



Exemption from the Study of Irish Questions and Answers for schools

Contents

1. What are the exceptional circumstances in which a school may consider granting an exemption from the study of Irish?	2
2. What happens when a parent appeals the school's decision?	3
3. When an applicant ticks more than one box on the application form, does the school have to review the application under all sub-paragraphs chosen?	3
4. When an application has been considered and a decision is reached to grant an exemption from the study of Irish, where do I find the Certificate of Exemption?	4
5. Can a parent/guardian re-apply for an exemption from Irish if they have been refused previously?	4
6. What do the phrases 'enrolment' and 're-enrolment' mean in the circulars on Exemption from the Study of Irish?	4
7. Can a student who is 11 ½ enrolling in primary school in Ireland for the first time be granted an exemption from the study of Irish?	5
8. Can a student who is enrolling in school in Ireland and has no understanding of English or Irish be exempted from the study of Irish?	5
9. What is the time frame for monitoring a differentiated approach to language before an exemption may be granted?	6
10. What is meant by a "significant and persistent literacy difficulty"?	7
11. What tests should be used in considering an application for an exemption from the study of Irish?	7
12. Is it necessary for the school to carry out the testing required or can this be done externally to the school?	7
13. In subsection 2.2.2.ii, what is meant by "at the time of the application"?	8
14. Is a report or a report from a specialist recommending an exemption sufficient grounds to grant an exemption from the study of Irish?	8
15. What is meant by the term "a high level of multiple and persistent needs"?	8
16. When a student moves school, can the new school consider information from the applicant's Student Support File developed in the student's previous school?	9
17. What is meant by a recommendation and eligibility for placement in a recognised special school and/or class?	9
18. If a student moves from a special school/special class into a mainstream school/mainstream class, what are the requirements regarding a Certificate of exemption from the study of Irish?	9

.....



19. What does it mean to “not exercise” an Irish exemption?.....	10
20. Is it necessary to exclude a student who has an exemption from the study of Irish from the Irish class/classroom?.....	10
21. Is a student with an exemption from the study of Irish, also exempt from studying foreign languages?	11
22. Is a student with an exemption from the study of Irish, also considered exempt from Irish and/or Foreign Languages for 3rd level entry purposes?.....	11
23. If a student has a language exemption granted by a third level institution does that remove the requirement for that student to study Irish.	11
24. What are the implications for a student of not studying Irish?.....	12
25. Can a school consider an application on behalf of a student who is not currently attending school due to a medical illness?	12
26. Can an application for an exemption from the study of Irish be made on behalf of a student who is enrolled in Irish-medium education or in a school participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme?.....	13
27. Can a student who has been home-schooled or attended a school which is not a recognised primary or post-primary school be granted an exemption from the study of Irish?.....	13

1. What are the exceptional circumstances in which a school may consider granting an exemption from the study of Irish?

The only exceptional circumstances in which consideration may be given to granting an exemption from the study of Irish in the case of primary schools are set out in Section 2.2 of [Circular 0054/2022](#) in the case of primary schools and in Section 2.2 of [Circular 0055/2022](#) for post-primary schools.

In line with the department’s policy, all schools are expected and encouraged to provide all students (including those granted an exemption), to the greatest extent possible and in a meaningful way, with opportunities to participate in Irish language and cultural activities at a level appropriate to their learning needs.

- In the case that an exemption from the study of Irish is granted it should be noted that an exemption held by a student will continue to be operative until the end of his/her post-primary education.
- A student holding an exemption has the option *not to exercise the exemption granted*, without any loss of the right to exercise it at a future time.

Note: The Circulars apply only to recognised primary and post-primary schools where English is the medium of instruction. Students who are home-schooled, enrolled in a place of education other than a recognised school cannot apply for an exemption from the study of Irish under the terms of these circulars. An exemption from the study of Irish cannot be operated in a school, or a class in a school where Irish is the medium of Instruction.

