Primary Language Curriculum: English and Gaeilge
Junior Infants to Second Class

Report on Consultation and Engagement

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Introduction

The new Draft Primary Language Curriculum: Junior Infants to Second Class, was published for consultation on April 9th this year. It was informed and supported by findings from curriculum reviews (NCCA 2005; 2008), findings from three commissioned research reports (Sheil *et al.*, 2012, Kennedy *et al.*, 2012; Ó Duibhir and Cummins, 2012) and NCCA's work with schools.

Draft Primary Language Curriculum

The Draft differs from the '99 curriculum for English and Gaeilge in several respects. Firstly, it is an integrated curriculum—it has the same curriculum structure and components for English and Gaeilge to support integration across the two languages. It has far fewer outcomes than objectives in the '99 curriculum and for each strand—oral language, reading and writing, it includes a continuum (map) of significant milestones and detailed steps involved in children's language learning and development. The outcomes and continua are complemented by examples of children's work and support material to help teachers to make professional judgements about, and to support children's achievement and progression across both languages. The Draft espouses the principles and methodologies of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009).

Consultation

Two versions of the Draft Primary Language Curriculum: Junior Infants to Second Class were prepared for consultation—one for English-medium schools and another for Irish-medium schools: Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools. As noted, both versions use the same structure and differ only with respect to some contents of the outcomes and progression continua. The following are the key sections of the Draft:

- Rationale

- Aims

- Overview

- Using the Primary Language Curriculum

- Learning outcomes.

The Draft, when finalised will be published as an online curriculum at www.curriculumonline.ie. For this consultation, both versions of the Draft were published online in Portable Document Format (**PDF**). A short **video** on the consultation webpage illustrated how the key components of the Draft

work together to support planning and teaching. An example of one continuum, the **Writing Continuum** was published online as part of the consultation materials. Respondents were encouraged to read the Draft which included a copy of the consultation questions at the end of each section, to watch the video and if they wished and to look at the Writing Continuum, before responding to the **online survey**. The 24-question survey included both open and closed question formats and all questions were optional. All consultation materials were published in English and Irish. The survey was open to anyone who wished to respond and was developed primarily for primary school teachers and principals and education professionals working in the field of primary education. Respondents could choose whether to respond to the English or Irish version of the survey.

Strategies to promote engagement

Dissemination and promotion of information about the consultation were key to engagement. In the first instance, the consultation was highlighted on the homepage of the NCCA website among the 'featured' and 'new' items. An e-invitation with a link to the consultation webpages was sent to 3,200 primary schools, to all teachers and practitioners presently or formerly involved with NCCA networks, and also to all subscribers to info@ncca. The consultation was promoted at key NCCA events involving primary teachers and stakeholders such as the *Aistear* Tutor seminar and the *Buzzing with Books* conference in May. Weekly tweets helped to raise awareness about the consultation, using the Twitter feed #primary developments and the #Edchatie forum. Facebook was used to circulate the link to the consultation and invite interested parties to respond.

Direct, face-to-face engagement with teachers was a key consultation strategy. Members of the NCCA Primary Team visited local schools to provide an 'introductory session' on the Draft. In this session, teachers watched the overview video, received a hard-copy of the Draft, and completed the survey independently. Members of the INTO Education Committee also worked with colleagues in their own school and in some cases, in neighbouring schools also, to facilitate and support engagement in this way.

The consultation, which began in early April was expected to remain open for eight weeks. However, following an initial low response, and requests for more time from stakeholders, the closing date for completion of surveys and written submissions was extended to July 31st. Given the low response rate to the invitation for written submissions at the end of June, the Deputy CEO wrote to stakeholders to invite and encourage submissions. Several stakeholders responded to request more time and the closing date for receipt of written submissions was extended again to September 30th. The extended consultation period for receipt of completed surveys provided an opportunity to include the 'introductory session' on the Draft (which had been facilitated by NCCA Education Officers and INTO

Education Committee Members) at literacy-related summer courses and at *Aistear* Summer Courses, organised by the Education Centres in collaboration with NCCA as part of the Aistear Tutor Initiative.

Data and analysis

Surveys

By October 1st, a total of 796 survey responses had been submitted and analysed. 775 respondents completed the online survey in English and 21 completed it in Irish. 688 (86.4%) of all survey responses were completed in hard-copy at July and August Summer Courses.

Table I.1 below provides an overview of the 24 survey questions across the three lines of inquiry (shaded rows). It includes information on the focus, number and type of questions within each line of inquiry.

Table I.1: Overview of survey questions

Focus	Questions	Types of questions
Introduction		
Profile of respondents	6	Multiple choice. (select all that apply)
Aspirations for Language Learning and Teaching	2	List, open-text response
Contents of the Draft Primary Language Curriculum		
Rationale	2	Likert – agreement List, open-text response
Aims	2	Likert – agreement List, open-text response
Overview	2	Likert, appropriateness List, open-text response
Progression	2	Multiple choice. (select all that apply)
Samples of Children's Work	1	Likert, helpfulness
Practice Guides	1	List, open-text response
Learning Outcomes	2	Likert, agreement Likert, appropriateness
Support for Teachers		
Play as a methodology	1	Likert, agreement
Familiarity with Aistear	1	Nominal, yes/no
General – Suggestions for Draft	1	List, open-text response
General – Suggestions for Support	1	List, open-text response

To ensure online access to tools for analysis, and to guarantee the physical security of the responses and analysis, an online survey tool was used. Responses to open-text response items were coded by

identifying and naming the main ideas. Codes were iteratively revised and refined to identify the three most frequently cited ideas for open-text response questions. Responses were then filtered and findings were compared across the three language learning contexts. Responses to multiple-choice and likert questions were also analysed to identify similarities and differences across respondents' language learning contexts. Beginning with Section 1 (Rationale), bar charts are used in this report to facilitate comparison of findings across the three school language learning contexts for primary schools in Ireland: English-medium and Irish-medium Gaelscoileanna and schools in the Gaeltacht. Given the small number of responses from respondents in the Irish-medium sector, relative to the number for the English-medium sector, some graphs include the population of respondents (n) for each of the three respondent groups. For these graphs, n_1 represents respondents from English-medium schools; n_2 represents respondents from Irish-medium Gaelscoileanna and n_3 denotes Irish-medium: Gaeltacht schools.

Written submissions

By mid-October, a total of 73 written submissions had been submitted and analysed. A number of written submissions were received in English and in Irish. A full list of authors of written submissions and their respective affiliations, is provided in Appendix 1. Each written submission was recorded, saved to the relevant consultation folder, and then read and reviewed to identify the main points of feedback. Similarities and differences across submissions were reviewed discussed in line with the three lines of inquiry in the online survey. This structure of this report follows the order of survey questions (Table 1) and findings for written submissions are embedded throughout the report along with the relevant findings for survey questions.

Limitations and signposts for the next phase of work

Every consultation has its limits. Three particular limitations are part of the story of this consultation. The first relates to the timing of the consultation, coinciding, as it did with the last—and arguably the most busy-term of the school year. This timing was planned from the outset, in line with targets and timelines in the Department of Education and Skills' Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011) for revision of this, and other curriculum areas at primary level. However, the timeframe has been revised to facilitate consultation and engagement with schools. In addition to extending the consultation period to facilitate responses, a further phase of engagement with schools is planned for the 2014/2015 school year. This provides an opportunity to work with schools to refine and improve

aspects of the Draft and to develop 'practice components' of the curriculum—namely *Examples* of children's language learning and *Support Material* for teachers. Furthermore, this additional year for engagement ensures that the Primary Language Curriculum when published online is informed by feedback from teachers on the accessibility and usability of the online interface. As Language is the first curriculum area for revision at primary, feedback from teachers in the next year will also guide and inform development of the Curriculum Online website for all other primary curriculum areas.

A second limitation of the consultation, also related to timing, concerns the process of facilitating teachers to engage with the consultation and share their views. From the outset the INTO Education Committee had flagged the necessity to visit teachers on-site to introduce both the Draft and the consultation materials and many members had offered to lead these introductory sessions in their own and in neighbouring schools. As mentioned, members of the NCCA Primary Team also led introductory sessions in their own or a local school. Despite these interventions, the number of responses to the survey remained low at the end of May and as a result, an 'introductory session' was embedded in *Aistear* and literacy-related summer courses, where the opportunity arose to do so. Approximately 84% of all responses to the online survey were provided via summer courses. Mindful of the need to minimise the 'interruption' the introductory session presented at summer courses, hard-copies of the survey were provided and the NCCA managed the process of returning these for later entry online.

This Final Report includes an analysis of consultation findings—survey responses and written submissions, received at the time of writing. The third limitation relates to the difficulty of generalising findings to all primary schools, given that consultation participants represent a relatively small cohort from the full population of primary teachers and schools. This is especially relevant to the Irish-medium sector, and in particular Gaeltacht schools. Given the low number of responses from teachers in these schools we must be cautious about making broader inferences. Indeed, the small number of responses, itself, provides a compelling argument for the additional year of engagement with schools outlined in response to the timing issue.

Bearing in mind the limitations regarding the timing of the consultation, the intervention to solicit engagement via summer courses and the small number of responses from teachers in two of the three school settings, this Final Report presents and discusses a robust set of findings to-date—across 24 questions for almost 800 respondents and in over 70 additional written submissions.

Structure of this report

The consultation findings presented in this report correspond with the lines of inquiry and questions in the consultation survey. The first, introductory section begins with an overview of the respondents themselves based on profile data gathered. Findings are then presented for each of the main sections of the Draft curriculum. The final set of findings focuses on support for teachers, in line with the last four survey questions. The Conclusion draws together key findings from the consultation in a set of proposed revisions to the Draft, and plans to convene a new network of primary schools to facilitate continued engagement with teachers on the new Primary Language Curriculum across the three language contexts. Finally, an update is provided on publication of the Primary Language Curriculum on the new Curriculum Online site.

This report has been prepared to facilitate discussion by members of the Early Childhood and Primary Language Development Group, the Board for Early Childhood and Primary, and the Council at their October and November meetings. It is intended that this report will be published on www.ncca.ie/primarylanguage and that the final section will be published as an Executive Summary.

Profile of respondents

A total of 796 survey responses were received across the two online surveys—775 using the English survey and 21 using the Irish. The majority of respondents (n=760) were primary teachers. Other groups of respondents included early childhood practitioners (n=14), researchers (n=9), post-primary teachers (n=5), and parents (n=5). Three respondents did not respond to this first profile question. A number of teachers in Irish-medium schools responded in English and a small number of teachers in English-medium schools responded in Irish.

Q2: School Language context: My school is…

Looking across both language versions of the survey, Figure P.1 represents the school language context of the 763 teacher respondents (including three post-primary teachers). In total, 93% were from English-medium schools with Gaelscoileanna making up 4.5% and Irish-medium Gaeltacht schools the remaining 2%. These figures are not surprising given the smaller proportion of Irish-medium schools relative to English-medium schools in the country.

Figure P.1: Respondents by school language context
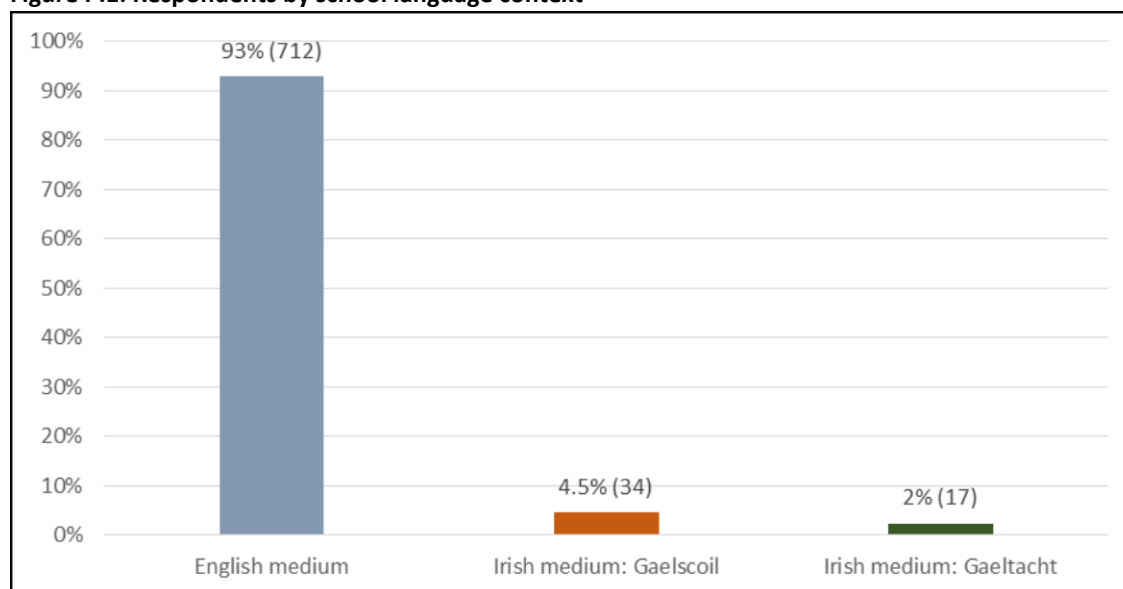
(*n*1=712, *n*2=34, *n*3=17)

It's of note that among the total number of English-medium schools represented in survey responses, two of these are English-medium Gaeltacht schools.

Q3: School Type. My school is …

As shown in Figure P.2, the majority of respondents taught in vertical schools from junior infants to sixth class (n=510) and/or in mixed-gender schools (n=348). A total of 125 teachers taught in schools with DEIS status with five of these from the Irish-medium sector (two Gaelscoileanna and three sa Ghaeltacht). Twenty-four respondents worked in special schools.

Figure P.2: Respondents by school type
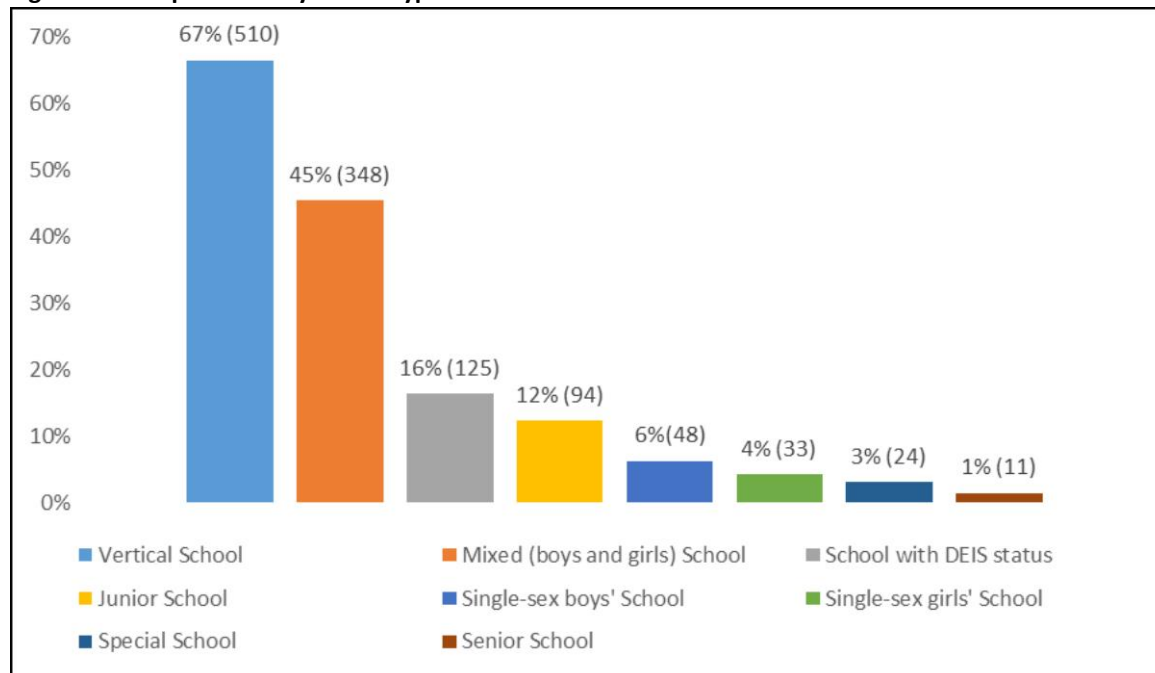
(n=766)

Most respondents taught in schools with enrolment numbers in excess of 101 children. The largest school sizes were in the English-medium sector with the majority of respondents working in schools with 301-500 children. Most respondents working in Gaelscoileanna were in schools of 201-300 children while the majority of teachers in the Gaeltacht were in schools with 61-100 children. Almost a quarter of teachers (n=191) worked in schools with fewer than 100 children.

Q1: I am responding as a…

Looking at the cohort of teacher-respondents, the majority were class teachers at 72%, followed by respondents who were principals and deputy or assistant principals at 16% and 14% who were resource or learning support teachers, with some overlap occurring across these categories. A number of teachers noted that they were substitute teachers or working in Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) units.

Q6: Number of years of experience in school…

Over half-of all teacher-respondents had less than 10 years of experience working in a school and over three-quarters had less than 15 years experience, as shown in Figure P.3.

Figure P.3: Respondents by years of experience in school
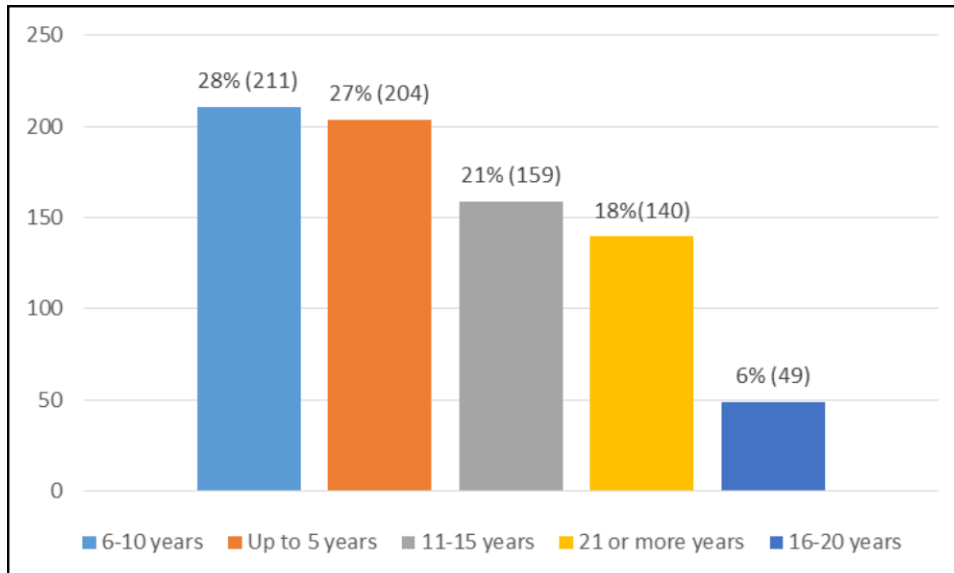
(n=763)

Q7: Hopes for children's language learning and development

Respondents were invited to share a word or phrase to describe their hopes or wishes for primary school children's language learning and development today and into the future. The words and phrases used by 668 respondents can be categorised into three broad themes:

- children's confidence and competence in language

- qualities of children's language learning experiences

- structure of the language curriculum.

