



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of
Education and Youth

Supporting children and young people whose home language is neither Irish nor English

Guide for Gaeltacht and Irish-
medium schools

An tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta
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Introduction

Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools play an important role in the language, cultural and community life of Ireland. They are responsible not only for developing a high standard of skills in Irish and English in their students¹ but also for promoting a school culture in which all learners are included and supported. Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools operate in a minority language context, where Irish must be carefully nurtured so that it flourishes alongside the major language, English. As these schools increase their number of students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, this additional dimension creates opportunities and challenges for accommodating learners from different linguistic backgrounds: maintaining the language ethos of the school while ensuring that all learners have access to the complete life of the school.

The vision of the Policy for Irish-Medium Education outside of the Gaeltacht is to provide high-quality, comprehensive education through the medium of Irish to all learners and to foster pride and competence in the use of the language. As Irish-medium schools succeed in catering for increasingly diverse communities of learners, they will be focused on fostering the identity of those learners as Irish speakers and preparing them with the linguistic, social and cultural understandings, values and skills necessary for lifelong learning and participation in society.

Inclusion is supported by the principles of bilingualism and multilingualism. These principles recognise that the use of Irish as a language of learning can be strengthened by recognising and building on the linguistic resources – knowledge, skills and experiences – of each student. When inclusion is undertaken carefully, continuously, and seriously, the environment of Irish-language immersion education is strengthened, rather than jeopardised. It is important to note that additional language requirements and special educational needs (SEN) are not the same. Many newcomers typically progress when supported through high-quality immersion education approaches that include opportunities for meaningful interaction. However, some learners may have additional needs, which are not related to language learning. A whole-school approach helps to ensure that language learning needs and special educational needs are understood as different areas that may intersect but need not be conflated.

¹ For the purposes of this document, the term *students* encompasses both primary pupils and post-primary students

It is recognised that the reasons why children and young people come to Ireland can vary and that a student's experience prior to coming to Ireland can have a significant impact on his/her readiness for learning and the pace of his/her progress.

This guide provides practical suggestions to support leaders, teachers, and practitioners in integrating newcomer learners — those with Irish and English as additional languages — into Irish-medium schools. Its aim is to support schools in developing a whole-school approach, whereby all students — regardless of their language background — can access the curriculum through Irish and contribute to school life in a meaningful way. Schools are advised to ensure that decisions taken at whole-school level have a consistent impact on classroom practice, so that the impact of this planning can be seen in the learning experiences and outcomes of all students regardless of their additional learning or language needs.

This guidance is aimed at both primary and post-primary schools. The examples set out in the tables are suggestions and possible activities rather than rigid instructions. While the main principles of immersion education, inclusive bilingualism, and inclusive practice apply to both sectors, schools can adapt the proposed approaches to their own context. In post-primary schools, for example, a whole-school collaborative approach would be expected, one that goes beyond collaboration within subject departments and which relies on communication and shared understandings between staff who have different areas of responsibility. At primary level, the guidance must also be read in the unique context of full early immersion education for a period of two years in infant classes, where Irish is used exclusively as the language of instruction. As such, schools can adapt their practice and activities in ways that suit their learners, age groups, curricula and time resources.

Principle 1: A whole-school collaborative approach as a basis for inclusion

Learning support teams

The effectiveness of the support provided to learners depends largely on shared understanding and cooperation between the relevant teachers. The establishment of a structured Support Team ensures responsibilities for the inclusion of new learners are assigned, on a coordinated and sustainable basis. School leaders in schools with more than one support teacher (Special Education Teachers, English/Irish as an Additional Language Teachers) or an allocation of learning or language support hours are encouraged to facilitate co-operation between these teachers to support the inclusion and participation of all students in their learning. Clear communication and strategic leadership support an approach to inclusion that embraces the school's policy on the Irish language. Teachers are encouraged to take a collaborative approach to promoting students' language skills and to assess and record progress. Everyone involved – including the student – should have a role to play in ensuring that the student's emotional, educational and social wellbeing is supported. When support services (e.g. National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)) have a role, this role and the expected outcomes, as well as the language(s) to be used with each child, should be clearly defined. All of this means that the school's management and staff will ensure that the school makes provision for linguistic and cultural diversity and that the additional language needs of students learning Irish and English as additional languages (IEAL) are systematically recognised and catered for.

