms for the same concept (e.g., experiment, investigation, examination) and the State Examinations Commission might be using an entirely different term. (Post-Primary School 1)

Teachers were informed that glossaries for the terminology, explained in Irish, might be useful for all subjects and they agreed that it would be good to have such a resource available. (Post-Primary School 1)

It was stated that the Irish teachers help the other teachers in the school to promote Irish in the various subjects. The teachers meet regularly, up to twice a month, to discuss difficulties. If a teacher or student has difficulty, they are supported, but finding sufficient time is a challenge to providing this active support. (Post-Primary School 6)

Teachers mentioned that there is a whole-school emphasis on identifying common errors and the focus in assessment is on students' progress in Irish literacy in every subject. It was stated that the school has established a Literacy Committee to focus on this aspect of the teaching and learning the language. (Post-Primary School 7)

Teachers in two post-primary schools stated that the students sat some of the Leaving Certificate subjects in English because teachers with Irish language proficiency were not available. It was reported, however, that one of these post-primary schools was working on a policy to ensure that all examinations were completed in Irish in the future. It was reported that some students wanted to do the mock examinations in English due to the fact that companies involved in the correction of examinations were not willing to correct them in Irish.

In the case-study reports on post-primary schools, inspectors reported that teachers used the specific terminology associated with the various subjects and that, periodically, students' attention was explicitly directed to new keywords. While inspectors praised the good practice that was evident in some lessons, it was also noted in other lessons that learning was not as successful because the opportunity was not availed of to acquire, consolidate and embed the language learning. The issue of using specific terminology for the various subjects and the importance of drawing students' attention to this matter was mentioned. It was stated that it was essential for students to acquire this new terminology, which would be required by them to express themselves correctly, both orally and in writing, and to enable them to take house and state examinations with confidence.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

However, opportunities were missed to support students' learning by repeating new words and terminology, putting them in sentences to ensure that the meanings of the words were properly understood and posting the new words on

the whiteboard. It is important to take advantage of these learning opportunities and to ensure that new phrases, vocabulary and terminology are acquired effectively. (Post-Primary School 2)

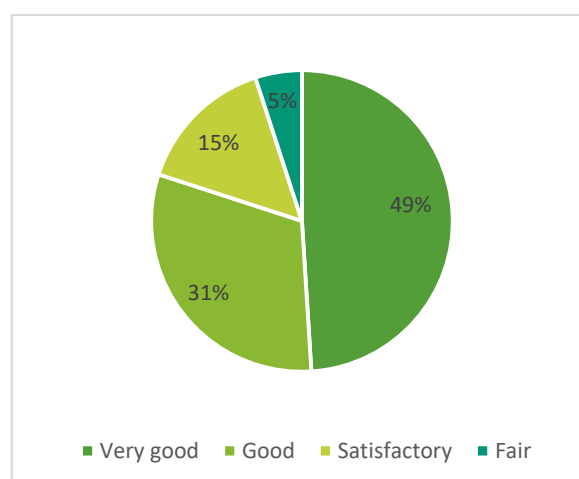
6.3.2 Planning and assessment

Preparation for Teaching

Preparation for teaching was very good in almost half of the lessons observed in post-primary schools, and good in about a third of the lessons (Figure 28).

The post-primary evaluation reports referred to the quality of planning and preparation for lessons. It was stated that planning was good and that a good plan had been prepared for the implementation of the Junior Cycle L1 specification for Irish and that comprehensive subject plans had been set out in a user-friendly manner. Descriptions of very good practice included a specific reference to planning for Irish language acquisition, and to setting precise and measurable learning objectives to inform the teaching and learning process.

Figure 28: The quality of preparation for lessons in post-primary schools



Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

Overall, teachers' individual planning and preparation for lessons was good. In the most productive lessons the content, in terms of subject matter and language, was adapted to the level of the learners. (Post-Primary School 3)

In the two best lessons where learning intentions were used, subject input and subject-specific terminology had been planned. (Post-Primary School 2)

Planning for the implementation of the Junior Cycle L1 specification for Irish was mentioned in the case of two schools, where teachers sought to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the specification, particularly as it related to planning for the implementation of the specification and the use of local literature.

Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

Teachers of Irish are making a genuine effort to address all the changes associated with the Junior Cycle specification for Irish, L1...They are aware of the value of local literature and the importance of fostering a keen awareness in students of the literary and cultural traditions of the area. (Post-Primary School 5)

Teachers' diligence in terms of planning is commended but planning for Irish language acquisition must be recognised as part of the learning in every subject and included in the plans in general. (Post-Primary School 7)

The reports also identified recommendations for improvement where areas of practice that were not effective were addressed. Those recommendations related mainly to whole-school planning for the development of Irish and an inclusive approach to the development and acquisition of Irish literacy skills in oral language and writing.

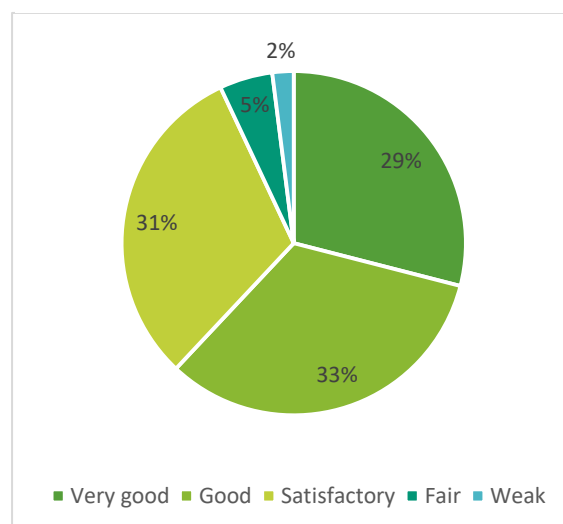
The impact of assessment to support the learning of Irish

In the evaluation reports on post-primary schools, inspectors acknowledged strengths relating to the effectiveness of individual teachers' assessment practice. Nevertheless, it was often reported that there was a need to develop teachers' collective/collaborative practice and a whole-school approach to assessment.

The quality of assessment at lesson level was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed in post-primary schools. It was evident, however, that there were weaknesses in a significant minority of lessons which needed to be addressed to achieve a better standard.

The strengths observed in lessons included areas relating to assessment for learning and in some cases, there was evidence that students were gaining experience of self-assessment and peer assessment. In one case, it was reported that the teacher provided effective support and scaffolding to develop students' ability to self-assess.

