

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN IRISH-MEDIUM PRIMARY SCHOOLS

DESCRIPTIONS OF PRACTICE

Consultative Paper

June 2006

beartas agus pleanáil - an teanga labh
artha - tús na léitheoireachta agus an
léitheoireacht - an scríbhneoireacht -
tacaíocht d'fhorbairt na teanga
agus na litearthachta
beartas ag

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Introduction

The acquisition of language is a complex process. How best to support the development of children's language and literacy is an ongoing challenge for primary schools and for policy-makers. Researchers continue to investigate how children acquire their first and further languages, how they learn to read and write, how they develop the ability to question, to imagine and to create through language.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) will soon begin to prepare guidelines for teachers to support children's language and literacy development in Irish-medium primary schools. The NCCA will also be advising the Minister for Education and Science on future policy in this area. When a child is learning a language that may not be the language of their home, nor of their local community, or when a child is learning through a language that is not their first language, the complex issues associated with language learning become even more complex.

This document presents the stories of six schools where these complex issues are faced every day in classrooms and in school yards. The schools are real; in this document they are presented as school a, b, c, etc. The schools agreed to allow the NCCA to spend time in the school gathering information from staff, parents and children on how the school supports the introduction and development of language and literacy in Irish and English. When each description of practice was in its final stages, it was sent back to the relevant school for checking. All six schools agreed that what is presented here reflects their practice and their challenges.

Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools: Descriptions of Practice, offers a unique insight into how six schools support language and literacy development. Other schools may approach language and literacy in other ways. The six were chosen not because they represented the best ways,

but because they showed how schools were responding in different ways to the complexity of language learning.

This document is primarily a consultative tool, which the NCCA will use to work in partnership with the education sector in designing the guidelines. The six stories are intended to focus the consultation on the challenges faced by Irish-medium schools in 21st century Ireland. Each description of practice provides information under the following headings:

- 1 Policy and planning
- 2 Oral language
- 3 Emergent reading and reading
- 4 Writing
- 5 Resources for language and literacy development.

The voices of children, parents, teachers and school principals are presented in each of the descriptions. They focus on the key issues that are fundamental to understanding approaches to the introduction and development of language and literacy in Irish-medium schools. The descriptions of practice have been prepared to provide a stimulus for readers in sharing ideas about different approaches to language and literacy development in Irish-medium schools.

It is important that teachers, principals, parents, and all who have a leadership role or an interest in the work of Irish-medium schools, take the time to read and to reflect the ideas presented through these descriptions of practice, and provide feedback to the NCCA. The views of young people, who have experienced Irish-medium primary education, and are now in second level education, will also be important in this consultation.

The five headings outlined above will also be used to structure feedback and responses during the consultation process. The NCCA will consult with

the education sector on these key issues concerning children's language and literacy development beginning in June 2006. The purpose of the *Summary of Issues* (Appendix A) is to facilitate those who may wish to develop a submission based on the issues that have emerged from the six descriptions of practice. The summary includes some questions which may be of assistance to those preparing submissions. The questions are neither exhaustive nor exclusive.

The consultation period will continue until the end of September 2006. The elements of the consultation phase will include

- a survey which will be available for completion in hard copy and online at www.ncca.ie (closing date Friday 14th July 2006)
- receipt of submissions by interested individuals or organisations in response to the consultative document *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium primary schools: Descriptions of Practice*. (final date for receipt of submissions 27th September 2006)
- the organisation of an invitational seminar to discuss the responses received and the development of guidelines on the introduction of language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools.

The NCCA wishes to thank the six schools who allowed their work to be presented here, and who engaged with the NCCA team over a number of weeks of meetings and visits. Their openness and honesty reflected their commitment to this consultation process and to the development of policy and guidelines on this important and complex issue.

Scoil A: Scoil Ghaeltachta

Scoil Ghaeltachta	Between 50 and 100 children	5 staff*
First language of the children	English is the first language of the majority. A minority speak Irish as a first language. However, most children are bilingual to varying degrees.	
Language/s spoken at home	English is spoken in all homes while Irish is spoken in many homes.	
Pre-school experience	Many children have pre-school experience in an Irish-medium setting.	
Post-primary opportunities	There are Irish-medium schools for boys and girls in the nearby town.	
Language policy of the school	English is taught as a subject in all classes, and all other instruction is through Irish. Children begin formal reading in Irish at the end of the first term in junior infants and in English at Easter in junior infants.	

* including the services of a Learning-Support and Resource Teacher

1. Policy and Planning

Policy and implementation

Both languages were taught in all classes. Children began reading in Irish first, and then in English. Teachers encouraged children to speak Irish by praising them for doing so and rewarding classes who spoke Irish in the yard.

The aim of the school, as stated by the Principal was for all children to leave the school speaking Irish and enjoying it. She explained this as follows, *go bhfágfadh gach leanbh an scoil agus é ar a gcumas Gaeilge nádúrtha a labhairt. Go mbainfeadh siad taitneamh as an teanga, uimhir a haon - go mbeadh sí acu go nádúrtha agus iad ag fágaint na scoile.* The school also placed great emphasis on developing the children's English, and promoted reading in English as a means of enhancing the children's oral language.

Factors that influenced the school's language policy

The language profile of children attending this school has changed significantly in recent years. Children arrive in school now with a diversity of language competence in Irish and English. Of the six children who started in junior infants last year, the Principal noted that just two came to school with what was described as very good Irish. One parent said,

There are very few native Irish speakers left, as such... That they would be speaking from day one. That both parents would speak Irish to them from day one ... You could actually count them. In this parish, anyway ... Most children are brought up with both. (Parent)

Teachers reported that their biggest challenge was the amount of time spent on developing children's competence in Irish, particularly in junior classes.

The Principal explained that there was *an bhéim ar an nGaeilge labhartha, mar caithfimid an-chuid Gaeilge a labhairt leo anois sa Ghaeltacht. Mar nil sí acu.*

Parents and the school's language policy

Parents were aware of the language policy of the school and supported the priority it placed on developing their children's oral language in Irish by speaking Irish with them where possible. Parents also praised the success of the language policy in developing children's competence at a young age, even in the case of children whose parents were not Irish speakers. One parent commented, *I notice a lot of kids here who wouldn't be Irish speakers at home and it's amazing, how they have learnt so much so young.*

Teachers reported meeting parents at parent-teacher meetings once a year, and having regular contact with them throughout the year. Parents supported various activities in the school.

2. Oral Language

Competence in Irish

Teachers reported that developing the expressiveness of children's Irish was a major task. When planning the curriculum, teachers noted that language needed to be simplified so that the children could understand and learn it. Progression in Irish was identified by teachers as being a difficulty since Irish wasn't spoken widely in the community.

Teachers reported, however, that children did develop a very high level of proficiency in Irish, including those children who began school with English only. Children's competence was also enhanced by the policy of Irish in the playground.

Ar dtús, tuigean siad i bhfad níos mó agus ansin de réir a chéile tosóidh siad ar an gcaint amuigh sa chlós. Agus bíimid an-dian orthu amuigh sa chlós go gcaithfidh siad ar fad

Gaeilge a labhairt, agus diaidh ar ndiaidh tagann siad ar aghaidh. (Teacher)

A particular improvement in the children's language development in both Irish and English was noted around second class.

Competence in English

A major challenge for the teachers was to ensure that both languages were developed to an appropriate level. The teachers said that the children's reading in English developed their oral language ability. One teacher explained, *tá an-Bhéarla acu sa Ghaeltacht anois. Níl aon fhadhb le Béarla.* The Principal reiterated this point noting, *is dóigh liom go gcuirimid an-bhéim ar an mBéarla de réir mar a théann siad suas sna ranganna agus go bhfoghlaimíonn siad agus go ndéanann siad an-chuid léitheoireachta ar fad sa Bhéarla. Cuirimid an-bhéim air.*

An Cúntóir Teanga

The Cúntóir Teanga visited the school two days per week. One teacher explained the strategies used by the Cúntóir Teanga to develop children's oral language, *déanann sí rudaí ar nós na gluíochí Gaelacha leo, paca cártaí agus na cártaí a ainmniú, rudaí mar sin a thacaíonn leis an múinteoir, foclóir breise, aon chabhair gur féidir léi a thabhairt.*

The Cúntóir Teanga used a combination of withdrawal and in-class teaching. She worked with whole class groups, reinforcing what had been done in class. This benefited the native speakers and beginners alike. The former had an opportunity to help other children and in so doing developed their own confidence in using language. She also took children who needed extra support in smaller groups.

3. Emergent Reading and Reading

Approaches to reading

A core reader was used for the teaching of reading in both languages. This was supplemented by other

books which the children took home. Children began the core reader in Irish at the end of the first term in junior infants. The core reader in English was introduced around Easter in junior infants. It was reported that the multigrade class situation enabled children to learn incidentally from other class groups, both in oral language development and in the case of emergent reading activities. Teachers explained that children in junior infants who hadn't yet begun to read might recognise words from flashcards being used with senior infants.

Teachers noted that the introduction of literacy in both languages close together meant that children often decoded a word in the other language, for example they often decoded a word in English while reading from an Irish book. This soon rectified itself however. Teachers explained that play was important in helping the children differentiate between the two languages.

Teachers reported using children's knowledge of letter-sound correspondence and the ability to recognise some sight words in Irish to gauge children's readiness to begin English reading. The teacher explained, *nuair a bhíonn máistreacht mhaith acu ar an litir agus ar chúpla focal i nGaeilge, tugaim cúpla focal Béarla isteach agus bíonn siad ag ullmhú i gcomhair an leabhair Bhéarla.*

The Principal explained that both a look-and-say and a phonics approach was used, *úsáidimid an dá mhodh, an féachaint agus é a rá agus gan dabht, an fhoghraíocht.*

Differences between the sound systems in Irish and English were highlighted, for example short and long vowel sounds.

Teachers reported that children used other books for shared reading in addition to the core reader. These included books produced locally by a teachers' network which reflected the local dialect and a set of language support materials designed specifically for

use in Irish-medium schools. The books were recorded on an accompanying CD-ROM using local pronunciation.

Teachers also favoured the use of the core reader in the middle classes for developing skills. One teacher said, *... go bhfuil sé go hiontach, go mbeadh leabhar ambáin ag an rang do na bunscileanna, agus ansin is féidir é a leathnú amach; tógaidís leabhair dhifriúla abhaile gach oíche, beidh siad ag léamb leabhar difriúil sa leabharlann.*

Teachers thought it impractical to have each child on a different book, for the purposes of monitoring progress, especially in a multigrade class situation. One teacher said, *má tá ... siad ar fad á gcur ar leabhair dhifriúla agat, cá bhfaighidh tú an t-am i rith an lae chun dul ó leanbh go leanbh don léitheoireacht chun a fháil amach cé chomh maith is atá siad?*

Teachers felt that organising children in reading groups for the core reader to cater for different reading levels was combining aspects of old and new approaches. One teacher said, *is maith an dá rud a dhéanamh, an sean agus an nua. Agus táimid ag tógaint an chuid is fearr dá réir. Is dóigh liom gurb é an rud is tábhachtaí ná muinín an pháiste.*

Parental involvement with children's reading

Parents showed a strong commitment to supporting their children's learning in Irish. However, shared reading in Irish was dependent on there being someone at home who was available to read Irish. Some parents who were newcomers to the area did not have any Irish and this posed a challenge in the promotion of shared reading. As one teacher explained, *tá sé sin go breá agus beidh an-chuid tuismitheoirí a dhéanfáidh é sin ach ansin beidh tithe ann nach dtarlódh sé sin iontu.* Nonetheless, it was noted that such parents could help by simply listening and praising the child. The provision of CD-ROMs did help with pronunciation in such situations. Teachers suggested that children who

spent time with Irish-speaking grandparents after school were likely to have better Irish.

4. Writing

Approaches to writing

Teachers reported that early writing activities included pattern work and writing letters. Workbooks and transcription were also used and children were encouraged to add their own sentences in their writing in Irish and English in senior infants. The teacher explained, ... *an leabhar saothair, athscríobh ón gclár dubh agus nuacht an lae. Chuimhneodh duine éigin b'fhéidir ar abairt amháin a chur leis.*

As children progressed to first class, they had more opportunities for creative writing. One teacher said, *de réir a chéile nuair a ghabhann siad isteach i rang a haon, bheadh níos mó de líon na bearnaí, go bhfágfá focal amach, níos mó den scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach.*

Writing, editing and redrafting

In the middle and senior classes, teachers reported that children had greater opportunities to use writing, editing and redrafting. When asked if they used word processing for redrafting their written work, one child replied, *uaireanta, i gcomhair aistí, bíonn cead againn é a úsáid.* The children reported redrafting handwritten work based on feedback from the teacher.

