

GAELSCOILEANNA TEO. Policy on the Structure of Irish-medium Units at Post-primary Level

This document sets out GAELSCOILEANNA TEO.'s policy on the appropriate structure for Irish-medium Units at post-primary level. This policy has been developed in consultation with established Irish-medium Units and the organisation's Board of Directors.

Background

GAELSCOILEANNA TEO. Mission

GAELSCOILEANNA TEO. is the coordinating body for Irish-medium schools. GAELSCOILEANNA TEO.'s mission is to promote Irish-medium education and to support communities wishing to develop Irish-medium education in their area. The organisation's mission statement is:

"To establish and maintain high-quality Irish-medium education throughout the country and to develop and strengthen the Irish-language community and culture."

It has been proven internationally that the most effective method of language acquisition for school students in a second language is to immerse them in that language during the school day (the immersion system). To do this, students must be free of the influence of the major language during these periods of immersion. The best way to facilitate this is to provide a gaelscoil or gaelcholáiste, in which all aspects of school life can be catered for through Irish.

It is GAELSCOILEANNA TEO.'s policy to establish independent post-primary schools, to allow for continuity in Irish-medium education for pupils of gaelscoileanna and to allow students from other schools access to immersion education at post-primary level. In GAELSCOILEANNA TEO.'s experience it is much more difficult to establish an Irish-medium post-primary school than it is to establish an Irish-medium primary school. Therefore, Irish-medium Units are sometimes established in English-medium schools. This is due to local circumstances, usually related to the geography and population of the area.

However, there are difficulties and challenges associated with immersion education in Irish-medium Units that are greater than those faced by an independent gaelcholáiste.

To overcome some of these challenges, Irish-medium Units need basic supports in order to provide effective Irish-medium education for those who to trust in that system.

Definition of an Irish-Medium Unit

An Irish-medium Unit is a linguistic unit in which students are immersed in Irish from the beginning to the end of the school day. The Irish-medium Unit operates within a parent school where English is the language of communication and teaching language of the school. The Irish-medium Unit is similar to a small school, organised and run through a minority language while the parent school is run through the everyday language of the community.

The Irish-medium Unit is usually located on the same campus as the parent school and often within the same building.

Definition of a Parent School

In this document, the definition of a parent school is an English-medium post-primary school where an Irish-medium Unit (as defined above) is in operation. The principal of this school is in charge of managing the parent school and the Irish-medium Unit, while the Director is in charge of the daily management of the Irish-medium Unit (see the section on the role of the Director).

Accommodation

As the Irish-medium Unit's main goal is that Irish only be used during the school day, the Irish-medium Unit should ideally have its own building. If that can not be provided, there should be at least a wing or an independent extension of its own provided for the Irish-medium Unit. Special purpose rooms can be shared between the Irish-medium Unit and the parent school.

Provision should be made for:

- Social space of their own for students of the Irish-medium Unit for break time and lunchtime, where Irish would be in use during these periods.
- Separate staff room for teachers from the Irish-medium Unit
- Separate administrative office for the Irish-medium Unit
- Office for the Director

Management of the Irish-medium Unit:

The Irish-medium Unit should have its own Board of Management, independent of the Board of the parent school, and this Board should convene at least 5 times a year. Decisions regarding the Irish-medium Unit should always be made in conjunction with the Director and the Irish-medium Unit's Board of Management. Irish should be the Board's language of communication. There should be regular communication between the Board of Management of the Irish-medium Unit and that of the parent school.

Representation on the Board of the Irish-medium Unit

The following are recommended as members of the board of the Unit:

- Director of the Irish-medium Unit should act as secretary
- Principal of the parent school (attending)
- Two parents (one mother and one father) with children in the Irish-medium Unit
- Two teachers from the Irish-medium Unit's staff
- Representatives of the trustees (depending on local circumstances)
- Two persons active in the local Irish language community

The Board should function under the rules of the Education Act, 1998. In addition, the Board would have a role in drafting and approving the ethos and policies of the Irish-medium Unit as well as advisory role regarding:

- Curriculum
- Staffing requirements
- Resources
- Irish language cultural events
- Accommodation and maintenance
- Making a submission to the Board of Management of the parent school on matters pertaining to the Irish-medium Unit

The Irish-medium Unit should have its own Parents Committee, which should work in cooperation with the Parents Committee in the parent school.

The Irish-medium Unit should have its own Student Council, which should work in cooperation with the Student Council in the parent school.

The Irish-medium Unit should have its own prospectus and school diary.

Daily Management of the Irish-Medium Unit

Director (original title: Teacher in Charge/Múinteoir i bhfeighil)

Irish-medium Units should have their own ex-quota Directors.