Figure 29: The quality of assessment at lesson level in post-primary schools



Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

The lesson review sheets, which were comprehensively designed to provide a summative assessment of the achievement of the learning intentions, were noteworthy. (Post-Primary School 2)

Overall, however, there was insufficient evidence of this good practice in the lessons observed in post-primary schools. Among the aspects to be developed, it was stated that there was a need for better feedback on students' work to provide guidance to them on how to improve and develop their work. It was also reported that students' ability in self-assessment and peer assessment needed to be developed more effectively.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

There was little evidence in students' work of formative, written feedback; monitoring and corrections were mostly in evidence in students' work. These

*shortcomings need to be reviewed when an assessment policy is being developed.
(Post-Primary School 3)*

*Opportunities were not availed of in lessons to develop self-assessment and peer-assessment skills as an integral part of the learning experience.
(Post-Primary School 3)*

In the case of some post-primary schools, inspectors reported that students were informed of subject-based learning intentions to support learning and assessment. This good practice was acknowledged. In other cases, it was stated that language-based learning intentions as well as content-based learning intentions were needed to focus students on language acquisition in the lesson. This would give students an opportunity to take some responsibility to improve their language learning across all subjects.

In one post-primary evaluation report, it was stated that the success criteria needed to be shared with students when undertaking writing tasks to help them to complete the task effectively from the outset. A few students in this school mentioned that they had difficulty writing the language even though they were native speakers. The inspectors recommended that a whole-school approach to Irish literacy be agreed and developed through the school self-evaluation process.

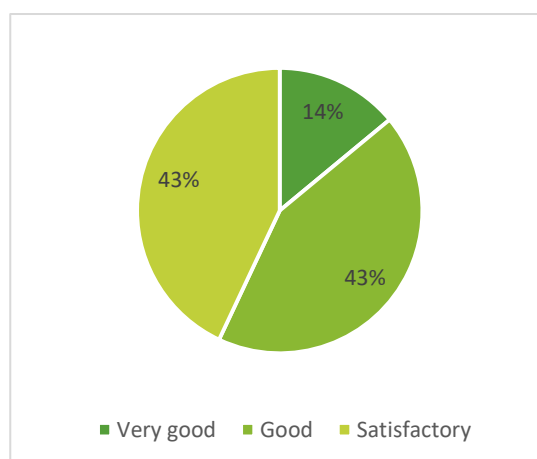
Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

*It is recommended that clear guidance be given for any writing task to be completed in each subject so that all students are absolutely clear what is to be written, regarding use of verb tenses, range of vocabulary and correct sentence structure.
(Post-Primary School 1)*

..Teachers need to discuss a wider range of literacy development strategies in order to improve students' writing skills. (Post-Primary School 7)

The evaluation reports for post-primary schools also refer to the quality of assessment at whole-school level, with the quality of assessment in post-primary schools deemed as very good or good in over half of the case-study schools (Figure 30). There were some references to good practice in evaluation reports, but there were many more recommendations for improvement. Many of these recommendations related to the need to develop a comprehensive whole-school policy for assessment. It was recommended in four of the seven reports that an assessment policy should be agreed and implemented at whole-school level, to provide clear guidance for students and staff.

Figure 30: The quality of assessment at whole-school level in post-primary schools



Extract from Inspectorate evaluation report

Overall, the quality of the school's approaches to assessment was fair. There is a need to develop an assessment policy that provides a framework for developing improved and more systematic approaches to assessment for learning and assessment of learning. (Post-Primary School 2)

It was reported in some post-primary schools that the students were accustomed to Irish being used in homework, house examinations and state examinations. It was stated that in one school the terminology associated with the state examinations was an area of focus for school self-evaluation and that the terminology was being taught explicitly to the students. This was recognised as good practice. Some of the post-primary teachers who participated in the focus groups with the ERC stated that spoken Irish was not given sufficient recognition in the state examinations and that this impeded efforts to raise the status of Irish as a language and a subject in schools. In schools' self-reflection accounts, it was reported that the downgrading of oral Irish in the Junior Cycle Irish examination was disheartening. It was said that it was difficult to understand why there was no recognition

for competency in speaking the language when so many efforts were being made to promote oral language.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

Although papers in Irish for the mock examinations can be downloaded from COGC's website, it was stated that the companies were not prepared to correct them. It was reported that some students were considering taking the mock examinations in English, because they wanted them to be corrected outside of school. (Post-Primary School 2)

The teachers expressed disappointment that there is now no official oral examination for spoken Irish in the Junior Certificate, to reward students who are fluent in Irish, although 40% of the marks do not necessarily have to be given to the oral examination as in the case of the Leaving Certificate examination. (Post-Primary School 4)

According to the teachers, there is also a difficulty with the Leaving Certificate. No additional points are available when students do the projects through Irish. If they do the projects in English, there is a tendency to do the written papers in English. It was stated that students would complete Woodwork portfolios in Irish if there were extra marks available for this. (Post-Primary School 6)

In the ERC focus groups, post-primary teachers also described the schools' efforts to assess students' attainment in first year.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

Standardised reading tests are now used at the beginning of first year. It would be worth using oral language tests also to assess students' oral language needs in Irish and to monitor their progress. (Post-Primary School 3)

Oral examinations are conducted with first year students - one at the beginning of the year and one after Christmas. (Post-Primary School 5)

In the case of an assessment policy in one post-primary school, there was no reference made to Irish. This left staff unsure as to whether to accept homework and examination papers that were answered in English. This practice of completing work through English was evident among a cohort of students who lacked confidence in using the language, as they were not native speakers. The inspectors strongly recommended that the issue be considered on a whole-school basis with a view to providing clear guidance for staff and students. It was stated that there should be an expectation that questions for homework or questions on examination papers should be answered through Irish and that help and support be given to students with difficulties in that aspect of learning.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

There is considerable scope for development in the whole-school approach to assessment. Although the school has a fairly comprehensive assessment policy, the issue of Irish is not mentioned. That leaves no guidance for staff on the language in which homework and house examinations should be given. (Post-Primary School 6)

Effective whole-school strategies need to be found to enable students in this aspect of learning and to develop their self-confidence and encourage them in the use of written Irish. This is an urgent matter for the board of management and senior management who need to show clear leadership in this vitally important area of learning. (Post-Primary School 6)

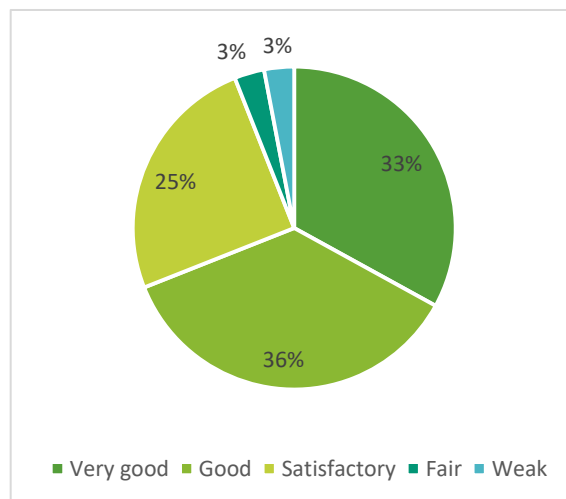
6.3.3 Catering for the different ability levels

Most Gaeltacht post-primary schools are small schools with mixed-ability classes in most cases. In the evaluation reports on post-primary schools, inspectors reported on the practices in lessons relating to the adaptation of students' learning experiences in accordance with their various ability levels. There were students in each class who needed additional support so they could benefit from the lesson. There were also students who needed to be further challenged so that their time would not be wasted. Inspectors

stated that teaching and learning were adapted effectively for the different ability levels in the majority of lessons (Figure 31).

