An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Circular 0020/2024

To: Boards of Management, Principals and Teaching Staff of Primary Schools and Special Schools participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme

Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme: Continued Implementation of the Scheme (2024/25) in Primary Schools and Special Schools

1. Background

The Policy on Gaeltacht Education was launched in 2016 with the overarching goal of "ensuring that a high quality and relevant Irish-medium educational experience is available to all young people living in Gaeltacht areas". To support the implementation of this goal, the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme ("the Scheme") was established, which gives schools in Gaeltacht language-planning areas the opportunity to seek recognition as Gaeltacht Schools. Schools must meet specific language-based criteria (see Appendix 1) in order to achieve this recognition. Additional targeted supports are provided to schools to support them in implementing the Scheme.

In October 2022, a validation process commenced to ensure that the schools participating in the Scheme are meeting the language-based criteria for recognition as a Gaeltacht School. As part of this certification process, all schools in the Scheme are being visited by the Department's Inspectorate between October 2022 and the end of March 2024. Recognition as a Gaeltacht school will be awarded to a school when it is confirmed that the practice of the school has been developed in accordance with the language-based criteria for recognition as a Gaeltacht school and that the school has the capacity to fully meet the criteria in the near future.

By the start of the 2024/25 school year, it is intended that notice of official recognition as a Gaeltacht School will have been received by those schools that the Inspectorate have confirmed are meeting the criteria. A certain number of schools will still be on their journey to implement these criteria, and will have agreed (or be in the process of agreeing) an additional period of time with the Gaeltacht Education Unit to make further progress.

This Circular sets out the supports that will be provided to schools that have achieved recognition as a Gaeltacht school and to schools that have been granted an additional period of time in the Scheme. It also explains the obligations of recognised schools in the next period of the Scheme. These supports and duties have been discussed with stakeholders at meetings of the Advisory Committee on the Policy on

Gaeltacht Education and the views of the members of the Committee have been taken into account.

This Circular follows on from Circular 0010/2022 and previous circulars and guidance on the Scheme.

2. Supports for primary and special schools in the Scheme

It is understood that continuity will be required in the supports provided to schools in the Scheme to support them on their journey towards achieving best practice under each of the language-based criteria. On this basis, the supports provided to schools heretofore will continue for the next phase of the Scheme, insofar as the Department's budget constraints permit.

In the 2024/25 school year, the following supports will be provided:
- Language support hours for Irish based on school enrolment
- Annual grant (€1,200) to purchase Irish language teaching resources
- Advice from the Department's Inspectorate
- Continuing professional development and support from An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)
- Guidance for schools
- Sharing of best practice.

Language support hours for Irish

Language support hours for Irish will be provided to schools in the Scheme for the 2024/25 school year based on school enrolment on 30 September 2023, as set out in the tables below.

Language support hours for Irish – primary schools	
Primary enrolment on 30 September 2023	**Number of language support hours for Irish per week for the 2024/25 school year**
<48	5
48-77	7.5
78-135	10
136-168	12.5
169-237	15
238-457	17.5
>458	25

Appendix 2 contains guidance on how to make the most effective use of the language support hours for Irish. Schools will be expected to manage the allocation of these language support hours effectively. The use of these hours may be monitored during the Inspectorate's advisory/evaluation visits.

These Irish language support hours are provided as part-time hours for the schools participating in the Scheme. Primary schools and special schools can create clusters for permanent full-time teaching posts by combining their language support hours for Irish. Further details on the creation of clusters can be found in section 3 below.

Grant allocation

An annual grant of €1,200 will be paid in 2024 to all schools participating in the Scheme to purchase Irish language teaching resources to support high quality immersion education provision. A list of resources in Irish is available from [COGG's website](#).

Schools will be required to keep all records of expenditure for audit purposes in accordance with public procurement procedures (see provisions by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform: [Circular 0013/2014](#)). School authorities must also ensure that the requirements of the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform and the Department of Education in relation to the provision, use and disposal of assets are met.

Support from the Inspectorate

Advisory visits by inspectors will be provided to provide support to schools in the implementation of the language-based criteria. To request an advisory visit, schools should email aog@education.gov.ie with details of the area in which support is required.