The cloud view of responses in Figure P.4 indicates the frequency of terms used with larger print indicating a higher frequency of mention.

Figure P.4: Hopes for children's language learning and development

Able to Express Active Articulate Broad Child Children Communicate Confident Engaging Enjoyable Fluency Fluent Full Potential Fun Improvement Inclusive Integrated Interactive Language Literacy Practical Progressive Relevant Rich Self Vocabulary
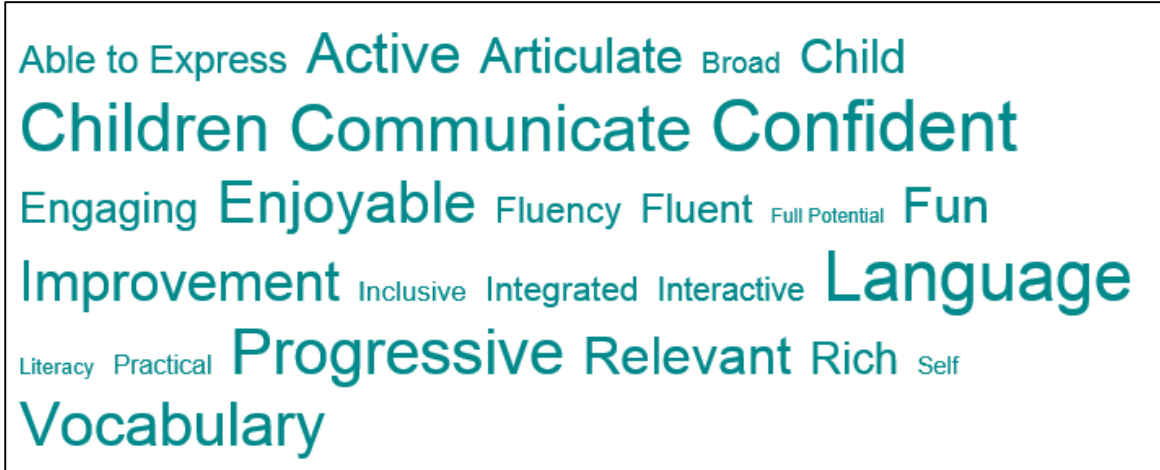
The first and most frequently cited theme by a quarter of respondents was that children would be confident and competent in their use of language. Some respondents expressed a desire for children to be *competent* and *effective communicators*, to have a good *vocabulary*, to be *fluent* and *articulate*, and able to *express themselves*. The hopes and wishes related almost exclusively to expressive language skills, with only a handful of respondents referring to listening/receptive skills.

The second main theme focused on qualities of children's language learning experiences. Respondents wanted these experiences to be: *enjoyable, active, fun, rich, engaging,* and *interactive.*

The third main theme referred to the language curriculum itself rather than children's experience. Respondents noted their desire for the language curriculum to be *progressive, relevant, integrated, broad, inclusive,* and *practical.*

Q8: Hopes/wishes for my language teaching

In this question respondents were again invited to share a word or phrase to reflect their hopes or wishes for their own language teaching today and into the future. 640 responses were received and these were categorised into the following three themes – relevant to all three language learning contexts:

- qualities of children's language learning experiences

- teachers and teaching

- supporting children's language progression.

The cloud view of responses in Figure P.5 shows the frequency of terms used by teachers.

Figure P.5: Hopes for language teaching
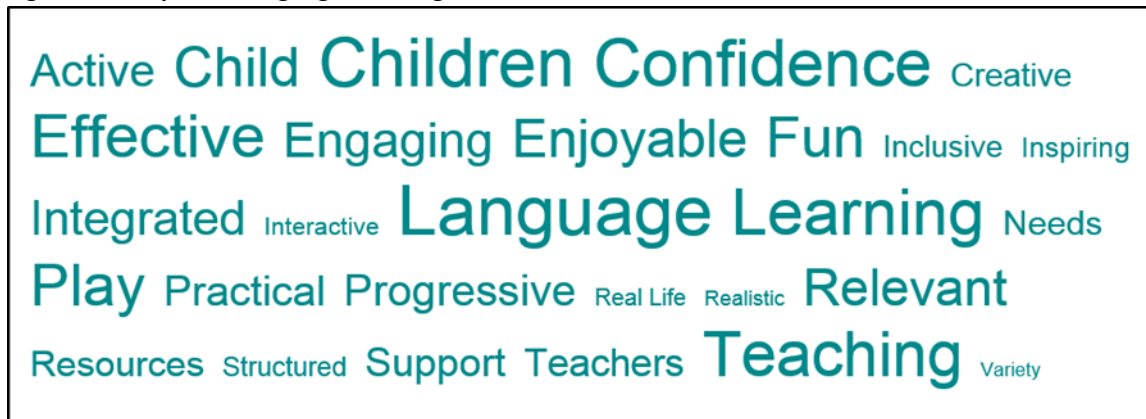
The first theme focused on the features of children's language learning experiences (similar to the second theme in the previous question). Providing *engaging* language experiences was considered key and respondents used words such as *motivating, stimulating* and *inspirational* to describe these. Respondents noted that experiences should also be enjoyable, e.g., *learning in a fun way;* and *relevant,* e.g., *related to children's own lives out of school*. *Time for talk and discussion*; *play and playful*; *integrated* and *practical*, were additional qualities of children's language experiences described in this theme.

The second theme related to teachers and their teaching. Teachers noted the importance of high standards of teaching and used words like *effective, beneficial,* and *high-quality* to describe these in a general sense. Self-improvement was considered important in this context, e.g., *to be continually growing and improving; ag dul ó neart go neart*. The need for *upskilling* through *Continuing Professional Development (CPD)* and for a balance between accountability and professional autonomy was noted, e.g., *clear focus on children's language learning and not on paperwork*. Teachers noted the need to *develop good strategies* and *effective methodologies* through continual improvement. Teacher qualities such as the need for *agility and flexibility* were named. Similar to the previous question, there was little reference to teaching to improve children's receptive skills, however the importance of effectively teaching expressive skills was noted, e.g., *extend their vocab; teanga na bpáistí a shaibhriú; help them to express themselves; less talking 'at' and more talking 'with'.*

The third theme focused on *supporting progression*. Respondents noted the importance of enabling children to *achieve their potential* in general terms and in particular, *to grow into confident communicators*. Respondents noted the need to have *clarity on curriculum outcomes*; *important milestones,* and *success criteria.* These were considered key for teachers to *support differentiation* and ensure all children can progress at an *appropriate and challenging pace.*

The Draft *Primary language Curriculum*

1. Rationale

Q9: The Language Curriculum Rationale

Question nine invited respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the rationale for the draft language curriculum. Figure 1.1 provides an overview of the responses.

Figure 1.1: Agreement with the curriculum's rationale – by language context
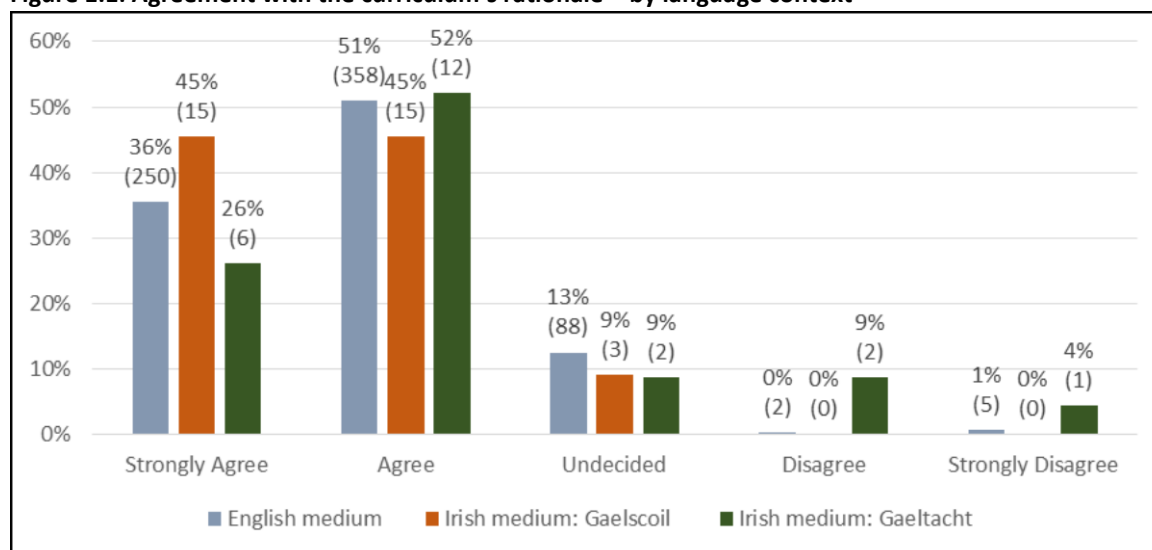
(*n*1=703, *n*2=33, *n*3=23)

A significant majority (87%) of respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the rationale for the new Primary Language Curriculum. While 12% of respondents were undecided, only 1% *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* with it. These responses indicate substantial support for the curriculum's rationale.

There were some differences in responses across the school language contexts. Teachers from Gaelscoileanna were more likely to *strongly agree* with the rationale than were teachers from English-medium or Gaeltacht schools. However, a significant majority of respondents in Gaeltacht schools also supported the rationale.

In their comments, many respondents did not directly address elements of the rationale, but where they did, their comments frequently approved of:

- the emphasis on language for communicative relationships

- the integrated process of language learning

- the developmental process outlined for language learning.

Roughly similar numbers of respondents considered the structure of the draft language curriculum to be more accessible or less accessible than its predecessor. The draft curriculum was frequently described as *excellent, concise, focused* and *more user-friendly*, as well as being *too lengthy*, and *too wordy*. Concerns were also expressed about the manner in which English and Irish are 'combined' or 'amalgamated', with some teachers (all from English-medium schools) feeling that relying on the transferability of language skills does a disservice to Irish. However, others supported the value of language transfer and cross-lingual connections. Nonetheless a written submission advised that a structured approach to integrated language teaching be exemplified. Many respondents affirmed the importance of a partnership between home and school and the significance of a child's mother tongue as he/she enters school, while some were concerned that the needs of EAL children in further developing their mother tongue were not adequately addressed in the rationale. A Gaelscoil teacher was concerned for *an páiste EAL (English as an Additional Language) sa scoil lán-Ghaeilge*. A written submission questioned the rationale for the reference to play in the section on contexts for children's language learning, they felt that it was out of place in this section and its inclusion potentially limited the potential to expand on the significant role the home plays in developing children's language skills.

Q10: Other ideas for inclusion in the rationale

Just over one fifth of respondents answered this question. The main suggestions made and in order of frequency of mention, related to assessment and screening, supports, resources and CPD, the needs of children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Special Educational Needs (SEN) and parental involvement.

The most frequently cited idea for inclusion concerned access to screening and diagnostic language tests for children in infant classes. Linked to this was the inclusion of specific assessment tools such as standard checklists or templates. Respondents suggested that this screening and diagnostic work needed to happen earlier and lead to quicker access to interventions. One written submission referred to the lack of consistency in children's pre-school experiences as contributing to the wide range of abilities of children on entry to primary. Many respondents also proposed that the rationale should highlight the importance of adequate resources being available to support schools' language work. Among such resources/supports were access to speech and language therapy; assistance from the Health Service Executive (HSE) and from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS); the return of EAL teacher posts; and provision for children with special needs. A number of respondents

suggested that the rationale should recognise EAL children as having particular language needs, while a Gaelscoil teacher considered that the particular language needs of Traveller children should be recognised: *Ba chóir tagairt don lucht siúil agus a ndeacrachtaí teanga (support for Traveller children and their language difficulties).*

Although it might not be part of the rationale itself, the upskilling of teachers through CPD featured prominently as a proposed inclusion with teachers feeling that the new curriculum would only succeed if supported by CPD. While it was recognised that the rationale did refer to parents and to adult/child communication, it was felt by some that teachers needed more specific guidelines and strategies in order to support parents, in particular parents of EAL children.

Among items suggested for inclusion by a smaller number of teachers were: spelling; handwriting; pre-schools' transfer of information to the primary school; and greater recognition of the role of technology in children's language development.

Written submissions from education partners noted that it was necessary to make EAL children more visible and that it was important to recognise the benefits which plurilingualism and increasing intercultural awareness can bring to the teaching and learning of languages. The importance of parental involvement and their responsibility in supporting language development was echoed. Other groups identified for inclusion in the rationale were children with special educational needs and children from low socio-economic backgrounds. Some written submissions cautioned against the use of qualifiers in the rationale such as 'most children' or 'the majority' and called for these to be removed in order to make the curriculum more inclusive of *all* children. A written submission called for the full array of school contexts in the Irish education system to be acknowledged and the challenges posed by each to be highlighted. Another submission sought recognition of large class sizes and the challenges this would impose on any curriculum implemented.

In relation to Irish a number of written submissions asked for a greater teasing out of the differences between the learning contexts of the Gaelscoil and the Gaeltacht. In addition a greater recognition was sought regarding the difficulties of bilingualism encountered in Gaeltacht settings. A number of written submissions from the Gaeltacht called for a curriculum to be available specific to the needs of the native speaker, these same submissions required the practice of early immersion to be referred to as compulsory. In one instance a working definition of immersion education in the Gaeltacht context was sought. In other written submissions clarity was sought on timing and when to introduce the teaching of formal and early literacy skills for second language learners in each of the school language contexts. A number of submissions from those working in the area of Irish sought a clearly

outlined and structured approach to second language teaching in the absence of the *téamaí* and *feidhmeanna teanga* that were part of the 1999 Irish curriculum.

A further submission sought that these components (téamaí, feidhmeanna teanga, na hEiseamláirí teanga) be further developed and integrated into the New Primary Language Curriculum, to support teachers in teaching Irish. A concern over the depletion of Irish instruction time in favour of English was also expressed, therefore the incorporation of minimum instruction times for Irish was sought. Some submissions requested that Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) would be explained in detail and that reference be made to the acquisition of Cognitive and Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) for native Irish speakers.

2. Aims

Q11: Aims of the Language Curriculum

Question 11 provided respondents with an opportunity to indicate their level of agreement with the aims of the draft language curriculum. Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the responses.

Figure 2.1: Agreement with curriculum aims – by language context
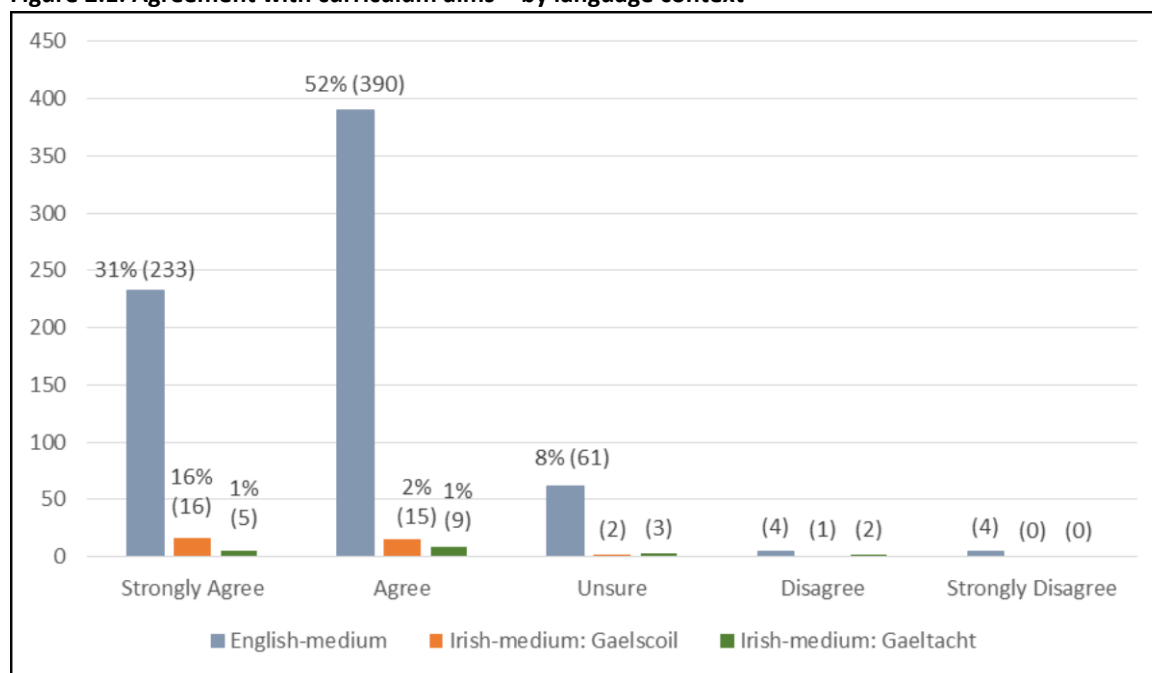
(*n*1=692, *n*2=34, *n*3=19)

Reflecting the largely positive responses to the curriculum's rationale, the great majority of respondents (90%) endorsed the draft curriculum's aims. Fewer than one in ten were undecided and a small minority, approximately just over 1% *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed.* Similar levels of support for the aims came from teachers in the different school language contexts—approximately 90% of teachers from English-medium schools and from Gaelscoileanna either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the aims in the Draft. As with the rationale, teachers in Gaelscoileanna were somewhat more satisfied with the aims, than to *strongly agree* than were those from English-medium schools. Among respondents from Gaeltacht schools, 71% *agreed* or *strongly agreed*. The survey responses here suggest no significant differences in levels of support for the aims from teachers in English- and Irish-medium schools

Some 86 respondents commented on the aims. Reflecting the responses to Q11, these comments were largely positive. The aims were variously described as *commendable, realistic, simple and clear, very comprehensive, concise, more relevant,* and *more accessible.* One respondent believed the aims *support the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. A minority of negative comments referred to the aims being *too vague, too wordy,* and *unrealistic* while a few respondents felt there were too many aims. A Gaelscoil teacher commented: *Is ar éigean a lúaitear múineadh na léitheoireachta sna haidhmeanna agus is é sin príomhghnó na scoile.* Respondents differed in their interpretation of 'implicit knowledge' of L2, while Aim 10 (concerning understanding of the history of languages) was considered by some to be 'inappropriate' for junior classes. A few teachers suggested a re-ordering of the aims to reflect their relative importance. Quite a number of comments emphasised teachers' concern that language skills be taught explicitly possibly indicating a fear that an integrated curriculum could disadvantage either or both languages. No significant issues were raised in the three comments from teachers in Irish-medium settings other than a desire for the provision of Irish-language materials by the Department of Education and Science (DES). Written submissions from partners working in the area of Irish asked for greater emphasis to be placed on learning and appreciation of the heritage and cultural significance of the Irish language, as specified in the Education Act (1998) and the `20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2013` (Government of Ireland, 2010). A written submission called for the aims to be more closely aligned with the elements and outcomes and presented in order of significance. This submission also suggested that the word 'imitation' be removed from the section on 'children's language learning' and that broad principles of language learning be referred to along with the underscoring of principles specific to second language learners.

