NCCA

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta

Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools

Supporting school policy and practice

January 2007

Contents

Section 1. Introduction

Following the development and introduction of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has embarked on a programme of rolling review. *Primary Curriculum Review Phase 1: Final Report* was published in 2005. This review focussed on the implementation of English, visual arts and mathematics in all primary schools. Phase 2 of the work has commenced and is focusing on Gaeilge, science and Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE).

As a component of its work on curriculum review, the Minister for Education and Science has asked the NCCA to provide advice on the introduction of language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools.

Since the introduction of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) a number of concerns have been expressed in relation to the curriculum for language in Irish-medium primary schools and the introduction of language and literacy in these schools. These concerns relate to

- Immersion practice in schools: Some Irish-medium schools operate early total immersion practices whereby the teaching of English is delayed for varying periods of time. In some instances it may be introduced in the second term of junior infants whilst in others it is not introduced before some time in senior infants.
- Gaeilge Curriculum: The language curriculum for Gaeilge is presented in terms of the four strands of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The emphasis is on the development of the child's ability to communicate effectively through the medium of Irish. However whilst the curriculum for English includes *Developing cognitive abilities through language* as a strand, there is no reference to the development of cognitive abilities through language in the curriculum for Gaeilge. This is of particular concern in Irish-medium primary schools.
- English curriculum: The curriculum for Gaeilge is differentiated for English-medium and Irish-medium schools. There is no differentiation in the curriculum for English in the context of the medium of instruction of the school.

▪ The language in which emergent literacy should first be introduced (English or Irish): Schools differ in the approaches they adopt.

▪ Addressing language and literacy difficulties in Irish-medium primary schools: Systems for identifying and addressing language and literacy difficulties in such schools are lacking. These relate in particular to the provision of learning support *for* Irish and *through* Irish, for example for mathematics.

▪ Assessment and standardised tests: That there are no standardised tests produced in Irish for mathematics (although standardised tests developed elsewhere are used in some schools[1]) or for the assessment of children's levels of ability in the Irish language is a particular concern.

▪ Changing population in Gaeltacht areas: Some schools in Gaeltacht areas delivering first language education through the medium of Irish are attended by a significant percentage of children who have no prior experience of Irish and therefore experience immersion-type education.

These concerns have arisen because the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) is somewhat ambivalent on the introduction of language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools. The Introduction to the curriculum states that *children, from the beginning of schooling, have an experience of language learning in two languages* (page 27). However, later, it notes that in infant classes *the suggested minimum framework is not directly applicable, as it is for other class groups* [at infant level] (page 69).

The Gaeilge curriculum on page 5 refers to the importance of the development of emergent literacy (*scileanna na réamhléitheoireachta*) in Irish-medium schools. However there is a lack of clarity for schools on the introduction of formal reading in Irish and English. The decision in this regard is made at school level.

Moltar gan tosú ar léitheoireacht fhoirmiúil sa dá theanga ag an am céanna i scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta.	It is advised that formal reading in the two languages is not begun at the same time in all-Irish and Gaeltacht schools.

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[1] Teisteanna Matamaitice Nfer Nelson, translated and published by Áisaonad, St. Mary's College Belfast, Northern Ireland

Section 2. Work to date

To facilitate engagement with the issues outlined in the introduction, the NCCA commissioned a review of literature and conducted a wide consultation process focussed on teachers, parents and children in Irish-medium primary schools. Council also convened a seminar in conjunction with An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) on 22 November 2006.

2.1. Review of Literature

NCCA commissioned *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools: Review of Literature* - a review of national and international literature on language and literacy in bilingual settings. This review focussed on the macro issues of language maintenance and language revitalisation, explained later on pages 12 and 13. It also focussed on issues related to the introduction of language and literacy in the Irish context, drawing on international research.

2.2 Consultation

2.2.1 Consultation document

To facilitate engagement with the sector on the key issues the NCCA developed a consultation paper, *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools: Descriptions of Practice* (2006). This paper was published in both Irish and English. It was developed from interviews conducted with principals, teachers, parents and children in six schools, three in Gaeltacht areas and three Gaelscoileanna. The purpose of the paper was to

- provide an example of a range of practices in relation to the introduction of language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools
- identify issues and concerns relevant to curriculum implementation. These were presented under five headings which provided the context for the consultation:
  - o School policy and practice
  - o Oral language development
  - o Emergent reading and reading

o Writing

o Resources for language and literacy development.