Table 1. A whole-school partnership approach underpinning inclusion: learning support teams

Possible actions	Examples in practice
Create a profile of the student. Use the Continuum of Support to identify needs and plan for a co-ordinated intervention. Create and avail of opportunities to centralise the student voice in this process.	Designate a member of the Support Team (e.g. IEAL teacher) to prepare the plan (including targets) and monitor its implementation. Consider the different curriculum subjects the student is taking; identify the language challenges associated with this and ways to address them (including the provision of additional language supports).

	The Support Team meets regularly (e.g. every 4–6 weeks) to review new learner profiles, update targets and register agreed strategies.
Schedule check-ins over the initial weeks, between the class teacher/subject teachers and the IEAL teacher, which focus on settling the student in and getting used to the daily use of the language. In post-primary schools, the year head, the class/subject teachers or other relevant teachers may have a particular role in this regard.	A planned meeting of 10 minutes at the beginning of each week to share observations, notes, new progress, and next steps. Conversations at Special Education Team meetings on progress and next steps.
Use a shared system to track language development and wellbeing. Consider the language functions that are central to language learning and that the student will need to achieve different communication goals.	A simple, common template with areas for new vocabulary learned, engagement, interaction with fellow students and strategies tried. Reminders going to subject teachers regarding updates to this template and how to support the learner in classroom. A system in place to facilitate students' mastery of the various functions of the language .
Clarify communication roles and expectations with external agencies.	NEPS/other relevant external professionals attend a planning meeting; record the languages agreed for communication and the results of their interactions with the student in the student support file.
Provide collaborative planning time on occasion to allow for deeper coordination between class/subject teachers, the language support teacher and the special education teacher, where appropriate.	Scheduled time (monthly, for example) for joint planning, analysis of observations/assessment and identification of appropriate targeted supports.
Align all decisions with the school's Irish language policy.	Decision-making processes guided by the principles of immersion education, recognising the student's home language(s).
Establish a system to monitor student social integration and participation.	The student is consulted weekly by a designated member of staff (including members of the care team, where relevant) to assess his/her satisfaction/ease with school life, using simple images or communication supports depending on the student's age group.

Make sure that all staff understand the school's approach to supporting additional language learners.

Overview at staff meetings at the beginning of each term – provide clarification on roles, expectations, and procedures.

Principle 2: Prioritising wellbeing needs

The transition to an Irish-medium setting can be challenging for children who have just arrived in the country, especially for those who do not have Irish or English as their home language. Having identified a student's strengths, interests and needs, the school should prioritise those socio-emotional and wellbeing needs that may be barriers to learning or participation. With the learner's strengths as a starting point for inclusion, natural opportunities for them to connect with their peers and access classroom procedures will be identified.

Interventions in this area are undertaken to help the student develop positive relationships, build trust towards adults, and develop confidence when interacting with fellow students. These supports can be provided through Irish, English, or the child's home language, if possible and appropriate. However, it is recommended that language supports in English/other languages should not be used as a substitute for effective immersion education methodologies as standard practice but should be used with discretion as an added support where necessary.

Once initial supports for wellbeing are in place and managed, the school can gradually strengthen the development of the Irish language, within immersion education. Within and outside of the classroom, there should still be an emphasis on participation in school social life—fun, creative experiences including sport, music, and collaborative activities—where language demands are low and where the learner can build confidence.

Table 2. Prioritising wellbeing needs

Possible actions	Examples of this in practice
Provide a clear and predictable daily timetable with visible supports.	Visual timetable visible at student eye level; the teacher reviews the plan for the day which uses simple Irish phrases and pictures.
Pair the student with different classmates to promote positive interactions and avoid dependence on one person.	A friendship/comrade system in which two fellow students help the new student understand the routines, yard/field games, and group activities. This may be done on a rotating basis until the student is comfortable with the rituals of the class/school.
Use a simple, regular emotional check to support self-expression.	Opportunity for daily communication with a recognised teacher. " Conas atá mé ag mothú/How am I feeling? " with faces, colours or other symbols; short face-to-face conversations for students who prefer to chat.
Design creative, movement-based or play-based activities to support the	Preliminary drama games, joint tasks, art and creative activities with an emphasis on participation rather than language outcomes.