Q12: Other ideas for inclusion in the aims

Respondents were invited to list up to three additional ideas for inclusion in the aims. These were to be listed in order of importance. The following are the ideas listed among the 140 responses, beginning with the most frequently cited:

- active promotion of Irish informally through the school day

- greater partnership with parents

- confident expression and fluency in children's everyday talk and discussion

- support for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

- promotion of bilingualism

- inclusion of non-verbal communication such as signing

- inclusion of specific elements of language such as phonics, spelling, grammar, handwriting, listening and memory development

- continuity of language development within the school and between pre-school and primary school.

Suggestions from teachers in Gaelscoileanna and scoileanna Gaeltachta included: *scileanna éisteachta a chothú,* and *Teanga chainteoirí dúchasacha na Gaeltachta a shaibhriú.* However, many of the ideas concerning the promotion of Irish came from teachers in English-medium schools.

3. Overview of the curriculum

Q13: Concepts, Dispositions and Skills

Question 13 invited respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the appropriateness of the concepts, dispositions and skills for each of the two stages. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 provide an overview of the responses.

Figure 3.1: Appropriateness of concepts, dispositions and skills for Stage 1– by language context
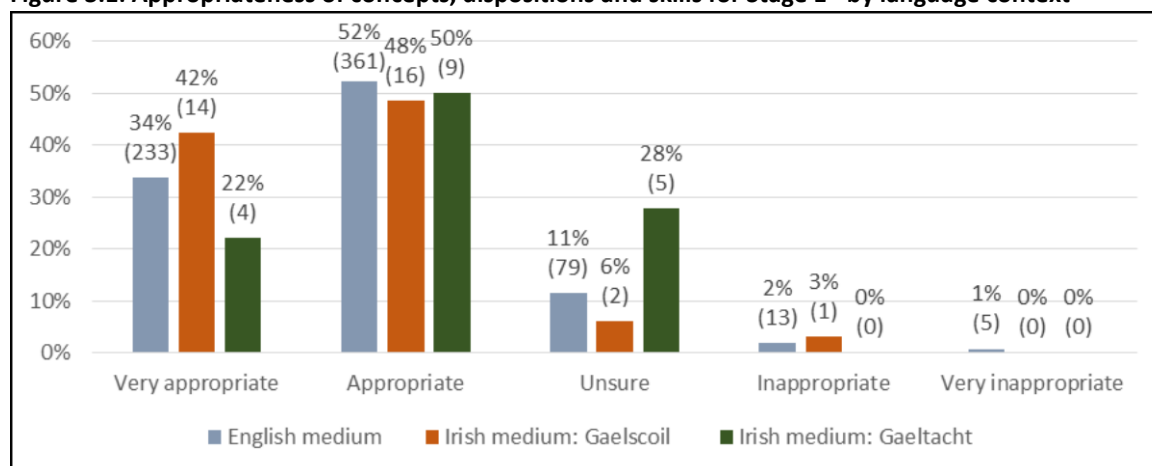
(*n*1=691, *n*2=33, *n*3=18)

Figure 3.2: Appropriateness of concepts, dispositions and skills for Stage 2– by language context
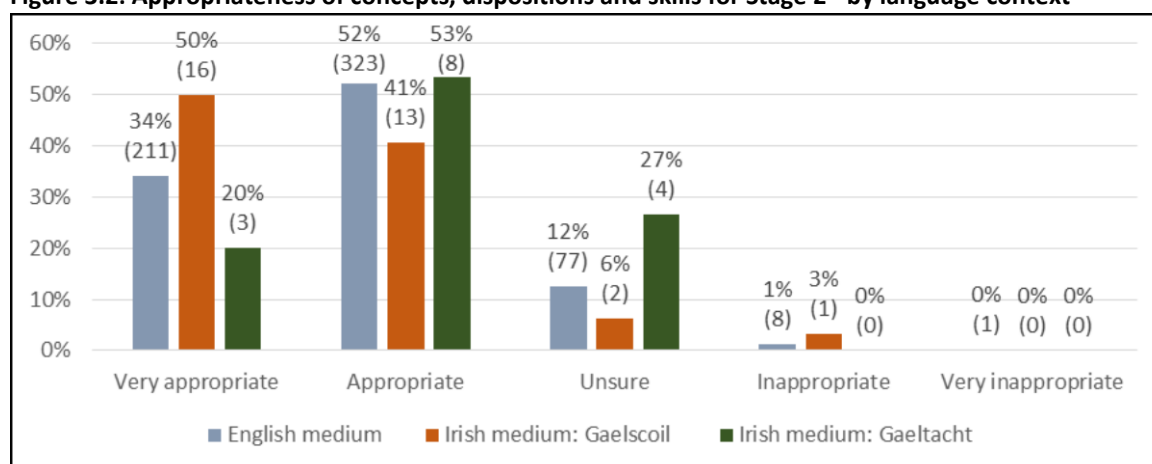
(*n*1=620, *n*2=32, *n*3=15)

Taking the two stages together, 87% (n=606) of respondents felt that the concepts, dispositions and skills listed were *appropriate* or *very appropriate,* 12% (n=85) were *unsure* while just over 2% (n=29) felt they were *inappropriate* or *very inappropriate.* These figures indicate very strong support for the concepts, dispositions and skills listed. However, significantly more respondents felt the concepts, etc. were *appropriate* (52%) rather than *very appropriate* (35%). This was most obvious in the case of

English-medium schools' respondents. This might indicate some uncertainty among teachers around the meaning of concepts, dispositions and skills, and/or their role in language teaching and learning. Some responses to Q14 indicated similar uncertainty. Equally the difficulty of assessing dispositions was highlighted in a further written submission.

Taking the two stages separately, there were no significant differences between them in the percentages of respondents who approved or disapproved of the appropriateness of the concepts, dispositions and skills listed. Taking the language medium of schools into account, there were no significant differences between the approval and disapproval ratings from respondents in any of the school settings. This was the case for the combined ratings for the two stages, and also for the stages taken separately. It should be noted that Gaeltacht schools were strongly represented in the *unsure* (28%) category and less strongly represented in the *very appropriate* (21%) category. Although fewer in numerical terms, teachers from Gaelscoileanna were somewhat stronger in their approval of the concepts, dispositions and skills than were respondents from the other school settings. Interestingly, virtually all teachers who felt the concepts, dispositions and skills to be inappropriate or very inappropriate were from English-medium settings.

Q14: Other ideas for inclusion in the concepts, dispositions and skills

Respondents were invited to list up to three additional ideas for inclusion in the Concepts, Dispositions and Skills. These were to be listed in order of importance, the first being the most important. This question had 74 respondents, three of whom taught in a Gaelscoil, with three others in Gaeltacht schools. Teachers suggested the following ideas they would like to see reflected in the Concepts, Dispositions and Skills:

- readiness; concentration; motivation

- confidence to speak aloud; expression in voice when reading

- listening skills; auditory processing; memory skills

- breakdown of phonological skills

- Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills

- grammar skills; punctuation; awareness of tenses in writing

- pre-writing skills; handwriting quality

- more structured approach to the writing genres.

As can be seen, responses largely referred to the language skills that should be taught, although some of these were already either implicitly or explicitly presented in the curriculum text. Responses were distributed across the three suggestions boxes, with no particular emphasis being evident in their prioritising. Examples of ideas suggested included: *prediction and visualising in oral language work; more emphasis on mechanical aspects of handwriting; use of the voice in reading; elements of language should include sign language; teach listening skills.* A Gaelscoil teacher wanted more supports in the form of *níos mó smaointe agus samplaí*. A written submission sought a series of elements particular to a wide range of writing skills be included in the tables on concepts, dispositions and skills. This submission also felt that the title of 'language concepts, dispositions and skills' was ambiguous and could cause confusion.

Just under half of all respondents to this question expressed dissatisfaction with the manner in which this section of the language curriculum was written. Most criticism was directed at the language register which was variously deemed to be *intricate*, *complex*, and w*ordy*. A cause of particular dissatisfaction was the inclusion of the glossary, which some saw as confirming the complexity of the concepts presented. Some written submissions gave suggestions for edits to certain areas in the glossary. *Dispositions* appear to have caused the greatest difficulty for the respondents, some of whom asked for the dispositions to be more clearly defined and linked to the language elements. A written submission reported that the teachers they had liaised with were unfamiliar with the terms 'constrained' and 'unconstrained skills'. A different submission felt that moving the information on constrained and unconstrained skills into the section on learning outcomes would benefit this section.

Written submissions requested that the language used in the rationale, aims and overview sections be consistent and any unfamiliar terminology be clarified in both language versions of the document. The use of a more appropriate umbrella term such as `*scoileanna atá ag teagasc trí Ghaeilge*` or `*scoileanna meáin Ghaeilge*` to refer to the Irish context was advised in one written submission. A further submission expressed a preference for the term `strand unit` as opposed to the term `element`, as teachers are more familiar with this terminology. Given the number of new components in the language curriculum, some respondents felt that clear diagrams illustrating how the components work together would be of benefit to teachers. The definition of text was referred to in one written submission and it was recommended that it be amended from the current 'all products of language use' to include children who may be non-verbal.

4. Using the Primary School Curriculum

Q15: Progression – Entry to Stage 1

The draft language curriculum has three progression continua, one for each of the strands. Each continuum consists of eight progression milestones labelled a to h. These describe, in broad terms, children's language learning and development and are intended to support teachers in working with children of a wide range of abilities from junior infants to second class. These continua are one of the newest components in the curriculum compared to the 1999 curriculum for English and for Irish. Question 15 in the survey invited respondents to identify the milestone(s) that best represented the range of children's language learning and development in oral language, reading and writing at the beginning of junior infants in primary school. Figures 4.1 to 4.3 present an overview of the findings in the case of the three school language contexts.

Figure 4.1: Entry points at the beginning of Stage 1 in English-medium schools
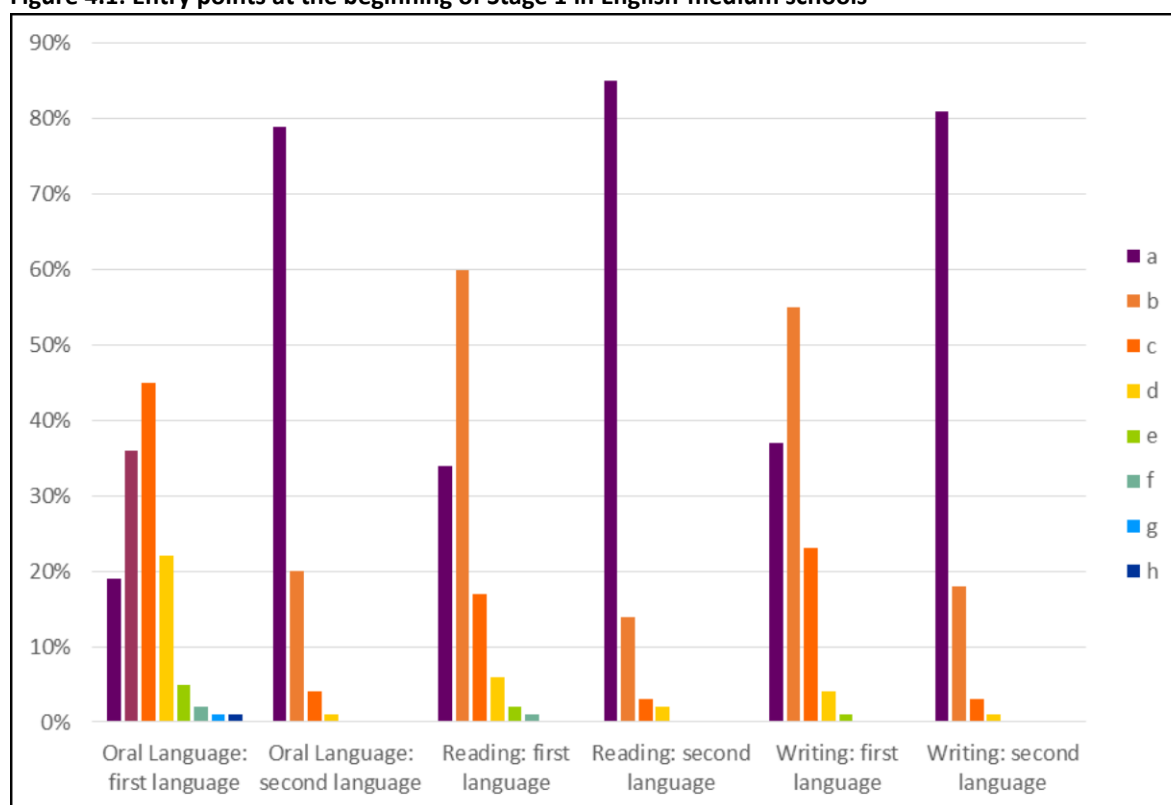
(n=635)
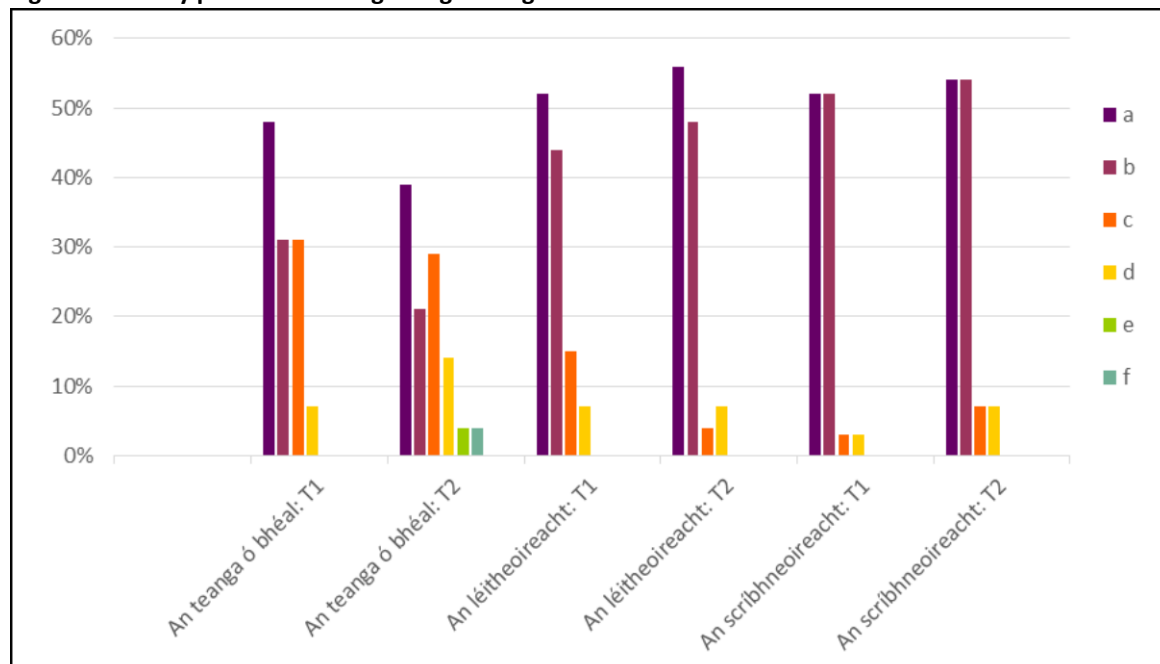
Looking firstly at English-medium schools, the findings in Figure 4.1 from 635 respondents are broadly similar across both L1 and L2 to the entry level expectations for the majority of children beginning junior infants as set out in the consultation document (page 29 in the English document). The most notable exception concerns oral language in L1. Drawing on the language research reports and

international curriculum developments, progression milestones b, c and d were suggested as entry level expectations for children commencing junior infants. The survey findings show 19% of respondents identifying milestone a for children's oral language in English: *The child gestures to and shares attention of an object with another person. He/she exchanges a smile and vocalises to respond. The child relies on the other person to interpret to share meaning.* This finding may reflect the number of respondents working with children for whom English is an additional language.

Ninety-four respondents provided comments which focused on three main themes. Thirty respondents referred to the strands of reading and/or writing in the school's second language (L2) of Irish being largely irrelevant when thinking about junior infants at the beginning of the school year: *reading and writing in 2nd language is n/a in junior infants.* This likely reflects teachers' experience with the '99 language curriculum in which emergent literacy in L2 is largely absent at the infant level. Moreover, a written submission suggested that the learning outcomes in Irish L2 were a little too ambitious, given that children have little exposure to Irish outside the school. The second theme noted by 21 respondents related to the wide range of children's abilities in language. Collectively, these respondents made specific reference to EAL learners, children with special educational needs, 'average' children and gifted children. The third theme emerging from the comments and referred to by nine participants concerned challenges in working with EAL learners who can make up 40% of the junior infant intake.