The Director should function as day-to-day manager of the Irish-medium Unit but he/she should work under the direction and in partnership with the Principal of the parent school. The Director should be given the opportunity to do development and management training.

Status of the Director

The authority of the Director within the Irish-medium Unit needs to be clarified. It needs to be understood that the Director has senior management authority within the Irish-medium Unit.

The Director would have formal input with regard to the following:

- Choice and range of subjects in the Irish-medium Unit
- Staffing requirements
- Recruitment of staff associated with the Irish-medium Unit
- Recommendations for the selection of staff from the parent school to teach in the Irish-medium Unit, in conjunction with the school principal
- Professional development of teachers to teach through Irish
- Timetable for the Irish-medium Unit in accordance with the timetable for the parent school
- Accommodation/Maintenance of the Irish-medium Unit
- Management of the Irish-medium Unit and allocation of resources
- Communication with parents of children in the Irish-medium Unit
- The promotion of the Irish language and culture outside the classroom
- Developing and maintaining relationships with the local Irish-speaking community and national Irish-language groups
- Networking with other directors in other Irish-medium Units (GAELSCOILEANNA TEO. would have a coordinating role in this)

Directors of Irish-medium Units under the patronage of the Vocational Educational Committee should have the opportunity to attend meetings of the senior management of those committees.

Administrative Support

It is very important that secretarial services through Irish be available to the Director and staff of the Irish-medium Unit.

The amount of secretarial support required would depend on the number of students in the Irish-medium Unit but a minimum of twenty hours per week would be necessary for each Irish-medium Unit.

There should be a dedicated telephone number/email address/fax number, etc. for the Irish-medium Unit.

Range of Subjects in the Irish-medium Unit

- All core subjects should be available through Irish and at least 13 subjects in total should be available at Junior Certificate level.
- A complete transition-year program should be available to the Irish-medium Unit.
- At Leaving Certificate level the following subjects should be available through Irish:
 - the core subjects
 - European languages
 - subjects from every band available in the parent school

Staff in the Irish-medium Unit

Any staff dealing with the Irish-medium Unit should be able to do so through Irish and be willing to work through the medium of Irish (including subject teachers, special needs assistants, counsellors, etc.). These staff should have a duty to promote the Irish-language ethos of the Irish-medium Unit. The staff of the Irish-medium Unit should be able to provide learning support and resource teaching through Irish to students in the Irish-medium Unit.

Teacher Allocation for the Irish-medium Unit

Any teachers appointed by the parent school should be able to teach through Irish. This will help to ensure the flow of teachers for the Irish-medium Unit.

It is very important that there be a specific teacher allocation for the Irish-medium Unit. If there is not a specific teacher allocation for the Irish-medium Unit, it may create conflict between teachers in the parent school and teachers in the Irish-medium Unit because the Irish-medium Unit may be perceived to be drawing teacher resources away from the parent school.

This can occur because the class sizes in Irish-medium Units are usually much smaller than those in the parent school.

The teacher allocation of the Unit should be in line with the allocation for a small school i.e.

Small school	Irish-medium Unit
Ex-quota Principal	Ex-quota Director
Additional ex-quota Teacher	Additional ex-quota Teacher
Additional teaching hours - ex-quota	Additional teaching hours - ex-quota

Teaching hours and salary of the Director

An agreement needs to be attained on the amount of hours a Director would be teaching as well as on the salary available to them that would illustrate the job that they do and the extra responsibilities that go with it.

Positions of Responsibility in the Irish-medium Unit

The Irish-medium Unit should have dedicated positions of responsibility and the number of these positions should correspond with student numbers in the Irish-medium Unit.

Assistant Director

- An Irish-medium Unit should have deputy director appointed based on the same student numbers as the appointment of a vice-principal in a small school.
- The appointee to this position should receive an allowance commensurate with that of a teacher with special responsibilities.

Finance for the Irish-medium Unit

There must be a dedicated budget available to the Irish-medium Unit to meet the needs of the Irish-medium education system, including the administration of the Irish-medium Unit. Money should be given on a pro-rata basis to the Irish-medium Unit (from Department of Education grants, etc.) or the equivalent spent directly on the Irish-medium Unit. Any money raised by the parents committee of the Irish-medium Unit should go directly to the Irish-medium Unit.

Identity of the Irish-medium Unit:

The Irish-medium Unit should demonstrate its identity through having a slightly different school uniform to that of the parent school (a different tie or motto at least), separate stationery, formal publications (e.g. newsletter). It is recommended that a separate intercom be available to the Irish-medium Unit if there is one in use in the parent school. It is recommended that the Irish-medium Unit confer its own certificates/awards or that it should have its own awards ceremony.

Normal communication and announcements in the Irish-medium Unit should be in Irish or at least bilingual, when necessary.