Audience and genre

Teachers reported that children wrote in a wide range of genres and their writing had developed considerably by fifth class. One teacher said, *cinnte i rang a cúig bíonn an-fheabhas ar na leanaí ó thaobh na scríbhneoireachta, ag teacht suas le scéalta, scéalta a chur le chéile.* The children overcame the scarcity of Irish-language resources by translating. One child said, *téimid ar an computer nó rud éigin agus déanaimid 'translating' air.*

ICT and writing

Each classroom had at least one computer. The children used the Internet to conduct research for project work. Computer software was used for word processing and for games to reinforce number facts in mathematics.

5. Support for Language and Literacy Development

Assessment

Teachers reported using a range of standardised tests. A non-reading intelligence test was used in senior infants, and Irish-normed standardised tests in mathematics and English were used from first class upwards. Teachers reported that the mathematics attainment test was available in English only.

Approaches to learning support

Both a Learning Support teacher and a Resource teacher visited the school a number of times per week. The Learning Support teacher provided support in English and mathematics. The teachers felt that receiving extra support in English did bring some benefits for the children's Irish but felt, nevertheless, that there was a need for access to learning support in Irish.

Má tá cabhair ag teastáil ó leanbh sa litearthacht, bíonn an chabhair sin uait sa Ghaeilge agus sa Bhéarla ... Ba cheart an chabhair a thabhairt dóibh sa Ghaeilge agus sa Bhéarla. (Principal)

Language resources for Irish

Teachers noted that effective use of the blackboard was important for learning in all curriculum areas. Other resources used included reading schemes and computer software.

However, teachers, parents, and children all referred to the scarcity of attractive books in Irish. Parents reported that they and their children had difficulties understanding some of the Irish-medium textbooks,

for example, the mathematics textbooks. One parent said, *faigheann na leanaí deacair é mar caitheann siad ar dtúis an rud atá ann a léamh agus ansin an rud a dhéanamh amach.*

Children said they preferred reading books in English to books in Irish and generally showed a positive attitude to reading for pleasure.

Language resources for English

Teachers reported using a broad range of English language material, including a class reading programme and additional books from other publishers.

With regard to a letter-sound correspondence programme available in English, teachers were of the opinion that excessive emphasis on the names of the characters to which the letter referred as opposed to the name of the letter was unhelpful.

Scoil B: Scoil Ghaeltachta

Scoil Ghaeltachta	Between 50 and 100 children	6 staff*
First language of the children	English is the first language of the majority. A minority speak Irish as a first language.	
Language/s spoken at home	English is spoken in all homes and is the dominant language in the community.	
Pre-school experience	Many children have pre-school experience in an Irish-medium setting.	
Post-primary opportunities	There is an English-medium post-primary school for boys and girls in the same town.	
Language policy of the school	<p>The curriculum is taught in full in all classes. Most instruction is through Irish. Some subjects are taught through English and some are taught bilingually.</p> <p>Formal reading in English is introduced in junior infants. Formal reading in Irish is introduced around Christmas in senior infants.</p>	

* including a Learning-Support Teacher and Resource Teacher

1. Policy and Planning

Policy and implementation

Irish was the language of the school. Both Irish and English were used for teaching. English was taught as a school subject in all classes.

The school emphasised the development of children's oral language in Irish from the start. Teachers used constant repetition to reinforce correct language. The Principal stated, *is í an Ghaeilge príomhtheanga na scoile seo agus táimid ag déanamh ár ndícheall leis. Labhraímid Gaeilge leis na páistí agus cuirimid brú orthu Gaeilge a labhairt linne.*

Factors that influenced the school's language policy

Teachers reported that Irish had a minor role as a language of communication in the community. Over the years, the number of native speakers of Irish had dwindled so that at this stage all children could speak English when beginning school. There was a

decrease in the small numbers of those who also spoke Irish in the home. Of the ten children who started in junior infants in this school year just one child had experience of Irish in the home.

The Principal explained that the majority of the children had attended a *Nátonra* in the town prior to starting in junior infants. This experience was considered important in preparing the children for learning through Irish.

Developing the children's competence in Irish was one of the biggest challenges in the curriculum facing the school. It was a particular challenge to get children to speak Irish between themselves in the schoolyard. They also needed greater encouragement to speak Irish as they moved towards the senior classes in the school.

Given the language profile of the children, one teacher wondered about how to strike the correct

balance when planning the use of time for English and Irish.

Nil a fhios agam ar cheart dúinn níos mó Gaeilge a thosú sna Naíonáin. Tá gach rud thuas i mo rang i nGaeilge, na suimeanna, déanfaidh mé iad fosta i nGaeilge, ach tá sé deacair a bheith cinnte an bhfuil tú ag déanamh an rud ceart ach sílim féin nuair a bhíonn fadhb leis an Bhéarla tá sé deacair teanga na Gaeilge a bheith ag na páistí fosta. Ní bhíonn a fhios agat ar cheart duit níos mó fócais a chur ar an Bhéarla nó ar Ghaeilge.
(Teacher)

Parents and the school's language policy

The Principal explained that the school plan was developed by the teachers and approved by the school's Board of Management. The plan was written in Irish.

English reading was taught first in the school. However, one parent interviewed suggested that starting both at the same time should be considered while others thought it might work for some children, but not for all. One parent explained that starting with one language before another communicated a certain message to the child about the status of both languages.

It's putting it across to them, if you give them the English first, that English is more important and that Irish is only a secondary thing. Whereas if they could try to have them both more equal.

Other parents noted that introducing English first to children was the reality, which faced the children in their own lives. One parent said, *and everything they do and see on television and their toys are all in English. That's reality but how do you deal with it?*

Helping children with homework was the chief means by which parents reported being involved in their children's learning. They considered providing help with Irish and with mathematics (once it went

beyond a certain level) to be the greatest challenge.

Parent-teacher meetings were held once a year in November after school hours. In addition, teachers were always available to discuss children's progress with parents.

Parents reported that they would speak more Irish with their children but that the children weren't always comfortable with that. One parent reported the following challenge in promoting the use of Irish in the home, peer pressure is the big one, wanting not to speak it. She ... would say to me, *'Mammy, please when my friends are there, don't ask me anything in Irish, or don't speak Irish to me.'*

2. Oral Language

Competence in Irish

Parents' perceptions of their children's progress in Irish varied quite a lot. One parent said, *with one teacher in particular my children's Irish improved hugely.* Whilst another, whose child was now in a senior class and who had spoken Irish as a first language when he started school, referred to the importance of a language-rich environment to support children's language learning.

I felt he had better Irish at four than he does now. But I wouldn't blame the teachers at all. I blame the environment, TV and all the rest of it. They go through this phase of 'not cool' and not speaking it ... I know he'll come full circle.
(Parent)

Another parent emphasised the extra challenge involved in creating the necessary conditions to promote Irish at home. This parent said, *it's very difficult for a parent who is trying to raise a child through the medium of Irish, it's a much more difficult thing to do than its opposite. It's nearly impossible. Everything is going against you.*

However, parents also reported that children used their Irish with enthusiasm and in very clever ways

in certain situations. One parent said, *my kids when they went to the States, I'd never heard them speak so much Irish. It was just showing off... I thought it was great.*

One child reported that while the family tended to use English mostly during the day, Irish was used when they were having dinner, *bíonn muid ag caint agus sin am maith a mbíonn muid ag cleachtadh an Gaeilge.*

Teachers reported that parents were a lot more concerned about children's progress in English than in Irish and added that because Irish was not being spoken in many homes this made the teacher's task more difficult. One teacher said, *tá sé an-deacair nuair nach bhfuil siad ag caint Gaeilge sa bhaile. Sin an rud. Tá brú ar na múinteoirí.*

An Cúntóir Teanga

A Cúntóir Teanga visited the school for one full day per week. She worked with whole classes at a time and differentiated for each child's ability, so that the more fluent speakers also derived benefit from the extra support.

The class teacher and Cúntóir Teanga planned for continuity in the work being done by both. The Principal explained that the Cúntóir Teanga focused on the oral language of the children, using story, rhyme, and conversation.

Competence in English

Teachers reported that they were happy with the progress children made in English. However, even though all children starting school in recent years spoke English as a first language, teachers said that children's oral English needed a lot of attention. Some children had poor levels of fluency and vocabulary in English.

Tá siad [páistí] ag teacht ó thithe nach bhfuil an Béarla go maith iontu, ní bhíonn an foclóir acu nuair a bhíonn siad an-óg agus caithimid

an-bhéim agus an-bhrú a chur air sin fosta le go mbeidh an Béarla acu. (Principal)

A teacher referred to the importance of consolidating one language in order to develop the children as language learners.

Tá sé deacair go leor mar tagann páistí go dtí an scoil nach bhfuil Béarla acu, níl siad ábalta abairt iomlán a rá i mBéarla. Tá sé an-deacair teanga eile a thosú fosta. Tá grúpa anseo agus níl an Béarla go maith acu. Nuair a chuirim ceist, ní thabharfaidh siad ar ais ach focal amháin, níl siad ábalta abairt iomlán i mBéarla a rá. (Teacher)

The parents interviewed were generally confident that the children's competence in English was assured. One parent commented, *well they're going to have the English anyway, there's no doubt about that. Any child brought up in [place-name] is going to have perfect English.*

Letter-sound correspondence for English was taught using a programme where each letter represents a special character. Letter-sound correspondence in Irish was taught afterwards, although the children also used their knowledge of English letters and sounds when reading in Irish. Some differences in the sound systems of both languages were also addressed.

3. Emergent Reading and Reading

Approaches to reading

Teachers reported that children continued to use a core reader from a recently-produced commercial programme. This provided three core books for each year. The three core readers for each year were supplemented by books from other programmes. Children took two English books home per week for shared reading with parents in junior infants who indicated that the book had been read on an accompanying record sheet. The teacher provided

weekly opportunities for the children to read aloud to the class from these books or to report to the class on what they had read.

Children began reading a core reader from a programme in Irish from around Christmas in senior infants. This reading programme pre-dated the Primary School Curriculum. In junior infants, children concentrated on *éisteacht and labhairt* in Irish. However, they were encouraged to read Irish print in the classroom. Irish words and sentences were often written on the black board during activities in oral language. Because the junior infants were in the same room as the senior infants, they listened to the *Nuacht*, which the senior infants read and wrote from the blackboard. Children encountered new words in Irish orally first and pictures or concrete objects were used to reinforce the learning of vocabulary. Other strategies such as drama were also used.

The Irish reading programme was supplemented by a set of language support materials which provided small real books or *leabhairíní* for shared reading. The children took these books home from about Christmas in senior infants. The teachers noted that availability of accompanying audio recordings in the dialect of the locality for the Irish *leabhairíní* was particularly important for the younger children.

Teachers reported that in some cases, children had greater difficulty with English reading than Irish reading, but noted that the standard expected in English was higher. By the end of second class, the children's competence in Irish reading was so well developed that the typical third class reading books in Irish were not sufficiently demanding or challenging. At that point the children began reading fourth class books. Similarly, the children in sixth class read material from the first year of post-primary.

Teachers reported giving greater prominence to talking and listening in English since the publication

of the Primary School Curriculum (1999). They reported creating language experience materials so that the children could read what they wrote themselves from their own experience as part of their homework.

Parents, teachers, and children agreed that the use of supplementary real books was a very enjoyable way of learning to read. One parent considered that the small books which can be read in one sitting were very good for giving children a sense of satisfaction, noting that: ... *they feel great when they close the book and it's finished.*

Reading groups were used within the class, in order to cater for the varied reading levels. One teacher noted that multigrade teaching impeded giving greater individual attention to children through greater use of group work, *tá dhá rang againn agus bíonn tú ag rith ó rang go rang. Tá siad ag déanamh rud éigin i Rang a hAon agus bíonn fiche bomaite agat fad a bhíonn siadsan ag déanamh rud éigin.*

Parental involvement with children's reading

Parents who wished to improve their Irish availed of courses organised by either the primary or post-primary school. They felt that the use of *leabhairíní* for shared reading activities with children did not pose any significant difficulties for parents who did not have Irish, unlike more demanding tasks involving grammar, for example, in the senior classes.