Practice was observed in a small number of support settings also. One of the post-primary schools was receiving additional support under the Forás pilot programme to provide targeted assistance to a group of students experiencing difficulty and lacking confidence in using Irish. It was apparent that this school needed to outline the pre-agreed measurable targets for each student in the group and provide a regular report to school management on their progress.

Figure 31: The quality of differentiated provision in post-primary schools



The challenge of catering for the various levels of language ability are evident in the following extract from one post-primary school's self-reflection.

Extract from a school's reflection on the implementation of the Scheme

The school has indicated that further work needs to be done to support the students who are native Irish speakers. The usual practice is to focus on students with learning difficulties, which is fair, whilst at the same time, the school recognises the importance of catering for all pupils. (Post-Primary School 5)

Some examples of good practice with regard to meeting the various ability levels were noted.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

In the best lessons, there was a good balance between student input and the voice of the teacher and class tasks were differentiated effectively to provide everyone with a taste of success and challenge. (Post-Primary School 3)

*Best practice was observed in one withdrawal setting, where the lesson activities focused entirely on the needs and aptitudes of individual students.
(Post-Primary School 5)*

It was reported that catering for the various ability levels was enhanced when students were active in the lesson and when lesson content and homework were adapted to individual students' needs.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

Questioning strategies supported differentiated learning in the majority of lessons, as appropriate. (Post-Primary School 3)

The way in which different ability levels and areas of interest were catered for in some lessons was noteworthy. In such cases, students with special educational needs were supported effectively and sensitively and they were given the opportunity to participate. (Post-Primary School 1)

In a significant minority of lessons observed in post-primary schools improvement was needed in adapting provision to cater for students' additional educational needs. The recommendations made often pertained to aspects of practice that included giving students a more active role to foster more learner-centred practice in general. It was recommended, for example, that students be given an opportunity to express opinions on the level of challenge of class activities. There was a need to provide opportunities for students to practice new words or phrases, or to put them in sentences to demonstrate that the language content had been learned correctly. Inspectors often reported on the need for more challenging learning goals and activities and, occasionally, for higher expectations for high-performing students.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

It is recommended that teachers discuss students' language learning needs and that those needs be attended to in the lessons. It is recommended, for example, that full sentences be sought as answers to questions rather than accepting single-word answers. (Post-Primary School 4)

Students must be given the opportunity to put recently learned words or phrases into sentences to ensure that they have been learned correctly. (Post-Primary School 6)

Students should also be given the opportunity to express their views on the level of challenge associated with various activities... This feedback is valuable for teachers when creating tasks for students. In a minority of lessons observed, the level of challenge was not in line with students' level of ability in Irish, many of whom were native Irish speakers. (Post-Primary School 6)

In some cases, it was reported that certain students required extra help during the lesson. It was suggested that mind maps, video edits and other resources be used to help students classify and recall information when needed. In one post-primary report, the importance of planning for students' language learning needs was mentioned, particularly when students were coming from different language backgrounds. There was significant scope for improvement in one post-primary school, where there were difficulties with some of the procedures for providing support for students with special educational needs.

Extracts from Inspectorate evaluation reports

It was recognised that greater differentiation in lesson content was required to ensure that all students could actively participate in the intended learning activities. (Post-Primary School 1)

Comprehensive planning is required for the learning needs of all students, particularly in the context of mixed-ability classes where students come from diverse language backgrounds. (Post-Primary School 2)

It is customary to use the support hours the school is entitled to for SEN supports to provide the normal curriculum. It is recommended that this practice be reviewed and that the supports be used in an inclusive manner as outlined in Circular 0014/2017 and in the Continuum of Support guidelines (NEPS 2010). (Post-Primary School 3)

The post-primary school reports often mentioned the procedures schools had in place for the organisation of additional teaching for students. In some cases, it was recommended that schools consider further the arrangements that would be most suitable for students. The student was often withdrawn individually from her/his class to provide her/him with extra tuition. Inspectors were sometimes of the opinion that another arrangement would be more beneficial for students. Suggestions were provided including the need to provide support within the classroom to students on an individual basis or as part of a group. It was stated that the school should consider the various options and ensure that the arrangements implemented were responsive to the needs of the student.

Three lessons were observed that were focused entirely on students with special educational needs in post-primary schools. The quality of the use of Irish for teaching and communication was very good or good in the three lessons. There were areas for improvement in practice in relation to preparedness for teaching, teaching approaches and the use of resources.

In the focus groups with the ERC, post-primary teachers reported that the support teacher for Irish had a key role in the development of students' language skills, particularly students who came to the school with little Irish. The additional support hours for Irish are reported to be an important feature of the Scheme. Nevertheless, teachers in the large post-primary schools or in the post-primary schools that were relatively weak in terms of Irish, felt there were insufficient teaching hours available to them.

Post-primary teachers explained that the majority of students who are not native speakers of Irish acquired the language with ease because of the various strategies in place in their

schools. Teachers indicated that students in some post-primary schools could attend an Irish-medium summer camp before starting in first year and that these camps gave them the opportunity to get to know each other and become familiar with Irish.

Post-primary teachers in the focus groups informed the ERC that learning experiences for students with little Irish had been adapted by giving them additional notes or notes with simpler Irish in the first instance. It was stated that students with little Irish had specific difficulties with the textbooks in some subjects, particularly Mathematics, Science and Music. It was reported that co-teaching was being used in some schools to address this matter. It was stated that the support teacher for Irish worked with the class teacher to promote the correct use of Irish, while also emphasising grammar and new terminology.

Some post-primary teachers in the ERC focus groups were disappointed that more learning resources in Irish were not available online for students with special educational needs. It was stated that diagnostic tests were not available in Irish to help identify students' learning difficulties, which was perceived as a disadvantage for students who are native speakers as well as those with learning difficulties. Some teachers spoke about challenges in relation to services such as language therapy, which they reported were not available through Irish. Teachers reported that psychologists would sometimes recommend that a student should not learn any language other than English, even when the student was already learning Irish.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

The teachers were satisfied that a support teacher for Irish (MTG) was available, but they considered nine hours per week to be insufficient as there were thirteen Irish class groups. It was stated that a period of two or three weeks could pass without any support from the MTG for the most competent students as the support must be given to the students with little Irish. (Post-Primary School 5)

Although parents were well aware that it was commendable that students who are native Irish speakers have the opportunity to receive additional support from the MTG, they were not aware that this support was available in the school. (Post-Primary School 5)

The Forás pilot programme provides an opportunity for teachers to focus on the language needs of students in greatest need, in terms of Irish, so they can be given additional supports. An extra Irish class has been created in first and second year to meet the language needs of these students. Oral and written examinations are used to select students for the programme. (Post-Primary School 6)

6.3.4 Co-teaching

In the focus groups with the ERC, post-primary teachers indicated that some schools were implementing co-teaching to support teachers and students in using Irish in subjects other than Irish, and that the support teachers for Irish often had a key role in this work. Not many examples of co-teaching were observed in post-primary schools during the case-study evaluations. However, there was positive commentary on the examples observed. It was stated that a language-centred and learner-centred approach was implemented in one lesson. The teaching in that class was effective and it was clear that students enjoyed and benefited from it. It was also mentioned that another school had co-teaching in place and the school reported that it was working well. The inspector commended the efforts being made to foster the practice of co-teaching in post-primary schools but it was acknowledged that timetabling presented challenges for co-teaching in some instances.