[Back to Top](#)



2. What happens when a parent appeals the school's decision?

If the parent/guardian (or student over 18 years of age) is not satisfied with the school's decision, then it is open to him/her to make an appeal to the Irish Exemption Appeals Committee (IEAC) using the appeal form available on the department's webpage.

The Schools Financial and Database Section will contact the school outlining the documentation that the Irish Exemptions Appeals Committee wish to review. The documentation required will be the grounds given for refusing the application (i.e. a copy of the refusal letter), the checklist that was used when processing the application, any supporting documentation that was available to the school which is contained in the Student Support Plan(s) and any supplementary information provided to the school by the applicant.

In the case where a parent is appealing under Section 2.2.2 of either Circular 054/2022 or 055/2022 the discrete test that was used to determine the standardised score **must** also be submitted.

Documentation considered by the school in making the decision not to grant an exemption from the study of Irish should be sent by the school to Irishexemptionappeal@education.gov.ie or by post to Irish Exemption Appeals, Schools Financial and Database Section, Department of Education, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, N37 X659.

[Back to Top](#)

3. When an applicant ticks more than one box on the application form, does the school have to review the application under all sub-paragraphs chosen?

No, An application is considered on one criterion/sub-paragraph only.

When an application is received, a school official should contact the applicant(s) at the earliest opportunity and discuss the written application and to confirm the sub-paragraph on which the application is based (the sub-section within 2.2 of the Circular). Applicants should apply under the category that best matches the circumstances of the student.

Note that if an applicant does not confirm the sub-paragraph under which the application is based, then the application is not consistent with the circular and in accordance with subsection 2.3(a)3, **no further processing of the application should take place.**

[Back to Top](#)



4. When an application has been considered and a decision is reached to grant an exemption from the study of Irish, where do I find the Certificate of Exemption?

The templates for Certificates of Exemption are available in the Forms for Schools section of the on the webpage but are also directly linked from the electronic versions of the checklists associated with each application criteria.

Copies of the application form, checklist and letter of refusal/certificate of Exemption should be kept by the school in accordance with section 2.3.c of the Circulars. The student's record on POD/P-POD should be updated as soon as possible.

[Back to Top](#)

5. Can a parent/guardian re-apply for an exemption from Irish if they have been refused previously?

Yes, If a parent/guardian who has previously had an application refused considers that the student meets another criteria outlined in the circular, they may apply for an exemption from the study of Irish again.

In this case, it is recommended that the applicant discuss with the school whether the school believes that it holds sufficient evidence to support a new application.

If a parent/guardian makes a new application under the same category that their original application was refused under, the principal may again refuse the application if he/she believes that the school does not hold any new evidence.

[Back to Top](#)

6. What do the phrases 'enrolment' and 're-enrolment' mean in the circulars on Exemption from the Study of Irish?

'Enrolment' means that a student starts their education in Ireland.

'Re-enrolment' means that a student is starting school in Ireland **after returning from a period living in another state** but who was previously enrolled in a school in Ireland.

After moving from another country and (re)commence their education in Ireland on a particular date, then, even if they change schools, this is the date by which they must have been aged 12 for the purposes of any application under subsection 2.2.1 of the circular.

For exemptions from the study of Irish, the circulars allow an exception to the normal way of dating the enrollment/re-enrollment of students who move from another state and enroll in a school in Ireland in the final 2 months of an academic year. In that case their enrolment date will be considered to be the first day of the following academic year when considering granting an exemption from the study of Irish. .



Note: Schools are expected and encouraged to provide all students, including those who may have been educated in another state, to the greatest extent possible and in a meaningful way, with opportunities to participate in Irish language and cultural activities at a level appropriate to their learning needs.

[Back to Top](#)

7. Can a student who is 11 ½ enrolling in primary school in Ireland for the first time be granted an exemption from the study of Irish?