In organising advisory visits, priority will be given to schools that have received an additional period of time to achieve recognition and who need support in implementing the language-based criteria.

Inspectors will work with schools to identify examples of good practice and innovative practice relating to the provision of high-quality immersion education.

CPD and supports from COGG

COGG will provide CPD support to schools participating in the Scheme. A combination of webinars and face-to-face sessions will continue to be provided. COGG will continue to facilitate opportunities to develop online networks of principals and teachers to identify and share best practice. Every effort will be made to minimise disruption to teacher-pupil contact time. COGG will provide details of CPD plans for schools participating in the Scheme.

If necessary, and as resources permit, substitution will be available in 2024/25 through the Online Claims System (OLCS), or under the management of the relevant Education and Training Board (ETB), up to a maximum of two days for two teachers in schools participating in the Scheme, to attend COGG seminars/workshops. These days can be claimed from the Online Claims System by selecting the following: *Continuing Professional Development /Professional Activities - Policy on Gaeltacht Education.*

A wide range of teaching and learning resources in Irish and for Irish are available on An Tairseach developed by COGG. Support will be provided to schools on how to access and use the online resources.

In addition, each school in the Scheme may apply to Oide – the support service for teachers and school leaders – for customised school support in all areas of teaching, learning and school self-evaluation. This can be sought through the usual contact channels for support from Oide. As part of their duties, the newly established GaelAonad in Oide, in collaboration with other sections of Oide, attends to the specific needs of schools that operate through the medium of Irish.

Guidance for schools

AOG has published a range of guidelines for Gaeltacht schools, including:

- Guidance for Gaeltacht Primary Schools: Indicators of Good Practice in Immersion Education
- Guidance for Gaeltacht Primary Schools: Strengthening links between primary schools and early learning and care (ELC) settings
- Guide for Gaeltacht Schools: Partnership with the public to promote the use of Irish

COGG is developing a Practical Guide for Gaeltacht primary schools in relation to meeting special educational needs in Irish-medium immersion settings. This Guide will be published before the end of 2024.

Sharing examples of best practice

A series of newsletters will be published by AOG to celebrate best practice and innovative immersion education practice taking place in schools participating in the Scheme. These newsletters will create opportunities for schools to share and celebrate their efforts in implementing the language-based criteria on an ongoing basis. It is intended that the newsletters will support schools in connecting with other schools that are in the Scheme network and will give schools an opportunity to learn from each other. The first edition of the newsletter will be sent to schools after Easter.

3. Clusters

Primary and special schools can come together in clusters and combine their language support hours for Irish to create permanent full-time teaching posts for the 2024/25 school year. Schools must ensure that the teachers selected for these posts are appropriately qualified and registered with the Teaching Council in accordance with the relevant recruitment circular, and that they have a high level of proficiency in Irish and a good understanding of immersion education.

For 2024/25, a school/cluster may combine Special Education Teacher hours and/or principal release days with the language support hours for Irish to create a permanent full-time post.

A School Cluster Application Form is available at Appendix 3 below and on the Department's website. The School Cluster Application Form should be sent to aog@education.gov.ie by **12 March 2024**.

Travel expenses for teachers travelling between schools in clusters

Teachers who are working as support teachers for Irish under the Scheme for the 2024/25 school year, and who are in a cluster with at least one other school, can apply for a refund of their travel expenses. This is available to those teachers who need to travel between schools in approved clusters under the Scheme to fulfil their teaching duties. Travel expenses are not payable to a teacher who has different contracts with part-time hours in more than one school outside of cluster arrangements.

The Travel Expenses Application Form to apply for the refund is available on gov.ie. 'Support Teacher for Irish (Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme)' should be selected in the 'employment details' question when filling in the form. The form should be signed by the principal in the base school. Scanned copies should be sent as attachments via the online form for travel claims.

Circular 0009/2015 explains the procedures for the payment of travel expenses to eligible teachers registered and employed as language support teachers and further information in relation to these services can be found on the gov.ie website.

4. Additional language supports for Irish as a result of a high number of new entrants

If there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils in a school in the Scheme since 30 September of the previous school year due to an increase in new entrants, the school may be entitled to additional support hours for Irish based on the bands set out in this Circular.