Figure 4.2: Entry points at the beginning of Stage 1 in Irish-medium: Gaelscoil


(n=29)

As with the English-medium schools, the findings above from 29 respondents are broadly similar in the school's first language (T1) and second language (T2) to the entry level expectations for the majority of children beginning junior infants as set out in the consultation document (leathanach 28 sa doiciméad as Gaeilge). Again, the most notable exception concerns oral language in T2 (English) with 39% of respondents identifying 'a' as an entry point for children at the beginning of their primary education. As noted earlier, this milestone on the oral language progression continuum refers largely to children who have not yet mastered the ability to verbalise. While nine of the 29 respondents provided comments in addition to identifying entry points on the language continua, these didn't elucidate the findings on the entry points. Two of these respondents, however, referred to the importance of immersion education including total immersion in the infant classes:

Sílim go bhfuil sé an-tábhachtach an tumoideachas a aithint agus a chosaint mar chur chuige. Tá tumadh iomlán sa Ghaeilge againn sa scoil seo. Oibríonn sé. …Tá an tumadh dhá bhliain an-tábhachtach chun cumas sa teanga ina bhfaighidh siad oideachas a fhorbairt. (I think it's very important to recognise and safeguard immersion education as an approach. We have total immersion in Irish in this school. It works…Two years of immersion is very important in order to develop an ability in the language in which they are educated.)

Figure 4.3: Entry points at the beginning of Stage 1 in Irish-medium: Gaeltacht
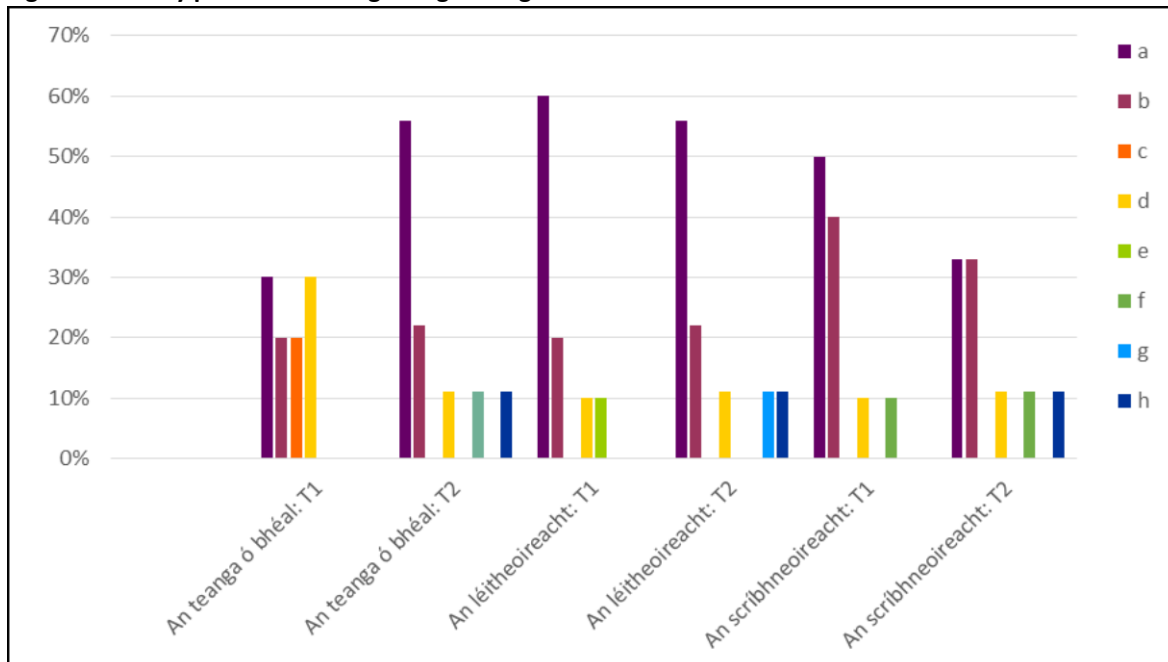
(n=10)

Figure 4.3 provides an overview of the findings from 10 respondents from Irish-medium schools in the Gaeltacht. While caution is needed in interpreting the data given the very small number of responses, it is nonetheless interesting to see a somewhat different 'spread' of entry points when compared with

figures 4.1 and 4.2. Perhaps this links to the changing demographic within these schools whereby children whose first language is English are enrolling alongside children whose first language is Irish. One of the comments provided focuses on this diversity of children's starting points in language learning in junior infants:

Teanga 1 – ag brath ar chúlra an pháiste. Uaireanta tagann siad gan focal Gaeilge ar bith. Uaireanta le cúpla focal, uaireanta le an-chuid, má thagann siad ó naíonra nó ó theach le Gaeilge. Beidh páistí ar chlochmhílte difriúla i gcónaí. Ní féidir litir amháin a phiocadh don rang ar fad. (Language 1 – depending on the child's background. Sometimes, they come without a word of Irish. Sometimes with a few words, sometimes with a lot if they come from a naíonra or a house with Irish. Children will always be at different milestones. You can't pick a single letter for the whole class).

Q16: Progression – Entry to Stage 2

Question 16 invited respondents to identify the milestone(s) that best represented the range of children's language learning and development in oral language, reading and writing at the beginning of first class in primary school. Figures 4.4 to 4.6 present an overview of the findings in the case of the three school language contexts.

Figure 4.4: Entry points at the beginning of Stage 2 in English-medium schools
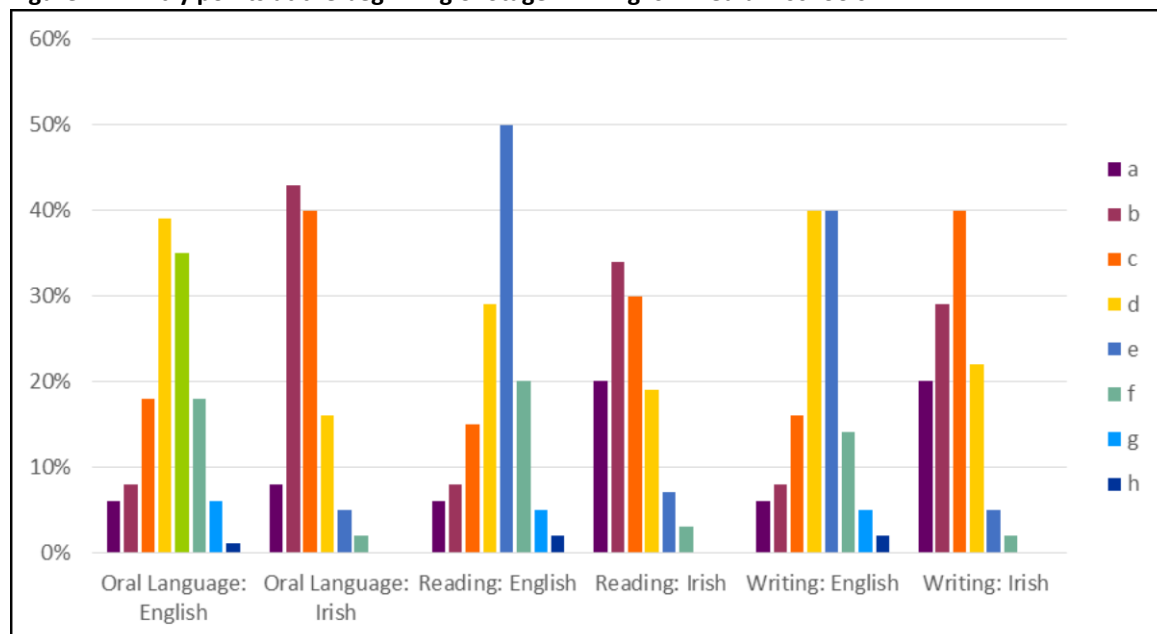
(n=595)

A total of 595 teachers working in English-medium schools responded to this question. While the findings shown above have some similarities with the entry level expectations set out in the

consultation document (page 29 in the English document), there are a number of notable differences. Beginning with first language learning (English), the consultation document suggested progression milestones d, e and f as entry level expectations for children starting first class. The survey findings show 18% of respondents identifying milestone c:

The child refers to familiar objects and events, and shared experiences. He/she uses language from home and their surroundings to communicate. The child uses non-verbal cues to help understand spoken language and when sharing meaning with others. The child uses basic social conventions when interacting. He/she responds showing some appreciation of others.

In addition, 6% and 8% of respondents identified points a and b respectively as entry points. Similarly with reading and writing, the consultation document focused on points d, e and f while sizeable proportions of respondents also identified points a (6%), b (8%) and c (15-16%). Looking across the three stands, the frequency with which points a, b and c were highlighted may reflect the number of teachers working with children with EAL or SEN. Turning to second language learning (Irish), the findings for oral language match the suggested entry points as outlined in the consultation document. However, the findings suggest the entry points for reading and writing (b and c) are too narrow and should include points a and d.

Seventy-four respondents provided comments on children's entry points to stage 2. Three main themes emerged in these with similar frequencies. Eighteen respondents noted their limited or lack of experience in working with children at first and second class level and hence their uncertainty in indicating entry points for the majority of children starting first class. Fifteen respondents referred specifically to the strands of reading and writing and noted the irrelevance of these in the case of L2 for children in first class. Two of these fourteen indicated that they were working on the basis of the current Irish curriculum for primary schools. The third key theme emerging in the data and also noted by fifteen respondents concerned the range of starting points for children's language learning and development in first class. Elaborating on this point, respondents referred to children's individuality as learners, their backgrounds and the language learning needs of children with EAL or SEN.

A written submission reported that teachers welcomed the continua and felt they were most useful in supporting planning and teaching. They commended the positive references to enjoyment of reading and a focus on independent reading and felt they lent themselves to integration with Aistear. One written submission stated, that it is not clear whether the progression milestones or progression continua are the same in Irish and English for all children. A number of further written submissions cautioned against referring to suggested entry points to the continua in order to reduce the risk of standardisation. While a further submission suggested that guidance as to where the `average` child

would be placed along the continua at each class level would be welcome. This same submission considered knowledge of synonyms at stage 2 as too ambitious. Mention was made of the need to clarify for teachers how they could use the *First Steps* programme in conjunction with the progression continua.

Figure 4.5: Entry points at the beginning of Stage 2 in Irish-medium: Gaelscoil
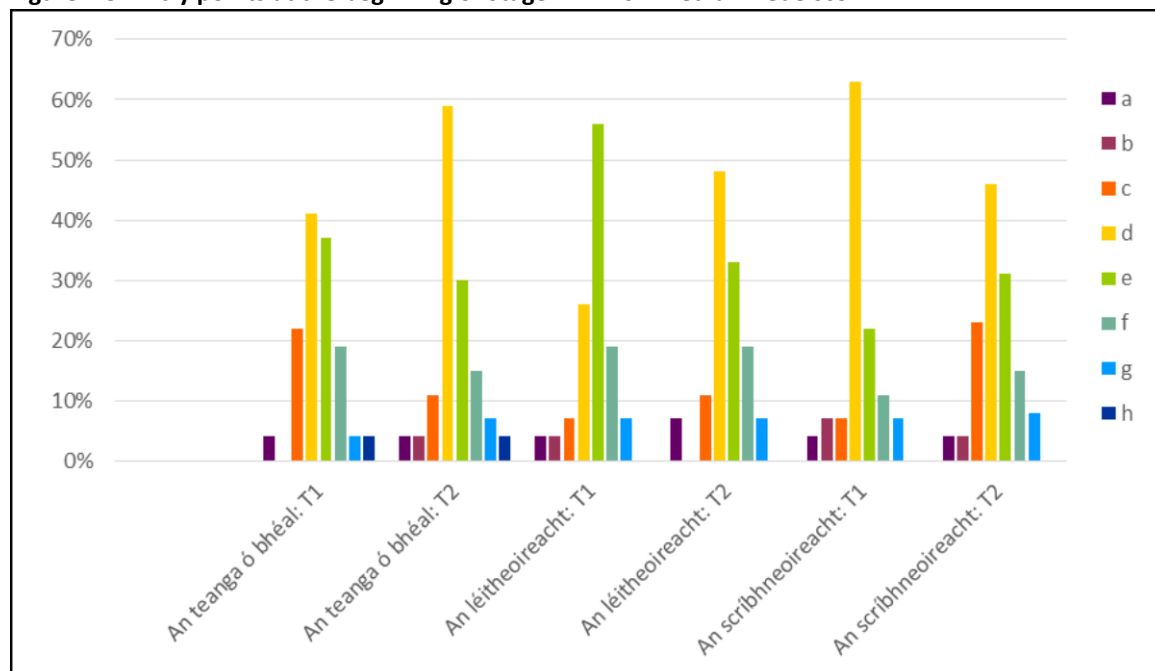
(n=27)

The findings in Figure 4.5 from 27 respondents are broadly similar for oral language, reading and writing in T1 (Irish) to the entry level expectations for the majority of children beginning first class as set out in the consultation document (leathanch 28 sa doiciméad as Gaeilge). In the case of reading and writing, 19% and 11% of respondents respectively identified point f as an entry point in addition to c-e. In the case of T2 (English), the suggested entry points for oral language may need to be extended backwards to include milestone c with 11% of respondents selecting this one and 7% selecting milestone g. For reading and writing, the suggested entry points in the draft curriculum are somewhat narrower than those represented by the findings: c-e compared to c-g. Six of the 24 respondents provided comments which noted their lack of experience teaching first class, the range of ability in an individual class and the ease with which they envisaged the progression continua being used and understood.

Figure 4.6: Entry points at the beginning of Stage 2 in Irish-medium: Gaeltacht
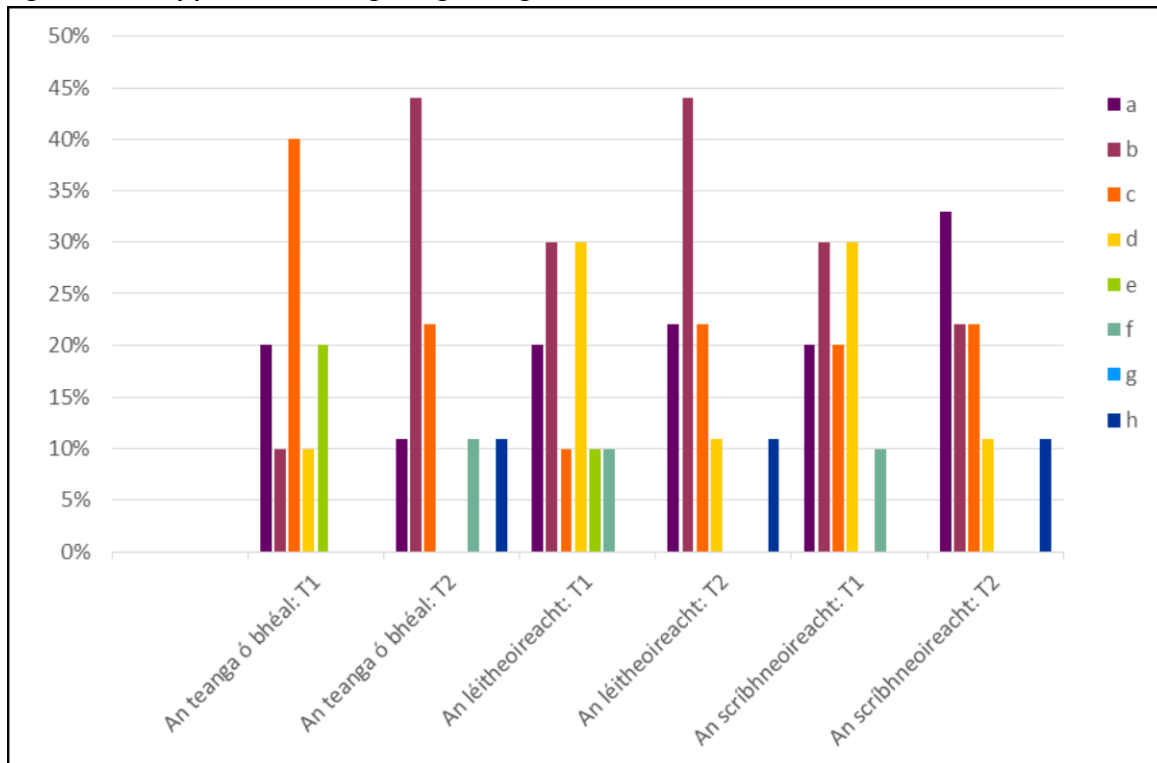
(*n*=10)

Ten teachers working in Irish-medium: Gaeltacht schools responded to question 16. As highlighted in the analysis of question 15, care is needed in interpreting the data from such a small number of participants. Nonetheless, the findings present some interesting observations. In the case of T1 (Gaeilge), the entry points suggested in the consultation document (milestones c-f) are at a more advanced stage in children's language learning than those represented in the data above (milestones a-e). In the case of reading and writing in T1, the data above would suggest that points a and b are entry points to Stage 2 for sizeable proportions of children starting first class. Looking at T2 (English), the suggested entry points are again pitched at a more advanced place on the progression continua in the draft curriculum compared to the findings above. As with question 15, these findings may reflect changed demographics in schools in Gaeltacht areas. One respondent provided a comment which noted the limited focus on English up to the beginning of first class.

Q17: Examples of children's work

Respondents were invited to give their opinion on the usefulness of examples of children's work linked to learning outcomes and the continua in progressing children's language learning and development. The majority of respondents (89%) indicated that they would find examples either *helpful* (31%) or *very helpful* (58%). A minority (2.4%) considered the examples would be *unhelpful* or *very unhelpful*.