One teacher reported that parents felt that they were not well-equipped to support their children learning in Irish, *tá caighdeán difriúil ag gach tuismitheoir ach an bhliain seo tháinig cúpla tuismitheoir isteach agus dúirt siad 'Níl aon Ghaeilge againn sa bhaile agus mar sin ní bheimid in ann aon chabhair a thabhairt dóibh.'*

As regards the policy of beginning Irish reading in senior infants (and after English reading), one parent felt that by beginning Irish reading sooner children

could benefit from the Irish they had learned in the *Naíonra*. Another parent suggested that bilingual books could be used with the text presented in both Irish and English.

4. Writing

Approaches to writing

Teachers reported using a range of workbooks and skills books to introduce children to penmanship and writing. Workbooks produced for different curriculum subjects were also considered important in developing children's writing in Irish. Children in senior infants and first class transcribed daily news from the blackboard and were encouraged to add their own sentences.

Teachers reported that oral language was an important part of the development of children's writing. In junior infants the emphasis was on children reporting their news orally and encouraging them to express themselves confidently and clearly. One teacher said, *déanfaidh mé an nuacht fosta ach ní chuirim suas í, caithfidh an páiste a bheith ábalta abairt iomlán a rá sula gcuirim suas ar an gclár dubh é, go mbeidh a nuacht féin ag an pháiste.*

Writing, editing and redrafting

In first class, children's writing consisted mostly of transcription from the blackboard and the use of workbooks. Process writing, editing and redrafting was used in second class. It was used sparingly initially, as teachers feared that the task of rewriting might discourage children. Teachers reported that children were more competent as writers of English than Irish and that their more extensive reading in English also improved the richness of their vocabulary and the quality of their expression when they wrote.

Audience and genre

Teachers reported that the children wrote in a wide range of genres, including descriptions, project work, and writing in other curriculum areas. Children in

junior infants began writing by adding captions to pictures.

ICT and writing

The school had a dedicated computer room. Teachers reported that children used the Internet to conduct research for project work. Software applications were used for word processing, visual arts, and games to reinforce number facts in mathematics.

5. Support for Language and Literacy Development

Assessment

The Principal noted that the size of the school enabled the ready transfer of information between teachers and others commenting that, *i scoil bheag tá aithne ag achan múinteoir ar achan páiste ... Bíonn níos mó teagmhála idir an cúntóir teanga agus an múinteoir ranga agus an múinteoir tacaíochta. Tá achan duine in ann achan duine a phlé.* A non-reading intelligence test was used in Senior Infants, and standardised attainment tests were used in mathematics and English. Teachers reported using a variety of other tools for assessment, including samples of children's work, weekly tests for spellings, and daily questioning and observation. They also referred to the unavailability of Irish-medium assessment tools. A maths attainment test was available in English only and teachers reported that this posed great difficulties for teaching and learning through Irish.

Approaches to learning support

The school had provision for a Learning-Support Teacher and a Resource Teacher. The Learning-Support Teacher provided support in English and mathematics. A number of diagnostic tests were used to identify children who might benefit from learning support. Occasionally, support was also given for Irish, particularly Irish reading. Commenting on the work of the Learning-Support teacher one parent

said, *I think it's done mainly through English but it did help him a lot.*

A number of children received exemptions from Irish following a psychological assessment. However, they were still taught Irish, especially oral Irish. One teacher said, *táimidne ag déanamh na Gaeilge leo sin agus caithfidh mé a rá, tá ag éirí go maith leo ag an nGaeilge cé go mbeadh siad níos fearr ag an mBéarla.*

Language resources for Irish

The availability of books and materials for teaching Irish was a major challenge. The set of language support materials available for Irish in the junior classes had addressed this to some extent, but the situation for the middle and senior classes was very problematic. One teacher said, *tá sé iontach deacair na leabhair sin a fháil trí mheán na Gaeilge ... agus ó thaobh na n-ardranganna, na leabhair Ghaeilge atá ansin tá siad bunaithe ar seanrudaí, is seanleabhair iad.*

In the infant classes the teacher spoke of the need to produce more attractive reading material, *níl go leor ábhar spéisiúil do na páistí ... na buachaillí i mo rang, bheadh an-spéis ag na paistí dá mbeadh leabhar faoi leoraithe nó 'quads' nó rud éigin mar sin, ach i nGaeilge.*

Children noted that, compared with English, the choice of Irish reading books was limited. When asked whether they preferred reading in Irish or in English in their spare time, one child replied, *B'fhéidir Béarla mar níl mórán leabhairí maith Gaeilge thart fán áit.*

Parents also reported that it was more difficult to find good books for children in Irish. English-medium books were also more competitively priced. A parent said, *Obviously cost is a factor ... You have all these book clubs doing deals but you'll never get those kind of deals with Irish books.*

Parents and teachers welcomed the use of the local dialect in the children's books such as those that

were part of the set of language support materials used in junior classes. One parent called for the greater use of bilingual books for emergent literacy, *I would certainly like to see bilingual books in naíonáin bheaga and naíonáin mhóra, I wouldn't put much emphasis on the reading, I would put more emphasis on the spoken.*

The lack of suitable Irish-medium texts for other subject areas of the curriculum was reported as a major challenge. Teachers reported that from third class onward, it was difficult to find good Irish-medium resources. For example, a particular Irish-medium programme was used in infant classes in mathematics, but the same programme wasn't considered suitable for the other classes, so a different programme which was available only in English was used for these classes.

A range of English-medium textbooks was used in the senior classes. Writing in many curriculum subjects was through English. The fact that the nearby post-primary school was English-medium was also a factor in deciding to use English (in addition to Irish) when teaching these subjects. The Principal stated, *níl Gaelscoil thíos ansin. Caithfimid i gcónaí a bheith cinnte go bhfuil an t-eolas acu, déanaimid ár ndícheall leis an teanga, ach caithfimid a bheith cinnte go bhfuil an t-eolas acu.*

English was also favoured as a language of instruction for subjects because the children were more familiar with terminology in English. Teachers felt that if English was needed to extend the children's grasp or knowledge of a particular area then it was used in order to complement the Irish that had been used.

Language resources for English

Teachers used a range of English language resources including a class reading programme and additional books from other publishers.

Tá cúpla take home schemes againn chomh maith le léitheoireacht neamhspleách mar sin

*chomh maith. Tá cúpla ceann go bhfuil siad
ábalta iad a léamh ina n-aonar agus cúpla
ceann eile a léann siad leis na tuismitheoirí, le
chéile, saghas paired reading atá i gceist ansin.*

(Teacher)

A letter-sound correspondence programme was used, although the infant teacher wasn't completely happy with it as children tended to focus not on the name of the letter but on the name of the character with which it was associated.

Scoil C: Gaelscoil: designated disadvantaged

Gaelscoil: Disadvantaged	Between 200 and 250 children	20 staff*
First language of the children	English	
Language/s spoken at home	English	
Pre-school experience	Most of the children attend pre-school prior to arriving in Scoil C. Roughly half attend a <i>Naíonra</i> and the pre-school experience of the others is in English.	
Post-primary opportunities	There is an all-Irish second-level school in the area to which most children from the school progress.	
Language policy of the school	The English Curriculum is taught in all classes. All other subjects are taught through Irish. Formal reading in both Irish and English is introduced at the beginning of first class.	

* including a Learning-Support Teacher, a Resource Teacher, and a Home-School Liaison teacher

1. Policy and Planning

Policy and implementation

The Principal reported that, when the school started, its language policy involved total immersion in Irish from the child's earliest years in school. However, because the school served a very disadvantaged area and because the children came to school with relatively poor competence in English, the policy had been changed to allow more flexibility in using English in the infant classes. The Principal justified the change noting that because children had difficulties in their first language a policy of total immersion was not followed in junior and senior infants as might be the case in other Gaelscoileanna. She explained, *seans go mbeadh níos mó solúbthachta maidir leis an tumoideachas sna naíonáin shóisearacha anois ná mar a bhí nuair a thosaíomar an scoil*. When asked whether a policy of total immersion was followed in junior infants one teacher said, ... *chomh fada agus is féidir linn, while another commented, Sin é. Múinteair an Bhéarla mar abhár.*

Factors that influenced the school's language policy

The Principal said that the Board of Management, the Principal, and the teachers developed the school's language policy initially, and made subsequent modifications. She noted that the Chairperson and other members of the Board were involved, but that parents had little involvement in the process because of their lack of Irish.

Day-to-day implementation of the school's language policy was planned by the teachers at three different levels: infants and first classes, second, third and fourth classes, and fifth and sixth classes. The Principal said, *sin an chaoi a mbrisimid stós ar ngrúpaí féin anseo sa scoil*.

Parents and the school's language policy

Parents reported choosing the Gaelscoil for various reasons including the size of the school, and the fact that it was more personal and family orientated. A number of parents cited negative experiences of learning Irish in a mainstream school or in a larger school. One parent said that when she was growing

up her best friends went to a Gaelscoil and seemed to do a lot better through the Irish language because the classes were smaller and they got more attention. Their comments generally did not refer to an interest in or love of the language. The Principal said, *tá an-chuid cúiseanna a bhfreastalaíonn na páistí ar an scoil seo, agus ní i gcónaí gurb í an teanga an phríomhchúis.*

All the parents were positive about what the Gaelscoil had to offer. They spoke about Ireland becoming a multicultural country, and the fact that immigrants all spoke their own language but that Irish people didn't. They were attracted by the ethos of the school and the fact that the children played sports and learned Irish music. One parent mentioned love of country and the importance of the Irish language, but went on to say that a further advantage of the school was that the children would be bilingual going to second level schools and that this would assist them in learning a third language. However, as one parent put it, her realisation of the language benefits came later. She said, *most of my generation actually hate Irish. And I think that's an awful shame. But that was an afterthought. I noticed all those benefits afterwards.*

Most of the parents said the language policy of the school, the curriculum, and the type of books the children would be using were explained to them at a meeting before their children went to the school, but that they had not attended subsequent meetings. Thereafter, the parents said that they found out about the implementation of the language policy from their children's experience in school. One parent said *my lad started in September and we had a meeting before hand, and they went through the curriculum and what type of books they would be using, and what stage they'd be at, and that sort of thing.* Another parent said, *we did all that at the start. Since then we haven't.*

Parents interviewed said that their lack of Irish was not a problem in relation to their children's learning.

They said that the Homework Club, the general support offered by the school, and the fact that the children spoke in Irish in the school and the playground offered children sufficient support. One parent said that her youngest boy went to an English medium school first and that she had to give him more support there than in the Gaelscoil. She said, *I thought it would be the reverse.*

The information form completed by the school indicated that 90% of the children attended a pre-school setting, and that 50% would have attended an Irish-medium pre-school setting.

2. Oral Language

Competence in Irish

The Principal and the teachers said that, although a rigorous policy of total immersion in Irish was not used in the infant classes, Irish was used as much as possible as both the medium of instruction and as the language of communication. No English was used in the period before lunch in junior infants. A junior infants teacher said, *nil cead Béarla a dhéanamh ach tar eis lóin agus ní bhíonn ach leath uair an chloig agam. Déanaim Gaeilge an chéad rud ar maidin, Gaeilge agus mata, roimh am sosa le go mbeidh Gaeilge ina gcloigne acu.*

The teachers identified a number of challenges with regard to the standard of Irish and the use of Irish in the school. In the case of the children who attended a *Naíonra* before coming to school the Principal said, *is Naíonraí iad nach mbeadh Gaeilgeoirí ó dhúchas ag múineadh iontu, agus is Naíonraí iad a bheadh ag brath ar scéimeanna FÁS, agus go mbeadh caighdeán oideachais na múinteoirí ... measartha go leor.*

Teachers were concerned about the quality of the children's Irish. They said that typically the children continually used English structures and some English vocabulary when speaking Irish. One teacher said, *... agus fós deireann said rudaí amaideacha sa Ghaeilge ... 'pass é on' agus 'It's mise'?. Usáideann siad*

structúr an Bhéarla agus cuireann siad focail Ghaeilge ann ... 'Tá sé mo turn', 'Tá sé mo' seachas 'Is liomsa é'.

One teacher questioned whether this was the result of the influence of the home or the amount of English that had to be taught to ensure that the children attained an acceptable standard in English reading when leaving school. This teacher said, *sáideann siad an struchtúr Béarla i gcónaí agus iad ag caint, agus ní fheadar an mbaineann sé sin leis an mbaile nó leis an méid Béarla a chaithfid a dhéanamh chun go mbeidís in ann léamh agus iad ag fágáil na scoile.*

Teachers found it difficult to motivate the children to speak Irish, not only in the playground but even in the classroom. They also said that the standard of Irish the children attained was better than that in English-medium schools but lower than that in other Gaelscoileanna. The Principal said that the standard of Irish the children achieved was sufficient to enable them to continue their education in an all-Irish second level school, *téann 99% díobh tríd an gcóras meánscoláiochta sin. Agus éiríonn go maith leo.*

Competence in English

The Principal and teachers stressed that the children came to school with relatively poor competence in English. To address this, a certain flexibility had been introduced in the policy of total immersion in Irish. Children arriving in the school had little or no experience of nursery rhymes or fairytales and they exhibited poor ability in expressing prepositional relationships such as on, under, above, below.

