



Circular 0015/2026

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 (2026/27) in
Primary Schools and Special Schools**

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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 was established in 2017 to support schools in Gaeltacht language planning areas to provide high quality Irish-medium education to their communities. Schools must meet specific language-based criteria in order to achieve official recognition as a Gaeltacht School, and targeted supports are provided to schools to help them achieve this.

Official recognition as a Gaeltacht School was awarded to 101 primary schools at a series of regional events that took place in October 2024. Recognised Gaeltacht Schools are expected to continue to implement the language-based criteria as laid out under the scheme, and to build on what they have achieved to move towards best practice in immersion education.

Supports will continue to be provided to all schools participating in the scheme to support them in implementing the language-based criteria.¹ There is a commitment in the Programme for Government 2025 - Securing Ireland's Future - to continue to provide these supports for Gaeltacht Schools.

Primary schools located within Gaeltacht language planning areas, that are not participating in the scheme, are encouraged to join the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme at any time during the 2026/27 school year, if they so wish. Information on the procedure to be undertaken and supports available to school authorities can be found in [Circular 0022/2024](#) which was issued to schools in February 2024.

This circular sets out the supports that will be provided to schools that have achieved recognition as Gaeltacht Schools and to schools that are still on their journey towards achieving recognition as a Gaeltacht School. It also outlines the obligations of recognised schools in the next phase of the scheme.

This circular follows on from [Circular 0010/2025](#) and previous circulars and guidance on the scheme.

2. Supports for primary and special schools participating in the scheme

For the next phase of the scheme, supports will be provided to schools to support them on their journey towards achieving best practice under each of the [language-based criteria](#).

In the 2026/27 school year, the following supports will be provided:

- Language support hours for Irish based on school enrolment
- Annual Gaeltacht School grant (€1,200)
- Advice from the Department of Education and Youth's Inspectorate
- Professional learning experiences and support from An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)
- Professional learning experiences and support from Oide
- Guidance for schools and sharing of effective practice.

Language support hours for Irish

Language support hours for Irish will be provided to schools participating in the scheme for the 2026/27 school year based on school enrolment on 30 September 2025, as set out in the table below.

¹ These supports will continue to be provided insofar as the department's budgetary constraints permit.

Language support hours for Irish – primary schools	
Primary enrolment on 30 September 2025	Number of language support hours for Irish per week for the 2026/27 school year
<48	5
48-77	7.5
78-135	10
136-168	12.5
169-237	15
238-457	17.5
>457	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 evaluated during evaluation visits from the Inspectorate.

Schools must ensure that teachers selected for these language support hours 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.

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.

Gaeltacht School grant allocation

An annual grant of €1,200 will be paid in 2026/27 to all schools participating in the Scheme to support high-quality immersion education provision and the implementation of the language-based criteria.

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 Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation and the Department of Education and Youth in relation to the provision, use and disposal of assets are met.

Advice from the Department of Education and Youth’s Inspectorate

Schools are encouraged to refine their school self-evaluation (SSE) processes to critically assess and enhance their Irish-language immersion practices, ensuring they continue to meet the language-based criteria set out for the scheme.

Schools may continue to request advisory visits from the Inspectorate for support in using the SSE process to achieve best practice under each 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.

Professional learning experiences (PLE) and support from COGG

COGG will provide professional learning experiences and support to schools participating in the scheme. A combination of webinars, face-to-face sessions and conferences/seminars will continue to be provided (including seminars for school leaders and for newly qualified teachers). COGG will continue to facilitate opportunities to develop online and in-person networks of school leaders and teachers to identify and share effective practice. Details of PLE plans for schools participating in the scheme will be shared by COGG with schools in due course. Every effort will be made to minimise disruption to teacher-pupil contact time.

If necessary, and as resources permit, substitution will be available in 2026/27 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 participating schools, to attend COGG seminars/workshops. These days can be claimed through the OLCS 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 these online resources.

Professional learning experiences (PLE) and support from Oide

Each school participating in the scheme may apply to Oide – the support service for school leaders and teachers – 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 GaelAonad in Oide, in collaboration with other divisions in Oide, attends to the specific professional learning needs of schools that operate through the medium of Irish.

Professional learning material, which may support Gaeltacht schools, is available on the [Oide website](#).

