

Language and Literacy in Irish-medium primary schools –end of consultation process.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in collaboration with An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG), today hosted a seminar on *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium primary schools* in the Gresham Hotel, Upper O' Connell Street, Dublin 1.

Findings from the NCCA's consultation on Language and Literacy in Irish-medium schools were presented at today's seminar. The consultation was designed to gather input from the sector to support the NCCA's work in developing guidelines for schools on the introduction of language and literacy in Irish-medium schools – especially in the infant classes – and advising the Minister for Education and Science in particular on this issue. Questionnaires and written submissions were used to gather information from the sector. In total the NCCA received 613 completed questionnaires and 14 written submissions.

Chief among the issues identified in the consultation were the implications for school policy and practice concerning:

- Introducing emergent literacy and literacy (in both languages)
- Teaching oral language (in both languages)
- Supporting children with language and literacy difficulties
- Involving parents in supporting their children's learning
- Providing adequate teaching resources and assessment instruments
- The need for continuing professional development for teachers

The views of children who participated in the consultation were also presented. 93% of the children who responded said that they learned Irish through listening and talking to the teacher, while 88% said that they learned English from the television, and 87% from talking to others outside school!

The seminar looked at possible future scenarios for the introduction of language and literacy in Irish-medium schools, and the implications of each for school policy and practice. In each case, the importance of engaging with parents was underlined and consistency across the school was emphasised. The best means of supporting children with special educational needs in Irish-medium schools was also considered.

The final report on the consultation and the advice to the Minister on the introduction of language and literacy in Irish-medium schools, will be presented to Council early in the New Year. Once approved by Council the consultation report and the advice will be forwarded to the Minister for Education and Science and posted on the NCCA website.

In her introductory remarks, the Chief Executive of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Dr. Anne Looney noted that the consultation had been significant for the numbers of parents who had responded and shown a keen interest in the issues raised. She stressed the complexity of language learning, and the challenges of ensuring that children's best interests are served while still meeting the needs of Irish-language communities and families. 'The advice of the NCCA to the Minister on this issue will put children first', she said, 'but we can't consider the needs of children in isolation from their families and communities. The future of the Irish language is a question of national importance, and Irish-medium education has a part to play in ensuring that future. But we cannot place the burden of restoring and revitalising the language on the backs of the next generation; if we are to look to a brighter future for Irish, then we must ensure that it is no burden, but a joy to learn, to speak and to hear'

Ends

Further information from

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