Teachers said that children also lacked the vocabulary for many of the common objects around them. One teacher said, *ní bhíonn an t-am ar eolas acu, is smaoinneamh nua é na séasúir. Laethanta na seachtaine, an clog, bíonn níos mó aithne acu ar na hainmhithe allta thar lear—sioráf agus rudat mar sin—ná mar a bheadh acu ar bhó nó capall.*

Trying to improve the children's English was a continuous challenge, and teachers said they felt

they were falling short of achieving the objectives of the curriculum at every level. In the infant classes they were trying to make up for what had not been learned in the home or in preschool, and that as the children progressed through the school they were one class behind not only in English and Irish but in every subject, and this was particularly true of children with language difficulties. One teacher said, *... bíonn siad rang taobh thiar dá leibhéal ranga. Tá rang a cúig ar leibhéal rang a ceathair agus mar sin de.* The teachers also said children with language difficulties needed to hear good English spoken and that this was a difficulty in a Gaelscoil. One teacher said, *ní chloiseann siad an méid a chloisfidís i scoil Bhéarla, is dócha.*

When asked whether the quality of language the children brought to school was compensated for by the time they left the school, teachers said children's language was greatly improved, and that the majority of the children did well at second level.

3. Emergent Reading and Reading

Approaches to reading

Children in junior infants began English as a subject and this continued throughout every class in the school. As has been noted, this marked a departure from a policy of total immersion in Irish and was decided on to compensate for the poor standard of English the children had when arriving in the school. Emergent reading activities were based mainly on a particular set of language support materials produced in the UK. The teachers said that the materials used included many of the activities recommended in the English Curriculum. One teacher of junior infants said she had difficulty in planning activities to develop phonological and phonemic awareness that were recommended in the English Curriculum, but felt that the particular support materials she was using helped her to incorporate these activities. She and other teachers in the school placed great stress on learning letter

sounds, on using flash cards, and on learning sight words. One teacher said that she created a print rich environment in Irish, but another spoke of reserving a special area for English print in the environment, *... cuirim Béarla sa chúinne Béarla agus Gaeilge in ngach áit eile.*

Teachers said that the children experienced a lot of oral language activity in Irish in junior and senior infants both to develop their oral competence and in emergent reading activities. These activities included rhymes, fairytales, drama activities, and the use of themes as a basis for talk and discussion. Themes were chosen in the planning process and were engaged with simultaneously throughout the school. This provided the children with a common subject for oral interaction. A set of language support materials designed specifically for Irish-medium schools was also used and was praised highly.

With regard to the introduction of formal reading in Irish and English one teacher said that both were begun at the same time in senior infants. However, another teacher said that, whereas formal reading in English began in senior infants, formal reading in Irish did not begin until first or second class.

Parents' involvement with children's reading

The Principal said that up to 80% of the parents gave little or no support to their children's learning, but that parents gave more support than was general in the area. She said that parents had made a deliberate decision to send their children to a Gaelscoil and she suspected that all of the children were enrolled as the result of word of mouth contact among the parents.

The Principal noted that many of the parents had learning difficulties themselves and that they did not know how to go about supporting their children's language and literacy development in the home. Earlier in the term the school had decided to stop written homework until Christmas and to concentrate on the children's language development

in both Irish and English. As part of this process parents were asked to give two or three books to the school that were no longer being used at home. Out of three classes, she estimated that the school was offered about twenty books. It was clear, she said, that there were few books at home and that neither parents nor children were reading. She said that there weren't even comics in the home and that the children watched television and played computer games instead.

The Principal said that even when parents followed the school's advice and bought books for their children, for example as Christmas presents, the books they chose were inappropriate. She said, *d'imigh na tuismitheoirí amach agus cheannatodar beart Harry Potter books anuraidh do pháistí rang a dó.*

Parents expressed considerable interest in their children's reading development, and a number of them said that they listened to their children reading, read stories to them, or encouraged older children to read to younger peers.

A number of parents said that they were involved with children's learning in the junior classes in reading and mathematics, although one said that many parents were too busy to become involved. Parents felt that they were learning Irish from their children at home, sharing new words the children learned in school. Comments from parents included, *... so you're on the same level as them, and ... you're learning with them.*

4. Writing

Approaches to writing

In junior infants great stress was laid on penmanship. Children were taught to write the letters as they learned them and to write their names by the end of junior infants. The teachers stressed that oral language activity was an important basis for writing. In the junior classes children were

encouraged to talk about pictures and write simple stories about them or to arrange a series of pictures in order and create a simple story. The teachers felt that the children seemed to lack imagination, particularly when writing stories in Irish. One teacher said, *ní bhíonn samhlaíocht ró-iontach acu chun na scéalta a scríobh.*

Writing, editing and redrafting

The teachers complained about the prevalence of spelling, punctuation, and grammar mistakes in the children's writing. Much of the writing, editing, and redrafting focussed on correcting these. It was stressed that not all such mistakes would be corrected. When asked whether the emphasis in the redrafting process was on correcting mistakes or on trying to improve expressiveness one teacher said, *ní phiocaimid amach na botúin ar fad a dhéanann siad mar chuirfeadh sé uafás orthu, ach roinnt de na botúin agus an sciobhnóireacht cinnte.*

Audience and genre

A number of sources were used as topics for writing. In infant classes writing was associated with work in other areas. The themes in the Curaclam Gaeilge provided an important source for writing topics, as did projects and the other areas of the Primary School Curriculum. Teachers cited difficulties with writing essays and stories in the senior classes. One teacher said, *bíonn fadhb i gcónaí againn le haistí sna hardranganna agus ní bheidís go maith ag scríobh scéalta.*

The children cited the news, stories, and essays as topics for writing. When they were asked who read their writing they mentioned the teacher, parents, and themselves, and said that they sometimes read their writing aloud to the class. One child said, *dúirt an múinteoir, 'Seas suas agus léigh é'*, while another said, *Léann mo Mhamai mo aiste obair bhaile.*

ICT and writing

The children used the Internet at home as a source of information for projects. They said they did not

use computers in school. The interviews gave no indication that ICT was used as part of the writing process.

5. Resources for Language and Literacy Development

Assessment materials

The school used a non-reading intelligence test, the Drumcondra Reading Attainment Test, and two other Irish-normed standardised tests for English and mathematics. These were administered in October in each school year. Children in need of Learning-Support were identified, and the progress of all children in these areas was monitored from year to year. No standardised tests were administered for Irish. The children's progress in Irish was monitored mainly through observation. The Principal said, *ó thaobh na Gaeilge de, is dócha gur sórt measúnachta ó chluas atá ann ... mura mbíonn siad ag labhairt Gaeilge tuigimid go bhfuil fadhb againn.*

The Principal also reported that there was effective co-operation between the class teachers and the support teachers. She said, *tá comhoibriú an-mhaith idir na múinteoirí tacaíochta agus na múinteoirí ranga.*

Approaches to learning support

The school had two support teachers who delivered Learning-Support for English and mathematics. The support involved withdrawing children from the classroom. The school also had a Home-School Liaison teacher who assisted in this area. Learning-Support was given through the medium of English. No Learning-Support was given for Irish. The Principal saw this as a weakness and said, *is laige sa chóras nach bhfaigheann siad cabhair sa Ghaeilge.*

The Principal was also critical of the fact Learning-Support in mathematics was provided through English given that all subjects other than English were taught through Irish. She added, *agus amach anseo is ceist mór a bheidh ansin do Ghaelscoileanna.*

Ba chóir go mbeadh tacaíocht foghlama á tabhairt trí Ghaeilge.

Language resources for Irish

A recently published set of language support materials designed for use in Irish-medium schools was being used. Teachers were generally pleased with it and said that it included all the elements necessary in a language programme for the classes for which it was available. The materials for first class had become available during the current school year. One teacher said, *ceapaimid go bhfuil sé go hiontach go fóill.*

However, teachers expressed some reservations about these materials. They said that the children in their school would not really have the standard of Irish to engage fully with them. They felt they needed to modify them somewhat. They also questioned their suitability for a disadvantaged school.

Níl sé ‘ideal’ i suíomh faoi mhíbhuntáiste mar seo, agus dít nach bhfuil Gaeilge ag na tuismitheoirí, nó ag na páistí ag teacht isteach sa scoil, ach fós tá sé beagáinín—ní dhéarfainn níos deacra, ach níos Gaelaí—ná roinnt de na scéimeanna eile. (Teacher)

A number of other language programmes were also in use throughout the school. However, the teachers said that no one set of materials on its own was suitable for their particular needs and that they photocopied many pieces from different sets of materials to suit their purposes. One teacher said, *déantar a lán fótochóipeála don Ghaeilge in ionad coimeád le leabhar amháin.*

Language resources for English

A set of materials, published in the UK and directed at teaching letter sounds, was praised by the teachers. One teacher said, *cheap mé go raibh sé éifeachtach agus go gcuirfeadh sé snáitheanna an chruaclaim i bhfeidhm.*

The teachers expressed great disappointment with much of the language support materials available for English. They said that most of the materials were developed with middle-class children in mind, that they were unsuitable for disadvantaged schools, and that they progressed through the different stages too quickly. One teacher said, *ní oireann aon sraith leabhar dúinn ó thaobh an Bhéarla de.*

They said that they chose pieces from different sets of support materials, published both in Ireland and abroad, and depended a lot on photocopying. The teachers also expressed similar dissatisfaction with support material available for subjects in the curriculum other than language. They said that in many cases they were too difficult for the children.

Scoil D: Gaelscoil

Gaelscoil	Between 300 and 350 children 15 staff*
First language of the children	English
Language/s spoken at home	English
Pre-school experience	Many children attend pre-school prior to arriving in Scoil D. Pre-school experience is mainly in English.
Post-primary opportunities	There is an all-Irish second-level school some miles away and a local second-level school with an all-Irish stream up to Junior Certificate level. Only two classes from the school have completed sixth class so far. No pattern of progression to further education has yet been established.
Language policy of the school	The school has a policy of total immersion in Irish in junior infants. The English Curriculum is not taught in junior infants with the exception of some informal English activities such as nursery rhymes, stories, and songs. English is taught as a subject in each class from senior infants through to sixth class. All other subjects are taught through Irish. Formal reading in English is introduced before Christmas in senior infants and formal reading in Irish is introduced after Christmas in senior infants.

* including two Learning-Support teachers

1. Policy and Planning

Policy and implementation

The above summary indicates that a principal goal of the school was to develop children's competence in Irish to the highest possible level from their earliest years in school. This would enable them to engage with all the subjects of the Primary School Curriculum (except English) through the medium of Irish. As the Principal said, *tá sé sin mar pholasáí daingean againn.*

The policy of using Irish as the medium of instruction was reiterated in the interview with the children. One child said, *déanaimid gach rud as Gaeilge ach amháin Béarla.* Children also confirmed that they had an English lesson every day, although

one said, ... *ní dhéanann mé é gach lá ach a lán am do cúpla lá.*

The Principal said that the school staff fully supported the policy of total immersion. Language policy and planning in the school was monitored and discussed regularly at staff meetings. The opinions of parents were also sought and the Principal reported that account was taken of them. However, as will be seen, this did not emerge clearly in the interview with parents. Over the past couple of years senior pupils in the school were given an opportunity to discuss and contribute to the language policy of the school.

Some years ago the District Inspector asked the school to implement the English Curriculum in

junior infants which the school did with one junior infant class for one year. The Principal explained that these children did not receive the same foundation in Irish as children who experienced total immersion. She said they needed more intensive Irish teaching in subsequent years to attain the same standard.

The Principal had worked in a number of Gaelscoileanna before coming to this school and was convinced that a policy of total immersion resulted in a higher standard of Irish than was the case when both languages were used from the beginning of junior infants. She said that children in such a situation found it difficult to adapt alternately to *am Gaeilge* and *English time*.

Factors that influenced the school's language policy

The most important factors cited by the Principal were the language background of the children and the fact that, because the school served a middle-class community, the vast majority of the children came to school with a good standard of English and very few exhibited language difficulties. Through using a policy of total immersion in junior infants the school aimed to raise the standard of Irish to the same level. She said, *bíonn muidne ag iarraidh Gaeilge atá chomh maith leis a thabhairt dóibh*.