2.2.2 Questionnaires and submissions

Questionnaires were developed to accompany the consultation paper. They were disseminated to all Irish-medium primary schools for completion by teachers, parents and children. The material was also sent to all post-primary schools (Irish-medium and English-medium). An online version of the questionnaire was also developed.

Submissions in response to the consultation paper were invited from organisations and individuals with an interest in the area.

The consultation closed on 29 September 2006. Findings from submissions and questionnaires received up to 27 October 2006 were included in *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools: Final Report on the Consultation and Seminar* (2006) which accompanies these proposals.

2.3 Seminar

Initial findings from the consultation process were presented at a seminar co-hosted by the NCCA and COGG on 22 November 2006.

Participants also engaged in mapping the way forward using scenario thinking and planning. Groups were invited to use creative foresight in describing language policy and practice in Irish-medium schools in 2010. The seminar report is included in the paper *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools: Final Report on the Consultation and Seminar* (2006).

Section 3. Current policy and practice concerning language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools

3.1 Language and literacy in the curriculum

The *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction* (p. 27) states:

> *An engagement with the Irish language throughout the period of primary education extends the child's linguistic experience and deepens cultural awareness.*

Two important areas in the child's development are identified above: the development of the child's linguistic ability and fostering a deeper awareness of the Irish culture. In primary schools in Ireland children are taught two languages. When teachers have an awareness of the development of transferable language learning skills and making connections between the languages that children are learning, and other languages where relevant, this provides a solid foundation for learning other languages in the future. The extract continues

> *The curriculum recognises that an experience and a knowledge of Irish are important in enabling the child to begin to define and express his/her sense of national and cultural identity.*

This sentence reflects the ongoing commitment of successive Irish Governments to the maintenance and revitalisation of the Irish language. These concepts are crucial to any consideration of the teaching of Irish.

Within the curriculum itself, the curriculum area, *Language* includes Irish and English although in the design of the curriculum some allowance was also made for the introduction of a modern language.[2]

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[2] The Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI) commenced as a pilot project in schools (Irish-medium and English-medium) in September 1998, the year before the Primary School Curriculum was launched. Children are taught another language (Italian, Spanish, German or French) for 1½ hours per week in 5th and 6th classes.

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The Education Act (1998) is relevant in this context. It places a specific responsibility on Gaeltacht schools to contribute to the maintenance of Irish as the principal language in Gaeltacht areas. Section 9(h) of the Act makes particular reference to the functions of these schools stating that they should use available resources to

> … in the case of schools located in a Gaeltacht area, contribute to the maintenance of Irish as the primary community language.

In addressing the functions of a school in respect of all primary schools, Section 9(f) refers to promoting *the development of the Irish language and traditions, Irish literature, the arts and other cultural matters.* Section 9(d) refers to the requirement to *establish and maintain an admissions policy which provides for maximum accessibility to the school.*

3.2 The language curriculum in Irish-medium primary schools: Findings

The consultation on this issue gathered findings from multiple perspectives (including children, parents, teachers, and representatives of Boards of Management) on five key issues which have been amalgamated in the next 3 sections. Findings presented in the final report on the consultation were based on 613 questionnaires and 14 submissions. Key findings are summarised under the headings of emergent literacy and literacy, policy and planning, and resources and assessment.

3.2.1 Emergent literacy and literacy

A variety of practice in relation to the introduction of language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools was highlighted in responses to the questionnaires from parents and teachers (Table 1). Such variety was also reflected in descriptions of practice documented prior to the consultation.