student's self-expression and self-confidence.	Give the student the choice of how they will express their understanding.
Create quiet, low-demand spaces for students who may be looking for relaxation and keep the students informed as to how to access this.	A quiet corner with books, sensory objects and pictures that the student can access when needed.
Create a space for daily interactions where growing friendships can develop and allow the teacher/SNA to identify signs of loneliness or anxiety and other areas that need support.	The teacher/subject teacher/SNA/language assistant takes short notes during yard time or group work to inform the planning and meeting with the Support Team.
Show inclusive behaviour and positive social language.	The team uses welcoming language (" Tar liom /Come with me...", " Suigh anseo /Sit here", " Gach rud ceart go leor? /Everything okay?") and they give, with simple suggestions and examples, a structure for processes of interaction between students.
Give clear expectations and praise during transition.	Support in the early weeks to help with the routines of the day – coming in in the morning, yard shifts, transitions between classes, break times and going home.

Principle 3: A strength-based approach that identifies learners' strengths, interests, and needs

A holistic approach, encompassing academic, socio-emotional and wellbeing areas, is recommended as the most effective way to identify students' strengths and needs. It is recommended that these needs be considered in the context of the classroom and the wider environment.

Effective inclusion starts with recognising each learner's strengths and learning needs. The learner profile should take account of their strengths, interests, life experience, and language resources—and not just the perceived gaps. To implement the Continuum of Support effectively, schools need to have clear and robust processes in place to create an initial profile that is faithful to the learner, and to review it regularly.

Table 3. Identify learners' strengths, interests, and needs

Possible actions	Examples in practice
Give the student the opportunity to share their interests, strengths and preferred learning paths and begin to create a "learning profile". Identify the student's language acquisition to date as a strength and register their language awareness as a bilingual/multilingual learner.	Students express themselves through a simple multilingual "Myself" activity and this will be used to start their learning profile. Younger pupils demonstrate their favourite activities or things they think they are good at. Older students could use a short video, voice note or digital language resources to support them in expressing themselves.
Engage with the student's family to further develop the learning profile, encompassing the student's language(s), areas of interest, talents, learning pathways, and support needs.	Design a concise profile, which includes input from the family, including language(s) spoken at home, hobbies, strengths, student's preferred activities, and any previous schooling experience.
Invite students to add to their own profile from time to time using age-appropriate formats.	Opportunities are created to register the voice of the students and their perspectives on evidence gathering, design of supports, goal identification and monitoring.
Gather information from parents/carers using clear and supportive communication. Make use of the appropriate digital technology/apps as appropriate.	A simple (translated) questionnaire or informal meeting with the help of a translator/digital technology if appropriate, focusing on the student's strengths and achievements, rather than limitations.
Keep a summary sheet accessible to the relevant staff.	A shared document (digital or paper) summarising strengths, languages spoken, needs that should be prioritised, and relevant updates.

Review and update the profile from time to time.	Regularly note progress on the language, self-confidence, friendship, and participation in the curriculum.
Consider the classroom and school context as part of the assessment.	Notes on how the student interacts during group work, yard time, routine, and literacy sessions, to understand supports or obstacles in their learning environment.
Use low-risk initial activities to understand the learner's strengths.	Quick tasks such as guessing games, drawing, or fun collaborative activities to monitor the student's problem-solving abilities and social interaction

Principle 4: Quality immersion education as a cornerstone for teaching

In Irish-medium settings, immersion education provides long-term and vibrant use of Irish as the main language of communication and learning for students. For students where neither Irish nor English is spoken at home, immersion education presents both a challenge and an opportunity: although the linguistic environment is new to them, the immersion education platform supports learning through sustainable routines, visual cues, rich oral language, and interaction with fellow students.

A consistent whole-school approach to high-quality immersion education² is essential. Irish should therefore be upheld as the primary language of instruction, with a limited strategic use of English or the student's home language – to encourage and support initial understanding where necessary only. Shared understandings between the different members of the school community are crucial in this area and whatever approach is proposed, the students themselves should be central to the decision-making process.