Parents and the school's language policy

The Principal explained that the language policy of the school was introduced to parents in May before their children began school. Advantages of total immersion were explained to them at this meeting, for example how easy it was for children to learn a second language by this method, and how some international research indicated that an experience of total immersion was a help in acquiring a third language.

Parents' perceptions of how they became aware of the language policy of the school (not merely the policy of total immersion) were less clear-cut. They felt they had found out about it in a more haphazard

way. They were fully aware of the policy of total immersion in Irish in junior infants but were less clear about the policy and planning for introducing reading in English and Irish.

When asked about the school policy with regard to the introduction of reading parents were aware that English reading began before Christmas in senior infants and Irish reading after Christmas in senior infants. They said they had found out about this from the teacher and from what their children were doing in school rather than from a formal briefing by the school. They also referred to the fact that the policy had been different five years ago when children started with an Irish reader in junior infants. As one parent said, ... *and to be honest, arising out of this, I was wondering how the changeover in that policy came about*.

Parents cited a number of motives for sending their children to a Gaelscoil. These included a positive school ethos, smaller classes, preference for a mixed school, and more scope for children's creativity. The Irish language was also a strong motivating factor. They cited the centrality of Irish to national identity, the importance of keeping the language alive, and the influence learning a second language to a high level might have on the children's learning of other languages. One parent said, *I think we're very proud of being Irish*, whilst another commented, *why not have our own language when we live in Ireland?*

2. Oral Language

Competence in Irish

The Principal said that, because of the policy of total immersion in junior infants, children quickly achieved a high level of competence in oral Irish to the extent that, as they progressed through the school, they become fluent in Irish. She said, *bheadh siad nach mór chomh líofa i nGaeilge is a bheadh siad i mBéarla*.

The teachers acknowledged that the children had a broader vocabulary in English, but because Irish was

the language of the school they quickly learned to translate words and phrases they had learned in English into Irish. They said that by the time the children had reached the senior classes they were as comfortable speaking Irish as English. However, a particular cause for concern was the type of Irish the children spoke, particularly among themselves. As one of the teachers put it, *is Gaeilge áirithe atá ann. Saghais 'gibberish', leath den Bhéarla intiigh ann uaireanta ... Gaeilge líofa lofa.*

The teachers also acknowledged that the common errors found in the children's speech in Irish were very difficult to eradicate and that these were common to every class. Examples given were: *Tá sé mo* instead of *Is liomsa é* and using *dul* instead of *téigh*. They felt, however, that the children saw the type of Irish they used in the same light as the English slang typical of their age group, and that if exposed to a different context they could quickly adapt to a more correct and idiomatic form of Irish. The teachers felt that that this was a problem common to Gaelscoileanna.

Parents were very impressed with the amount of Irish their children were learning and spoke of their willingness to use it spontaneously at home. One parent referred to her child as, ... *using pidgin Irish at home all the time.*

None of the parents felt they were proficient in Irish, although some said they were making an attempt to learn it. Some thought that their Irish had improved merely through having children attending a Gaelscoil. They said they or their spouses could offer help to their children with homework in junior classes, but by the time they reached senior classes the amount of Irish they had prevented them from giving the level of help they would like.

Competence in English

The teachers did not believe that the standard of English was any lower in the school than in a mainstream primary school. They stressed that the

school drew its pupils from middle-class families, that the standards of reading were high (as measured in standardised tests), and that the parents who were very education conscious would be very quick to point out if standards were lower than they expected. The teachers also acknowledged that children only used a fraction of incidental English in school compared with those in a mainstream school and that they mightn't advance to the same extent in English, but that there was no evidence they could use to establish whether they were better or worse in oral English.

One particular curriculum-related issue arose out of the language policy of the school. The teachers felt that it imposed constraints on the *incidental opportunities for language teaching in English*. This is stressed in the English Curriculum, and it was acknowledged that such opportunities did not occur in a Gaelscoil. English was taught only as a subject, and when an opportunity arose to avail of 'incidental opportunities for language teaching' this was accomplished through Irish. As one teacher put it, *má eitlionn féileacán isteach sa rang, labhróidh tú faoin bhféileacán. Ní bheidh ceacht agat 'about the butterfly'.*

The teachers felt that the English Curriculum was not suitable for Gaelscoileanna. The Primary School Curriculum gave a centrality to language and its relationship with learning across the curriculum. They said that the reciprocal benefits this conferred applied to Irish in a Gaelscoil but not to English.

3. Emergent Reading and Reading

Approaches to reading

As noted, the English curriculum was not followed in junior infants, although children did learn rhymes, stories and songs. Through the process of total immersion in this class the children progressed from using a mixture of English and Irish to a point where Irish was the language of communication in the classroom. At this stage all emergent reading activities were conducted through Irish.

Emergent reading activities, as recommended in the English Curriculum, did not begin until the first term in senior infants. Formal reading in English began before Christmas. Formal reading in Irish began after Christmas in senior infants. The Principal stressed that this approach was being reviewed over the next three or four years to assess its effectiveness.

Some parents felt their children were slow in learning to read in English. One said, *I couldn't believe that she couldn't read her English books. But now she's flying at it, but it did take a while.*

All the teachers interviewed agreed that, whereas some children displayed reading difficulties in English, reading in Irish posed no problems. As one teacher observed, *tá an léitheoireacht sa Ghaeilge go sár-mhaith, níl aon fadhb acu. Is sa Bhéarla a bhíonn na fadhbanna.*

The teachers said that children in the junior classes recognised words more easily in Irish than they did in English. Some of them felt that the success in Irish reading at this level was based on a look/say method whereas in English the children tried to identify the different sounds in the words. However, they stressed that this was only an opinion. All the teachers agreed that, as they progressed through the school, the majority of the children read successfully in English, and by the time they reached the senior classes the novels they read in English were linguistically more difficult than those they read in Irish.

The teachers said they encouraged children to use the school and class libraries, and five children in the interview indicated that they used the local library.

The teachers pointed out that another feature of the approach to reading in the school involved children from the middle and senior classes engaging in shared reading activities with younger children.

Parents' involvement with children's reading

Parents had just recently become involved in shared

reading activities in the infant classes. Groups of parents came to the school each morning and spent half an hour on these activities with the children. Previously, their involvement in reading in school had been confined to World Book Day when particular parents would be invited to take part in reading activities in the school. However, parents questioned the extent to which they needed to be involved in the classroom, and felt that there might be legal implications in relation to this. They did feel, however, that they had extensive informal communication with the teachers and saw that as very important in terms of parental involvement.

Parents felt that they needed more information about the approaches and methodologies being used in the school. This was mentioned particularly in relation to emergent reading and reading where the approach to the blending of sounds seemed to puzzle parents. One parent said, *yes, even give us a lecture on phonics.* Another said, *that would be a big help ... emphasise blending and emphasise phonic stuff.*

4. Writing

Approaches to writing

In junior infants children had sensory experience of making letters through using Plasticine and sand, and towards the end of this year they copied simple sentences the teacher had written in their copybooks. In senior infants they copied sentences related to the daily news or some theme on which learning was based. Later they drew pictures based on such sentences and added their own captions or sentences. In second class they composed their own stories in Irish and English, based on stories they had been reading.

Writing, editing and redrafting

When questioned about the process of writing, editing and redrafting two second class teachers said that they were going to begin this after Christmas in the current school year. One teacher who had previously taught senior infants said that, towards

the end of the year, she had encouraged the children to choose a topic, draw pictures about it, and write a sentence or two about each picture. These were collected in the form of little books. The teacher followed the process of writing, editing, and redrafting in that she talked to the children in groups about what they had written, questioned them about the pictures they had drawn, and encouraged them to write about them. She also assisted with spelling and correct grammatical expression. She did this in both Irish and English.

Audience and genre

Children indicated that they practiced writing in a number of genres, including essays, stories, diaries, writing for projects, and writing connected with the different school subjects. It might be expected that much of this would entail writing in Irish since all the school subjects except English are done through Irish. However, the question, *an scríobhann tú níos mó as Gaeilge nó as Béarla?* elicited the following replies from different children:

- *Mar an gcéanna!*
- *Níos mó as Gaeilge!*
- *Níos mó as Béarla!*
- *Níos mó as Gaeilge!*
- *Mar an gcéanna!*

When the children were asked who read what they wrote they cited the teacher, other children in class, or their parents. There was some evidence that they were sometimes encouraged to read what they wrote to the class. However, nothing emerged from what the children said to indicate that sharing their writing with the teachers or other children entailed more than the identification of mistakes, presumably in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. One child said, *má bhí go leor botúin ann, b'fhéidir scríobhann tú amach arís é.* Another child commented, *uaireannta athraíonn muid é thart, muid féin, agus ceartaíonn muid é. Agus glaonn an múinteoir b'fhéidir é amach agus ceartaíonn muid é.*

ICT and writing

Children reported that they used the computer at home extensively. The use of ICT in school work, however, seemed limited to accessing information for projects on the Internet or for the presentation of writing. There was no evidence that it was used to facilitate the process of writing, editing, and redrafting either in Irish or in English. As one senior pupil said: *de ghnáth, i gceachtanna scoile, ní bhainfimid úsáid as an ríomhaire.*

5. Resources for Language and Literacy Development

Assessment

The school had two Learning-Support Teachers serving about fifty pupils, most in mathematics. The Drumcondra Tests in English and mathematics were used. The Principal said the school preferred these to other widely used and Irish-normed standardised tests because they were perceived to have greater diagnostic potential. When a child was found to be experiencing a learning difficulty the Learning-Support Teachers administered further diagnostic tests to establish the nature of the difficulty. The Principal said that it was difficult to obtain suitable diagnostic tests in mathematics for senior classes. The Learning-Support Teachers had profiles in mathematics which they used for classes to which the Drumcondra Tests did not apply.

The Principal said the Drumcondra Tests for Irish were out of date and of little use, but the school used the Drumcondra Profiles in Irish, which were published quite recently and they were using them to establish levels of achievement in Irish at the end of third class. The school had taken part in the piloting of these.

Approach to learning support

The Principal and teachers acknowledged that, in the context of a Gaelscoil, children with language or learning difficulties were a special case, but that they were provided with adequate Learning-Support teaching. The Principal said that in the ten years the

school had been in operation there were only a couple of children for whom that particular Gaelscoil could have been deemed unsuitable.

The Principal reported that children received Learning-Support in English through English, because of its importance to them in their later lives in society. In mathematics, Learning-Support was provided through Irish. The teachers pointed out that in the senior classes English mathematical terminology as well as Irish mathematical terminology was taught to all children because most of them progressed to second-level schools in which English was the medium of instruction and because the standardised tests in mathematics were in English.

Children were withdrawn from the classroom for Learning-Support from first class but in senior classes the Learning-Support Teachers worked with groups of children in the classroom. A policy of early intervention in the infant classes was to begin after Christmas in this school year. The Principal hoped that in the future Learning-Support would be provided by combining work in the classroom with the withdrawal of children, but felt that the extent to which the Learning-Support Teacher would work effectively in the classroom depended very much on the class teacher. The Principal explained, *d'fhéadfadh múinteoir ambáin i náionáin shinsearacha a bheith sásta fiú dá mbeadh foireann rugbaí sa chúinne agus d'fhéadfadh duine eile a bheith cúthail faoina leithéid.*

Language resources for Irish

The Principal and teachers expressed frustration at the lack of suitable reading materials in Irish, although a scheme developed specifically for use in schools in which Irish is the medium of instruction was praised highly by all the teachers who had used it. It is only available up to first class at the moment, but there was great anticipation of the support it would offer when it became available for the other

classes. Apart from these Irish reading materials the teachers felt that there was a distinct lack of suitable stories for children.

Language resources for English

In general, most teachers expressed confidence in one set of English phonic materials, although some teachers (including the Learning-Support Teacher) found fault with the strategy of teaching children the names of the characters in the stories but not the sounds of the letters. They said the children continued to use the mnemonic (the name of the character) for the letter. Parents agreed. One parent said, *it has its place but the business of confusing the character faces with the sound of the letter is gone mad.* Another said, ... *[there is] too much emphasis on these characters, to the extent that the child doesn't actually say the sound.* The teachers said that some schools were changing to another phonics-based set of materials but that by and large this school was satisfied with the materials it was using.

The school had also been using a set of English reading materials produced by an Irish publisher but had changed to another because it was better structured and graded, and because the children were reading more stories.

Another feature of the school's approach to reading was the availability of different sets of reading materials for different classes in the school library. Teachers photocopied extracts from these and used them in the classroom.