Guidance for schools and sharing of effective practice

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

- [Guide for Gaeltacht Primary Schools: Indicators of Good Practice in Immersion Education](#)
- [Guide 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 has published [Táscairí Dea-chleachtais maidir le Soláthar Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais i mBunscoileanna agus i Scoileanna Speisialta Gaeltachta](#) (Indicators of Good Practice for Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in

Primary Schools and Special Schools in the Gaeltacht) which provides practical guidance for Gaeltacht primary and special schools in relation to meeting special educational needs in Irish-medium immersion settings.

An tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta/The Gaeltacht Education Unit (AOG) publishes a biannual newsletter – [Scéal na Scéime](#) – to celebrate effective and innovative immersion education practice taking place in schools participating in the Scheme. Schools are continuously finding effective ways to overcome challenges in a changing educational landscape while remaining fully aligned with the core principles and criteria of the scheme. Scéal na Scéime creates opportunities for schools to share and celebrate their efforts in implementing the language-based criteria on an ongoing basis. The newsletters set out to support schools in connecting with other Gaeltacht Schools and to give schools an opportunity to learn from each other.

If a school participating in the scheme is interested in sharing their effective practice, the school is encouraged to fill in this [expression of interest form](#) and to forward it to AOG at aog@education.gov.ie.

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 2026/27 school year.

For 2026/27, 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 gov.ie website. The School Cluster Application Form should be sent to aog@education.gov.ie by **28 April 2026**.

Travel expenses for teachers travelling between schools in clusters

Teachers who are working as support teachers for Irish under the scheme for the 2026/27 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 [payroll contact form](#).

[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. Schools with a high number of new entrants

If there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils in a school participating 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 language 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.

There can be no changes to existing school clusters due to the approval of 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 recognition as a Gaeltacht School, and schools that are still working towards achieving 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 SSE 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 process to facilitate their implementation.

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

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 implementation of immersion education. 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. 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,
Acting Principal Officer
Gaeltacht Education Unit
Department of Education and Youth

Date: 26 March 2026

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.
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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	2	3
		to be implemented	progress made	being implemented
1	Implement a two-year total-immersion programme ² 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/Modern Foreign Languages, 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 ³ 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 L1⁴ learning outcomes in the <i>Primary Language Curriculum for Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools</i>			
7	Use Irish-language resources to support the teaching of all curricular			

² 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.

³ 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)

⁴ 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.

	areas through Irish, apart from the English curriculum			
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 (<i>naíonraí</i>)			
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 language 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

- 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 support 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.
- Both formative and summative assessments of the pupils' language competence and learning objectives in Irish should be carried out to monitor those learning objectives and improvements in the learning outcomes of the pupils, and this should be done in collaboration with other relevant teachers and with the language assistant.
- All teachers (including Support Teachers for Irish and special education teachers) should retain 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 and pupils, 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

- The Irish-language support teacher should play a central role in formal discussion about the specific terminology of the various subjects and in making appropriate preparation with the subject teachers on a phased and developmental basis to pre-teach the academic language to the pupils or to teach it during joint classroom instruction.
- 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 the Primary Language Curriculum and building upon 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 activities 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 outlined 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 activities and projects with pupils in other L1 Irish-medium schools.
- It is also recommended that links be fostered with the local Language Planning Officer and that cultural and language events are promoted in the school community and in the local community.

Appendix 3: Primary School Cluster Application Form 2026/27

(Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme)

Application form to create a permanent full-time post through a cluster of schools for 2026/27

This form must be completed and an electronic copy (scanned with signatures) returned by email to the Gaeltacht Education Unit aog@education.gov.ie by 28 April 2026.

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 Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme)	
Roll number:	
School address:	
School email:	

Phone number:	
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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						
Fourth 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			
Fourth school			

All cluster arrangements **for full-time posts arising from Irish language support hours will be for the 2026/27 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

FOURTH SCHOOL: Name of school: _____ Roll number: _____

Signature of principal of fourth 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.

The main reason the department needs the personal data you are providing is to make arrangements for a cluster of schools to create a shared post. This is on the basis of the additional hours provided to schools under the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme. The personal information provided may be exchanged with other sections in the Department of Education and Youth and with other schools involved in cluster arrangements. Details of the department's data protection policy outlining how your personal data will be used, as well as information about your rights as a data subject, are available at gov.ie.