If the number of pupils now fits within a new band, the school can apply to AOG to request these additional hours. This is being done exceptionally in response to the increase in new entrants that schools are welcoming.

There can be no changes to existing school clusters due to the additional hours above. Schools must ensure that pupil data is properly registered on the POD system. Applications for additional Irish language support hours under these circumstances must be made on the application form available on gov.ie and sent to aog@education.gov.ie.

5. Whole-school action planning to strengthen immersion education

School self-evaluation enables schools to participate in a cyclical action planning process including regular review. As part of the action-planning process for

improvement, evidence should be gathered, appraisals made, specific targets identified, actions implemented, progress to targets monitored and reviewed, and new targets set out to reinforce the quality of immersion education in schools.

Schools participating in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme and the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme must continue to identify targets and actions that meet both the criteria of the Scheme and the DEIS Programme. They must clearly identify, review, and register these goals and activities in their school improvement plan. Insofar as is possible, the priority SSE areas that support the implementation of immersion education should be included under the relevant headings in the DEIS action plan.

Schools that have achieved Gaeltacht recognition, and schools that are still working to achieve it, must use the SSE planning system to build on the good work that has been done to date and address any recommendation(s) made by the inspectors in the reports arising from the validation process for recognition.

An SSE report and improvement plan should be prepared annually. The annual report and improvement plan should be shared with all board members and staff. Consideration should also be given as to how best to share the main points of the report and improvement plan with parents and pupils.

6. Duties of recognised Gaeltacht Schools

Each school which has been awarded recognition as a Gaeltacht School will continue to develop its practice in accordance with the language-based criteria. Schools will continue to inform their school communities of the progress made in meeting the language-based criteria. They may be asked to provide mentoring to other schools in the Scheme if required.

Schools will use school self-evaluation to guide progress in the implementation of the language-based criteria as they continue their journey towards best practice. Schools that received recommendations from the Inspectorate in the evaluation to achieve recognition as Gaeltacht schools will ensure that the recommendations are included as an integral part of the school's self-evaluation to facilitate their implementation.

Schools will be required to apply to the Department of Education to renew their recognition as a Gaeltacht School after a period of five years from the date on which the school was confirmed as having received recognition.

Recognised Gaeltacht Schools will be included in the Inspectorate's regular annual inspection programme. The individual status and context of the school as a Gaeltacht School will be taken into account when planning for school evaluations and advisory visits. Recommendations will be made in the evaluations as appropriate to support schools on an ongoing basis to strengthen and maintain their participation in the Scheme. If it appears during an inspection that a school is not satisfactorily meeting the language-based criteria, its recognition and supports may be reviewed during that five-year period.

7. Supports for schools with an additional period of time to implement the criteria

The supports available under the Scheme will continue to be provided to schools who have been granted an additional period of time in the Scheme. Additional targeted supports will be provided to support them in implementing the language-based criteria during this period, including:

- Mentoring from colleagues in recognised schools
- Advisory visits from the Department's Inspectorate
- Supports from COGG in relation to the development of an action plan
- Targeted CPD from COGG.

Other ways in which schools can be supported on their journey to achieve recognition will be considered.

8. Additional information

Continued participation by schools in the Scheme will depend on satisfying the conditions of this Circular and any other circulars relating to the Scheme. If, at any time, the Department determines that the conditions of the Scheme are not being met, the right to remove a school from the Scheme is retained. If a school is not satisfied with the Department's decision in relation to any particular aspect of the administration of the Scheme, it will be considered by an independent panel of appeals.

Queries in relation to the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme and/or the Policy on Gaeltacht Education should be emailed to aog@education.gov.ie.

Issued by: Muireann Tóibín, Gaeltacht Education Unit, Department of Education
Date: 26 February 2024

Principals of primary and special schools participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme are asked to please bring this Circular to the attention of all members of the board of management/education and training board, teaching staff (including those on leave of absence), the patron of the school, and the members of the support staff.