Parents had problems with some of the support materials used in infant classes, particularly junior infants. A number of them complained about the excessive use of 'colouring-in'. One parent said, *I find the amount of colouring they do, although I know it aims at developing skills such as writing, but neither of my children liked colouring. It's excessive.*

Scoil E: Scoil Ghaeltachta: designated disadvantaged

Scoil Ghaeltachta: Disadvantaged		Between 150 and 200 children	13 staff*
First language of the children	Irish/English		
Language/s spoken at home	Approximately a third of the children come to the school speaking Irish only, a third speaking English only, and a third are bilingual.		
Pre-school experience	The great majority of children have Irish-medium pre-school experience, 2% have English-medium pre-school experience, and the other fifth have no formal pre-school experience.		
Post-primary opportunities	Children have access to Irish-medium post-primary education in the Gaeltacht.		
Language policy of the school	The school has a policy of total immersion in Irish. All subjects are taught through the medium of Irish. Formal reading in Irish is introduced in senior infants. Formal reading in English begins in first class.		

* including one Learning-Support teacher

1. Policy and Planning

Policy and implementation

The school policy was one of total immersion in Irish. Much emphasis was placed on the development of the children's oral and listening skills in Irish in junior infants. Very little oral English was engaged in junior infants with the exception of some rhymes and a number of themes related to the children's immediate environment. These were adapted from an Irish programme used for teaching Irish in English-medium schools.

It was the policy of the school that children began formal reading in Irish in senior infants and formal reading in English in first class. The school's policy regarding reading in Irish and English changed following the introduction of the Primary School Curriculum. Previously, formal reading in both Irish and English was introduced in junior infants. However, the Principal reported that children had

many reading difficulties. The teachers attributed these to the school's approach to the introduction and development of language and literacy. One teacher stated, *bhí siad á [Béarla agus Gaeilge] meascadh ó thaobh na foghraíochta de agus [bhí] fadhbanna léitheoireachta acu. Tá sé ag oibriú i bhfad níos fearr ... Beidh an Béarla níos laige acu ach beidh léitheoireacht na Gaeilge iontach.*

Teacher planning for individual classes was informed by the school's language and literacy policy, children's attainments in standardised tests, children's learning needs and interests, and teachers' observations and experience. One teacher of a senior class reported informing the parents of his plans for reading in both Irish and English for the school year. Planning for Irish from junior infants to first class was based on a set of language support materials that had been developed specifically for use in Irish-medium schools.

Factors that influenced the school's language policy

The school's location in the Gaeltacht and the diversity in the language experience of the children enrolling in the school were key factors in informing the school's language policy. The school was attended by children who spoke Irish only, children who spoke English only, and children who were raised bilingually in Irish and English. The school endeavoured to meet the learning needs of all these groups while simultaneously striving to implement the curriculum through the medium of Irish in a Gaeltacht school setting.

An dúshlán is mó ná na extremes difriúla seo ó thaobh na teanga atá acu agus ó thaobh meoin i leith na teanga de ... Is droch Bhéarla a bhíonn acu agus ní bhíonn Béarla ná Gaeilge acu ag deireadh thiar thall, níl tada acu. Cruthaíonn sé seo dúshlán ó thaobh an dá theanga.

(Principal)

Parents and the school's language policy

Although not all of the parents recalled being informed of the school's policy of using Irish as the language of communication and instruction, they accepted and expected that to be the case, since the school was situated in the Gaeltacht. Parents had not participated in the development of the school's language and literacy policy.

The Principal and one of the teachers spoke of the need to send letters home to remind and encourage parents to use Irish in the home in order to support their children's learning at school. Opportunities to enforce this message were also availed of at parent/teacher or other less formal meetings.

All the parents interviewed also said their children had attended a *Naíonra*. The local *Naíonra* operated two programmes, one for children for whom Irish was the language of the home and another for children who were learning Irish for the first time. However, one parent mentioned that it was not

always possible to send the child to the programme which better suited the language learning needs of the child. This resulted in some children being introduced to English for the first time in the *Naíonra*.

This school was the local school and the closest to many parents. One parent had moved to the area from an English speaking area and chose it because it was the local school. Another parent mentioned that she chose the school because it had a very good reputation. She said, *bhí fíor-cháil air agus sin an fáth gur roghnaíomar an scoil seo.*

At a meeting held with parents in May, the Principal stressed the importance of the children having Irish coming to the school as all subjects were delivered through the medium of Irish, but stated that it was often too late at this point since the language of the home was already fixed. The Principal said, *an rud a bhriseann mo chroí ná go bhfuil b'fhéidir beirt de na tuismitheoirí go mbeadh an Ghaeilge acu ach fós is Béarla atá ag na gasúir.* Irish classes were provided for parents in the school.

Parents said mathematics posed many difficulties for them and for the children. This related primarily to the vocabulary used in questions. One parent said, *bíonn focail ann nach n-úsáidfidh na gasúir sa gcaint, is teanga matamaitice atá á múineadh dóibh, ní díreach an matamaitic ach an teanga freisin.* Another parent added, *... go bhfuil an caighdeán matamaitice níos ísle sna scoileanna Gaeltachta [due to the difficulties with vocabulary/translation].* The parents interviewed were happy that the school's language policy did not pose any difficulties for them in being involved in their children's learning.

2. Oral Language

Competence in Irish

Teachers were asked whether the standard of oral competence reached by children in junior to middle classes was the same in Irish and English. One

teacher said that children whose mother tongue was English and where parents/guardians were not supportive of the Irish language encountered difficulties in developing language competence. It was expected, as a minimum, that all children would be able to understand Irish when they reached first class.

With regard to progress in the development of children's oral language in Irish, a number of parents were of the opinion that their children's competence in Irish did not progress when they started school. One parent, who spoke Irish to her children at home, explained that while the school offered many good opportunities that promoted the development of her children's Irish competence through drama and lessons, something extra was required in order to maintain the language. She said, ... *ó thosaigh siad ar scoil [níor] tháinig mórán dul chun cinn ar chor ar bith ar a gcuid Gaeilge ... go bhfuil rudaí iontacha ag tarlú sa scoil trí Ghaeilge, ó thaobh drámatíochta agus ranganna iontacha agus teastaíonn sé sin ar fad ann ach teastaíonn rud breise chun an Ghaeilge a choinneáil.*

Children's listening skills and oral skills were developed through *Nuacht an lae*. In the case of junior classes the native speakers spoke in Irish and other children used both languages when necessary. Parents and teachers suggested that the native speakers, with the exception of those children with specific language learning difficulties, acquired English easily. One parent spoke of her experience regarding language learning in the case of an older child who had attended the school and who had had a specific language disorder.

... ceann de na rudaí a dúirt an síceolaí linn ná nach ndéanfadh sé staidéar ar an bhFraincís go brách. Agus chuir sé seo as dó go mór ag an am mar ní raibh sé ach i Rang a hAon ... agus dúirt mé, nár fhoghlaim sé Béarla, agus d'fhoghlaim sé Gaeilge, shilféa go mbeadh sé in

ann? Agus dúirt sí, no, ní bheidh sé ag foghlaim Fraincise go brách, sin é. Agus sin ceann de na hábhair is fearr atá aige anois ... sa mheánscoil!
(Parent)

One teacher stated that it was very difficult for the teacher to take on the sole responsibility for teaching Irish to the children particularly where children were not getting any support with the language in the home, even though one or both parents might have Irish but Irish was not spoken in the home. The Principal and teachers interviewed emphasised the importance of drama, role-play, sketches, debating, and *agallaimh bheirte* throughout the school in developing children's oral competence in both languages.

An Cúntóir Teanga

The school had a Cúntóir Teanga for Irish with an allocation of eight hours per week. Children in junior and senior infants were given intensive courses in Irish language. The classroom teacher and the Cúntóir Teanga co-operated in this work.

Competence in English

Teachers noted that children who were native speakers of Irish readily acquired English because they encountered English everywhere in their environment. One of the greatest challenges was to ensure that they did not pick up poor English. Oral language development in English was introduced in January when children were in senior infants.

When teachers were asked whether children had attained the same level of competence in Irish and English on completion of primary schooling they agreed that language background and factors such as learning difficulties were complicating influences.

Má tá gasúr go bhfuil máthair agus athair gur cainteoirí dúchachasacha iad, agus má labhraítear an Ghaeilge sin mar ghnáththeanga sa bhaile, cinnte, bíonn an-chumas ag an bpáiste sin i labhairt na Gaeilge. Agus más

páiste éirimiúil atá ann beidh siad in ann an traschur sin a oibriú ... cuid de na gasúir ansin, más í an mháthair nach cainteoir ó dhúchas í ... b'fhéidir go mbeadh i bhfad níos mó Béarla cloiste aige agus gurb in í an teanga chumarsáide a bheadh ag páiste [agus bheadh sé nó sí] níos cumasaí agus níos compordaí [ag labhairt i mBéarla].

With regard to children's standard of oral English one teacher said, *d'aithneofá go maith sa Ghaeltacht fós go bhfuil caighdeán an Bhéarla, ar an iomlán ... ní bheadh sé ar an meán a bheadh sé ar fud na tíre, ach cén chaoi a mbeadh sé?*

This teacher also added that the children's standard of oral Irish wasn't necessarily as high as might be expected.

3. Emergent Reading and Reading

Approaches to reading

One parent said that much debate took place in the school following the introduction of the Primary School Curriculum because of the lack of clarity in guidance for Irish-medium schools.

Children in junior infants were engaged in emergent reading activities in Irish only. This reflected the school's policy of immersing the children in Irish when they were in junior infants. Children's phonemic and phonological awareness was further developed in senior infants through work involving vowels and the blending of sounds. They began to read formally in Irish in October of senior infants. A programme specifically developed for Irish-medium schools was used for this purpose and it was occasionally supplemented with material from a less complete programme also developed for the teaching of Irish.

Work commenced on emergent reading activities for English in January in senior infants, with activities outlined in the English Curriculum. A particular programme for teaching letter-sound correspondence

in English was used for this purpose. Teachers reported that children transferred reading skills acquired in Irish to English reading and that formal reading in English began in first class.

One parent said that children should have been given the opportunity to learn to read English in senior infants, particularly when they showed signs of readiness to do so. This parent said, *tá iníon liomsa i rang a haon agus feictear dom go raibh sí in ann, go raibh sí ag iarraidh a bheith ag léamh Béarla i naíonáin mhóra ach ní raibh sí in ann, abair, ón scoil. Ní raibh aici ach an Ghaeilge.*

Parents' involvement with children's reading

The school emphasised to parents the importance of their role in developing their children's reading competence and habits. Books were sent home for children to read with parents, and a video was sent home to demonstrate the importance of shared reading activities. In the event that parents did not have sufficient Irish, an older child was relied on to help with reading in the presence of a parent/guardian. Books on CD/tape were also used in order to enable parents to support their children's reading.

English reading material proved more popular with the children. Parents and teachers alike attributed this to the difference in the reading material produced in Irish and in English, and to the ready availability of English texts. As one teacher explained, *bhí siad ag léamh léithéidí Harry Potter i mBéarla agus 'Tá an bhó sa ngarraí' i nGaeilge.*

Parents reported that children perceived reading in English to be easier, and selected English books more readily.

Parents cited homework as an opportunity to be involved in their children's learning. One parent spoke of her child bringing home a game based on word recognition and how this encouraged children to help each other learn through play.

Parents were very positive about how their children learned to read and about the use of the *leabhairní*. All the teachers interviewed said that parents were asked to sign a record card of reading that had been completed each night.

4. Writing

Approaches to writing

Teachers reported using a lot of emergent writing activities in Irish in junior infants including drawing, and creating and copying letter patterns. Workbooks based on letter-sound correspondence exercises were used in senior infants to further develop the children's writing skills, and they also copied the *Nuacht* which had been written on the board by the teacher. They also learned penmanship in senior infants. Children in senior infants wrote individual words or short titles for drawings. They commenced writing formally in English in first class. Workbooks, including reading comprehension worksheets, were used in both languages.

Writing, editing and redrafting

Children self-corrected and peer-corrected written-work in the middle and senior classes. They also edited and redrafted written material in accordance with the Primary School Curriculum. One teacher of a senior class found this to be a most valuable approach to children's writing and stated, *ar bhealach faoin am go dtagann aiste chugat anois, tá siad tar éis na botúin a aimsiú, a fheiceáil, a cheartú. Sin an chuid is tairbhí de.*

Where appropriate, children worked individually or in groups on written tasks at all levels in the school. In senior classes grammar was taught formally in both languages, and its importance in allowing the children to communicate effectively was stressed.