One of three scenarios will apply to such a student:

Sub-section 2.2.1(b) allows for the granting of an exemption, irrespective of the student's age, if the student has **completed** his/her primary education outside the state and this primary education **did not include** the study of Irish, and if the School Principal is satisfied that there is **evidence** to this effect.

Sub-section 2.2.5 of the primary school circular allows the child of a diplomatic or consular representative of another country to Ireland to be exempt from the study of Irish irrespective of their age. At post-primary level, the student must meet the criterion outlined in section 2.2.1 of Circular 0055/2022.

However where the student has received his/her education outside the state, and has **not** completed a full course of primary education recognised by another state or is not the child of a diplomatic or consular representative of another country to Ireland, then an exemption from the study of Irish may not be granted unless the student is 12 years of age at the time of their enrollment/re-enrollment and meets the criteria outlined in subsection 2.2.1(a) of the circular.

Applications on behalf of a student enrolling/re-enrolling after moving from another country are not restricted to subsection 2.2.1 and as circumstances arise they may be considered under other parts of the circular.

[Back to Top](#)

8. Can a student who is enrolling in school in Ireland and has no understanding of English or Irish be exempted from the study of Irish?

No, not on those grounds alone.

All children educated in Ireland, including those who move from another country, are expected to be provided with the opportunities to study the Irish language to an appropriate standard, and achieve a level of personal proficiency that is appropriate to their ability.

If an application is made on grounds that are in line with the exceptional circumstances as set out in Section 2.2 of the Circulars and the student meets those criteria, then he/she may be granted an exemption from the study of Irish.



A student who has little or no understanding of English should be provided with intensive English as an Additional Language (EAL) support in preparation for his/her full engagement with the school curriculum at a level appropriate to his/her ability and needs.

The provision of EAL teaching to a student is not considered grounds for granting an exemption from the study of Irish.

[Back to Top](#)

9. What is the time frame for monitoring a differentiated approach to language before an exemption may be granted?

For applications under **subsection 2.2.2 (significant and persistent literacy difficulties)** there is no prescriptive time frame for monitoring a differentiated approach to language and literacy learning across the curriculum/all subjects. It is a matter for the school management to consider if supports and intervention have been in place long enough for the school to accurately determine that the literacy difficulty continues to be an obstacle to the student's learning despite the interventions in place over time. Schools are advised to follow the [Continuum of Support](#) process for planning, monitoring and review of intervention.

For applications under **subsection 2.2.3 (a high level of multiple and persistent needs)** the circular specifies that the interventions should take place over a minimum period of 2 years and that in general an exemption would only be considered after the student has reached 5th class at which point interventions may already have been in place for several years.

Further information for schools on this process is available in [Special Educational Needs: A Continuum of Support](#).

See also:

Question 16: [When a student moves school, can the new school consider information from the applicant's Student Support File developed in the student's previous school?](#)

Question 25: [Can a school consider an application on behalf of a student who is not currently attending school due to a medical illness?](#)

[Back to Top](#)



10. What is meant by a “significant and persistent literacy difficulty”?

In the context of this circular “significant” means that the student is experiencing literacy difficulties to a degree that their literacy scores are at or below the 10th percentile.

“Persistent” means that it is demonstrated in their records that they continue to experience the significant difficulty despite appropriate interventions over time. A student’s needs cannot be identified as being “persistent” on the basis of a single test or report, but only through the recording of evidence over time.

Section 2.2.2 of Circular 0054/2022 (Primary) and Section 2.2.2 of Circular 0055/2022 (Post primary) outline the types of evidence a school should have before consideration can be given to applying for an exemption from the study of Irish.

[Special Educational Needs: A Continuum of Support](#) also provides further information and support for schools in this regard.

[Back to Top](#)

11. What tests should be used in considering an application for an exemption from the study of Irish?

Guidance on the selection of tests is available on the department’s website in the document [Exemption from the Study of Irish - Guidance on Test Selection](#)

A **discrete test** is a standalone test which can be applied to an individual student to assess a single literacy skill – in this case a test of either Word Reading or Reading Comprehension or Spelling.