Appendix 1:
Language-based criteria for recognition as a Gaeltacht primary school: Self-monitoring of the school's progress in fulfilling the language-based criteria to strengthen immersion education

	The language-based criteria for a Gaeltacht primary school	1 to be implemented	2 progress made	3 being implemented
1	Implement a **two-year total-immersion programme**[1] through Irish in infant classes, during which no English will be taught			
2	Implement a **total-immersion approach**, where all areas of learning, apart from English, will be taught through Irish			
3	Deliver **high-quality educational experiences** through Irish to all pupils focusing particular attention on the **differentiated language needs** of native Irish speakers[2] as well as learners of Irish			
4	Develop a whole-**school action plan for improvement** that will: a) set out how the school will ensure the use of Irish as the language of communication, instruction and socialisation within the school and b) communicate and promote the benefits of learning Irish and learning through Irish to the school community (principal, staff, pupils, parents and board of management)	 a) b)		
5	**Review** the quality of educational provision through Irish to ensure continuous improvement **through the school self-evaluation (SSE) process**			
6	Provide Irish-language learning experiences in accordance with the **L1[3] learning outcomes in the *Primary Language Curriculum* for Gaeltacht** and Irish-medium schools			
7	**Use Irish-language resources** to support the teaching of all curricular areas through Irish, apart from the English curriculum			

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[1] A total-immersion programme in infant classes means that the learning environment operates solely through Irish and the teaching of English will commence from first class. This enables the fuller development of children's Irish-language capacities in infant classes.

[2] A native speaker of Irish is defined as a child who is raised through Irish in an Irish-language community and whose parents speak Irish as the main language of communication in the home, such being declared at the point of enrolment for school (*Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022*, p 11)

[3] L1 refers to Irish as the main language of the school in relation to teaching and learning, and communication in official, administrative and recreational affairs.

8	Deliver curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular **activities** (where provided) through Irish			
9	**Support their school community in the language-planning process** (under the Gaeltacht Act 2012) by contributing to the use and maintenance of Irish in the school and local Gaeltacht community			
10	**Prioritise the use of Irish in communicating** with parents, the local community and other parties			
11	Establish useful and mutually-beneficial **language and cultural links** with local Irish-medium **early-years settings** (*naíonraí*)			
12	Establish useful and mutually-beneficial language and cultural **links** with local Irish-medium **post-primary schools** and other Irish-medium primary schools			
13	Make every effort to recruit **teaching and ancillary staff** who are proficient in Irish and have a knowledge and understanding of pedagogical practice relevant to teaching through Irish as well as an understanding of the language and cultural dynamics of the Gaeltacht.			

Appendix 2:
Guide on how to make the most effective use of the additional support hours for Irish

At school management level

- The school's board of management and senior management team should monitor continuously how successfully the additional support hours for Irish are implemented to improve pupils' learning. The effectiveness of provision should be reviewed regularly through the school self-evaluation process.
- Collaboration at whole-school and class levels is required so that the role and responsibilities of mainstream teachers, the special education teacher, the support teacher for Irish and the language assistant are agreed in order to provide differentiated language support for pupils.

Planning for teaching and assessment in collaboration with mainstream teachers

- Both formative and summative assessments of the pupils' language competence in Irish should be carried out to monitor their progress, and this should be done in collaboration with other relevant teachers and with the language assistant.
- As part of the school-improvement planning process, schools should make use of recent assessment results to identify the language-learning needs of pupils. This will assist all teachers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the language needs of pupils, and to plan interventions accordingly to address the priority language competences of pupils.
- Clear records of the progress of all learners in Irish should be maintained to inform the teaching and learning process, and the relevant information should be shared with parents, as appropriate.
- It is particularly important that pupils' self-awareness as language learners be developed through the assessment process and it would be beneficial to develop pupils' self-assessment and peer-assessment skills.
- It is recommended that pupils be enabled to develop a language diary/learning log to demonstrate their language competence and progress and help them monitor and self-evaluate their learning journey. This diary/log could be designed in a manner that would show pupils' learning goals, their learning goals attained, and the learning experiences that proved challenging on their language-learning journey.