Figure 4.7: Helpfulness of examples of children's work
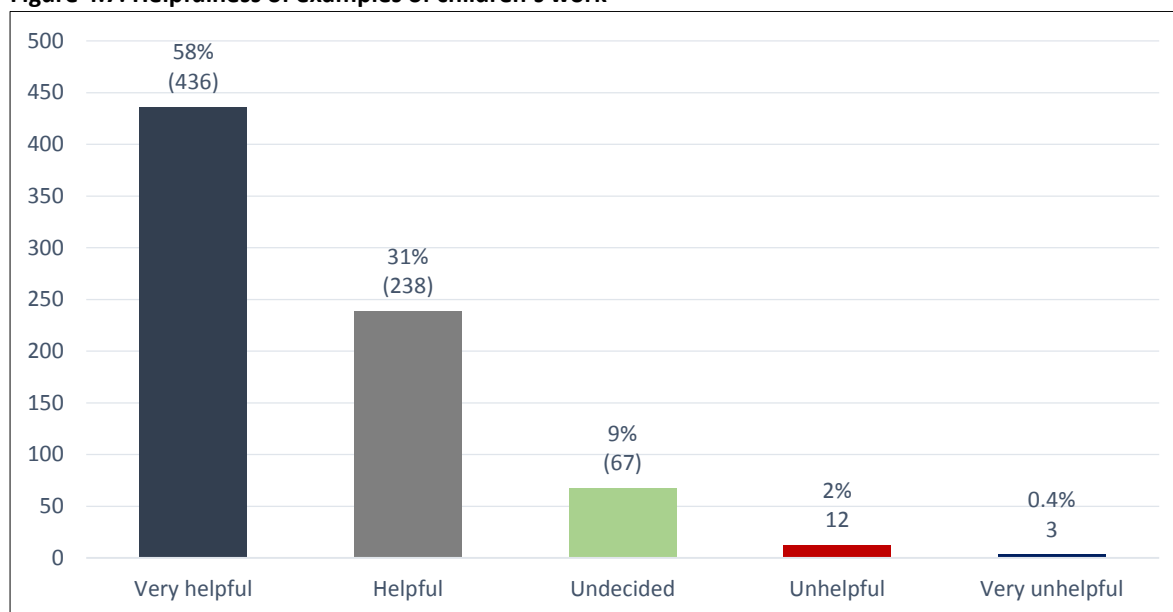
(*n*=756)

Respondents from English-medium schools indicated the importance of having a wide range of examples from across curriculum strands, linking to points on the language continua and relating to particular contexts. The usefulness of examples in illustrating progress in a child's language development was a common theme from the English-medium school respondents. Respondents also saw examples of children's work as being a useful reference point when explaining to parents about language development in primary school.

The most positive response to examples of children's work came from respondents in Gaelscoileanna. Of the 24 respondents, 22 (92%) indicated they would find the examples either *helpful* or *very helpful*, the remainder were undecided. One respondent drew attention to the current workload of teachers and the time constraints upon them. This point was also raised by respondents from Irish-medium Gaeltacht schools.

Respondents from Irish-medium Gaeltacht schools indicated a high level of agreement (77%) for the use of examples of children's work linking to learning outcomes and the progression continua. Of the 17 respondents, two indicated the examples would be *unhelpful* or *very unhelpful*. Both respondents identified teachers' increasing workload and the growing focus on assessment in primary schools as the reason for their response.

Q18: Practice guides

Question 18 invited respondents to share their opinions on the development of practice guides to support language teaching and learning. The preamble to the question included lists of practice guides already in development. In the case of English, these included guides on children's vocabulary, critical thinking and book talk, cursive writing from junior infants, engaging children with literature, guided reading, Reader's Theatre, socio-dramatic play and language learning, supporting children's reading at home, and the writing workshop.

There was a total of 236 respondents to this question. From analysis of the responses across school types, the areas of oral language (n=56), phonics (n=45) and comprehension strategies (n=39) emerged as areas perceived to be in need of practice guides. Respondents across all school types highlighted the need for a practice guide on phonics related to the teaching of English. Some of those who focused on comprehension strategies, referred to the 'Building Bridges of Understanding' approach to comprehension development. Oral language was perceived as needing particular focus by teachers in schools with disadvantaged status (DEIS) (15 mentions out of 29), while teachers in special schools placed an emphasis on general communication strategies such as non-verbal cues, conversation skills and social skills. A written submission reported that teachers they had liaised with required guidance on supporting EAL children areas identified for supports were how best to support children's appreciation of their home language, their understanding of language diversity, and their ability to use different languages to communicate in different contexts.

Regarding Irish, the question informed respondents that practice guides under development include: Conas litríocht na nÓg a úsáid d'fhonn straitéisí tuisceana a fhobairt; Cur chuige cumarsáideach; Eolas le haghaidh Tuistí: conas tacú leis an nGaeilge agus litearthacht na Gaeilge; Fónaic na Gaeilge; Gníomhachtaí litearthachta/ fónaic; Graiméar na Gaeilge; Leabhair phictiúir gan focail sa seomra ranga; Léitheoireacht faoi threoir; Scéalta mar áis teanga i rang na Naíonáin; Taifead Reatha.

There were 53 responses to this part of the question. From analysis of the responses across school types the areas of support material (n=10), the use of songs/rhymes/poems (n=5) and the use of

drama (n=5) in the teaching of Irish emerged as important areas for practice guide development. As is indicated in the number of responses the need for Irish support material was highlighted. This opinion was expressed in particular by respondents in Gaeltacht Irish-medium schools. The respondents drew attention to the need for reading books, whole class teaching books, interactive resources and listening tasks in Irish. Equally, a detailed practice guide on facilitating the transferability of language skills was requested by a written submission for Irish. In English-medium schools there was particular emphasis placed on the need for a practice guide on teaching Irish through drama. Written submissions emphasised the need for clear guides in the areas of vocabulary development, morphological awareness, phonics and comprehension. One written submission noted the usefulness of prioritising work on the 'planning and teaching' section of the curriculum and providing this to teachers in advance of the outcomes and the continua in order to enable teachers to try out and use different methods for effective language teaching. While examples of the curriculum in action were welcomed in subsequent written feedback, it was felt that support material (e.g. videos) should reflect the reality of the school context in terms of large class sizes. Further support in the areas of guided reading, assessment of oral language, and interactive materials in both Irish and English was also sought in the same submission.

In relation to the area of assessment in section 4 on using the curriculum, a number of written submissions focusing on the Irish language highlighted the importance of assessment for language learning and called for greater detail on this aspect of practice. Submissions also suggested that the Common European Framework Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the European Language Portfolio (ELP) could contribute to the area of planning and assessment for second language learning. In one instance, it was felt that the requirement of standardised testing in Irish for Irish-medium schools, was counterproductive to Irish in English-medium schools. Further submissions advanced that there should be mandatory standardised testing in Irish for all pupils in Gaeltacht settings. In addition, the development of standardised tests in English as a second language was advised for Gaeltacht Irish-medium schools.

5. Learning outcomes

Q19: Number and nature of learning outcomes

Question 19 invited respondents to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the learning outcomes in general. They were invited to respond on whether they deemed the number of outcomes to be appropriate, whether the language in which they were phrased was accessible, whether the inclusion of dispositions and skills alongside concepts was welcomed and whether section six on the 'explanation of concepts, dispositions and skills' was considered helpful to use with the outcomes.

The draft primary language curriculum contains fewer outcomes than the 1999 curriculum with 67% of these stretching across the two stages. As shown in Figure 5.1, a total of 723 teachers responded to question 19 with 670 teachers in English-medium, in Irish-medium schools; 32 teachers in Gaelscoileanna and 22 teachers in Gaeltacht schools rated how strongly they felt that the number of outcomes were appropriate for their school context. The majority in all three school contexts were in agreement with the number of outcomes. The greatest support came from teachers in Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools with 81% and 82% respectively *agreeing* or *strongly agreeing*. It should be noted, however, given the small sample size of twenty two respondents in Gaeltacht schools it may be difficult to generalise from this finding. 75% of teachers in English-medium schools also *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the number of outcomes.

Figure 5.1: Appropriateness of the number of outcomes – by language context
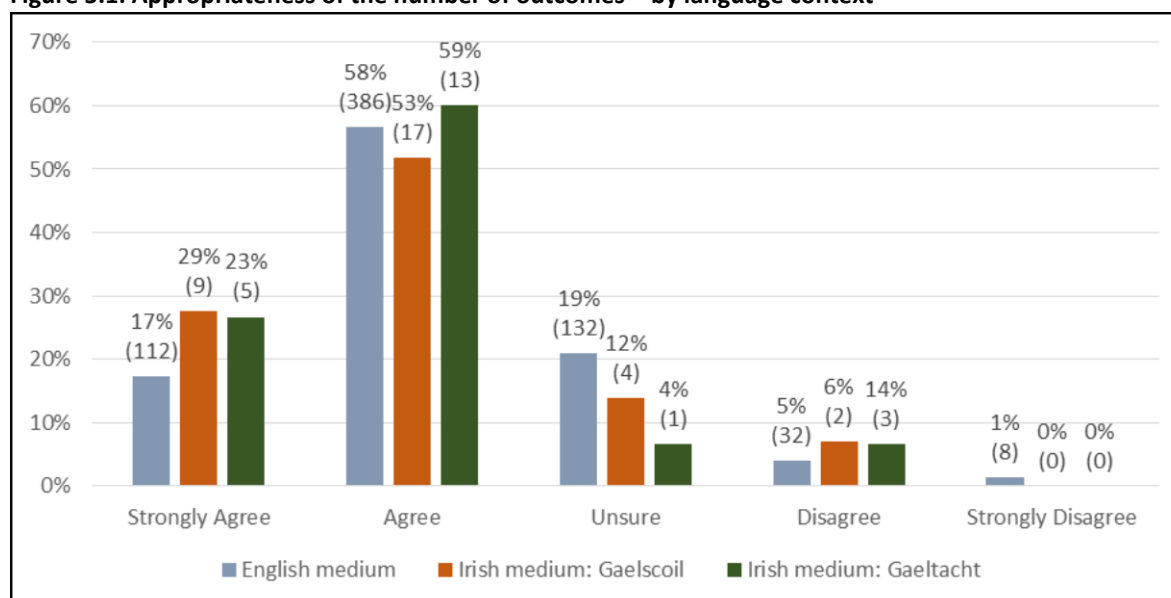
(*n*1=670, *n*2=32, *n*3=22)

Figure 5.2: Appropriateness of the number of outcomes – by school type
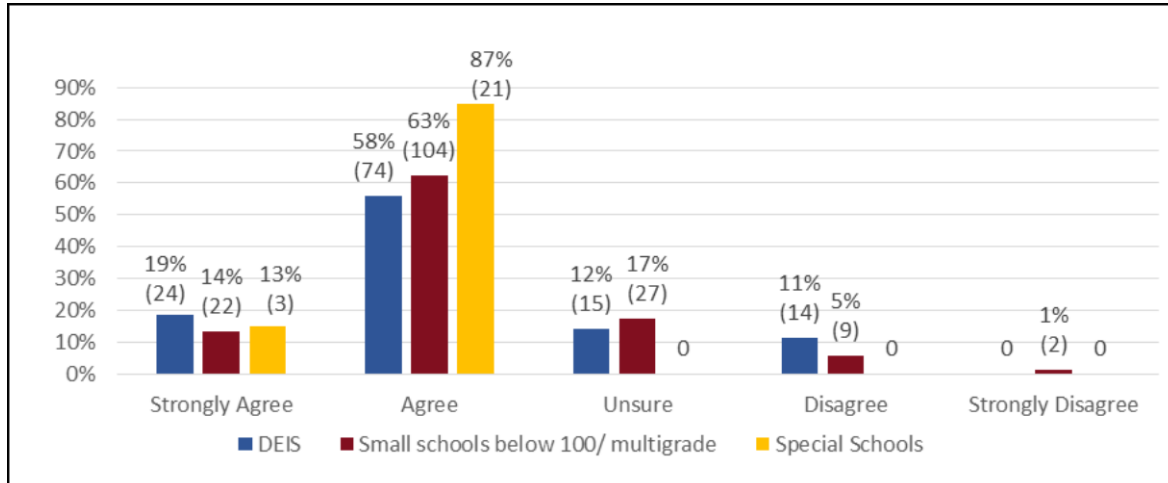
(*n*1=127, *n*2=164, *n*3=24)

Results were filtered further to see if teaching in a particular school context such as a school with disadvantaged status (DEIS), small school/multigrade or a special school, had any bearing on teachers' views on the number of outcomes. In total, 127 teachers in DEIS schools, 164 in small schools and 24 in special schools responded to this question. Of these groups, teachers showing the highest level of agreement were those teaching in special schools. Seventy-seven percent of teachers in DEIS and smaller schools agreed with the number of outcomes with 23% being unsure or disagreeing.

Of those who *disagreed or strongly disagreed* with the number of outcomes the majority were teachers in English medium schools, 6% (40) of these teachers reporting disagreement with the number of outcomes. Twelve of these teachers were working in DEIS schools. Nine of those 40 teachers provided written responses. Two of these felt the outcomes were either too vague or broad and would be difficult for teachers to break down as they stretched across four years. Concern about the breadth of the outcomes and the potential for this making planning difficult was mirrored in a number of written submissions. Perhaps the detail of the three progression continua can address this. One teacher felt that there were too many outcomes while another considered them to be *too wordy* and possibly *too lengthy*.

A total of 74 teachers across the three school contexts provided written commentary on the learning outcomes question, only 3 of these (4%) referred to the actual number of outcomes and felt that there may be too many. Education partners expressed satisfaction with the number of outcomes in their written submissions.

Figure 5.3: Accessibility of the language in which the outcomes are phrased– by language context
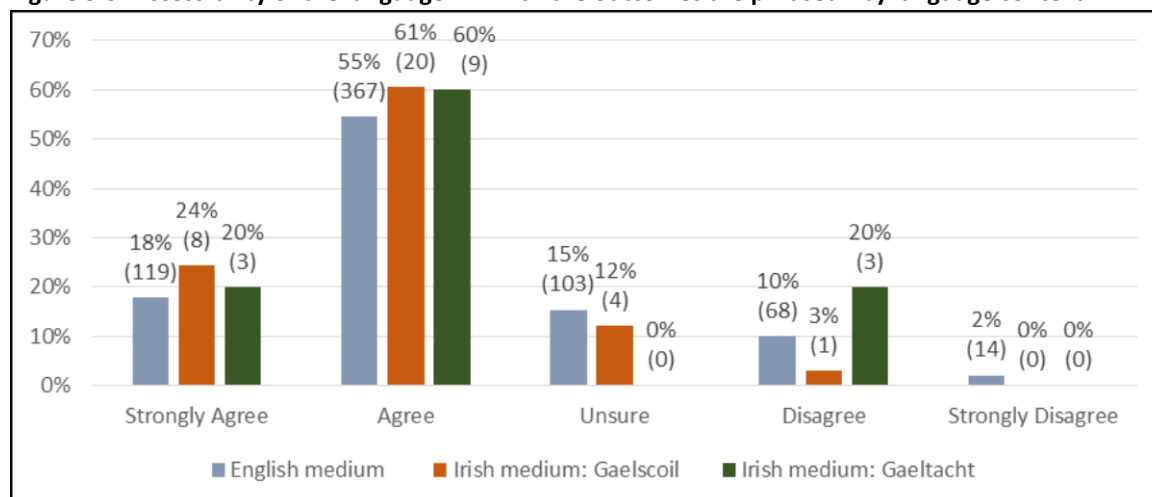
(*n*1=671, *n*2=33, *n*3 =15)

In total, 719 survey participants responded on the accessibility of the language used in the outcomes— 671 in English-medium, 33 in Gaelscoileanna and 15 in Gaeltacht schools. The majority of teachers across all three school contexts agreed with the language used. Of the 74 teachers who provided written commentary, 31% (26) referred specifically to the language used in the draft curriculum document. Some noted that there may be too much in each outcome with nine teachers referring to the outcomes as being *too wordy* and calling for them to be more concise. Likewise, education partners through their written submissions, queried whether the outcomes were too broad and felt they would benefit from being more specific. They also felt that seeing the full progression continua and making clear links between the outcomes and the continua would be beneficial. Seventeen teachers asked for the language to be simplified. It may be that these teachers were linking terminology in the outcomes with the tables of concepts, dispositions and skills in the overview section. One written submission highlighted the potential for the tables of concepts, dispositions and skills to be confused with the similar-looking tables of learning outcomes.

In contrast, ten other teachers commended the outcomes for being clearer, condensed and easier to use than the content objectives in the 1999 curriculum.

A total of 739 respondents responded to the inclusion of dispositions and skills in the outcomes and the usefulness of a section providing an explanation of these alongside concepts. Seventy-seven percent welcomed their inclusion while 81% agreed that providing explanations would be helpful. Of the 74 respondents who provided written commentary, three wanted dispositions to be made more explicit in the outcomes. Five respondents suggested that a glossary would not be necessary if the language used was simplified while one teacher in an English-medium school found section 6 helpful in understanding the outcomes for Irish.

Thirty-nine percent (29) of the respondents who provided written commentary focused on the layout and presentation of the outcomes. Some found the tables hard to read or the colours distracting while others recommended the use of bullet points and clearer headings. Twenty-three percent (17) highly commended the new outcomes noting their usefulness as assessment criteria, their clarity and their practical focus. A number of written submissions called for clear links to highlight where transference of skills occurs across languages.

Q20: Suitability of the learning outcomes

Question 20 invited responses on the appropriateness of the learning outcomes for children in stages 1 and 2 in their schools' first and second languages. The data was filtered for school language context. The results were then filtered further to see if responses were impacted by other contextual factors such as working in a school with DEIS status, a smaller school/multi-grade or a special school.