Extracts from the ERC research reports

It was stated that the school is analysing the role of the language support teacher to strengthen the co-operation in classrooms, and it is in the plan to extend this collaborative work. (Post-Primary School 3)

Specific strategies (input from the language support teacher, co-teaching) are used to ensure that students who come to the school with little Irish at the beginning of first year can progress in Irish and in the other subjects. (Post-Primary School 5)

There is co-teaching in some French classes. It would be good to extend this, if possible, to other subjects. For example, when a new teacher starts in the school, one of the Irish teachers could work alongside him/her for a while, to provide appropriate support for the effective implementation of immersion education. (Post-Primary School 6)

6.3.5 Summary of the quality of teaching in post-primary schools

Table 17: Findings on the quality of teaching in post-primary schools

Strengths	Areas for development
<p>It was reported that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ teachers in general were highly competent in Irish ✓ there was a focus on written accuracy ✓ the number of subjects available through Irish in post-primary schools has increased ✓ the use of Irish as the language of instruction was very good in the majority of lessons observed ✓ there was an appropriate emphasis on the local dialect in the teaching programme ✓ some schools were using effective strategies to teach subject-specific terminology, including displaying terminology on a dedicated whiteboard during lessons, and providing a glossary of terms ✓ preparedness for teaching was very good in most of the lessons observed ✓ there were strengths in the effectiveness of assessment in individual teacher's practice ✓ the terminology associated with the state examinations was a focus for school self-evaluation in one school and this terminology was taught explicitly to the students ✓ in some cases, initial steps were taken to develop students' self-assessment capacity 	<p>It was reported that there was a need to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ give students a more active role in lessons ○ make greater use of pair work and group work ○ explain new terms or concepts in simpler Irish, rather than translating into English ○ provide more opportunities for students to speak in lessons, including those who are least competent in the Irish language ○ provide more opportunities for students to use digital resources in their learning to increase their interest and participation ○ explicitly teach the subject-specific Irish-language terminology and create a need for the use of the terminology among the students ○ gather baseline information on students' language proficiency and monitor progress ○ develop a whole-school approach to assessment, to provide clear guidance to students and staff ○ develop students' ability to self-assess and peer-assess more effectively ○ provide higher expectations and more appropriate challenges for students who have a very high standard of Irish ○ provide more support for students with little Irish, and plan appropriately for this

- ✓ teaching and learning were adapted effectively for the various ability levels, in the majority of lessons
 - ✓ a summer camp through the medium of Irish was provided for students in some post-primary schools before they commenced in first year
 - ✓ most students were doing homework, house examinations and state examinations through Irish
 - ✓ worthwhile efforts were being made to cultivate the practice of co-teaching despite the timetabling challenges
- consider the best arrangement for the student in relation to the provision of additional teaching

7 CONCLUSION

7.1 Recognition for progress made under the Scheme

The Research and Evaluation Study shows that schools in the Recognition Scheme have taken major steps to develop their capacity as a key resource in the preservation of the language and culture in the Gaeltacht. The Scheme is enabling schools to support the use of Irish as the language of the home and the community, and to foster respect for the rich heritage of the Gaeltacht. As a result of these developments, schools are adding to the capacity of Gaeltacht communities to foster and preserve the Irish language for the next generation.

The schools in the Scheme have been re-energised in terms of their vision for the Irish language and the Gaeltacht. The Scheme encourages and empowers schools to work towards that vision in partnership with their communities. School leaders are clearly communicating and reinforcing the vision of the Scheme and that vision is impacting on the practice and the language behaviour of various members of the school community.

Boards of management at both primary and post-primary level have identified the need to recruit teachers who have good proficiency in Irish. Pupils/students have access to good examples in the use of the language from the majority of teachers in their schools. Practice will continue to be enhanced with the participation of teachers in professional development courses, such as the Masters in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht Education in Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick; the Professional Masters of Education in the National University of Ireland, Galway; the Bachelor's Degree in Irish-medium Education in Marino Institute of Education; and other relevant teacher education programmes. It is anticipated that recent developments in distance learning will make these teacher education programmes more accessible to teachers and school leaders.

Teaching and learning are good in general. A two-year early-immersion programme is being implemented in all of the case-study primary schools, which is contributing greatly to pupils' ability to learn through the medium of Irish. Previously, some parents were concerned that immersion education would have a negative impact on pupils' attainment in English. It would appear that pupils' experiences of the two-year early-immersion education programme is alleviating that concern. It is worth remembering that the beneficial effect of early-immersion education will not impact fully on post-primary schools for another number of years. A new Irish-language early-literacy screening test for senior infants in Gaeltacht schools was developed by the ERC as part of the Research and Evaluation Study. The ERC has also developed an Irish-language listening-comprehension test for sixth class.

Pupils/students are benefiting generally from the changes that have occurred in language behaviour and teaching practice because of the Scheme. It is evident that learning is good overall and that the development of pupils'/students' receptive language has been

particularly effective. In some cases, elements of the local dialect can be heard in pupils'/students' expressive language, and credit for this is due to the parents, the mainstream teacher, the language-support teacher for Irish and the language assistant. There has been an increase in the number of subjects available through the medium of Irish in post-primary schools. Innovative strategies are used in some schools to teach the specific terminology for various subjects, although this good practice has not yet been widely implemented. In both primary and post-primary schools, new resources provided by COGG and other support services are used effectively.

The use of Irish outside of classrooms by primary school pupils is generally good. While the context of the age group at post-primary level presents specific challenges, progress has been made in this area also. At both levels, incentive strategies and the Irish rule are in use. Further opportunities for using the language are being provided through co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. The language assistant often has an important role in these Irish-language activities.

7.2 Next steps

Currently, it is considered that the following actions would best contribute to the attainment of the goals of the Recognition Scheme and to the learning and use of Irish in Gaeltacht communities.

7.2.1 Use of Irish among pupils/students

- a. Every school should, with the support of the board of management, and in conjunction with pupils/students, parents and other parties as appropriate, encourage pupils/students to use Irish outside the classroom as frequently as possible.
- b. Every school should implement a strategy to foster ownership among pupils/students regarding the goals of its action plan for improvement.