Audience and genre

Interviews with teachers and children revealed that the children wrote in a number of genres in both

languages as is recommended in the Primary School Curriculum. These included essays, stories, and letters.

The class teacher, peers, and parents were cited as the main audiences for the children's work.

ICT and writing

Interviews with children and teachers revealed that programs using word games were occasionally used to develop children's spelling and vocabulary in both Irish and English. Children also used the school's ICT facilities for word processing and research purposes. In the case of a senior class, for example, the teacher spoke of children typing their essays and printing them off in order to give them to other children to read. Children reported visiting websites in Irish and in English for project work.

5. Resources for Language and Literacy Development

Assessment

A non-reading intelligence test was used in senior infants. Irish-normed standardised tests in mathematics and English were used from first class onwards.

Children were not tested on reading in Irish due to the lack of availability of assessment instruments in Irish.

Approaches to learning support

There was one learning support teacher in the school. Children were withdrawn from class for Learning-Support. Learning-Support was provided for English and mathematics. Support with mathematics was provided through the medium of English.

While agreeing with the school's language and literacy policy and acknowledging that the Principal and teachers engaged in much debate on the issues in the development of the policy, one parent voiced

concern that there was greater need to address the learning needs of individual children, particularly those with learning difficulties.

Feictear dom féin go bhfuil sé go breá má tá páiste sa lár nó gur páiste an-chliste atá agat, ach má tá páiste agat le riachtanais, agus má tá tú ag díriú isteach ar léitheoireacht i dteanga amháin leis an bpáiste sin agus ansin go bhfaigheadh an páiste sin cúnamb i dteanga eile, ní luíonn sé le réasún. Tá sé an-chasta mar scéal. (Parent)

One teacher noted that it was difficult to identify children's reading difficulties at an early stage when formal reading in English did not commence until first class. One teacher said, *aon ghasúr atá lag ní bheidh a fhios sin againn go dtosóimid ar an scéim Bhéarla.*

Language resources for Irish

A set of language support materials designed specifically for use in Irish-medium schools for the teaching of Irish, and available for classes ranging from junior infants to first class was in use. It was reported however that class readers were used to supplement this material and in particular to gauge children's progress in reading. It was praised by the teachers. One teacher considered it ... *thar a bheith éifeachtach ó thaobh cúrsaí teanga, foghraíochta, léitheoireachta agus a léithéid.*

The lack of availability of graded readers in Irish similar to those available for English was reported by a teacher of middle classes as another area of concern in providing children with reading material suitable to their level of ability.

In the case of the middle and senior classes various programmes were used to provide class readers and workbooks. Strong emphasis was also placed on the use of 'fíorleabhair' and the use of other authentic material from the school and local libraries to supplement class reading material.

Language resources for English

Two different reading schemes were in use for English. One scheme was used with first and second classes, and a different scheme with children from third class to sixth class. The importance of using 'real books' as supplementary material in the development of the children's reading skills and habits was stressed. Because of the diversity of language backgrounds in the classes and the need to differentiate, teachers also used other programmes, which allowed them to provide children with material better suited to their levels of ability.

Scoil F: Gaelscoil

Scoil Ghaeltachta	Between 200 and 250 children	13 staff*
First language of the children	English/Irish	
Language/s spoken at home	English is the language of the home for the majority of the children. For the remainder, Irish only is the language of the home or they are raised bilingually.	
Pre-school experience	The majority of the children attend a <i>Naíonra</i> .	
Post-primary opportunities	Children have access to a small number of Irish-medium post-primary schools. Approximately 50% transfer to these schools.	
Language policy of the school	<p>No formal teaching of English takes place in junior infants. Informal English activities include some nursery rhymes, stories, and songs. English is taught as a subject in each class from senior infants upwards.</p> <p>Formal reading in Irish is introduced before Christmas in senior infants. Formal reading in English is introduced after Christmas in senior infants.</p>	

* including two Learning-Support Teachers

1. Policy and Planning

Policy and implementation

The school policy was one of total immersion in Irish in junior infants. Any English input children received was informal and included storytelling, nursery rhymes, and songs. Children were engaged in pre-reading activities in Irish in junior infants. Formal reading in Irish was introduced before Christmas in senior infants and formal reading in English was introduced after Christmas. Oral language development in English began formally in first class and the English Curriculum was followed thereafter.

Prior to the introduction of the Primary School Curriculum reading was introduced in both languages in junior infants.

Factors that influenced the school's language policy

The school ethos and parents' wishes that their children be immersed in Irish were cited as the main factors in formulating the school's policy. Additional factors included the Board of Management's belief that immersion in Irish would not in any way hinder children's progress in English as they reached the higher classes and the fact that the majority of children would have experienced Irish-medium education in a *Naíonra*.

There was a school plan for Irish and English and these were monitored and reviewed from time to time. Teachers prepared schemes of work for their individual classes. One teacher held a post of responsibility for Irish in the school. This responsibility included investigating errors in the children's Irish at all levels and suggesting methods

to remedy them in the context of a whole school approach.

Parents and the school's language policy

Parents stated that they became aware of the school's language and literacy policy when their children were attending the *Naíonra*. They had understood that children would be immersed in the Irish language. One parent said, ... *[parents] may have found that their [children's] English would have suffered in the early years, [but] they would come back much stronger later on.*

A number of parents reported learning about the school's language and literacy policy at meetings held in the month of May prior to their children starting school the following September. Parent-teacher meetings were cited as another source of information on the school's policy.

Irish-medium education was cited by parents as their main reason for choosing the school for their children. Other factors mentioned, but in no order of priority, were the size of the school, that it was mixed, class size, that it had no uniform, recommendations from other parents and past-pupils, and the positive atmosphere in the school. A small number of the parents interviewed had experienced immersion in other countries. One parent said, *I think it gives them a very open attitude towards languages.*

Parents of older children were aware of the change in policy relating to the introduction of reading in Irish and in English. They were happy with the current policy of introducing reading in Irish first, and agreed that this did not pose any difficulty for their children when learning to read in English. The parents interviewed were very supportive of the immersion model being experienced by their children.

The majority of parents interviewed cited homework as providing opportunities for them to be involved

in their children's learning. One parent noted the change from the *bosca focal* in Irish and English being brought home by their older children when they were in junior infants and in senior infants a few years before. Another parent expressed the view that learning was more informal now because there were no words to be learned each night.

Some parents said that not having a good grasp of Irish left them at a disadvantage, particularly when their children were in the more senior classes. Mathematics, history, and religious education were cited as subjects that posed particular difficulties because of the complexity of terminology. Project work in Irish was reported by one parent as being particularly difficult. One parent said that such difficulties ... *force the child to take responsibility for ... a lot of it [homework].*

2. Oral Language

Competence in Irish

Children came predominantly from English-speaking homes. Irish only was used with junior infants up to the mid-term break, with a strong emphasis on a communicative approach. Much time was spent on conversation, instructions, songs, rhymes, stories, drama and sketches, and games in Irish. Time was dedicated to play and handling toys through the medium of Irish in junior infants. The following quotations illustrate how children experienced being immersed in Irish and knowing little of the language in the early stages. One child said, *ar dtúis bhí sé sórt deacair mar ní raibh a lán Gaeilge agam. Ach i naíonáin mhóra thosaigh mé, bhí a fhios agam a lán Gaeilge. Another added, chabhraigh na múinteoirí, díreach chaint siad ar ais chugainn i Gaeilge. Thuig muid céard a raibh siad a rá so bhí sé ana-éasca just teacht suas air, ar an nGaeilge.*

Teachers reported concentrating on the structures of Irish in the junior classes. Children mimicked or repeated what they heard from teachers, and teachers believed that they had a good command of the

structures by the time they reached senior infants/first class.

Teachers reported using differentiation strategies for oral language development in Irish, including adding more complex structures or vocabulary to the language that the teacher modelled, inviting children to narrate stories or news to the class, and inviting them to share their Irish with their peers in group/pair work situations.

Teachers noted that children developed a good level of competence in Irish up until second class at which point progress levelled off. By third and fourth classes, it was reported that faults in structure and vocabulary became evident because the Irish they spoke was being strongly influenced by English syntax. In order to combat these problems teachers said that it was necessary to provide children with as much literature as possible to familiarise them with the correct structures.

Rud a thugaimid faoi deara anseo agus cuireann sé iontas orainn i gcónaí ná go minic sna meán agus sna hardranganna i nGaelscoileanna téann na páistí i dtaithe ar a lingo féin a labhairt agus bíonn go leor botún gramadaí agus foclóra acu ach nuair a iarraimid orthu iad féin a cheartú bíonn siad in ann. (Teacher)

Interviews with the children revealed that some used Irish in the home. In the case of one family, for instance, Irish was not the language of the home but the child was encouraged to use it during meal times. Children also spoke of using Irish in the playground.

Competence in English

Oral language development in English began in first class. Prior to that, and in keeping with the school's policy of early total immersion, children did very little oral work in junior and senior infants. Teachers reported that children in second and third classes might not have achieved the same level of

competence in English as their peers in English-medium schools. The Principal said that their greatest challenge in terms of English oral language development in first, second and third classes was, ... *a chur ina luí ar na páistí gur ceacht é seo agus go bhfuil cead Béarla a úsáid.*

Teachers reported that by the time they reached senior classes the children had succeeded in achieving the same level of competence as their peers in English-medium schools. One factor cited was the supply of reading material in various genres available for English, compared with the limited supply for Gaeilge.

3. Emergent Reading and Reading

Approaches to reading

Emergent reading activities in Irish were introduced after the mid-term break in senior infants. Children carried *Leabhair bheaga* home for reading during the last term of junior infants. Teachers reported that the emergent reading activities for Irish served both languages and allowed for the transfer of skills, but also acknowledged that there were occasions on which children confused the sounds of the two languages.

Reading activities in the middle and senior classes included reading to the children and discussion of reading materials in both languages. In order to develop children's reading in Irish, themes were selected and 'authentic' vocabulary was gathered and used on flashcards. Suitable reading material containing as much as possible of this vocabulary was then selected for use.

Although the Principal and teachers said that children were introduced to emergent reading activities in English at the beginning of senior infants and started formal reading after Christmas in senior infants they also said that very little oral English work was engaged with in senior infants. Teachers noted that children received instruction in

English for at least one hour per day in first and second classes to raise their standard of reading. It was reported that the integrated approach to the implementation of the curriculum ensured that children were not denied instruction in any area of the curriculum as a consequence.

Teachers and the Principal reported that children found their English readers difficult in first class because they would not have had the same classroom experience of English as other children, but that this was counteracted by the allocation of extra time at a later stage. It was reported that little differentiation was required because all the children came from the same language background (predominantly English speaking families). Children who were able to read independently before their peers were given access books appropriate to their reading abilities. Children were encouraged to borrow books from the school library. Children in senior classes in the school assisted children from junior classes with reading on one day per week.

Parents' involvement with children's reading

Independent reading was encouraged both at school and in the home, with children selecting/buying predominantly English books. Some children said they bought books in both languages. Children also borrowed books from libraries. Most parents reported that their children would have been read to in English and chose to read English books, ... *[they] would love to get Irish books out of the library, for a window of about six months. But then it went. They liked to show off that they could read, but thereafter, it was straight to the Narnias, and the Star Wars or whatever.*

4. Writing

Approaches to writing

Work on writing commenced in junior infants. This involved a lot of drawing, copying, and matching of patterns. The children in senior infants reported copying the *Nuacht* which had been written on the

board by the class teacher into their copybooks. It was evident in the interviews with children that workbooks were used in all classes. These involved gap-filling exercises and reading comprehension exercises in both languages. It was reported that, when English became a formal part of the curriculum of the school in first class, it was necessary to spend more time on English since the children found the workbooks a little difficult in the initial stages. One teacher said, *bheadh uair an chloig gach lá á chaitheamh ar an mBéarla i rang a haon agus laethanta níos mó le hiad a thabhairt suas píosa.*

The children were sometimes asked to work in pairs on writing activities and to self-assess their work.

Both Irish and English grammar was taught formally from first class onwards. In the case of Irish it was reported that children would be familiar with terms such as *ainmfhocal, briathar, séimhiú, urú*. One teacher voiced concern that children needed to have the basics of language, ... *go bhfuil rudaí bunúsacha fágtha ar lár ... nach mbeadh eolas orthu seo ag múinteoirí nua, go ndéanfar dearmad orthu ... go mbeidh deacrachtaí ag na páistí – athrá agus foghlaim de ghlanmbeabhair.*

Children were expected to be able to use the vocabulary and structures they had experienced in reading activities in their writing.