It is important to note that many Gaelscoileanna adopt *tumoideachas* or early total immersion as an approach to language learning, for all or part of junior infants, whilst some delay the introduction of English until sometime in senior infants. Other

Gaelscoileanna adopt a partial immersion approach where English is taught for 2½ hours per week as proposed by the *suggested minimum weekly time framework* (*Primary School Curriculum: Introduction*, p.70)*.*

Table 1: Introduction of language and literacy: Questionnaire responses

Respondents	n	Gaeilge first	English First	Gaeilge and English at the same time
Teachers	123	53	11	6
Parents	272	136	25	111

Ó Laoire & Harris (2006) have suggested that research internationally on emergent literacy and literacy is inconclusive. Some researchers have advised that emergent literacy should be addressed in the language medium of the school (Cummins, 2000). Others have recommended the home language of the child (Noonan, Colleauz and Yackulic, 1997). Ó Laoire & Harris (2006) suggest that it might be more appropriate to emphasise the approaches and methodologies used in introducing emergent literacy and the development of transferable language learning skills to facilitate the introduction of another language, rather than on the respective timing of the introduction of literacy in the two languages.

3.2.2 Policy and planning

Two key issues - language revitalisation and language maintenance - were raised in the submissions concerning policy and planning. Of the 132 teachers who responded to the section on policy and planning in the questionnaire, 61 or *46%,* considered the level of language development of pupils to be an important factor in planning the language and literacy policy of the school. 38 or *31%* of the teachers who responded highlighted the importance of parental involvement and support for the development and implementation of school policy. This was also mentioned as an important factor in submissions received.

3.2.3 Resources and assessment

Respondents reported a lack of appropriate assessment instruments available for use in Irish-medium schools. The following priorities were also identified in the consultation findings:

- ensuring that assessments are conducted by experts who possess a high standard of proficiency in the Irish language
- developing effective strategies for identifying children with language and literacy difficulties
- developing effective strategies for identifying the language in which support should be provided
- ensuring that teachers and parents recognise that children develop literacy at different rates in an immersion setting and that this may not necessarily imply a language difficulty
- recognising the need for the provision of learning support *for* Irish and *through* Irish for mathematics
- providing support for those teaching in a first language Irish-medium setting in which a significant percentage of children enrolling do not speak Irish at home/other settings
- providing a suitably qualified Cúntóir Teanga (teacher who provides support for the oral language development of children, currently for Gaeltacht schools only) for *all* Irish-medium primary schools.

Further findings from the consultation, reiterate the issues raised on page 5 of this document. These included:

- the level of concern about the disparity between the *Language c*urriculum for English and the *Language* curriculum for Gaeilge (L1)[3] in the emphasis placed on the development of cognitive abilities through language. See page 5 of this document.
- ensuring that teachers are prepared for working in the variety of Irish-medium settings involving *tumoideachas*, bilingual education and the development of transferable language learning skills

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[3] [3] L1 is the language medium of the school (Irish in Irish-medium schools). L2 is the second language (English in Irish-medium schools).

- the need for both pre-service and in-service professional development to equip teachers to teach in first language Gaeltacht settings and in immersion settings
- the shortage of research conducted in Ireland to inform policy and practice in language and literacy in Irish-medium schooling.

3.3 Irish-medium primary schools and the Irish language

Spolsky (1998), cited in the commissioned review of literature, has suggested that language revitalisation involves *restoring vitality or natural intergenerational transmission to a language that is moribund or endangered or whose use has become contracted.* In other words, it involves a reversal of language use whereby people begin using a language in order to restore its vitality. King (2001), also cited in the review (p.7), defines language maintenance as, *the continued use of the language in as many domains (social situations) as possible*. Language maintenance is typical of a situation in which a language is still viable, or has already been revived, but whose future may be precarious and may even be threatened with extinction (King 2001, Spolsky 1998 cited in Ó Laoire & Harris 2006).

As noted by Ó Laoire & Harris (2006), in Ireland, traditionally, language efforts directed at strengthening and securing usage of 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. However, it has become evident recently that such a clear cut distinction may no longer be asserted, since there are Gaeltacht areas that now need to be targeted in terms of revitalisation rather than maintenance.

Some Gaeltacht schools have particular concerns relating to the percentage of those children enrolling in schools who have not spoken Irish in the home or other settings (for example in a naíonra/with grandparents), and the implications this might have for language learning and the development of school policy on language. In some Gaeltacht schools a significant percentage of those enrolling are from non Irish-speaking homes. These children experience their education in what is, in effect, an immersion setting. The challenge for schools, therefore, lies in addressing the needs of

these children whilst also providing first language education through Irish for other children.