The first part of the question looked at the general appropriateness of the outcomes for stages 1 and 2. In total, 694 survey participants responded with 675 of these being teachers. The majority of teachers in all three language contexts deemed the outcomes appropriate as shown in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4: Suitability of learning outcomes for stages 1 and 2 – by language context
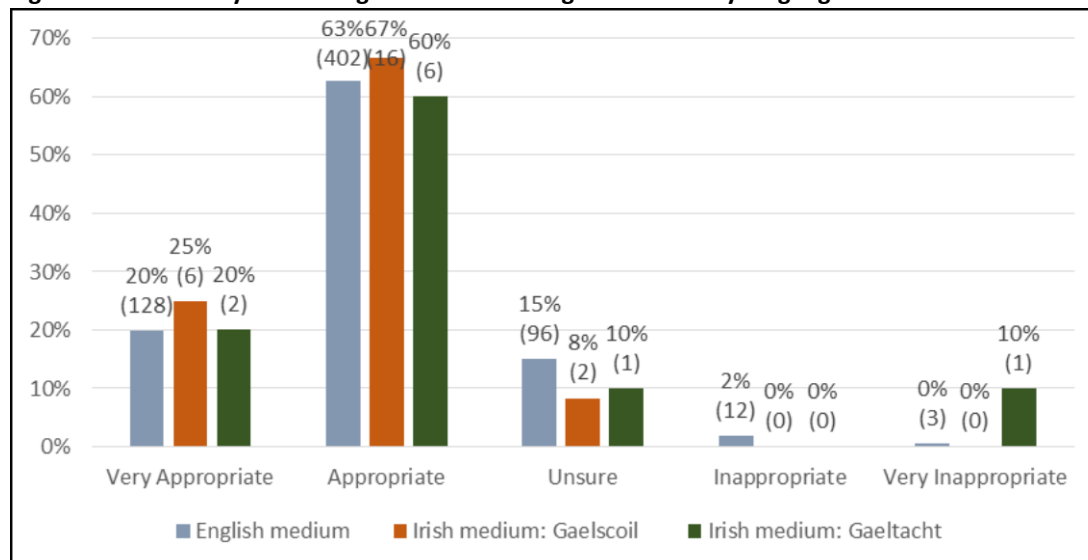
(*n*1=641, *n*2=24, *n*3=10)

Respondents were then asked to provide more in-depth insights into their level of agreement with the appropriateness of the outcomes. They were asked to rate the appropriateness of the outcomes for each of the two stages in both the school's first language and second language. Figures 5.5 to 5.10 illustrate not only the responses from each of the three language contexts but also the responses from

teachers teaching in DEIS, small schools/multigrade and special schools to provide a more rounded picture.

Figure 5.5: Suitability of learning outcomes for stage 1, first language – by language context
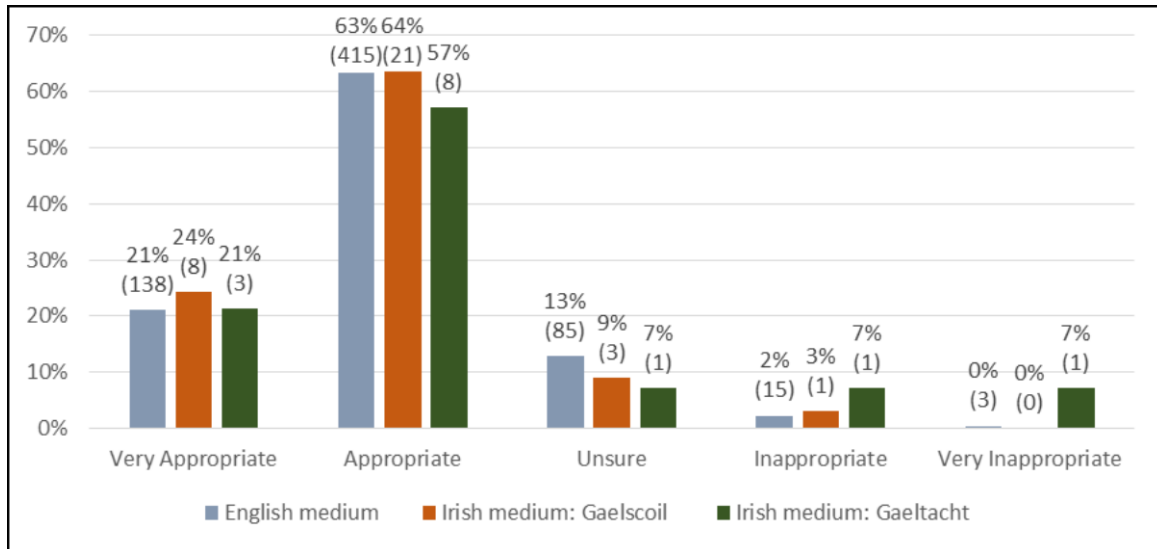
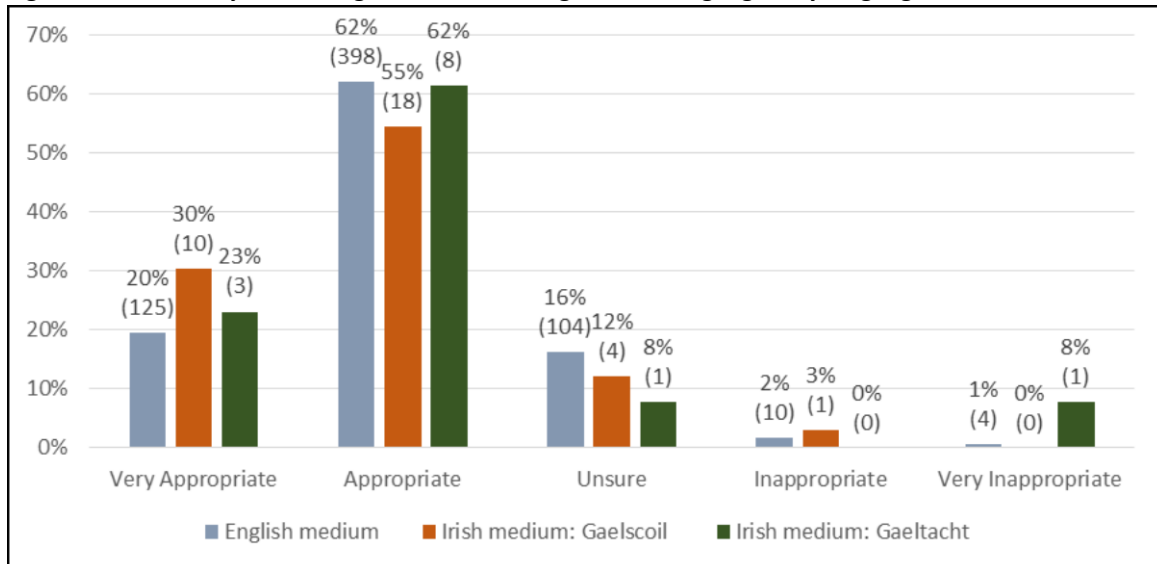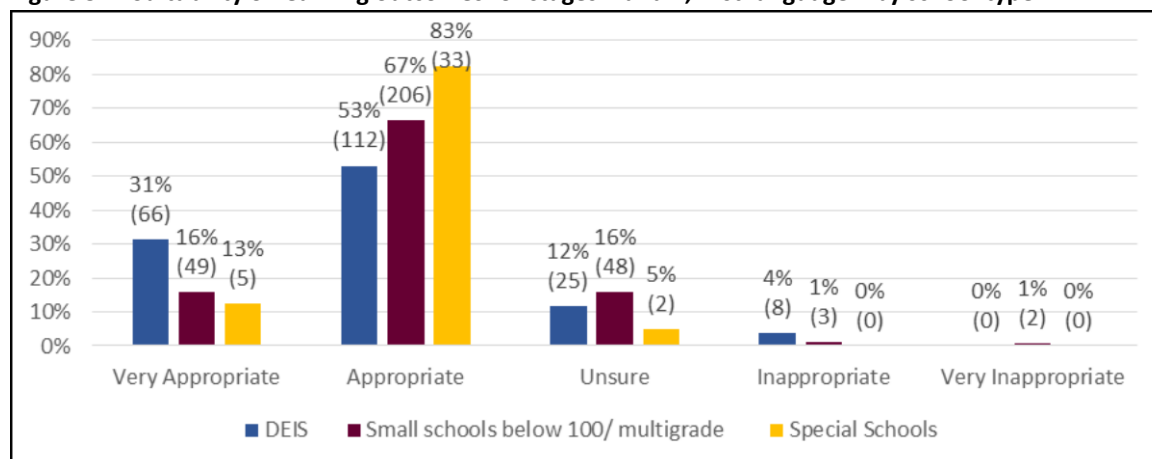(*n*1=656, *n*2=33, *n*3=14)

Figure 5.6: Suitability of learning outcomes for stage 2, first language – by language context

(*n*1=641, *n*2=33, *n*3=13)

Figure 5.7: Suitability of learning outcomes for stages 1 and 2, first language – by school type


(*n*1=211, *n*2=308, *n*3=40)

In English-medium schools the learning outcomes for the school's first language for stages 1 and 2 were broadly welcomed by 82-84% (523-553) of teachers. Of these teachers in English medium who welcomed the outcomes, 3% (24) were in special schools and 17% (120) were in DEIS schools. Of the 15-19% (103-118) of teachers in English-medium schools who were either *unsure* or who *disagreed*, 15% (15) worked in schools with DEIS status. Comments from these teachers indicated that they needed more time to familiarise themselves with the materials in order to comment fairly. A number of these respondents felt that the outcomes were too lengthy and that they would benefit from being more specific echoing some responses to Q19. There was a query around the appropriateness of the outcome for cursive writing for stage 1 this query was echoed in written submissions. One submission cautioned against solely focusing on the process approach to writing and sought a range of approaches such as genre-based, strategic writing and writing to learn amongst others.

In both of the Irish medium sectors the outcomes for the school's first language were welcomed, Gaelscoileanna 85-88% (28-29) and Gaeltacht 78-85% (11). Four of these respondents in the Irish medium sector were from DEIS schools. 12-21% (2-5) of teachers in both Irish medium contexts were unsure of or deemed the outcomes inappropriate. Due to the small number of respondents it may be hard to generalise such findings. Of the 36 teachers from the Irish medium sector who responded to question 20, six supplied written commentary. One respondent felt that grammar and writing genres should be postponed until third class as children would have more interest in them as a new area. One teacher requested lists of vocabulary for each stage and one teacher felt that children may be more advanced than the standard articulated given recent advances in phonics. Those who submitted written submissions from the Irish sector requested that lines of development in accuracy, grammar, phonics and vocabulary be more evident in the outcomes for those learning Irish as a first language. One written submission sought this level of depth in the areas of vocabulary, phonology, morphology

and comprehension strategies for each language in each of the school context. Direct form-instruction was also sought in the same submission around the areas of punctuation, alphabetic principle, writing genres and oral language for each language in each school context. A further written submission felt the outcomes for Irish while suitable for children in Gaeltacht schools may need to be differentiated for children in Gaelscoileanna, many for whom Irish will not be their home language. Additional written feedback highlighted that the learning outcomes in reading and writing for Irish as a second language were too ambitious. Equally, while there was reference to culture and heritage in the aims, written submissions requested that this reference be strengthened in the learning outcomes and the progression continua.

Figure 5.8: Suitability of learning outcomes for stage 1, second language– by language context
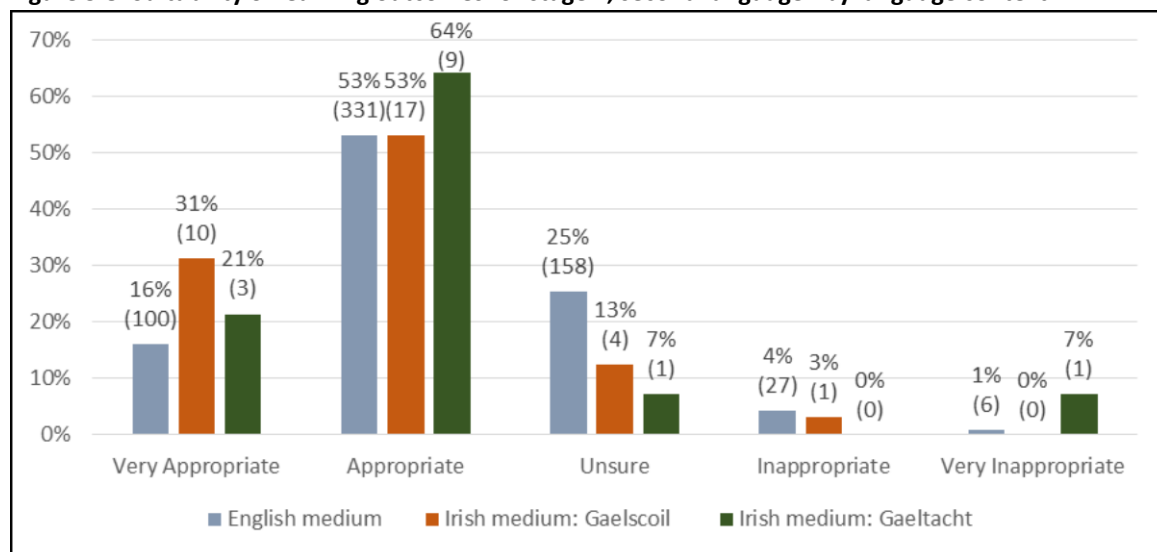
(*n*1=622, *n*2=32, *n*3=14)

Figure 5.9: Suitability of learning outcomes for stage 2, second language – by language context
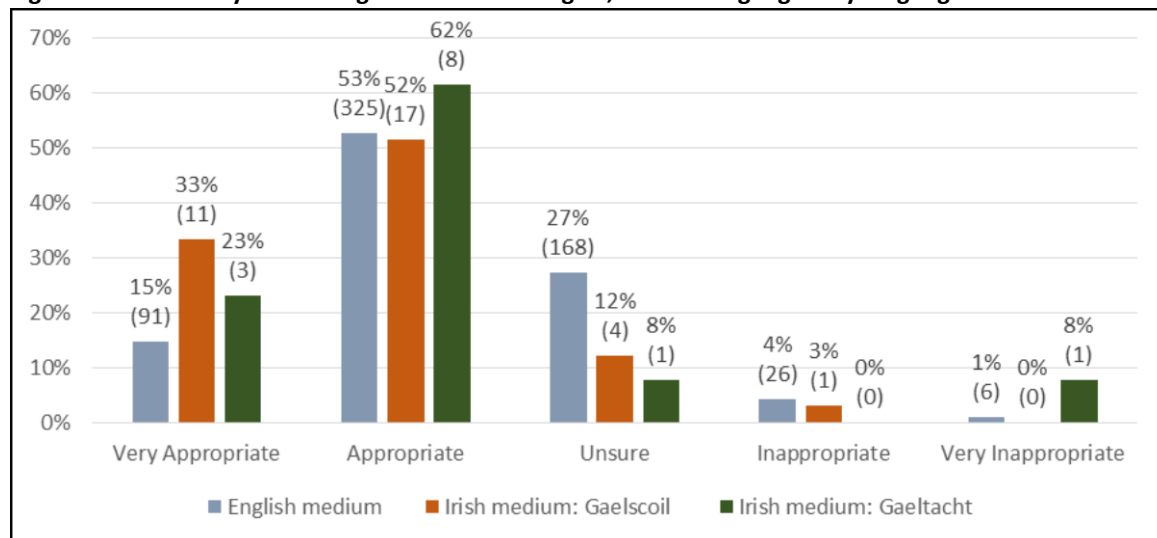
(*n*1=616, *n*2=33, *n*3=13)

Figure 5.10: Suitability of learning outcomes for stages 1 and 2, second language – by school type
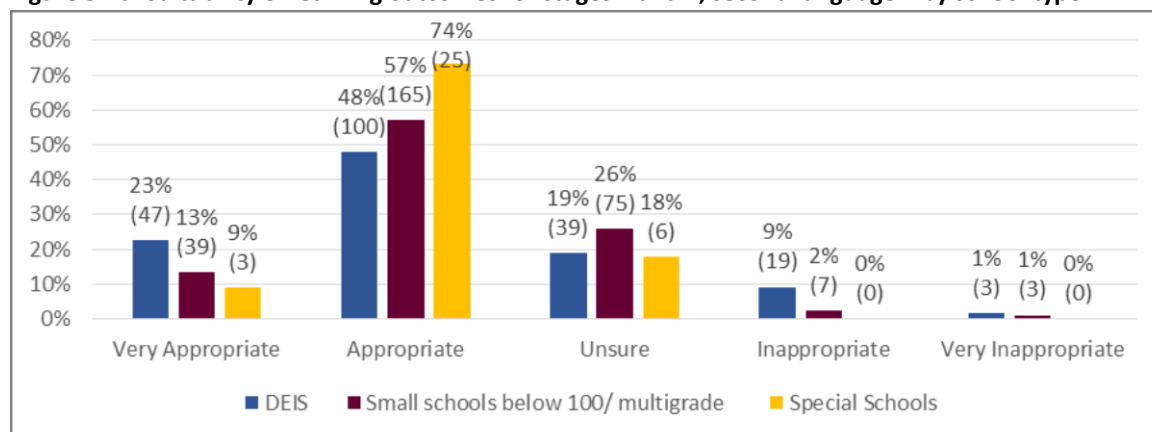
(*n*1=208, *n*2=289, *n*3=34)

The majority of teachers (68-69%:416-431) in English-medium schools deemed the learning outcomes for the school's second language of Irish in stages 1 and 2 appropriate. It was noted that there were more teachers who were either unsure of or deemed the outcomes inappropriate for the school's second language of Irish than did for the school's first language of English. A total of 30-32% (191-200) of teachers were either unsure of or deemed the outcomes to be inappropriate for the school's second language, with the majority of these 25-27% (158-168) being unsure. Of the teachers in English-medium schools who were unsure, 11% (16-18) were in DEIS schools and 2% (3) were in special schools. Twelve of these teachers commented, the main reasons given for their uncertainty was that they felt they did not have sufficient time to engage with the materials and two teachers felt the outcomes were 'too wordy'. One teacher felt she couldn't comment on stage 2 as she only had experience of infants and one teacher felt there was no recognition given to EAL children's home language, a sentiment which was echoed in the written submissions received from education partners.

Five percent (32-33) of teachers in English-medium schools deemed the second language outcomes for Irish to be inappropriate. Of this group of teachers, 33% (11) were from DEIS schools. Eleven teachers in this group provided written commentary outlining the primary reason for their objection; these respondents felt that there should be no outcomes for reading or writing in the school's second language for stage 1. In contrast, the written submissions welcomed the addition of informal literacy outcomes for reading and writing in English schools' second language for children in Stage 1. They recognised that while children in the infant classes would not engage with formal literacy skills in reading and writing in the school's second language, the outcomes would provide children with valuable opportunities to engage informally with literacy and with the written word. They cautioned that this would need to be explained to teachers from the outset as any outcomes provided for reading and writing in the school's second language in stage 1 could otherwise be misinterpreted by teachers.