Note: A literacy attainment score at/below the 10th percentile in a discrete test of either Word Reading or Reading Comprehension or Spelling **is only one aspect of the criteria to be taken into consideration** when processing applications for exemption from the study of Irish in line with sub-section 2.2.2 of the Circulars. Schools should ensure that the applicant meets all of the criterion outlined in subsection 2.2.2

[Back to Top](#)

12. Is it necessary for the school to carry out the testing required or can this be done externally to the school?

Yes. The onus is on the school to conduct and consider its own testing and the student’s performance in school.

The school may also have external evidence/report of a test result at/below the 10th percentile, and **in addition** to its own test results these results may be useful to help inform the school in relation to the student’s needs.

[Back to Top](#)



13. In subsection 2.2.2.ii, what is meant by “at the time of the application”?

Good practice suggests that the results from any attainment tests required (i.e. standardised tests in Word Reading, Reading Comprehension or Spelling) be obtained **within the 12 months prior to the date of application.**

A literacy attainment score at/below the 10th percentile in either Word Reading or Reading Comprehension or Spelling is only one aspect of the criteria to be taken into consideration when processing applications for exemption from the study of Irish in line with sub-section 2.2.2 of the Circulars.

[Back to Top](#)

14. Is a report or a report from a specialist recommending an exemption sufficient grounds to grant an exemption from the study of Irish?

No. A psychological or medical professional’s report is not a requirement for granting an exemption from the study of Irish.

If a school receives an external report (e.g. from a psychologist, speech and language therapist (SLT), Psychiatrist, GP or other practitioner), this may contain advice and recommendations that are useful to help inform the school in relation to the student’s needs and to identify appropriate interventions, but is not the primary supporting document for granting an exemption from the study of Irish.

While an external report might recommend an exemption it is up to the school to decide if it has the evidence as set out in the circular, (ongoing support, response to intervention and current level of need as identified in school testing) when considering the exceptional circumstances in which an exemption should be granted.

[Back to Top](#)

15. What is meant by the term “a high level of multiple and persistent needs”?

The term *multiple and persistent needs* recognises that some students may experience significant difficulties outside of, or in addition to, those related to literacy that impact on their learning and participation at school.

Multiple and persistent needs are those that are enduring and severe in nature and that significantly impact on the student’s functioning at school on a day to day basis, and are a cause of significant distress to the student in the school environment, despite the implementation of a highly individualised, intensive and evidence-based programme of support, that has been developed, implemented and monitored by the school, in collaboration with the student, parents and other relevant agencies involved in providing support.

[Back to Top](#)

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16. When a student moves school, can the new school consider information from the applicant's Student Support File developed in the student's previous school?

Yes. A parent/guardian can request that the previous school send a copy of the child's Student Support File, which will outline the level of support he/she has required while in the previous school. This should include his/her student support plans and details of in-school testing and interventions.

Primary schools should also provide an 'Education Passport' to the post-primary school once they receive confirmation of the student's enrolment. This will inform the new school about his/her needs and the level of literacy support required within their own Continuum of Support. It will also contribute in whole or in part to the requirement for the school to have substantial written evidence that these individualised student support plans have been implemented over time (a 2 year period in the case of applications under subsection 2.2.3) as outlined in the relevant part of the Circulars.

[Back to Top](#)

17. What is meant by a recommendation and eligibility for placement in a recognised special school and/or class?

This means that the recommendation for the student to be placed in a special school or special class meets the specifications for such placement as determined by the NCSE and the student has been deemed eligible and/or is awaiting the recommended placement. Documentary evidence to this effect should be available to the school.

A special school/class is one that is one that is sanctioned and resourced by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). See www.ncse.ie for a list of such schools/classes.