Section 4. Supporting school policy and practice

This section summarises the rationale for the NCCA proposals presented in this document, including the range of models outlined, and elements of these models.

4.1 Rationale

4.1.1 Variety of Practice
In the consultation paper *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools: Descriptions of Practice* (2006), and in *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools: Report on the Consultation and Seminar*, it is evident that practice in relation to the introduction of language and emergent literacy in Irish-medium primary schools differs between schools and within schools. In the NCCA's consultation, teachers and parents reported that they were unclear on the basis for a school's policy and practice on children's language and literacy development. Findings showed that staff within a school differed in their understanding of the policy implemented in the school. For example, in one school where parents considered they understood the school policy the policy, it was not, in reality, as they understood it to be.

4.1.2 Flexibility afforded by the Primary School Curriculum
The *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) for Gaeilge has two sections: one for English-medium primary schools and one for Irish-medium primary schools. The curriculum for Irish-medium primary schools does not differentiate between the variety of contexts in which Irish-medium education is provided (Gaelscoileanna and schools in Gaeltacht areas). A separate curriculum for English in Irish-medium primary schools was not developed.

The provision of discrete time for Language (Irish and English) outlined in the *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction* (1999) has been interpreted in different ways. On page 27 the curriculum states that *it is a particular feature of Irish primary education that children, from the beginning of schooling, have an experience of language learning in two languages*. The suggested minimum weekly time framework (ibid, p. 70) includes provision for 5½ hours discrete time for Language per week: 3 hours for L1 and 2½

hours for L2. However page 69 of the Introduction states that in infant classes *the suggested minimum framework is not directly applicable, as it is for other class groups*, (at infant level) *approaches to teaching and learning … will entail a more flexible use of the suggested time frame*. It is evident that the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) is itself equivocal in regard to the languages in which children develop literacy.

4.1.3 Research

In the Irish context there has been very little research on language teaching and the development of emergent literacy and literacy in Irish-medium primary education.

In discussing immersion education, which is mainly concerned with language revitalisation, Ó Laoire & Harris (2006) draw attention to the fact that the research is inconclusive as to the language in which literacy should first be introduced. They reported that *existing international research is not adequate to decide the reading sequencing issue clearly in the context of Irish immersion - either in a general way or in particular schools* (p. 37).

However, researchers also noted that teaching and learning approaches and methodologies are key in the development of emergent literacy and literacy and the development of transferable language learning skills, in the context of additive bilingualism and dual literacy.[4] The authors have suggested that *there is no necessary reason why best practice in this area should be the same in all all-Irish schools* (ibid. p. 38).

In the light of findings from *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools: Review of Literature* (2006) it is imperative that research is conducted in Ireland that would generate evidence on which national policy on language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools could be based.

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[4] *Additive bilingualism* describes proficiency in two languages, where the acquisition of a second language does not occur at the expense of proficiency in the first language.
Dual literacy involves the acquisition and development of literacy skills in two languages.

4.2 Models to guide policy and practice

Faced with similar challenges, a number of categories or models have been developed in the Basque region and in Wales to guide the development of language and literacy.

In the context of the Basque region, *3rd Sociolinguistic Map, 2001,* describes three models (A, B and D) developed in the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC). These relate to students in schools in 2002-2003. Model A describes schools which are Spanish-medium with Basque as a subject. Model B describes schools which are Spanish and Basque medium and model D describes schools that are Basque medium with Spanish as a subject.

In Wales, in the consultation paper, *Defining Schools According to Welsh Medium Provision* (2006), schools were defined according to the language which is used as the medium of instruction and in the normal business of the school. Five primary school categories were defined

1. Welsh-Medium Primary School
2. Dual Stream Primary School
3. Predominantly Welsh medium with significant use of English
4. Predominantly English Medium with significant use of Welsh
5. Predominantly English medium.