At class level

- Pupils need to be taught the academic language and terminology associated with the various curricular areas. Regular opportunities should be provided to enable pupils to practise and acquire the new terminology in creative and innovative ways.
- Pupils' early experience of language learning is an important starting point for further language development. In infant classes, an early intervention Irish-language literacy programme, based on the principles of Aistear, should be implemented in collaboration with the support teacher and class teacher, with a particular focus on the specific language needs of both native speakers and learners with limited Irish.
- The native speaker of Irish provides a rich source for the language development of all pupils. Their language competence should also be developed and further enriched through group activities and team teaching.
- The use of differentiated teaching strategies, questioning, games and communication tasks is recommended. Enriched language input from the teacher and participation in

interactive tasks, such as project work, role-play, drama, discussion, and cooperative learning, help pupils to identify and manipulate target structures in the language. This greatly enhances their self-confidence in speaking Irish.

- Pupils' participation can be encouraged and their language skills developed through the use of digital technology and Irish-language digital links, whether pupils are in school or at home.
- Literature should be used to develop pupils' writing and reading skills as well as to develop their language enrichment, accuracy, awareness and creativity in an integrated manner, as laid down in the Primary Language Curriculum.
- It is especially important that pupils be provided with a wide range of reading and literary material in Irish covering a wide range of genres, including local and oral literature, which is suited to their interests, age and ability in the language.
- Pupils should be made aware of celebrated speakers of Irish in the local community and further afield, who are a source of Irish-language enrichment and wisdom. The school should avail of opportunities to invite such guest speakers to stimulate pupils' pride in Irish language and culture.

Outside the class

- It is through participation in language and cultural events that pupils' motivation, language competency and identity as Irish speakers in their own community and beyond are strengthened. Such activities include literary competitions or festivals, entrepreneurship, reporting, debating, arts and sports as well as participation in Irish-language movements and in networks with pupils in other L1 all-Irish schools.

Appendix 3

Primary School Cluster Application Form 2024/25
(Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme)
Application form to create a permanent full-time post through a cluster of schools for 2024/25

This form must be completed and an electronic copy (scanned with signatures) returned by email aog@education.gov.ie to the Gaeltacht Education Unit **by 12 March 2024.**

	Schools must ensure that the selected teachers have a high level of proficiency in Irish and a good understanding of immersion education so that they can fulfil the roles, as required.	
	Cluster options	**Please tick one option**
A	Cluster language support hours for Irish **between schools**	
B	Combine language support hours for Irish with special education teaching hours and/or principal release days **between schools**	
C	Combine language support hours for Irish with special education teaching hours and/or principal release days **in the same school**	

Base school details for the permanent full-time post to be created by clustering hours (1 post = 25 hours)	
Name of base school: (The base school must be participating in the Scheme)	
Roll number:	
School address:	

School email:		
Phone number:		

Details of partner schools for the permanent full-time post to be created by clustering hours (1 post = 25 hours)						
	Name of school	**Roll number**	**Total number of Irish language support hours allocated to the school under the Scheme**	**Number of Irish language support hours in the cluster**	**Number of principal release hours in the cluster**	**Number of special education teaching hours in the cluster**
Base school						
Second school						
Third school						
Total hours in cluster:						

Details of Irish language support hours not used in this cluster (i.e. total number of language support hours less language support hours in the cluster). These hours will be approved as part-time hours on the OLCS.		
	Name of school	**Roll number**	**Number of hours for language support for Irish <u>NOT</u> used in cluster**
Base school			
Second school			
Third school			

All cluster arrangements **for full-time posts arising from Irish language support hours will be for the 2024/25 school year only.**

Note: In the exceptional case that a school participates in more than one cluster, the appropriate form must be submitted for each cluster.

Declaration

I declare that the above information is accurate and that I agree with the proposed cluster arrangements for this position as set out above.

BASE SCHOOL: Name of school: _____ **Roll number:** _____

_____ _____ _____
Signature of principal of base school   **Signature of chairperson of base school**   **Date**

SECOND SCHOOL: Name of school: _____ **Roll number:** _____

_____ _____ _____
Signature of principal of second school   **Signature of chairperson of second school**   **Date**

THIRD SCHOOL: Name of school: _____ **Roll number:** _____

_____ _____ _____
Signature of principal of third school   **Signature of chairperson of third school**   **Date**

The information in this form will be made available to the relevant sections of the Department, as required. A copy of this form will be given to the Department's Teacher Allocation Section for their records.