7.2.2 Catering for the various ability levels

- a. When designing the action plan, schools should take into account pupils'/students' with additional learning needs, and in particular those with special educational needs.
- b. Decisions about teaching and learning at school level, class level and individual pupil level should be based on evidence from a range of assessment approaches.

- c. Teachers should ensure that they set appropriate learning challenges and expectations for pupils/students who are native speakers or who are highly proficient in Irish.

7.2.3 Giving pupils/students a more active role in learning

- a. Teachers should have pupils/students communicating as early and as often as possible in every lesson to develop their expressive language ability.
- b. Teachers should develop pupils/students' ability in self-assessment and peer-assessment more effectively.

7.2.4 Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

- a. School leaders should ensure that every teacher is aware of the principles and practices of content and language integrated learning (CLIL) in immersion education settings.
- b. Every school should ensure that agreed whole-school practice is implemented in relation to the learning and use of specific terminology in Irish across curriculum subjects.
- c. Schools should provide parents of pupils/students with lists of Irish terminology.
- d. Teachers in all subjects should explain new terminology or concepts in Irish, rather than translating them into English.

7.2.5 Teacher recruitment, deployment and development

- a. The Department of Education should continue to make efforts, in conjunction with the relevant parties, to address issues relating to the supply of teachers with appropriate Irish-language proficiency, for Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools.
- b. School leaders should, with the support of the board of management, and in conjunction with the in-school management team, ensure that every member of staff actively supports the implementation of the school's action plan under the Scheme.
- c. As evidence of their own commitment to Irish and to the aims of the Scheme, it would be commendable for teachers to share their Irish-language resources as a gesture of solidarity. This could be done on the COGG portal, through networks and communities of practice.

7.2.6 Action Planning

- a. Boards of management and school leaders should develop the competencies of in-school management teams in relation to the process of school self-evaluation, particularly in relation to the setting of goals and monitoring of progress.
- b. Schools should monitor and assess learners' progress in Irish to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching interventions.

7.2.7 Partnership

- a. The Department of Education, in conjunction with the relevant parties, should look at ways in which schools could be assisted to develop the role of parents and that of community generally in achieving the objectives of the Recognition Scheme.
- b. The board of management should ensure that all parents are aware of the action plan developed by the school under the Scheme and of the progress made in the implementation of that plan.
- c. Every school should work in partnership with the language-planning officer to progress all of the goals in the action plan.
- d. Every school in the Scheme should support the language-planning officer in encouraging parents to use Irish as the household language, as outlined in the publication: *Guide for Gaeltacht Schools: Partnership with the Community to promote the use of Irish* (2021).
- e. Every primary school in the Scheme should strengthen links between the school and the early learning and care setting, as recommended in *Guide for Gaeltacht Primary Schools: Strengthening links between primary schools and early learning and care settings* (2021).

7.2.8 Resources

- a. The Department of Education should consult with the relevant parties to have learning and assessment materials adapted to the language contexts of the various Gaeltacht areas.
- b. All schools should ensure that digital technology is used effectively in teaching and learning to ensure that the pupils/students have opportunities to derive maximum benefit from the various digital platforms.

Appendix A: Attainment of primary school pupils in standardised assessment tests in case-study schools

This appendix provides an analysis of the attainment of pupils in the case-study primary schools in Irish reading, English reading and in Mathematics in spring 2018, directly prior to the commencement of the Scheme. In relation to Irish reading, pupils in second class, fourth class and sixth class completed the Irish Drumcondra Test. Pupils in the case-study schools did better than expected according to the test norms. With reference to the norms for Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools, the number of pupils in the case-study schools attaining well above average was higher than expected and the number of pupils attaining well below average was lower than expected. For example, in second class, 8% attained a STen of 1-3, in comparison with 15.9% when the test was standardised in 2010. 36% attained a STen of 8-10 at the same class level, in comparison with 15.9% in the standardisation.

Irish reading

The Department of Education collects the results of standardised tests for English reading and Mathematics for all schools annually, and the results for Irish reading from schools operating through the medium of Irish.⁹ The results of the case-study primary schools for Irish reading - those that participated in the research in this report - are described here.

The Drumcondra Irish Reading Test was administered to pupils in 2nd, 4th and 6th classes in the case-study schools at the end of the 2017-18 school year (i.e. before the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme began). The Scheme would not yet have had an impact on the data, for example, the two-year Irish language early immersion programme in infant classes was not yet in place in all schools.

STen scores are provided by primary schools to the Department of Education for reading overall (i.e. both vocabulary and reading comprehension combined). When the test was standardised by the Educational Research Centre in 2010, the STen scores were distributed at even intervals (assuming a normal distribution) from 1 to 10. It should be noted that the norms, including the STen scores, apply to Gaeltacht schools and Irish-medium schools (Gaelscoileanna) only¹⁰. Table 1 explains STen scores and indicates the distribution of pupils whose scores fall into the different STen score categories.

⁹ Across the case-study schools, it was noted that only one pupil in 2nd, 4th and 6th classes was absent, and that one child was granted an exemption, because they were unable to take the test.

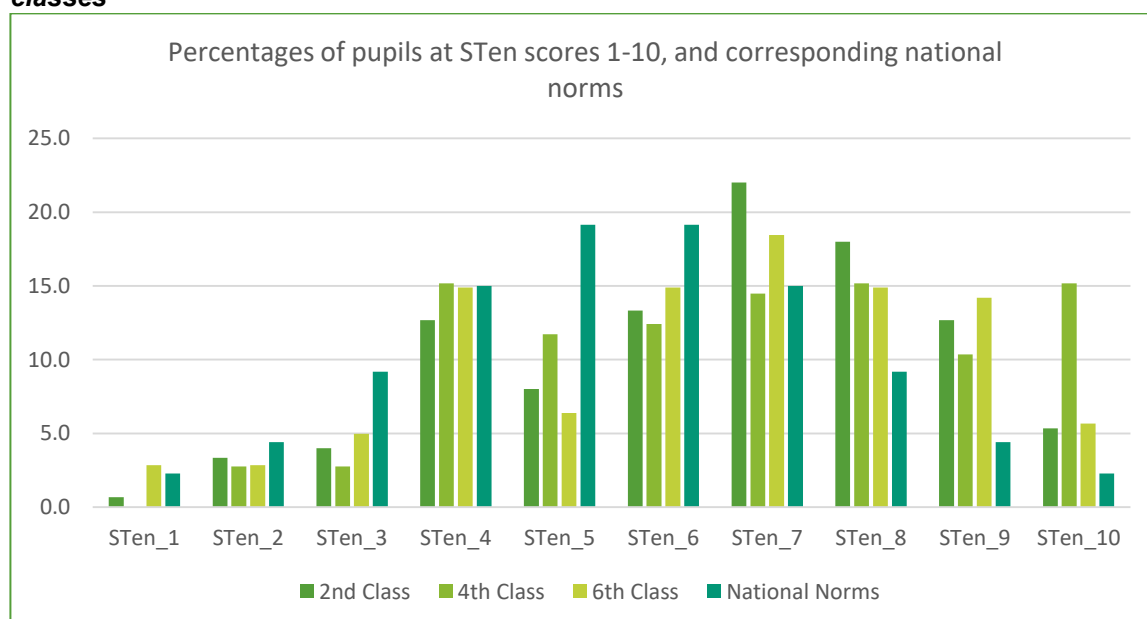
¹⁰In terms of the corresponding national norms, 2.3% of the scores achieved by pupils nationally in Gaeltacht/all-Irish schools would be expected, at the various class levels, to be at STen1 and again at STen10, 4.4% at STen2 and STen9, 9.2% at STen3 and STen8, 15% at STen4 and STen7, and 19.2% at STen5 and STen6 (total = 100%).