The Welsh Assembly Government intends that agreed definitions should be adopted by all admission authorities … (p. 2). This was considered necessary for the following purposes

- *establishing clear objectives for educators and pupils regarding linguistic outcomes*
- *providing unambiguous information to parents and their children regarding the options available*
- *allowing systematic evaluation of the relative strengths and weaknesses of different models of language teaching.* (p.4)

The concept of a range of models offers much to the Irish context. In the first instance, it recognises that research on this area is inconclusive as to best practice. Second, such an approach also takes account of the different ways in which the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) has been interpreted by Irish-medium primary schools in its implementation in the infant years. Third, it affords an opportunity to develop clarity for schools, teachers and parents on the approach being adopted. Finally, and most importantly, it offers an interim arrangement to support much-needed Irish research on the introduction and development of language and literacy. Such an approach will have implications for the NCCA and for the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) which will need to be revisited to take account of the models proposed.

In line with developments in Wales and in the Basque region, the NCCA proposes the development of models or múnlaí as an interim measure to support a programme of research. The múnlaí will provide a structure within which school policy can be developed. Schools will adopt múnlaí according to criteria to include

- the language of the school
- prior language learning experiences of the children
- the language of curriculum delivery.

The múnlaí provide flexibility for schools to develop school policy and practice appropriate to the context of the school. Schools will need to keep the policy under review even during this interim period although any change in policy will need to be flagged to researchers and to the Department of Education and Science. Important considerations in developing and reviewing school policy will include the impact of the múnla adopted on the approaches to the development of literacy throughout primary education, provision for children with special educational needs, the provision of learning support and effective ways of communicating policy to members of the school community.

4.2 1 Development of models/múnlaí

Múnlaí are described in terms of the discrete time for language learning, as a percentage of the total time for curriculum delivery in the Irish-medium primary school.

A broad outline of each múnla is presented here. Time allocation for each of the múnlaí is based on the discrete time allocation of 5½ hours per week for *Language* in the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) (allocated in the curriculum as 3 hours for L1 and 2½ hours or c. 10% of overall curriculum delivery time for L2). In developing guidelines the NCCA will include a more comprehensive overview of each múnla.

In developing múnlaí the NCCA has considered the breadth of possibilities relating to language and literacy development in both English-medium and Irish-medium primary schools. The focus is on developing policy and guidelines for infant classes in Irish-medium primary schools. The múnla adopted will have implications for the approaches to the further development of language and literacy throughout the school. Other approaches to developing language and literacy in primary schools, such as the adoption of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and the inclusion of a modern language in the primary school, will be considered in the advice that the NCCA will provide on the place of modern languages in primary schools following the implementation of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999).

Each school will adopt a múnla taking into account language of the school, language of the home, the language of other settings within a child's experience, and the language and literacy needs of the children. School policy will be developed in conjunction with the school community and will provide for the educational needs of all children, including those with special educational needs and those for whom neither English nor Irish is a first language. It will consider the language of communication within the school, the language of communication with parents and how the policy will be communicated to all members of the school community.

It will be important that all teachers from junior infants to sixth class including support teachers have a clear understanding of additive bilingualism and dual literacy in order to ensure continuity and progression in the child's language and emergent literacy and literacy development throughout primary education. It is also important that parents would understand the relevance of these concepts to supporting language learning in the home. The guidelines (discussed on page 28) will provide advice and support for schools on these issues.

Múnlaí are presented on the following pages. Múnla 1 to Múnla 4 focus exclusively on Irish-medium primary schools. A further múnla is presented that might apply to English-medium primary schools.

Conducting any further research will be contingent upon all Irish-medium primary schools adopting one of the four múnlaí described. This will provide both the context and the focus for the much-needed research on the best approaches to language and literacy in Irish-medium settings.

4.2.2 Interim múnlaí

Múnla 1

Table 1: Múnla 1

Múnla 1	Junior Infants	Senior Infants
Term 1	**Curriculum delivery through Irish: 100%.**	**Curriculum delivery through Irish: 100%.**
Term 2	**Curriculum delivery through Irish: 100%.**	**Curriculum delivery through Irish: c. 90%** **Discrete time for English: c.10%**
Term 3	**Curriculum delivery through Irish: 100%.**	**Curriculum delivery through Irish: c. 90%** **Discrete time for English: c. 10%**

Junior Infants: Curriculum delivery is through Irish. The focus is on the development of the child's communicative skills and the development of a print-rich environment which supports the development of emergent literacy.

- Emergent literacy strategies are introduced in Irish first.

Senior infants: Curriculum delivery is through Irish. Discrete time for *Language* is 5½ hours per week.