Writing, editing and redrafting

It was reported that one class group wrote the school's Christmas play in Irish. This formed their writing activity over a period of time and involved editing, redrafting, and the integration of all the language skills.

Audience and genre

The audience for the children's writing included the class teacher, peers, and parents. It was reported that different genres of writing used in the middle and senior classes included creative and descriptive writing.

ICT and writing

Teachers said that children used computers in their writing, mostly for word processing. On occasions stories were written, printed, and passed around the classroom for peers to read. Children also used the Internet to research topics for projects. To assist them, they used an Irish language search engine. The skill of translation was cited as being of great importance to children when using the Internet to research projects. However, they also needed to be able to extrapolate the main points in a text instead of translating each word to Irish. Some programs involving word games in both languages were also used in class.

5. Resources for Language and Literacy Development

Assessment

A non-reading intelligence test was administered in senior infants. Irish-normed standardised test in mathematics and English reading were used for the other classes. No standardised tests were administered for Irish because no appropriate tests were available. Teachers relied on their own experience and the English tests to identify difficulties in language and literacy the children might have had.

Approaches to learning support

Learning-Support for mathematics was provided through Irish. However when children reached sixth class they were also given the mathematical terminology in English since they might have to pursue their second level education through English.

While the school was in a position to provide Learning-Support to more children, sixteen children were in receipt of support because they were at or below the 10th percentile. In some instances the Learning-Support Teacher worked with children in the classroom. Depending on individual needs other children were withdrawn from the class to received tuition on their own or in groups.

Children received support with oral Irish in first and second classes when necessary, in order to ensure that they could access the curriculum. The identification of children's learning difficulties was based on teacher observation and experience. Learning-Support in reading was generally provided from second class onwards, with the exception of acute cases that had been identified earlier.

Language resources for Irish

An English language programme based on letter-sound correspondence was used. Sound differences between the letters in Irish and in English were explained to the children. It was also reported that they learned only some of the accompanying songs and rhymes in the programme. At the time of the interviews the use of this particular programme was under review. It was supplemented by the use of a programme based on the long vowels and consonants in Irish, which was developed for Irish-medium schools and which was being used in the junior classes.

However, the teachers said that it was necessary to use an additional reading scheme as well. Strong emphasis was also placed on the use of *florleabhair*.

Language resources for English

In addition to the English language programme mentioned above, two sets of language support materials were used for English. The importance of using *real books* as supplementary material in the development of the children's reading skills and habits was stressed.

Appendix A

Summary of Issues

1. Policy and Planning

Language revitalisation and language maintenance

Crucial to a consideration of issues arising from the six descriptions of practice in schools in relation to language and literacy are the concepts of language revitalisation and language maintenance. Language revitalisation involves a reversal of language use whereby people begin using a language that is moribund or is threatened with extinction in order to restore its vitality. Language maintenance is typical of a situation in which a language is still viable in certain communities, or has already been revived, but whose future may be precarious and may even be threatened with extinction.

In Ireland, traditionally, efforts to strengthen and secure use of the Irish language in Gaeltacht communities have constituted language maintenance, whereas the task of restoring the language outside those communities (predominantly in English speaking areas) has been characterised as language revitalisation. Recently it has become evident, however, that such a clear cut distinction may no longer be useful, since there are Gaeltacht areas that now need to be targeted in terms of revitalisation rather than maintenance.

- To what extent can language maintenance or language revitalisation be taken account of by schools in formulating a language policy in the case of a Gaeltacht school and a Gaelscoil?

Immersion and the Primary School Curriculum

The benefits for second language teaching of a policy of total immersion is supported by research from abroad, although international research has reached a variety of conclusions as to which characteristics of total immersion are most effective. A particular issue with regard to a policy of total immersion in the Irish context arises in relation to

the Primary School Curriculum. All curriculum areas and all subjects within the curriculum areas are begun in Junior Infants and are pursued in a developmental manner throughout the child's primary school years. Great emphasis is also placed on the integration of learning across the different subjects of the curriculum. Some of the participating schools had a policy of total immersion in junior infants and English was taught only incidentally or informally for that year. A central issue in the approach to language and literacy raised in these schools is the tension between total immersion and the *Suggested minimum weekly time framework*¹ for L2 as it is currently stated.

- Children at infant class level perceive and experience learning in an integrated way. In what way, if at all, would an engagement with English for the time recommended in the Primary School Curriculum impinge on their progress in Gaeilge?
- What are the implications of a policy of total immersion in the second language in junior infants for children whose home language development is behind that of their peers?
- Is an experience of Irish-medium education appropriate for children with general learning disabilities or specific learning disabilities in their home language if this is other than Irish?
- In the case of both Gaeltacht schools and Gaelscoileanna, what should the features of appropriate provision for children with general learning disabilities or specific learning disabilities be, if their home language is Irish?

Parents and the school's language policy

In line with the findings of the Primary Curriculum Review 2005, in English, mathematics and visual arts regarding the involvement of parents generally, parents were not involved in the formulation of language policy in the schools. The extent to which they were informed of the school's language policy and the details of its implementation varied. Parents' sources of information included formal meetings in

¹ Primary School Curriculum: Introduction, p.70.

the school, informal chats with teachers and other parents, and children's homework.

- Whether the aim of the language policy of the school is language maintenance or language revitalisation the support of the home is vital. How can parents best be enabled to participate in decision-making with regard to the formulation and implementation of the school's language policy?

Irish-medium instruction and community support

Findings from research into language maintenance and language revitalisation appear to differ. Some research would indicate that pre-school and the primary school are critical contexts for language maintenance and language revitalisation. Other studies claim that schools have a limited value in language revival and survival, and that their role will always be secondary unless they feed into and facilitate the reinstatement of home and family transmission of the language. Links with the speech community are also critical. In the case of Gaelscoileanna the opportunities for establishing links with a community of Irish speakers can be very limited. In Gaeltacht areas this is much easier, although the contraction of Irish as the normal language of communities in Gaeltacht areas may pose a challenge.

- How can a school contribute to language maintenance and/or language revitalisation when the home and community supports are limited?

2. Oral Language

Teachers in Gaelscoileanna and in Gaeltacht schools expressed concern about the quality of Irish spoken by children, especially in informal situations. They commented on the extent to which it was often neither idiomatically or grammatically correct. The children were inclined to use some of the structures of English and to insert the English equivalent for vocabulary they knew quite well in Irish. Teachers also noted that this tendency became more pronounced after the children left the junior classes.

The communicative approach to language teaching embodied in *Curaclam na Gaeilge* not only seeks to create an authentic language environment in which children involve themselves in real language activities based on their own interests and concerns but emphasises the importance of pre-communicative, communicative, and post-communicative tasks for oral language learning.

- How can the importance of the inclusion of pre-communicative, communicative and post-communicative tasks in second language learning be reflected in the language learning experiences of children?
- What could a greater focus of attention on the three phases of oral language acquisition contribute to addressing the lack of idiomatic and correct grammatical form that characterises children's use of Irish in the more senior classes in primary school?
- How can teaching in formal classroom settings inform informal language use?

Children's earlier experiences of language learning

A majority of the children enrolled in the schools had attended pre-school. A considerable proportion of children attending Gaeltacht schools had pre-school experiences through the medium of Irish while this was not the case for many of the children enrolled in the Gaelscoileanna who had attended pre-school through English. It was reported that the quality and extent of Irish-medium pre-school experience varied. It ranged from children whose pre-school experience of Irish was limited to children who experienced what was close to total immersion in a *Naíonra*.

The diversity in pre-school experience had considerable implications for the schools in which children enrolled. These implications related to the development of language and literacy programmes that would cater for the wide spectrum of language experience of children arriving in the primary school.

- How can the broad spectrum of prior language learning experiences best be accommodated in Irish-medium schools?

3. Emergent Reading and Reading

Approaches to literacy and questions such as which language children should start reading in first are of central concern to Irish-medium schools. Practice in the schools visited varied: in some cases Irish reading was begun first, in some cases English reading was begun first, and in others reading was begun in both languages at the same time. Furthermore, some teachers were unsure how far literacy should be developed in the first language before starting it in the second. A key concern of parents in both Gaeltacht schools and Gaelscoileanna was that children should attain a good standard of literacy in English so that they would gain maximum benefit from second level education. Research as to the optimal age to embark on reading and writing in the first language in immersion situations is inconclusive. International research findings would appear to indicate that it is impossible to generalise without taking account of the context and the variables in any local setting. This would suggest a priority area for research in Ireland.

Curaclam na Gaeilge, the English Curriculum, and the *Treoirínte do Mhúinteoirí* and *Teacher Guidelines* that accompany them recommend approaches and methodologies for language teaching and learning. It was not evident from the descriptions of practice that the recommended approaches were being fully implemented. In some schools, while the suggested approaches to engagement in emergent reading activities in Irish were being implemented prior to the introduction of formal reading in Irish, the period for engagement in emergent reading activities in English was very short before the children began formal reading in English. In one school there was very little emphasis on the inclusion oral language development activities prior to the introduction of formal reading. From the evidence of some of the

support materials that were being used it was not clear, even if sufficient time were given to emergent literacy activities, that these activities encompassed all that the English Curriculum envisaged.

This is very relevant to some recent research findings that suggest that it is the quality of instruction in the classroom—the pedagogical activities and models that facilitate language acquisition—that is more influential than factors such as the timing of the introduction of reading in promoting effective advances in literacy.

- One of the most contested areas of second language learning is the timing of the introduction of emergent reading and reading in Irish and English, respectively. What are the critical issues that need to be taken into account when advising on whether a child's first experience of emergent reading and reading should be in their home language or in the language of the school?
- How should the approaches to emergent reading and reading take account of the fact that children in Irish-medium schools engage with subjects other than English through the medium of Irish?
- The quality of children's oral language development is crucial to their success in reading. Should emergent reading and reading in the second language be delayed until an acceptable level of competence in that language is attained?

4. Writing

The importance of the teaching approaches adopted in the development of language acquisition is relevant to the development of each of the strands of oral language, reading, and writing. The over-reliance on workbooks, the lack of emphasis on process writing as recommended in the English Curriculum, and the low level of use of ICT reported by teachers in participating schools reflected similar findings from the Primary Curriculum Review (2005). A particular concern of

teachers in all schools was the lack of availability of suitable texts in different genres produced in the Irish language.

- An experience of reading suitable texts in different genres can assist children in developing writing skills. What are the features of suitable materials? How can their effectiveness be evaluated?

5. Resources for Language and Literacy Development

Assessment and learning support

Teachers in both Gaeltacht schools and Gaelscoileanna expressed concern at the unavailability of suitable Irish-medium standardised tests in mathematics. In the six schools Learning-Support was provided in English and mathematics, and in the three Gaelscoileanna and one Scoil Ghaeltachta Learning-Support in mathematics was provided through the medium of English. In the senior classes in the Gaelscoileanna mathematical terminology was provided in English as well as Irish, in order to ensure that children would be prepared for second level schooling through the medium of English, whenever that might be the case.

- A significant number of children in the general population display some difficulty in developing phonological and phonemic awareness in their home language. What are the implications of this for children's reading attainment in the home language in Irish-medium schools?
- What criteria ought to be considered when deciding the language in which learning support should be provided?

Language resources

All schools expressed the need for improved provision of suitable reading materials in Irish, although in Gaelscoileanna this seemed to be more focussed at the level of the third and fourth Classes. One of the outcomes of this, in Gaeltacht schools

particularly, was that children were more inclined to read for pleasure in English. If literacy in Irish is an essential part of language development, then progress in this area could be affected by a lack of age-appropriate reading material in the language. A set of language support materials designed specifically for use in Irish-medium schools is currently being developed and is available up to first class. Teachers in the Gaeltacht schools expressed concern regarding the lack of suitable materials in Irish for other subjects. It was also said that those that were available tended to be too difficult even for parents who were native speakers.

- What materials are needed to facilitate learning through the medium of Irish in the different subjects of the curriculum? How should these be developed?

6. Further Research

Further research on a number of aspects of first and second language learning in Ireland may focus on

- the effectiveness of total immersion in infant classes in promoting second language learning
- the optimal timing of the introduction of emergent reading and reading in Irish and English in Irish-medium schools
- the suitability of Irish-medium education for children with language/reading difficulties in their home language
- the tendency of children in Irish-medium schools to use the second language in a way that is neither idiomatic nor grammatically correct, particularly in the later stages of primary school
- the extent to which the approaches to language teaching in both Irish and English, as these are outlined in the Primary School Curriculum, are being implemented.
- Are there further research questions that should be explored in this area?