Table1 – Explanation of STen scores

STen score	Meaning of STen score	Proportion of pupils with this score nationally
8-10	Well above average	1/6 or almost 17%
7	High average	1/6 or almost 17%
5-6	Average	1/3 or almost 34%
4	Low average	1/6 or almost 17%
1-3	Well below average	1/6 or almost 17%

If a group of pupils achieves 5 or 6 as a STen score, this indicates that the level of attainment is in line with the (national) average. The table indicates that one in three pupils achieves a STen score in this range. The table shows that other STen scores lie above and below the average. Chart A1 indicates that pupils in the case-study schools performed better than expected according to the norms for the test. For example, fewer pupils at each of the three class levels were performing at STen 1-3 (i.e. well below average), and more pupils at each of the three class levels were performing at STen 8-10 (well above average), particularly in 4th class. Overall, a wide range of attainment was observed across the case-study schools.

Chart A1: Pupil c in Irish reading in the case study primary schools – 2nd, 4th and 6th classes

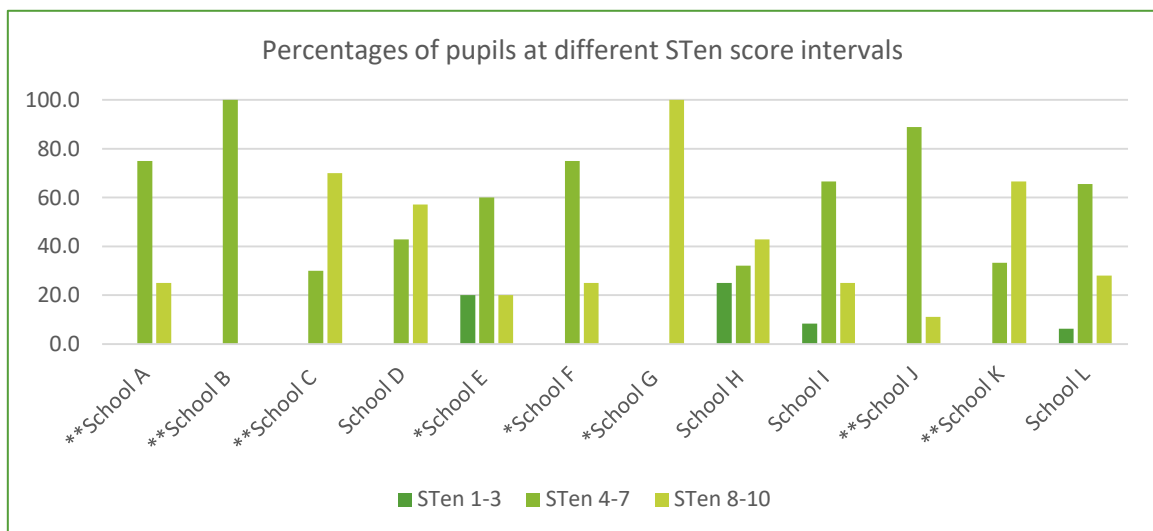


Number of pupils: 2nd class = 150; 4th class = 145; 6th class = 141

Of course, there are differences in attainment between primary schools. Charts A2 to A4 below show the percentages of pupils in 2nd, 4th and 6th classes achieving STen 1-3, STen 4-7 and STen 8-10. It should be noted that some classes in case-study schools are small. For example, School G had only one pupil in 2nd class.

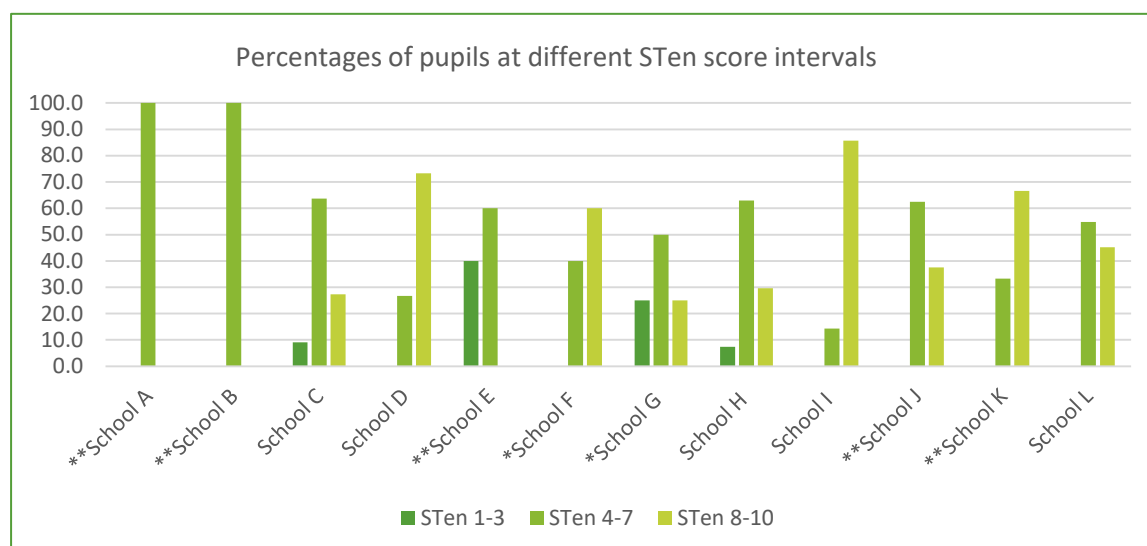
Clearly, there are differences between schools. It is evident, for example, that eight schools had no pupil performing at STen 1-3 in 2nd class and, in two schools, between 20% and 25% of pupils performed at STen 1-3. It is also evident that there were differences in the proportions of pupils at STen 8-10 in schools with more than ten pupils in 2nd class. For example, 25% were performing at STen 8-10 in School I.