- Discrete time of 3 hours per week for Gaeilge is introduced in Term 2.

- Discrete time of at least 2½ hours per week (c. 10%) for English is introduced in Term 2. In introducing English, teachers will need to ensure the development of children's oral language in accordance with the strands and strand units of the English Curriculum, prior to the introduction of reading.

- Formal reading is introduced in Irish first during senior infants when the teacher considers the child is ready.

- Formal reading in English will be introduced *after Irish* when the teacher considers the child is ready.

Múnla 2

Table 2: Múnla 2

Múnla 2	Junior Infants	Senior Infants
Term 1	**Curriculum delivery through Irish: 100%.**	**Curriculum delivery through Irish: c. 90%.** **Discrete time for English: c.10%**
Term 2	**Curriculum delivery through Irish: 100%**	**Curriculum delivery through Irish: c. 90%** **Discrete time for English: c.10%**
Term 3	**Curriculum delivery through Irish: 100%.**	**Curriculum delivery through Irish: c. 90%** **Discrete time for English: c.10%**

Junior Infants: Curriculum delivery is through Irish. The focus is on the development of the child's communicative skills in the context of a print-rich environment which supports emergent literacy.

▪ Emergent literacy strategies are introduced in Irish first.

Senior infants: Curriculum delivery is through Irish for 90% of the time. Discrete time for *Language* is 5½ hours per week.

▪ Discrete time for Gaeilge is 3 hours per week.

▪ Discrete time of at least 2½ hours per week (c. 10%) is allocated for English. In introducing English, teachers will need to ensure the development of children's oral language in accordance with the strands and strand units of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) for English, prior to the introduction of reading.

▪ Formal reading in Irish is introduced in senior infants when the teacher considers the child is ready.

▪ Formal reading in English will be introduced *after Irish* when the teacher considers the child is ready.

Múnla 3

Table 3: Múnla 3

Múnla 3	Junior Infants	Senior Infants
Term 1	Curriculum delivery through Irish: 100%	Curriculum delivery through Irish: c. 90% Discrete time for English: c.10%
Term 2	Curriculum delivery through Irish: c. 90% Discrete time for English: c.10%	Curriculum delivery through Irish: c. 90% Discrete time for English: c.10%
Term 3	Curriculum delivery through Irish: c. 90% Discrete time for English: c.10%	Curriculum delivery through Irish: c.90% Discrete time for English: c.10%

Junior Infants: Curriculum delivery is through Irish for 90% of the time.

- Discrete time of at least 2½ hours (c. 10%) per week for English in Term 2. In introducing English, teachers will need to ensure the development of children's oral language in accordance with the strands and strand units of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) for English, prior to the introduction of reading.
- Discrete time for Gaeilge of 3 hours per week in Term 2.
- Emergent literacy strategies are introduced in Irish first.

Senior infants: Curriculum delivery is through Irish for 90% of the time.

- Discrete time for Gaeilge is 3 hours per week
- Discrete time of at least 2½ hours (c. 10%) per week is provided for English
- Formal reading is introduced in senior infants when the teacher considers the child is ready. Formal reading in English and Irish should not be introduced at the same time.

Múnla 4

Table 4: Múnla 4

Múnla 4	Junior Infants	Senior Infants
Term 1	Curriculum delivery through Irish: c. 90% Discrete time for English: c.10%	Curriculum delivery through Irish: c. 90% Discrete time for English: c.10%
Term 2	Curriculum delivery through Irish: c. 90% Discrete time for English: c.10%	Curriculum delivery through Irish: c. 90% Discrete time for English: c.10%
Term 3	Curriculum delivery through Irish: c. 90% Discrete time for English: c.10%	Curriculum delivery through Irish: c. 90% Discrete time for English: c.10%

Junior Infants: Curriculum delivery is through Irish for 90% of the time.

▪ Discrete time for Gaeilge is 3 hours per week.

▪ Discrete time for English is 2½ hours (c. 10%) per week. In introducing English, teachers will need to ensure the development of children's oral language in accordance with the strands and strand units of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) for English, prior to the introduction of reading.

Senior infants: Curriculum delivery is through Irish for 90% of the time. Discrete time for *Language* is 5½ hours per week.