[Back to Top](#)

18. If a student moves from a special school/special class into a mainstream school/mainstream class, what are the requirements regarding a Certificate of exemption from the study of Irish?

Students in special schools and special classes have an exemption from the study of Irish without a parent or guardian needing to apply. There is no requirement for a certificate of exemption to be issued for a student enrolled in a special school or special class.

As is the case with all exemptions, once a student holds an exemption from the study of Irish, they may decide to operate it for all or part of the duration of their primary and post-primary education.



Therefore the issuing of a Certificate of Exemption **is only necessary in the case of students who are transitioning to a mainstream educational setting** after being enrolled in a special school or special class.

If a student is leaving a special school or special class, the Principal of that school should provide the student's parent(s)/guardian(s) with a Certificate of Exemption granted in accordance with Section 2.2.4(i) of the Circular and Section 8 of the Guidelines document available on the department's website. After the transition, the student's Student Support File should include a copy of the Certificate of Exemption. The mainstream school should update the student's record on the Primary or Post-Primary on-line Database with the details of the exemption.

[Back to Top](#)

19. What does it mean to “not exercise” an Irish exemption?

A student may continue to engage in the study of Irish at an appropriate level despite holding a Certificate of Exemption. The reasons for this will vary from student to student.

All children educated in Ireland, including those who hold an exemption from the study of Irish are expected to have the opportunity to study Irish to an appropriate standard.

These students are encouraged to study the language and to participate in Irish classes and/or examinations and achieve a level of personal proficiency that is appropriate to their needs and ability.

The granting of an exemption from the study of Irish should not be an obstacle to a student building on their language skills.

[Back to Top](#)

20. Is it necessary to exclude a student who has an exemption from the study of Irish from the Irish class/classroom?

No. In line with the Department's policy of inclusion, schools are expected and encouraged to provide all students to the greatest extent possible and in a meaningful way, with opportunities to participate in Irish language and cultural activities at a level appropriate to their learning needs.

If a student is exempt from the study of Irish that student has the option *not to exercise the exemption* granted and to participate in Irish classes and/or examinations, without any loss of the right to exercise the exemption at a future time.

[Back to Top](#)



21. Is a student with an exemption from the study of Irish, also exempt from studying foreign languages?

No. Circulars 0054/2022 and 0055/2022 are for exemption from the study of Irish only. Where an exemption from the study of Irish is granted, it should not be interpreted as an exemption from the study other languages.

In accordance with the [Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools](#) and the [Framework for Junior Cycle](#), the study of foreign languages is optional. Any decision not to study a modern foreign language should be made carefully and following discussion between the student's parent(s)/guardian(s), Guidance Counselor, SET teachers and other school representatives as relevant.

A student may commence the study of a language (including the study of Irish) at an appropriate level after the granting of an exemption from the study of Irish. The reasons for this will vary from student to student and may include having a background in language, that the subject is being studied at an ab initio level and/or that they have experienced an improvement in their ability to engage in language learning.

[Back to Top](#)

22. Is a student with an exemption from the study of Irish, also considered exempt from Irish and/or Foreign Languages for 3rd level entry purposes?

No. Circulars 0054/2022 and 0055/2022 are for exemption from the study of Irish in recognised primary and post-primary schools only. 3rd level entry and course requirements are a matter for the individual institution.

Some 3rd level institutions may waive an Irish and/or foreign language entry requirement in the case of a student with an exemption from the study of Irish granted under the Department of Education Circulars. Parents/guardians/students should familiarise themselves with such 3rd level entry requirements and any implications which may arise due to the holding of an exemption from the study of Irish granted in primary/post-primary school.

[Back to Top](#)

23. If a student has a language exemption granted by a third level institution does that remove the requirement for that student to study Irish.

No. Only exemptions granted under the Department of Education Circulars can be used to exempt a student from the requirement to study Irish.