Of the remaining teachers who commented, one felt the outcomes were too lengthy and two teachers felt they were pitched too low. Three teachers called for the outcomes for Irish in an English-medium school to be presented to teachers in English.

There was a welcome for the outcomes for the school's second language of English from both Irish-medium sectors, with 84-85% (27-28) of teachers in Gaelscoileanna and 85% (11-22) of Gaeltacht teachers deeming them appropriate. Four teachers in a Gaelscoil and one in a Gaeltacht school were unsure about the outcomes for the school's second language and unfortunately these teachers didn't comment on their reason for this. One teacher in both a Gaelscoil and Gaeltacht school deemed the outcomes inappropriate. As noted already, due to the small number of respondents from the Irish-medium sector it may be hard to generalise from these findings.

In the case of the outcomes, written submissions focused primarily on oral language with particular reference to the skill of listening. While the submissions noted that the importance of listening was implied in the curriculum's overview and in the learning outcomes, they expressed concern that without explicit references, there was a danger that teachers would not afford the skill the attention it requires. This point was made by those working in English-medium and Irish-medium education. Some suggestions were made to include outcomes focusing specifically on listening, and to rename the Oral Language strand as Oral Language (Listening and Speaking). In subsequent feedback the appropriateness of the stem 'in partnership with the teacher, children should' and 'children should be able to' was questioned and a preference was expressed for the former stem 'the child will be enabled to' which was deemed to be more in line with progression. There was a further concern about what use would be made of the learning outcomes and progression continua beyond classroom planning and assessment. Three points of caution were expressed; that expectations for the individual tracking of pupils may arise, that the progression continua could lead to an IEP for each child, and that the combination of the learning outcomes and the continua, if misused, could lead to a box-ticking approach to teaching and assessment.

Curriculum support for teachers

Q21: Language learning through play

Question 21 asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed that play could be used as an effective methodology in supporting children's language learning and development. A total of 717 people working across the three language contexts responded. Of these, 693 (97%) agreed or strongly agreed that play as outlined in *Aistear,* could support learning as presented in the outcomes for junior infants to second class. Figure 5.11 shows the responses across the three language contexts. Clarity on how a playful methodology such as that outlined in *Aistear* could be used with the language curriculum, was sought in one written submission.

Figure 5.11: Appropriateness of language learning through play – by language context
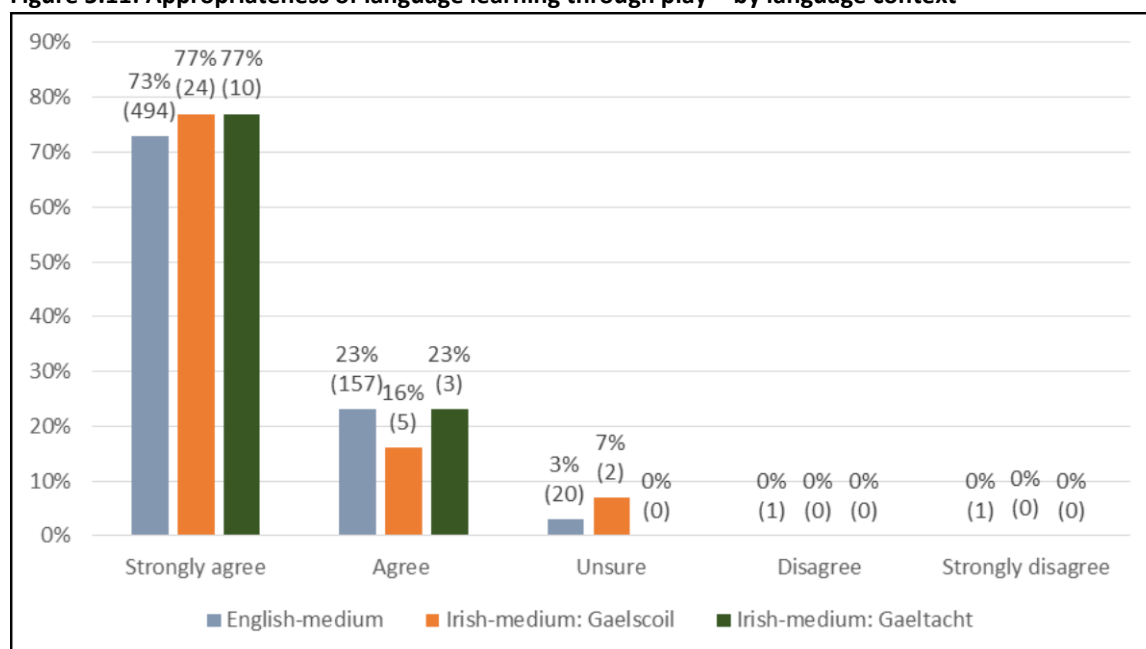
(*n*1=673; *n*2=31; *n*3=13)

Expanding on this, 101 respondents provided additional comments; 90 of these were working in English-medium schools, eight in Gaelscoileanna and three in scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge sa Ghaeltacht. Most of the 101 respondents were positively disposed to using play methodologies to support children's language learning and development. Thirty-two of them referred to the importance of using play when working with young children: *Best way for children to learn; Play should be encouraged and supported*. A further 14 respondents referred specifically to the role of play in nurturing and promoting children's oral language development: *Play is the corner stone upon which oral language develops; Tá sé go maith an bhéim a bheith ar theanga labhartha trí shúgradh (Play is a good way of putting a focus*

on oral language). Twenty-four respondents identified challenges in using a play-based methodology in their classrooms. These included time constraints, large class sizes, the absence of support personnel, and lack of training, funding and resources; *Teachers need training/up-skilling to ensure that it is implemented effectively and meaningfully.* A small number also referred to their own successes in using play: *I am using the Aistear framework and am amazed by the results; it has changed and refreshed my teaching.*

Q22: Familiarity with *Aistear*

Question 22 asked respondents to indicate their familiarity with *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* which was published in October 2009.

Figure 5.12: Familiarity with *Aistear* across school language contexts
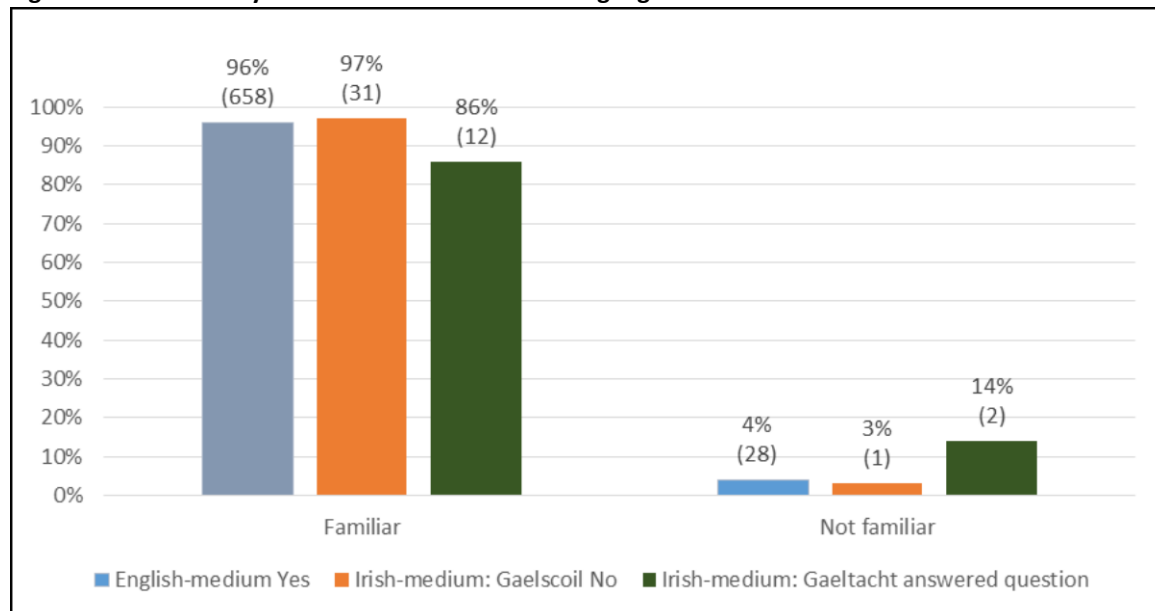
(*n*1=686; *n*2=32, *n*3=14)

In total, 732 respondents completed the question with only 33 (5%) indicating that they weren't as yet familiar with the Framework. Since *Aistear*'s publication, over 10,000 primary school teachers and principals in both English-medium and Irish-medium schools have participated in *Aistear* workshops and/or summer courses provided through the network of Education Centres. This work has helped to raise awareness of the Framework amongst teachers and especially those working at the infant level. This awareness has, in turn, enabled increasing numbers of teachers to begin to try out some of the ideas in *Aistear* in their classrooms in the context of their work with the Primary School Curriculum (1999). This work has focused mainly on *Aistear*'s principle of *Play and hands-on experiences*.

As CPD on *Aistear* has been undertaken by teachers in their own time and on a voluntary basis, there remain many teachers who are unfamiliar with the curriculum framework.

A number of written submissions queried the links between *Aistear* and the new language curriculum. They cautioned that as many teachers had not yet received training in using *Aistear* that explicit references to it within the new language curriculum may cause apprehension. These submissions called for clarity on whether or not teachers needed *Aistear*-specific training in order to implement the new language curriculum. Large class sizes were referred to as problematic in implementing Aistear. Further submissions suggested that, professional development for teachers on *Aistear* prior to the introduction of the new Primary Language Curriculum or as a part of the implementation process, could alleviate such confusion. One submission questioned the references to Aistear in certain sections of the document and suggested it be referenced early on in the document as a framework and repeated references to it thereafter be avoided.

Q23: Suggestions for improving the language curriculum

Respondents were invited to make up to three suggestions, in order of importance with the first being the most important, for how the draft Primary Language Curriculum could be improved. These were to be listed in order of importance with the first being the most important. In total 444 responses were provided across all three school contexts. Some of the most frequently cited words/phrases in response to this question are included in Figure 5.13.

Figure 5.13: Suggestions to improve the draft language curriculum – cloud view

Across responses, three main improvements were identified. These related to:

- effective communications

- support for teaching and learning

- *Aistear.*

The most frequently suggested improvement related to effective communications. It included both how information about the new Primary Language Curriculum is presented and communicated 'in the curriculum' itself and also how information 'about the curriculum' is disseminated and shared with teachers and others. Respondents made general calls for *greater clarity*; for information to be *more concise*; *not to be too complicated* and for priorities to be clear. Respondents asked for the curriculum itself to be made *more accessible* and more *user-friendly,* and to be written in *simpler language* avoiding *jargon.* Regarding the curriculum structure and components, there were calls for clarity on the nature of the relationship between different curriculum components—most notably the Outcomes and Progression Continua and for *priorities to be clearer*. There were also calls to improve the 'presentation' of curriculum contents, and recommendations for greater/different use of a range of formatting devices, e.g., *bullet points*; *headings*; *shading*; and *simpler tables*. The need for effective communications 'about' the curriculum was also noted, i.e., to *make all primary teachers aware of the changes*. Many teachers commented that they weren't aware of any plans to change the curriculum until they encountered the 'introductory session' in their summer course.

The second priority for improvement related to support for teaching and learning with the new language curriculum. Two aspects were noted—specific support material for teachers and classroom resources. Teachers called for a range of support material to show how the new Primary Language Curriculum can be made *more manageable*. There were calls for *guidelines on using the Progression Continua* and the Outcomes for planning, teaching and assessment and specific suggestions for *templates and tools*. Teachers pointed to the need for additional guidelines and *pointers* on *how the pieces of the curriculum work together*. Specific areas of children's language learning and development were highlighted for more guidance and support including listening activities; handwriting; language enrichment; basic conversational skills; teaching children with SEN and EAL (where English and Irish may be second and third languages); and assessment, e.g., *making judgements about children's progression* and *explain(ing) criteria needed to assess work.* Responses for resources focused almost entirely on the need for standardised resources in a range of areas most notably vocabulary development, reading schemes, phonics, and *graded resources*.

There were suggestions also for more classroom whiteboards, posters, and children's reading books for libraries. Funding to purchase such resources was also considered a necessity. And finally, respondents called for reduced class size in the early primary years.

The third main improvement suggested concerned *Aistear*. In the first instance, there were calls for the Primary Language Curriculum to reflect the principles of *Aistear*, in particular the third set of principles concerning how children learn and develop. Respondents called for the language curriculum to be more child-centred with a greater focus on supporting children's oral language and communication in *enjoyable, relevant activities*, and *through play*. In this context, there were some references to the outcomes being pitched at too high a level for young children in second class. Respondents suggested also that important *dispositions* for children's language learning and development should be made more overt. The second set of findings for *Aistear* related to the need for professional development supports for the new Primary Language Curriculum to begin first and foremost with an introduction to the *Aistear* – its principles and guidelines for practice, e.g., *compulsory Aistear training for all teachers*.

Q24: Suggestions on how to support teachers to engage with the Primary Language Curriculum

Respondents were invited to share up to three suggestions for how teachers could be supported to engage with the draft Primary Language Curriculum. As for the previous question, these were to be listed in order of importance with the first being the most important. In total, over 698 responses were provided across all three school contexts. It's of note that there were over 50% more responses to this question compared with the previous question on general curriculum improvements, perhaps highlighting the importance of this question on support for teachers. Some of the most frequently cited words/phrases in response to this question are included in Figure 5.14.

Figure 5.14. Suggestions to support teachers to engage with the curriculum – cloud view

Across responses, three areas of support were identified:

- Continuing Professional Development

- resources

- information dissemination.

The first area for support, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), included many one-word/one-phrase responses including *CPD; professional development; in-service; in-career support* and *training.* Many respondents referred to the low-morale of teachers in this context, e.g., *In-service training is a must. Teachers experiencing low morale with cuts, Croke Park hours, etc.* While some respondents suggested that CPD could be provided in Education Centres, the most popular site for CPD was the school itself, e.g., *whole school workshops*. The classroom was also considered an important CPD-site, e.g., *classroom visits; classroom* modelling and *more in-class support*. Respondents called for CPD to include all teachers and *not just [literacy] link teachers*, e.g., *I feel this is vital otherwise a (very) few staff are trying to fight an uphill battle!* Those who submitted written submissions requested that training on *Aistear* would be provided to more teachers and a number of submissions also requested greater supports for teachers in teaching Irish as both a first and second language. A written submission from the Irish sector highlighted the need to provide in-service to support teachers` own standard of Irish. Equally specialised training for Gaeltacht teachers was also advised, to enable them to cater for the needs of the native speaker. A number of submissions requested that the inspectorate monitor and support the implementation of the new Primary Language Curriculum. These submissions also sought that new curricular alterations be mirrored in initial teacher education.

The second main area of support focused on provision of adequate resources. Respondents called for resources to be *teacher-friendly* and available *for all class teachers* and all curriculum levels/stages. Responses noted the need for resources to be practical rather than theoretical in focus, e.g., *resources for practical application in classrooms* and to include examples of the process and outcomes of children's work, e.g., *lots examples of children's work to refer to at each class level*. Many respondents suggested that resources would be available online, e.g., *resources online like photos, posters etc.*; videos of good practice; online toolkits; online demonstrations. Online resources also included CPD materials, e.g., *online lessons; continuous up-dated online support* and *online tutorials*. Structural supports identified in this context included *improved broadband in schools* and *IT support for primary schools.* Additionally, a written submission highlighted the necessity for an online document exemplifying the similarities and differences between the `99 Primary School Curriculum and the New Primary Language Curriculum. Written submissions from those involved in the Irish sector called for graded reading materials suitable to native speakers and a comprehensive phonic scheme to be supplied for Irish. The production of high quality Irish language teaching resources for English-medium schools was also sought. The provision of in-school language support classes for both pupils and parents, with Irish as an L2 in the Gaeltacht was advised.

The third main area of support identified by respondents related to dissemination of information about the new Primary Language Curriculum and its implementation, e.g., *cuir amach an t-eolas… ní raibh mórán eolas agam go raibh curaclam nua ag teacht – is tré sheans go raibh mé ar an suíomh NCCA agus go bhfaca mé an nasc ann*. A written submission in Irish, suggested that all schools be e-mailed in advance of any future consultations. Further written submissions highlighted the need to utilise Colleges of Education and Educational Partners (INTO, IPPN, PDST, The Teaching Council, NPC, Parents Associations) to disseminate information. Respondents called for the curriculum itself to support teachers by ensuring its contents were accessible and clear for teachers, e.g., *be as accessible as possible* (reiterating findings for Questions 7 and 8, reported earlier in this document). Again, respondents called for *improved broadband* in primary schools to access the curriculum and support material. Respondents welcomed the proposed 'synergy' between curriculum components and noted the value of these connections in supporting teachers to engage with the curriculum, e.g., *making it simple and easy to map the outcomes to the skills to the continua as this is what its intention is. If this is made clear to teachers and the planning and assessment and feedback can be neatly tied in, I think it will be supportive.*

Conclusion and next steps

The development of a new Primary Language Curriculum is a significant step in the continual process of updating and improving the curriculum. The Draft published for consultation responded to teachers' calls (in curriculum reviews and work with schools) for greater support for their language planning and teaching, with children as the ultimate beneficiaries. Building on research and on evidence from classrooms, one of these key changes focuses on supporting children's learning and development in and across languages—in an integrated language curriculum—rather than in two discrete and separate languages or curricula. Other key changes include using learning outcomes to describe what children should know and be able to do as language users in the first four years of their primary education. Linked to this and through the use of progression continua and associated examples of children's work, the new curriculum provides specific support for teachers in differentiating their practice in order to help *all* children make progress in their language learning and development.

Notwithstanding the small number of respondents from Gaeltacht schools in particular, the findings highlight a general and largely positive response to the Draft Primary Language Curriculum for junior infants to second class. Along with high levels of agreement regarding many of the curriculum's components, there are clear indications of the specific areas which warrant further consideration and development. The next section identifies the ten areas which will be the focus of further development as we move from the Draft to the Final version of the Primary Language Curriculum for Junior Infants to Second Class. The ten areas are not listed in order of priority—numbers are used simply to facilitate reference to specific revisions in discussions about the contents of the planned revisions.