Early immersion education is implemented in all schools participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme and in Irish-medium primary schools outside Gaeltacht areas, where the teaching of English is delayed until first class. Research on immersion education shows that continued and strong use of the target language is essential for effective language acquisition, and that differentiated strategies within immersion education are needed to support students' understanding and wellbeing, rather than reducing the use of the target language. The support provided by language support teachers is more effective when it is aligned with the school's Irish language/immersion education policy, ensuring a common, strategic approach to the use of the language, and in its expectations.

Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools can adopt a culturally responsive approach that recognises, embraces and values students' home languages as cognitive assets that support positive identity, all within a strong immersion education framework in which Irish is the primary language of learning. This supports, rather than detracts from, the Irish language environment and reflects good practice in additive bilingualism and multilingualism.

² In line with early immersion practice under the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme, Irish is used exclusively as the language of instruction in the early years of primary education, and the strategic use of other languages is only introduced at later stages. The aim of this is to maximise students' contact with Irish in order to accelerate their acquisition of the language before they commence learning other languages.

Table 4. Immersion education approach

Possible actions	Examples in practice
Use a "Connect-Build-Use" approach to support full immersion education.	Linking: A brief clarification in the student's English or home language if safety or basic understanding is at risk. Construction: Introduce important phrases in Irish using images/illustrations ("Téigh go dtí/Go to...", "Glac páirt i /Take part in...", "Seachain an/Mind the..." and "Ná/Don't..."). Independent use: Decrease in the use of other languages as understanding increases.
Keep Irish as the main language of instruction and interaction in the classroom and in the school in general.	The teacher shapes the structures of Irish sentences; the staff use Irish continuously in the classroom and informally around the school (" Bain triail as /Have a go...", " Éist liom /Listen to me").
Use images, signage and actions, and multimodal supports to reinforce meaning.	Illustrated vocabulary cards, labelled classroom items, equipment supported routines, colour-coded displays.
It is recommended that everyone use Irish with each other in normal conversation.	Place new students with fluent Irish speakers for collaborative tasks, games, or group work.
Learners' opinions translated naturally into Irish.	Language remodelling is used to strengthen responses in Irish. If the student gives an answer partly in Irish and partly in his/her home language, the teacher repeats the entire answer in Irish.
Provide short immersion education support sessions, focused on learning in the classroom.	10–15-minute sessions in small groups on terms and phrases required for the week's lessons (e.g., maths, science terms, etc.). For post-primary students, short, targeted sessions on academic vocabulary, images and pronunciation will be required for students to participate fully in the lessons (depending on the school context, these

	sessions may be supported by Transition Year students). Within the context of co-teaching, support structured oral responses, and the language requirements for the tasks ahead.
Ensure that all staff are implementing consistent immersion education practices.	All school phrases, images and routines are agreed upon and used in the corridors, in the yard, on the playing field and in all school events.
Communicate clearly with families about immersion education practices and its objectives.	A short welcome leaflet (translated to the student's home language) explaining why Irish is used, the value of immersion education for the learner and how families can support it as an approach.

Principle 5: Promoting language learning – social and academic language

School leaders, class teachers, subject teachers, and support teachers have a role to play in the development of the language skills of children and young people who do not have Irish or English as their mother tongue. There are two important elements intertwined in language learning:

- **Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)** — everyday social language used for interaction; these skills are usually developed within two years of a person's commencement in the language context.
- **Cognitive and Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)** – the academic, subject-specific language required to understand and communicate curriculum concepts.

A comprehensive approach recognises the value of Common Underlying Proficiency—the principle that concepts, literacy skills, and cognitive strategies developed in the student's home language or in English can be transferred to learning through Irish. Effective language development therefore requires not only immersion education in a vibrant, interactive setting but also structured planning for academic language development. For many students who are learning Irish and English as additional languages, they already have a second or third language at their disposal, and the learning of these languages leads to intellectual flexibility and a high level of metalinguistic awareness. These learners are often accustomed to making sense of structures and to attempting to express themselves in a language that is not their native language. In organising the provision of language support, this prior experience of language learning and the use of additional languages should be taken into account.

5.1 Social Language: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)

BICS refers to the language used in normal interaction—greetings, instructions, play, and simple exchanges in the classroom. For newcomer students, BICS works better when immersion education is reinforced with structured opportunities to interact with fellow students.