▪ Discrete time for Gaeilge is 3 hours per week.

▪ Discrete time for English is 2½ hours (c. 10%) per week.

▪ Formal reading is introduced in senior infants when the teacher considers the child is ready. Formal reading in English and Irish should not be introduced at the same time.

Múnla eile

This paper is concerned with language and literacy development in Irish-medium schools only. The possibilities for the inclusion of a CLIL approach in both Irish-medium and English-medium schools have been alluded to earlier on page 19. The table below refers to English-medium primary schools and the context in which language and literacy development might be considered in the future.

Table 5: Múnla eile

Múnla eile	Infant Classes
Múnla A	**Curriculum delivery through English: up to 90%** **Discrete time for Irish from beginning of junior infants: c. 10%.** **Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is used to teach a strand or a strand unit of a subject through for example Irish or another language**

4.3. Múnlaí for schools

In deciding the múnla a school is going to adopt, consideration will need to be given to the following elements and their implications for the development of school policy.

- Language of the school
- Language of curriculum delivery
- Language of the home
- Theoretical basis for the múnla.

4.3.1 Language of the school

Identifying the múnla a school will adopt will involve considering a number of criteria relating to the language of instruction/curriculum delivery, language of informal communication (within the school generally), the language/s of communication with parents and the language/s of communication among/between staff working in the school.

4.3.2 Language of curriculum delivery

Each school will develop policy on the language of curriculum delivery in accordance with the múnla that is being adopted. Some schools will provide discrete time for English (2½ per week or c. 10%) from the beginning of junior infants and all other subjects will be taught through the medium of Irish. Other schools will delay the introduction of English until Term 2 in junior infants, the beginning of senior infants or Term 2 in senior infants. In all schools discrete time for *Language* will be 5½ hours per week in infant classes, in accordance with the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999).

4.3.3 Language of the home

Development of school policy on early language and literacy development will have regard for the cohort of children attending the school. It is proposed that schools would identify the situation below which most closely describes the cohort of children enrolling. As school policy is reviewed regularly it will take account of any significant changes in pupil profiles. Five situations are identified in the table. The table draws on data from the 2002 Census relating to the percentage of the population who speak Irish on a daily basis as cited in *Stáid Reatha na Scoileanna Gaeltachta* (2005, p. 4) and is included as a guide for schools in deciding the múnla to adopt. The first three of these pertain particularly to Irish-medium schools. The final two could be considered by all primary schools.

Table 6: Pupil profile on enrolment in Irish-medium schools[5]

Home language of children enrolling in school	Percentage	Medium of school
Children enrolling from homes where Irish is spoken on a daily basis	70+%	Irish-medium
Children enrolling from homes where Irish is spoken on a daily basis	between 40% and 69%	Irish-medium
Children enrolling from homes where Irish is spoken on a daily basis	less than 39%	Irish-medium
Children enrolling from homes where English is spoken on a daily basis	practically 100%	Irish-medium and English-medium
Children enrolling from homes where	significant	Irish-medium and English-

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[5] Adapted from Stáid Reatha na Scoileanna Gaeltachta *using data from the 2002 Census relating to the percentage of the population who speak Irish on a daily basis.*(2005, p. 4)

neither Irish nor English is spoken on daily basis		medium

4.3.4 Theoretical basis

As noted earlier on page 16, *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools: Review of Literature* states that the research is inconclusive on the language in which literacy should first be introduced. However in opting for a particular múnla schools will need to take account of the range of underpinning language theories. Such theories may relate to language and literacy learning, additive bilingualism, dual literacy and the principles of the *Primary School Curriculum*. All of these will have implications for the aims and objectives of each múnla and the use of appropriate approaches and methodologies by teachers.

