

Steering Committee

Policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht

Minutes of Meeting 6

Date: Wednesday, 8 November 2023

Location: G13/14, Department of Education, Marlborough Street, Dublin

Time of Meeting: 3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Attendance (12):

Gavan O' Leary (Chairperson) – **Assistant Secretary, Department of Education**
Muireann Tóibín, Pól Mac Cathmhaoil, Naoise Ó Faoláin, Mary-Rose O'Sullivan – **Gaeltacht Education Unit, Department of Education**
Yvonne Ní Mhurchú – **Inspectorate, Department of Education**
Toby Wolfe – **Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)**
Aislinn Duffy – **Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)**
Jacqueline Ní Fhearghusa – **An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)**
Cáit Ní Chonghaile – **National Council for Special Education (NCSE)**
Aodán Mac an Mhíle – **Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, the Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (DTCAGSM)**
Seosamh Ó Coinne – **Foras na Gaeilge**

Apologies

Lisa Nic Dhoinnleibhe – **Principal Officer, Gaeltacht Education Unit**
Stella Ní Shé – **National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)**

1. Fáiltiú/Welcome

GO'L opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

There were no matters arising from the previous meeting and the minutes were approved with no amendments.

3. Discussion of Sealbhú reports

MT presented the key recommendations made by Sealbhú, based on the themes identified in their *Summary of recommendations for the policy*. She stated that the information from the bilateral meetings was still being analysed.

Provision & Training of Educators

The following recommendations were discussed:

- Provide a range of courses for early years educators, teachers and special needs assistants to work in educational settings through Irish
- Provide scholarships/grants/sabbaticals for upskilling to teach in Irish
- Provide opportunities for professional development presented by facilitators with expertise and understanding of immersion education
- Re-introduce the allowance for teaching in an Irish-medium school
- Explore expansion of the e-Hub to schools outside of the Gaeltacht

JNíF noted the success of the e-Hub project for Gaeltacht schools. Potential expansion of the e-Hub project and challenges in relation to this were discussed.

TW asked whether there may be issues recruiting lecturers for the courses proposed and noted that there had been difficulties with recruitment in relation to an Irish-medium (IM) course for early years educators.

The reintroduction of allowances for teaching in IM schools was discussed. GO'L noted that the reintroduction of allowances would need to be discussed with the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, who would take a wider view of the issue as it relates to other areas of the public sector. JNíF noted that a programme being developed by DTCAGSM to incentivise primary teachers to improve their Irish involved a financial element. AManM stated that initial monetary incentives may be made available for upskilling but would not be continuous.

Awareness of IM third level courses was discussed and an information pack from COGG noted in this regard.

Support Services

The following recommendations were discussed:

- Include specialist support staff in Oide with responsibility for Irish-medium schools
- Clarify and provide for the needs of special needs assistants in the Irish-medium sector
- Ensure clarity around roles of various support organisations: COGG, Oide, NEPS, NCSE, An Gúm, Gaeloideachas, school patrons

MT suggested that the development of the policy actions would offer clarity about the bodies responsible and their roles. GO'L noted that stakeholders who may not be involved daily in matters of education could benefit from having clarity on what the roles of various organisations were. He noted the need to continue the positive co-operation between the organisations.

Provision of resources/Use of digital technology

The following recommendations were discussed:

- Increase the capacity of COGG to meet the demand for Irish-medium resources
- Provide a marketing and promotional budget to make educators aware of the resources available
- Fund a renewal of the Séideán Sí programme
- Fund research on the use of digital technologies in Irish-medium schools

The dichotomy between a need to increase capacity to meet demand for IM resources, while also seeking to fund marketing of the same resources was discussed. GO'L noted the strides made in relation to the availability of IM resources in recent years, thanks to agencies such as COGG and An Gúm. JNíF agreed that a lot has been done in this area, but advised that there are also areas (particularly in relation to SEN resources and assessment) where more is needed.

SÓC suggested that an awareness campaign of the material in existence could be done but acknowledged that there may be limitations in regards to its effectiveness.