Rule 21 of the [Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools](#) outlines that the approved course for recognised students at Junior and Senior Cycle must include Irish. This applies to all students except for those holding an exemption from the study of Irish granted under the terms of a circular issued by the Department of Education.



A language exemption granted by at third level is a matter for the individual University and only apply to the entry requirements and/or course requirements which are set by the individual institutions.

A student with an exemption from the entry requirements and/or course requirements of a third level institution but who does not hold an exemption from the study of Irish granted under the Department of Education Circulars is still required to study Irish while enrolled in a recognised school.

[Back to Top](#)

24. What are the implications for a student of not studying Irish?

Irish language requirements for entry to third level courses/programmes of study are at the discretion of the relevant colleges and universities. These requirements may be subject to change and it is therefore important that students/parents are aware of such requirements. Information on third level entry requirements can be accessed on relevant college/university websites. Guidance Teachers should ensure they have access information on this matter.

It is important that parents/guardians and students are made aware that Irish is an entry requirement for access to programmes for initial teacher education (primary) offered in the four state funded Higher Education Institutions. Information on entry requirements to these primary teacher education courses is available on the Teaching Council's website: www.teachingcouncil.ie

Official Languages (Amendment) Bill 2021 contains a requirement that 20% of new recruits to the public service be competent in the Irish language by 2030. This suggests that students who study Irish it may have greater employment options in the public service sector.

Schools, parents/guardians and students should also note that some other employments, depending on their nature and/or location, may from time to time identify proficiency in Irish and/or a formal qualification in Irish as requirement for or an advantage in respect of appointment.

[Back to Top](#)

25. Can a school consider an application on behalf of a student who is not currently attending school due to a medical illness?

No, Schools can only consider applications on behalf of students currently enrolled in their school. When a student is absent for a prolonged period of time they will experience difficulties reengaging in their learning across all subjects and schools should take steps to assist the student.

Absence from school alone is not grounds for granting an exemption, the student's circumstances must also meet those as set out in the circular for granting an



exemption and the school must have the appropriate documentation to support the decision in the student's Student Support File.

All children educated in Ireland, including those who are home-schooled or in receipt of Home tuition are expected to have had the opportunity to study Irish to an appropriate standard.

[Back to Top](#)

26. Can an application for an exemption from the study of Irish be made on behalf of a student who is enrolled in Irish-medium education or in a school participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme?

No. The Circulars apply only to recognised English-medium primary and post-primary schools. An exemption from the study of Irish cannot be operated by a student who is being educated through the medium of Irish.

Where a school reports to the department that English is the medium of instruction for some of the students in the school, then the terms of Circular 0054/2022 or 0055/2022 apply to those students, but do not apply to the students in the same school who are educated through the medium of Irish.

[Back to Top](#)

27. Can a student who has been home-schooled or attended a school which is not a recognised primary or post-primary school be granted an exemption from the study of Irish?

No. The Circulars for exemption from the study of Irish are for implementation in the case of students who are enrolled in recognised primary and post-primary schools. A student who is home-schooled or enrolled in a school which is not recognised cannot therefore be granted an exemption from the study of Irish under the terms of these Department of Education circulars.

Home education does not entitle students to an exemption from the study of Irish in the event of a subsequent school enrolment. Parents are advised by TUSLA – the Child and Family Agency - to acquaint themselves with the examination and career implications of not studying Irish and/or having a second language.

If a student who was previously educated at home in Ireland or enrolled in a school in Ireland which is not recognised subsequently enrolls in a recognised school, they cannot be considered under subsection 2.2.1 of the circulars but can be considered on a case by case basis against the other sub criteria of the circular.

Any arrangement made not to study Irish while being home-schooled or while enrolled in a school which is not recognised, is not considered an exemption from the study of Irish.



The department has provided guidance to Home-schooling families in the document: Guidelines on the assessment of education in places other than recognised schools available on the government's website; <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/5a819e-guidelines-on-the-assessment-of-education-in-places-other-than-recog/>

[Back to Top](#)