Chart A2: Pupil attainment in Irish reading in each case-study primary school – 2nd class



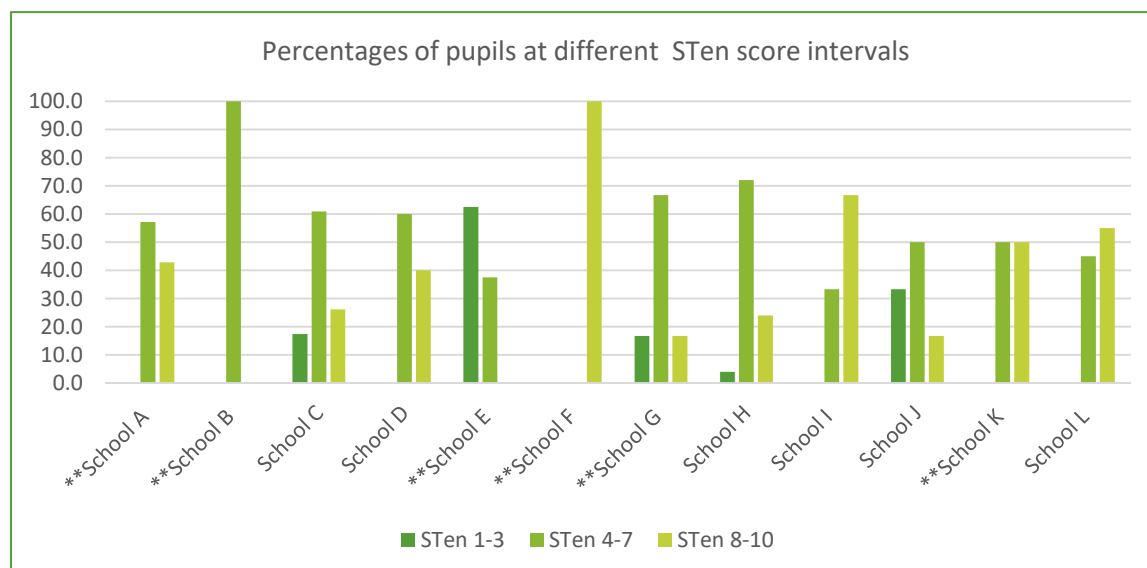
**Between one and five pupils in the class; ** between six and ten pupils in the class*

Chart A3: Pupil attainment in Irish reading in the case-study primary schools – 4th class



**Between one and five pupils in the class; ** between six and ten pupils in the class; more than 10 pupils in the class in other schools*

Chart A4: Pupil attainment in Irish reading in the case-study primary schools – 6th class



**Between one and five pupils in the class; ** between six and ten pupils in the class*

Mathematics

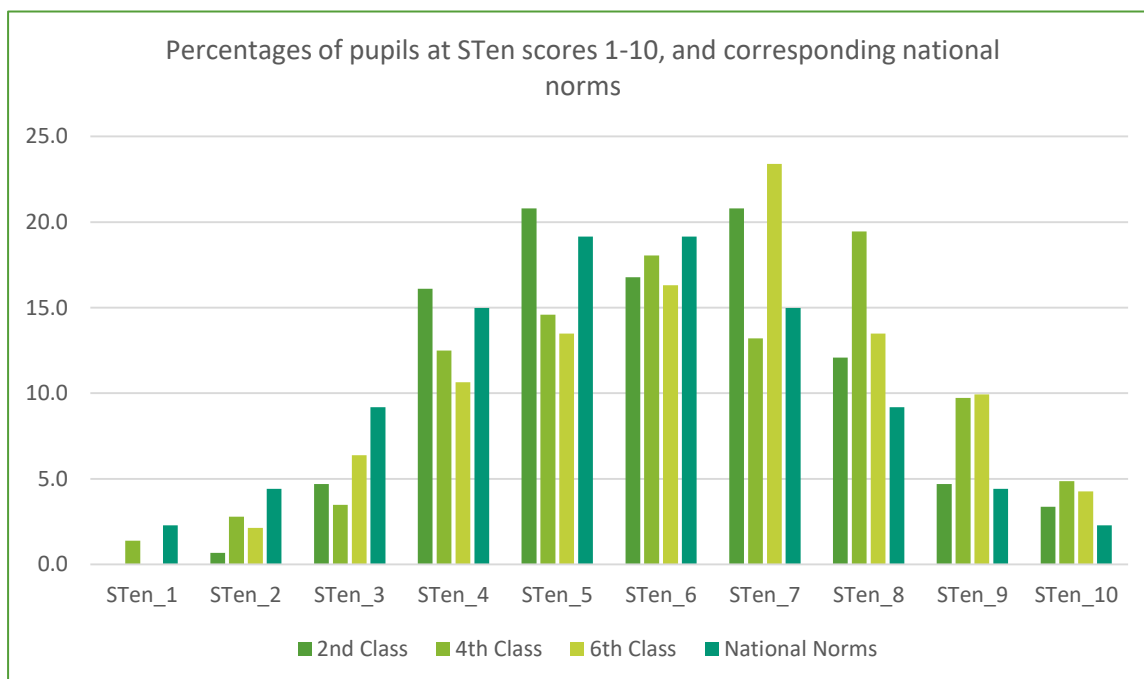
It should be noted that schools used three different tests (Drumcondra Mathematics Test, New Drumcondra Mathematics Test, and the SIGMA-T test), with each school selecting one of these, and the results of these tests were combined to create Chart A5. Furthermore, the test norms apply to pupils in schools generally (including Gaeltacht schools). It is evident from a report published by the Department of Education in 2016 that tests such as the Drumcondra Mathematics Test (standardised in 2007) and the SIGMA-T test have become easier since they were published.¹¹ The expectation is that most schools will move to the revised forms of the tests in the future (some schools are already using the New Drumcondra Test). There is no data available for the case-study schools on the language in which the Mathematics test was administered in 2018.

As occurred for Irish reading, Charts A5 indicates that there were not as many pupils performing at STen 1-3, compared to the 2007 norms (in this case), and there were more performing at STen 8-10. For example, in 2nd class, 5.4% were performing in the STen 1-3 range, compared with 15.9% when the test was standardised, and 20.1% were performing in the STen 8-10 range, compared with 15.9% at standardisation.

Although a fifth of the pupils in 2nd class, 34.0% in 4th class and 27.7% in 6th class performed at STen scores 8-10, the tests do not have a ceiling level for children in Gaeltacht schools at this point in time, with relatively few performing at STen 10.

¹¹ Department of Education and Skills. (2016). *Standardised achievement tests: An analysis of the test results at primary school level for 2011-12 and 2012-13*. Dublin: Author.