JNíF suggested that research on the use of digital technologies could be included in COGG's research programme for 2024.

Models of provision for Irish medium education/ Participation in Irish medium education

The following recommendations were discussed:

- Significantly increase the number of Irish-medium settings
- In areas where there is insufficient population density to establish a stand-alone setting, adopt a satellite model
- Introduce a free travel system while demand is growing
- Examine possibilities of attracting English-medium (EM) schools to transition to Irish-medium schools
- Establish a right for parents to request Irish-medium education for their children
- Run an awareness campaign for parents
- Intensive language courses for late-comers to Irish-medium education

It was noted that specific measures are in place in relation to school transport to Irish-medium schools.

The process of schools transitioning from EM to IM was discussed. GO'L and JNíF discussed a possible pilot project and the potential challenges that could arise. JNíF noted that the supports provided under the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme could be utilised to support this process. MT added that CLIL programmes could be developed as a stepping stone to assist transitions.

SÓC asked about the online patronage process system (OPPS) and it was outlined that further development of the OPPS was needed in order to meet the demands of participants that make up substantial minorities. MT advised that changes had already been made to the system to allow schools to be pre-designated as IM schools in certain circumstances.

JNíF noted that 19% of students attending IM post-primary schools come from EM primary schools. MT suggested that good practice could be shared by schools in relation to supporting students transitioning from EM to IM settings.

Giving parents the right to request IM education was discussed and it was noted that this may not be required in the Irish context and that it could create difficulties.

Special educational needs and assessments

The following recommendations were discussed:

- Provide a guide for schools to ensure an inclusive system
- Develop a wide range of assessments in Irish
- Develop an appropriate teaching programme
- Provide teachers with professional development courses to enable them to meet the needs of all students

GO'L noted that a perception existed that IM education was unsuitable for children with SEN. SÓC noted that it was important that any awareness campaign reached parents. MT noted the difference in the proportion of SET hours claimed at primary level compared to post-primary level in IM schools.

CNíC noted the success of introduction courses on SEN supports for teachers through Irish and advised that further courses will take place in February.

JNíF stated that COGG have called for expressions of interest in regards to compiling a booklet for schools drawing together existing research in the area of SEN in IM education. AD noted this research could raise awareness of the existing resources.

CNíC noted that in regards to an awareness campaign, publicising the real life experience of those with SEN in Irish-medium settings would be informative.

Use of Irish in the community

The following recommendations were discussed:

- Employ regional language planning officers to build Irish language communities around schools (recommendation for DTCAGSM)
- Set up a dedicated unit in the Department with responsibility for provision of supports for promotion of the language
- Provide an additional teacher to each school with responsibility for language planning
- Provide free Irish language classes for parents/guardians

It was noted that engagement would be required with agencies and other departments on these recommendations, and that the responsibility for encouraging use of Irish in the community could not be left solely with schools. It was asked whether the scheme for language planning officers could be extended to include IM schools. Concerns were raised that the work of Irish language planning officers could become separated from other Irish language community endeavours.

JNíF noted that language planning officers are being made available to designated areas outside of the Gaeltacht who qualify as *Líonraí Gaeilge* or *Bailte Seirbhíse*.

4. Update on Comprehensive policy for Early Years Education

TW provided an update on the development of the DCEDIY strategy on Irish in Early Learning and Care Settings. The following points were discussed.

- The strategy will cover IM setting and use of Irish in EM settings
- The Aistear curriculum is being updated and will now include a reference to awareness of Irish
- A public consultation is being planned and research is to be commissioned to inform the policy
- A steering group has been formed with an AOG representative included.

It was agreed that TW would continue to provide updates at Steering Committee meetings in relation to development of the DCEDIY strategy.

5. Actions and next steps

Actions & next steps:

- AOG to meet bilaterally with relevant organisations and DE sections to further discuss actions for inclusion in policy
- Outline framework for the policy to be developed in advance of the next meeting.

***Gaeltacht Education Unit
November 2023***