If a principal or a new vice-principal is to be appointed to a parent school with an Irish-medium Unit, care should be taken ensure that the person appointed speaks Irish, or has an understanding of the language. Any principal or vice-principal dealing with the Irish-medium Unit should do so through the medium of Irish as much as possible, particularly when dealing with teachers and students of the Irish-medium Unit. This will contribute to the Irish-language identity of the Irish-medium Unit and give it proper recognition.

The Irish-medium Unit has a positive effect on the parent school and the bilingual rights of the school as a whole

Where a particular event is not exclusive to the Irish-medium Unit, the Irish language should be included in events that involve the school as a whole. Examples:

- Mass/school assembly - lectures/music/presentations, etc. in Irish
- School website/Facebook, etc. to be bilingual, with a link to information about the Irish-medium Unit on the main page
- The Irish-medium Unit should have its own examination reports
- School Plan
 - Plan specific to the Irish-medium Unit (Board minutes, Irish-medium Unit structure, etc. to be included here)
 - The school development plan should give significant recognition to the development of Irish-medium education in the Irish-medium Unit
 - Policy on Irish-medium education in the Irish-medium Unit

It is recommended, as much as possible, that the parent school's advertising/announcements be bilingual.

Recognition from the Department of Education

The Department of Education should grant official permanent recognition to the Irish-medium Unit. **It needs to be clarified within each section of the Department of Education that Irish-medium Units can be in any sort of post-primary school (community schools, VEC schools, voluntary schools, etc.).**

- Examinations in the Irish-medium Unit - all students from the Irish-medium Unit should sit exams together to allow for the practical distribution of their examination papers. The supervisor for examinations in the Irish-medium Unit should have Irish.
- An allowance for teaching through Irish must be paid on a pro-rata basis to every teacher who teaches through Irish in the Irish-medium Unit.
- There should be a recognised option available, in appropriate circumstances, to allow the Irish-medium Unit to become an independent school, depending on demand.
- Any correspondence from the Department of Education to the Irish-medium Unit should be in Irish.

Establishment of new Irish-medium Units

If it can be proven that there is ongoing demand in a post-primary catchment area for Irish-medium post-primary education, school management should be entitled to establish an Irish-medium Unit with 15 students in first year.

A range of subjects and teacher allowance must be provided for these Irish-medium Units in accordance with what has been set down in this document. A plan for the expansion of the Irish-medium Unit must be agreed between the school, the patron and management of the Irish-medium Unit, with defined goals for growing numbers of students, curriculum provision, recruitment of teachers, etc.

An Irish-medium Unit becoming an independent school

The development plan referred to above should include an agreed point at which the Irish-medium Unit should be awarded recognition as an independent Irish-medium school. GAELSCOILEANNA TEO. recommends that forward planning for the independence of the Unit should be in place when the unit is established.

- In order to facilitate this process, a contract would need to be signed with the parent school's board of management and patron, and with the Department of Education and Skills at the establishment of the Unit. This will ensure that the Unit will have independence when certain criteria are fulfilled. Factors that should be amongst these criteria include:
 - A specific number of pupils that the Unit will have attained

- A list of pupils that will attend the Unit in the future that illustrates a growth in the number of pupils
- When the above criteria are fulfilled there will be a need for:
 - Planning for the date when the Unit will be transferred into an independent school.
 - Making provision for the teachers that were teaching in the Unit.
 - Keeping their pay rights etc. that they had in the Unit.
 - Making arrangements regarding seniority of the staff in the new school
 - Making provision for any resources that belong to the Unit, for example ensuring that there is allocation and resources available to support pupils with special needs in the new school.
 - Planning for the curriculum in the new school.
 - Find appropriate accommodation for the new school if it doesn't exist already. It's important that the new school has its own site.
 - Procure a school roll number from the Department of Education.
- When the Unit has achieved recognition as a new school there would need to be a system that ensures that the change happens as seamlessly as possible. To that end it is recommended:
 - That there is cooperation between the new school and another school (the old parent school for example) to give the pupils the opportunity to continue with some subjects that they began in English in the parent school where that subject isn't available in the new school (in particular if those pupils are in senior classes), and to give the new school an opportunity to deliver a wider subject choice if the school deems necessary.
 - That there would be provision for an interim management period to support the new school and to manage the change, if this is deemed necessary. Otherwise a board of management or a sub-committee of the local Education and Training Board will need to be appointed to manage the new school.

GAELSCOILEANNA TEO.

Irish-medium Units are encouraged to register with GAELSCOILEANNA TEO. to avail of support and to network with other Irish-medium Units and Irish-medium post-primary schools. Information on the organisation is available at www.gaelscoileanna.ie.