Chart A5: Pupil attainment in Mathematics in the case-study primary schools – 2nd, 4th and 6th classes



Number of pupils: 2nd class = 149; 4th class = 144; 6th class = 140

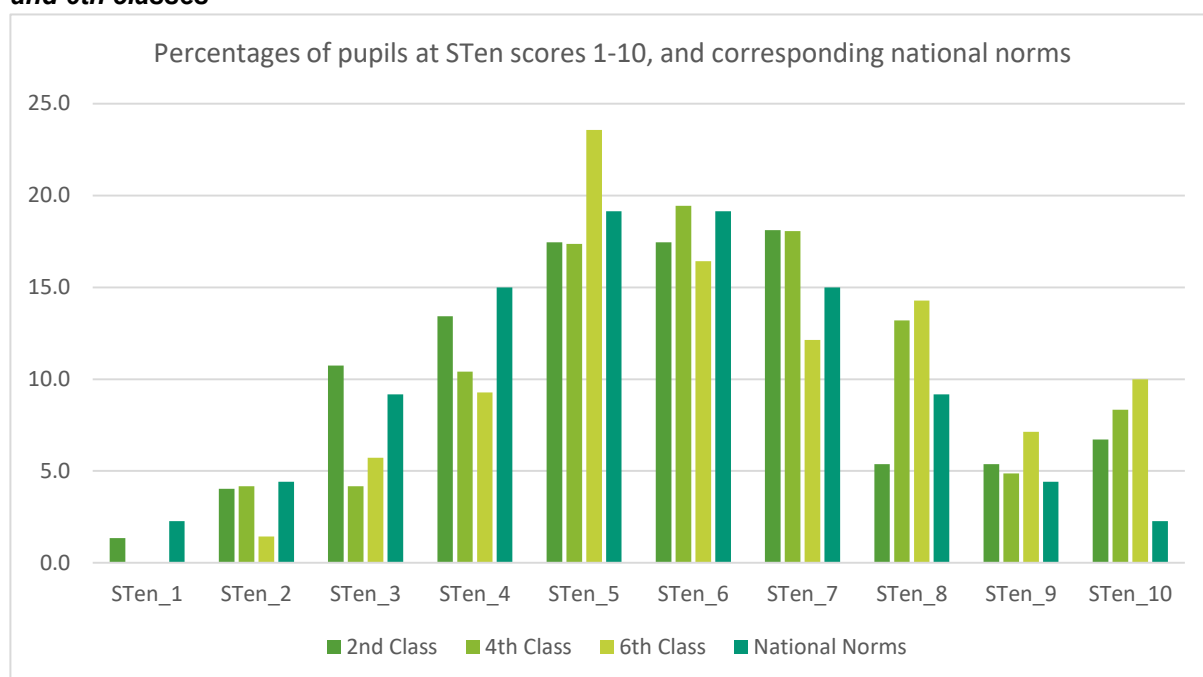
Reading in English

The Gaeltacht schools used three tests for English in 2018 - the Drumcondra Primary Reading Test, the New Drumcondra Primary Reading Test, and the MICRA-T test. Results on these tests were combined to create Chart A6. These tests are based on national norms although the Drumcondra Primary Reading Test and the MICRA-T were standardised several years ago. The expectation is that most schools will move to the revised forms of future tests (some are already using the New Drumcondra Primary Reading Test).

Similar to outcomes in Irish reading and mathematics, fewer 4th and 6th class pupils than expected, based on test norms, performed at STen 1-3. In all, 8.3% in 4th class and 7.1% in 6th class performed in this range, compared to 15.9% nationally. Interestingly, 16.1% in 2nd class performed at STen 1-3, but this decreased in 4th and 6th classes. Some pupils may have had a delayed start in English reading, but then progressed quickly afterwards.

The proportions of pupils performing at STen 8-10 is quite high - 17.4% in 2nd class, 26.4% in 4th class, and 31.4% in 6th class, compared to 15.9% at each level when the tests were standardised. For 6th class, 10% were performing at STen 10, compared to 2.3% when the tests were standardised. This suggests that, in 2018, the older tests may have been too easy for those children who were most competent in English.

Chart A6: Pupil attainment in English reading in the case-study primary schools – 2nd, 4th and 6th classes



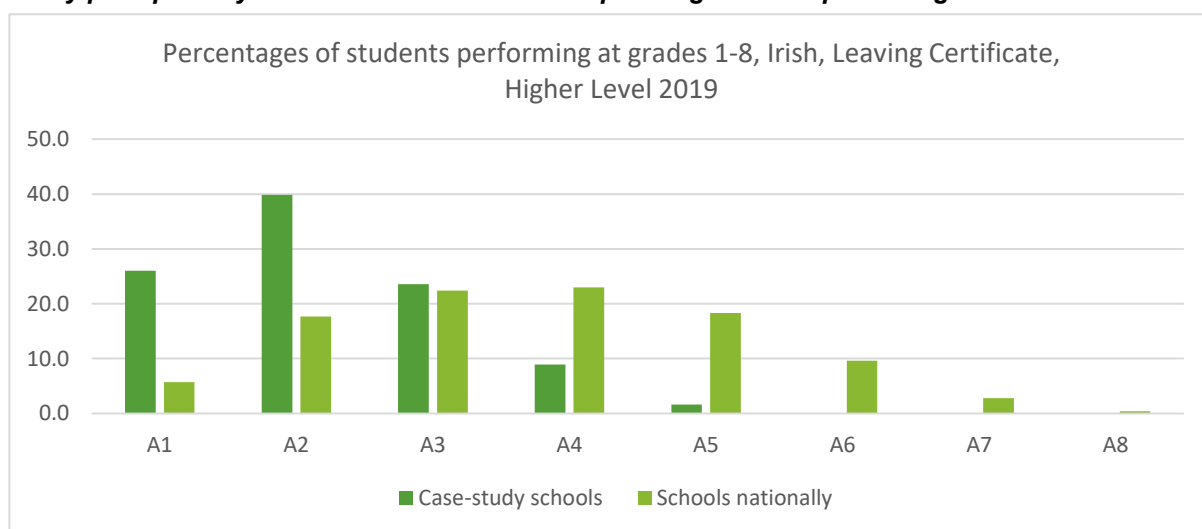
Number of pupils: 2nd class = 149; 4th class = 144; 6th class = 140

Appendix B: Attainment of students in Leaving Certificate Irish in a small sample of case-study post-primary schools

Appendix B provides data on student attainment in Leaving Certificate Irish (Higher Level) in 2019 in three case-study post-primary schools. The attainment of students in the three largest case-study schools was analysed, as part of the research into the standard of Irish in these schools¹².

The data show that more students in the case-study post-primary schools achieved the highest grades (A1, A2) compared with students nationally taking higher-level Irish. None of the students in these case-study schools took Irish at Ordinary or Foundation levels.

Cairt A6: Attainment of students in Leaving Certificate Irish (higher level) in three case-study post-primary schools in 2019 and corresponding national percentages



Number of Leaving Certificate students in the sample case-study schools = 123; Number of Leaving Certificate students, nationally = 23,176

¹² A more comprehensive analysis of student attainment in Gaeltacht schools will form part of a report on in the schools participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme to be published by the ERC in 2022.