1. Access to information *within* and *about* the curriculum

- In preparing the Draft for online publication, the **language register** will be reviewed and updated in a process involving classroom teachers. While some new terms are to be expected, this work will focus on improving the accessibility of curriculum contents for teachers in all three school language contexts.

- The Language Curriculum for Gaeilge, for all school language contexts, will include an option to view the **English translation**.

- The online interface will include an option for teachers to **view definitions of terms** used in the curriculum as these arise in the text, e.g., as a 'rollover' mouse option (called a 'tool tip'

by the web developers). These terms were published in the final section of the Draft, named 'Explanation of Concepts, Dispositions and Skills'.

- Options for a **hard-copy publication of the Primary Language Curriculum** for each primary school teacher will be examined to include a durable print design, three progression continua posters folded and inserted, and a memory stick included with contents of the Primary Language Toolkit (including Examples of children's work and Teacher Support Material) available at the time of print.

- The components of the Primary Language Curriculum will be mapped-out clearly for teachers. In line with the increased use of 'Toolkits' across sectors which contain a range of resources and support material for teachers in both video and text-based formats, the **Primary Language Toolkit** will include both the examples of children's work and the range of support material for teachers (Table 6.1):

Table 6.1 Primary Language Curriculum and Toolkit

Primary Language Curriculum	Primary Language Toolkit
Rationale Aim Overview Using the Primary Language Curriculum Learning Outcomes Explanation of Concepts, Dispositions, Skills. Progression Continua	Examples of Children's language learning and development with teacher annotation (and linked to Progression Milestones and Outcomes) Support Material for Teachers to guide teaching and learning in a range of aspects of children's language learning (linked to Progression Milestones and Outcomes, as appropriate)

- **Information resources for teachers** will be prepared to highlight key messages about the new Primary Language Curriculum including a list of Frequently Asked Questions (e.g. Reporting FAQ) and a User Guide (e.g., Aistear User Guide).

- A **communications strategy** for the Primary Developments will be prepared. This strategy will have the singular aim of ensuring that important messages about the curriculum changes are communicated in a clear and timely manner to primary teachers. Actions will include use of websites and social media as well as hard-copy communications to all schools, and direct

contact with stakeholders who have access to teacher networks such as Teacher/Education Centres, Colleges of Education, the Teaching Council, the INTO, the PDST and others.

2. Integrating English and Gaeilge and teaching for skills transfer

- Edits to the introductory curriculum components and new publications about the curriculum will help teachers to understand **how this 'integrated curriculum' is different to the '99 curriculum for English and Gaeilge**. The Rationale will include a clear and explicit focus on 'language integration'. A clear explanation will be provided in a list of Frequently Asked Questions, Podcasts which explain the principle of 'Integration' in language and other resources of interest to teachers.

- Support material for teachers in the **Primary Language Toolkit** will focus on planning and teaching to support skills transfer across languages. These will include relevant examples from classroom practice (using video) across the four class years.

- **Outcomes** in the online curriculum will be tagged with a 'link icon' to flag opportunities for teachers to support skills transfer across outcomes in both languages to support their planning.

**3. Understanding how the main curriculum components work together**

- Each step in the three **Progression Continua**; each **Outcome**; each **Example** of children's language learning and development and each piece of **Support Material** for teachers, will be 'tagged' and coded so that hyperlinks can be created across these four curriculum components in the online Primary Language Curriculum.

- To help teachers understand how the different curriculum components interact and can be used for classroom planning and teaching, the following items will be prepared:

- **Figures and images** to show the relationship between the different curriculum components, and **explanations** which describe how teachers can view these interactions will be designed and included in the curriculum and in communications about the curriculum.

- A **short video** will be created to show how the online curriculum works and, in particular how teachers can link from one curriculum component to another. Similar videos have been used to positive effect to support teachers' use of the Report Card Creator.

4. The breadth of learning presented within individual learning outcomes and connections between the outcomes and progression continua

The primary language curriculum will be published on the www.curriculumonline.ie website. This online environment will provide significant opportunities for linking curriculum components and showing how they can work together to help teachers plan their language work. In particular, the following strategies will be used.

- Each learning outcome in Stages 1 and 2 will be **tagged to the relevant band of milestones and organiser** on the relevant progression continuum. This will enable a teacher working in any one of the three language contexts, to see the connections between individual learning outcomes and the continua.

- Individual milestones on the progression continua will be **tagged to annotated examples of children's work** which will show language learning and development along the continua. The annotations will reflect progression steps at a particular milestone highlighting what the child can already do and signposting possible next steps in his/her language learning.

- The learning outcomes will be **tagged to relevant support material** which will offer teachers practical ideas and suggestions for how they might help children progress further in their oral language and literacy development (See Figure 5.15).

- With 67% of outcomes spanning the first two stages of primary teachers felt that this 'stretch' may make planning difficult. However, making clear connections online between the stages, outcomes, and the **relevant span of the continua** will give teachers greater clarity in understanding the breadth of diversity in children's language learning and development across children in their class; these connections across components will also support teachers in with the steps to implement their planning.

- The amount contained within **each outcome can be unpacked** with reference to the corresponding milestones and steps in the continua. These links will show how dispositions, concepts and skills in the outcomes are represented in specific steps within the continua.

Figure 5.15: The language continuum online:
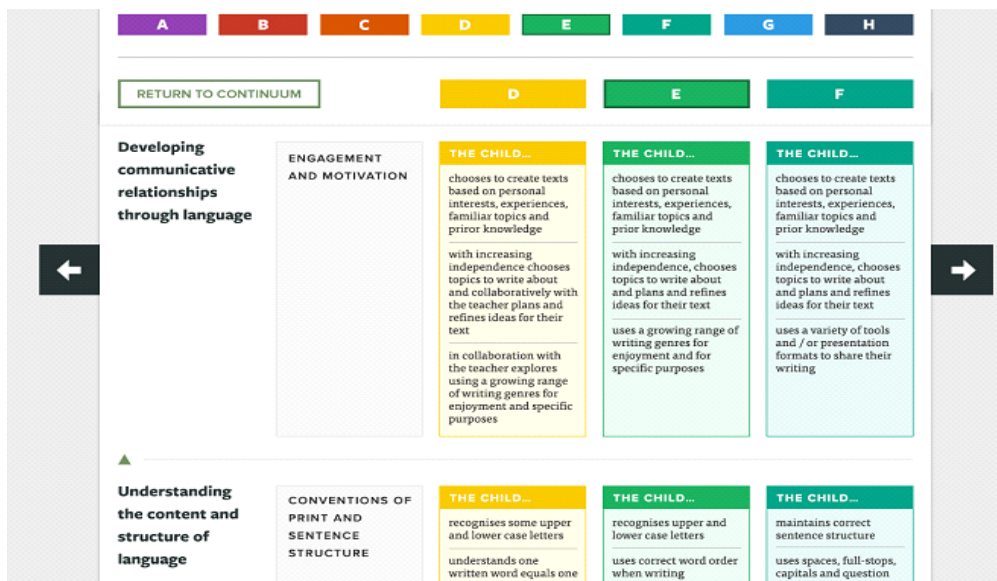
5. The differentiation of outcomes for the two Irish language contexts

- By linking the Irish outcomes to two different stretches of the continua, it is envisaged that the native speaker and the non-native speaker will be catered for[1].

- This structure will enable the Gaeltacht context to access steps within a wider span on the continua, thereby catering for the language proficiency of native speaker while simultaneously enabling Gaelscoileanna to adequately accommodate the language requirements of children in their context.

6. The prominence and visibility of, and supports for the skill of listening

- While the skill of listening features prominently in the Oral language continua. To better cater for the skill of listening, this skill will be strengthened within the continua and made more prominent in outcomes.

[1] Native speaker refers to speakers with Gaeilge as their mother tongue.
While non-native speaker in this instance, refers to speakers who do not have Irish as their mother-tongue.

7. Inclusivity of, and support for teaching children with EAL and SEN

- **Greater visibility** will be given in the introductory sections for children with EAL and the benefits that **EAL** children can bring to raising language awareness and learning in schools.

- **Support material** will be created for supporting teachers in their work with EAL children in language and literacy.

- The introductory sections of the document will be made **more inclusive** of children with SEN by removing qualifiers such as 'most' or 'majority'.

- Definitions will be checked to insure inclusivity and **recognition of the non-verbal child.**

- **Support material** will be created for supporting teachers in working with children with SEN in the areas of language and literacy.

- We will be **working with** SEN **schools** and schools with high numbers of EAL children in the Primary Language Network, to support teachers' to use the language curriculum with a range of children.

8. The approach recommended for second language learning

- Consultation feedback highlighted the necessity for a detailed and structured approach to second language learning for teachers.

- Following discussions, the *cur chuige cumarsáideach* (communicative language teaching) has been chosen as the most effective approach to second language learning. A link out to this approach will be provided in the curriculum document itself.

9. Entry milestones on the progression continua

- The **work with schools** in spring 2015 will provide opportunities to explore children's starting points in junior infants and in first class on the three progression continua and the usefulness, or not, of providing a band of suggested entry points for teachers especially where that band may need to include five or possibly more milestones on the continua.

- This work which will involve English-medium schools, Gaelscoileanna and scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge sa Ghaeltacht will focus on better **differentiation** between the bands of suggested

entry milestones according to the school's specific language context and the needs of native and non-native Irish speakers.

- The Support Material will include **examples** of how teachers can **use the progression continua** to help them plan their classroom work based on learning outcomes. These examples will show how teachers can use the information about children's language work that they gather on an ongoing basis to make judgements about which milestone best reflects their current work and use this to plan for the next steps.

10. The visibility of, and support for *Aistear*

- The NCCA will prepare a **short note** explaining how key ideas (principles and methodologies) in *Aistear* are embedded in the new language curriculum.

- The Primary Language Toolkit will include support material for teachers with practical ideas and examples of a **range of teaching methodologies** to support children's language learning. Drawing on *Aistear*'s guidelines on interactions and the concept of reciprocity (sometimes the child leads learning and at other times, the teacher leads), these methodologies will be organised along a continuum ranging from child-led interactions using methodologies such as play, to more adult-led interactions using methodologies such as dialogic teaching. This will help show highlight play as important part of a repertoire of teaching approaches.

- Building on the point above and as part of the **Primary Language Toolkit** the language curriculum will provide practical assistance to teachers in using a play pedagogy to support children's oral language and literacy development. Some of this material is already published as part of the online Aistear Toolkit (www.ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit) and will be incorporated into the new language curriculum. These materials include illustrations from single-grade and multi-grade, English-medium and Irish-medium, large and small classes, and classrooms with limited play resources as well as those with a greater range of resources.

- Some of the **examples of annotated children's work** linked to milestones on the progression continua and to learning outcomes, will be generated through a play pedagogy and will demonstrate the extent to which play supports young children's oral language and literacy development. These examples will also show how more child-led teaching approaches and methodologies can contribute to teacher judgements on how well children are doing in their language work and help identify next steps. Collectively, these curriculum components will

help teachers to see how the principles and methodologies of *Aistear* can contribute to their language work.

At the time of writing, work is underway to further develop and refine the Draft Curriculum and the accompanying Toolkit in response to feedback for each of the ten areas identified above. It is anticipated that these updates to the curriculum, and the development of the online interface for publishing the curriculum, will be completed in early 2015. At the same time, work is underway to convene a Primary Language Network to include schools for all three school language contexts. The timeframe for this strand of activity will ensure that schools involved in the Network will also have the opportunity to engage with the curriculum in its online environment and to provide feedback on their experience as users, which will inform and support the final edits to the online interface. The Network schools will also have a key role contributing to the development of the Toolkit, including the Examples of Children's Work and Support Material across the three language school contexts.

Although the formal consultation period ended on September 30th--over 5 months after it began—the process of engagement will continue at the school site, and in collaboration with partners to support CPD planning for the Primary Language Curriculum. It is envisaged that the Primary Language Curriculum will be published online in June 2015 and teachers will receive their copy of the Primary Language Curriculum with some Toolkit contents (as outlined in the first action point) in September and October 2015. National support for curriculum implementation is currently scheduled to begin then—in the 2015/2016 school year, with primary teachers using the Primary Language Curriculum with children in Junior Infants to Second Class from September 2016.

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Appendix 1: Written Submissions received

Source of submission/Affiliation	Lead name(s)
Aighneachtaí ó mhúinteoirí-scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge	X 2
Aighneachtaí ó thuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta	X 37
Barefield NS, Ennis, Co. Clare	John Burns
Church of Ireland College of Education	Áine O'Neill (*Independent Response)
COGG	Muireann Ní Mhóráin
Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta	Mairéad Mac Con Iomaire
Conradh na Gaeilge	Peadar Mac Fhlannchadha
Department of Education- Inspectorate	Pádraig Mac Fhlannachadha
Dice Project	Siobhán Sleeman
Foras na Gaeilge	Seosamh Ó Coinne
Foras Pátrúnachta	Caoimhín Ó hEaghra
Froebel College-Language Department	Niamh Fortune, Fiona Nic Fhionnlaoich
Gaelscoileanna	Bláthnaid Ní Ghréacháin
Gaelscoil na Lochlanna	Seán Ó Cearnaigh
Hibernia College-Primary Education	Anna Davitt
INTO	Deirbhile Nic Craith
Mary Immaculate College	Teresa O`Doherty
One voice for Languages	Kristin Brogan
PDST	Catherine Treacy
Reading Association of Ireland	Gerry Shiel

Royal Irish Academy	Paul Lynam
Scoil Bríde, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15	Déirdre Kirwan
Scoil na Maighdine Muire gan Smál, Camus, Co. na Gaillimhe	Bairbre Ní Thuairisg
St. Nicholas Montessori College	Ian McKenna
St Patrick's College-Theagaisc na Gaeilge	Máire Ní Bhaoill
St Patrick's College-Special Education Dept	Anna Logan
St Patrick's College-Special Education Dept	Thérese Day, Anna Logan, Ellen Reynor
Teacher feedback-English medium	X 6
Trinity College-School of Education	Gene Dalton
Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta	Sorcha Ní Chéilleachair
YoungBallymun	Hazel O'Byrne

Appendix 2: Ongoing Engagement: Example

The following is an example of the NCCA's commitment to the ongoing process of engagement with teachers on the Primary Language Curriculum. Workshop participants (teaches and others) at the Reading Association of Ireland Conference (September 2014) were invited to consider the four questions below following a brief overview of the Draft and of findings in the Interim Report. Their feedback is provided below.

Q1: Frequently Asked Questions   **What Questions do you think should be asked and answered in the FAQ?**
How do I work the online curriculum?   *Where does the Aistear fit into the new Language Curriculum?*   *What style of writing should be formally used in schools?*   *How does one prioritise objectives in the curriculum that is very broad?*   *A summary of the document would be useful to respond to key questions:*   ○ *What is different about it?*   ○ *How to plan for children?*   ○ *How to incorporate Aistear?*
Q2: Sharing Information with schools   **What further actions could the NCCA take to help raise awareness of the new**   **Primary Language Curriculum?**
Through Universities/Colleges of Education (e.g. staff working in the areas of Language & Literacy, Early Childhood Education, link with in-school placements).   *Other on-line spaces: education posts, Facebook.*   *Visiting schools/In-school CPD.*   *Downloadable packs.*   *In-touch Articles.*   *E-mail to all schools: Request that e-mail to be forwarded to each teacher in school.*   *Package with Poster for display in staff rooms, principal disseminating information during Croke Park hours.*   *NCCA Website: Summary of what`s new.*   *Link with Education Centres who have network of schools/ info sessions.*

- *Partners in Education: National Parents Council, inspectorate, IPPN Conference, INTO Education Conference, PDST, Parents Association.*
- *Link with the Teaching Council, e-mail individual teachers as opposed to schools.*
- *Document needs to be simplified and changes clearly stated.*
- *Summer Seminar/course.*
- *In-service for teachers.*

Q3: Support for Teachers to engage with the Language Curriculum

What types of support would be useful for schools to engage with the Primary

Language Curriculum, relevant to the work of the NCCA and the PDST?

In-school support, in terms of:
- *On-going school visits.*
- *In-service during school time or on a whole-school basis.*
- *Professional Development: planning, whole-staff meeting, in-class modelling, modelling the use of resources, managing a whole-school approach to literacy & learning support*
- *In-school support rolled out to Junior schools/Junior classes first.*
- *Education Centre Information meetings.*
- *Summer School on the new Language Curriculum detailing content, strategies, resources.*
- *Adequate Broadband.*
- *Resources such as laptops & i-pads for all teachers.*
- *Schemes of work & samples of the continua.*
- *How to incorporate Aistear, First Steps. Assessment & benchmarks for EAL students.*

Q4: Ideas for Support Material

When asked what supports would be required for the Primary Language Curriculum,

the following are the responses given in order of preference.

- *Oral Language-Samples of video clips, Oral language for EAL children, language games.*
- *Phonological Awareness: activities & order of teaching.*
- *Handwriting: When to begin & timeframe for introducing letters.*
- *Emergent/Early writing supports.*
- *Writing: A clear structure for each class with associated outcomes & methodologies, mini-lessons in writing workshops.*
- *Integrating reading & writing effectively.*

- *Writing genres & whole-school cursive writing, writing genres for junior classes.*

- *Assessment materials for Oral Language & Assessment around the milestones*

- *Comprehension Strategies for reading & their integration into the Language curriculum.*

- *Co-operative learning for comprehension strategy teaching.*

- *ICT & Literacy.*

- *Digital literacy.*

- *Approaches to developing communicative competency, vocabulary & fluency.*

- *Support to improve L2 Competency.*

- *Grammar.*

- *Vocabulary Development.*

- *Graded reading material & how to match children`s ability to appropriate reading material.*

- *Summary of the Language Curriculum in simplified language.*

- *Planning supports & DVD`s.*

- *The role of the learning support teaching in supporting the implementation of the language curriculum.*

- *Embedding & sustaining practice, how?*

Similar workshop sessions to raise awareness of the curriculum and gather feedback from teachers will be organised with partners at upcoming events, e.g., the November gathering of the Comhdháil Oideachais Gaelscoileanna Teo 21/11/2014.