4.4 Implications for the development of school policy

In developing policy schools will have regard to their functions as a school as outlined in the Education Act (1998) Section 9 and its use of available resources to

> *(a) ensure that the educational needs of all students, including those with a disability or other special needs, are identified and provided for,*
>
> *(j) ensure that the needs of personnel involved in management functions and staff development needs generally in the school are identified and provided for,*
>
> *(m) subject to this Act and in particular section 15 (2) (d), establish and maintain an admissions policy which provides for maximum accessibility to the school.*

Schools in Gaeltacht areas will have regard to a further function included in Section 9 (h) of the Education Act and mentioned earlier (3.1).[6]

In developing múnlaí schools will need to

- liaise with parents on development and dissemination of school policy
- identify the situation that most closely describes the pupil intake
- identify the múnla most appropriate for the school according to criteria developed by NCCA

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[6] Note: In the context of 9 (h) of the Education Act (1998) and its relevance to schools in Gaeltacht areas it is important to note that there are other agencies working in Gaeltacht areas with a remit for the promotion of Irish.

- plan to regularly review school policy in light of changing demographics and socio-cultural context of the school environment.

Schools will also be responsible for ensuring that all children are enabled to achieve curriculum objectives for Language – English and Irish, by the end of senior infants. Based on the múnla chosen and the term in which the English Curriculum is introduced, schools may need to increase the minimum time (2.5 hours per week) for curriculum delivery in English as specified in the múnlaí. The allocation of additional time for the English Curriculum in the infant classes is a matter for local school planning within the context of a given múnla. This information would form part of a school's policy on language and literacy. This issue of the time required for children to be enabled to achieve curriculum objectives for English by the end of senior infants in Irish-medium schools operating different múnlaí, will be revisited following the outcomes of the research.

4.5 Implications for the NCCA in the development of guidelines

The NCCA will develop guidelines to assist schools in developing policy for the introduction of language and emergent literacy and implementing it in practice. The NCCA will have regard to the research, to findings from primary curriculum review and to the findings from the consultation as discussed in Section 3 of this paper.

The NCCA guidelines will also address the following areas

- Literacy: Approaches to emergent literacy and literacy in Irish and English
    - methodologies for approaching transferable language learning skills
    - additive bilingualism and dual literacy
    - approaches to the introduction of English in the case of each múnla
    - assessment
- Involvement of parents including
    - engaging the support of parents
    - supporting parents in participating in their child's learning
- Inclusion
    - supporting children with special educational needs

- o supporting children with language learning difficulties and general learning disabilities and consideration of the language in which such support should be provided
- o addressing the needs of children for whom neither English nor Irish is the language of the home.

4.6 Implications for further research

As noted earlier the findings of international research are inconclusive in relation to the language in which literacy should first be introduced. It is suggested, however, that it might be more appropriate to focus on the approaches and methodologies used by teachers when addressing emergent literacy rather on which language is introduced first.

Ó Laoire & Harris's review also highlights the importance of commissioning research in Ireland on issues that relate specifically to language and literacy development in Irish-medium schools and in the context of the remit of such schools (Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools) highlighted in the *Education Act* (1998). The research should be focussed on gathering information on different language and learning experiences in Irish-medium schooling and may include research conducted over short, medium and long-term periods. The research would consider, for example

- the location of the school (urban, rural, Gaeltacht, Galltacht)
- the designated status of the school
- the home language of the children
- homogeneity in language acquisition
- additive bilingualism and dual literacy
- the approach to the development of policy locally and support engagement with parents
- the identification of language and literacy learning needs
- the provision of learning support, the areas for which support is provided and the language in which that support should be provided.

The múnlaí will be the basis on which all other variables listed above will be considered. The relative merits and impacts of each múnla will be empirically assessed in the course of the research to be undertaken.

Section 5. Conclusion

The múnlaí proposed in this paper are designed to support Irish-medium primary schools in the development of language and emergent literacy for children in infant classes. Further assistance will be provided in the guidelines that NCCA will develop as outlined in 4.5.

The múnlaí offer an opportunity for clarity and coherence around an issue that has been of considerable concern to the Irish-medium primary sector since the introduction of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999).

The múnlaí represent an interim solution to be adopted by *all* Irish-medium primary schools. They provide the context in which further research in Irish-medium primary schools may be conducted. Any changes in policy will be informed by and firmly based on evidence gathered from such research.

The inspectors as key partners in the research project will have a significant role in supporting the implementation of múnlaí in schools.

A further issue concerns addressing the professional development needs of teachers and other staff in pre-service education and in the context of continuing professional development, to ensure that they are prepared to work in the variety of Irish-medium first language and immersion settings associated with the múnlaí.

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