Table 5A. Supporting BICS

Possible actions	Examples in practice
Teach high-frequency functional phrases related to daily routines.	" Cén chaoi a bhfuil tú/How are you? ", " An féidir liom/may I ...? ", " Abair arís é, led' thoil/Say it again please. " and this is presented with images and signs during the first few weeks.
Create language-rich procedures that support repeated interpretation and explanation.	A welcome song in Irish for young pupils; predictable phrases used to direct the day's routine events – for example, for group work. (" An dtuigeann tú an tasc/d Do you understand the task? ", " An bhfuil sampla eile agat/Do you have another example? ", " Cén chaoi a ndéanaimid é seo/How do we do this? ", " An féidir leat cabhrú liom leis an gcuid seo/ Can you help me with this part? ")
Use gesture, visual and contextual cues to support understanding.	The teacher points out, performs activities, or uses picture cards to reinforce meaning (" Suigh síos/sit down a Sophie ", " Éist led' thoil a Mharcuis/Listen please, Marcus ").
Encourage communication between the students through structured collaboration activities. It would be very worthwhile, if possible, to draw upon the language assistant and the language support teacher as a resource to support communication (comprehension and expression) during the learning activity.	For young pupils, games such as "I spy with my little eye...; construction tasks in pairs; a board game using simple Irish phrases. Simple everyday phrases in social and classroom contexts, for example, greetings, basic requests and practical questions (' Dia duit/Hello ', ' Conas atá tú?/How are you? ', ' Ní thuigim/I don't understand ', ' An gcabhróidh tú liom/Will you help me? '), are used to facilitate confident interaction with peers and teachers.
Provide low-pressure opportunities to engage in conversation.	Pair work is used for improvisational thinking and sharing of opinions in pairs, role-playing (puppets can be used with young pupils), providing opportunities for regular structured repetition.
Note progress in the informal use of Irish by the learner.	Short observation notes on independently, incidentally used phrases (e.g., " Go raibh maith agat/Thank you ", " Táim réidh/I'm ready ", " Inis dom/Tell me ", " Dúirt sé/He said ").
Use predictable scripts to shape common social interactions.	Small hint cards (" I'm/Is mise... ", " Seo mo chara/This is my friend... ") for students to use during fun or social events.

5.2 Cognitive and Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)

CALP refers to the language skills and abilities required to understand and communicate curriculum concepts. It encompasses the more complex language structures and terminology required for subjects such as mathematics, science, geography and history. It includes academic and cognitive language, grammatical structures, and conversation patterns to explain, compare, predict responses, and verify.

In Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools, the development of CALP requires a precise integration of language objectives into the teaching of the subject. Without this clear support, students may be fluent in conversational Irish but struggle with academic challenges.

CLIL³ (Content and Language Integrated Learning) emphasises the teaching of curriculum content through the second language. This approach supports concept development and academic language development at the same time. CLIL is essential in immersion education settings, as it supports students to acquire the academic language of learning through Irish rather than relying on translation, which supports conceptual understanding and long-term language fluency.

Table 5B. Supporting CALP

Possible actions	Examples in practice
Teach the subject terminology in advance with bilingual images and supports.	Before a science lesson, for example, make sure students understand words such as tuaslagán/solution , imoibriú/reaction , solas/light , leacht/liquid , and use diagrams and vocabulary/terminology mats to support learning.
Use illustrations to structure the reasoning, logic and understanding of a text (and to illustrate language patterns where appropriate).	Venn diagrams or mind maps (which give the student an option to make their own sense of the information being shared with them) to compare animal characteristics, for example; illustrations and charts labelled in Irish for the water cycle, for example.
Provide sentence structure and frameworks to support oral and written responses.	"Ar an gcéad dul síos/First of all,..." , "Sílim...mar.../I think... because..." , "Is é an chúis ná/The reason is..." , "Mar fhocal"

³ Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a bi-focused educational approach that uses another language to learn and teach both content and language (translated from Coyle, Hood and Marsh, 2010, p.1)

	scoir/Finally... " provided on writing charts or tip sheets.
Shaping academic terminology through shared writing.	The teacher writes a brief explanation on the whiteboard, thinking aloud to model the understanding of concepts and the use of terminology.
Sequence learning as follows: speaking, reading, writing.	Discuss the topic orally, read a short, accessible text in Irish, then write a summary with the support of a writing framework.
Promote cross-language links by keeping terminology diaries.	The student keeps a diary in which he or she writes Irish words → illustration (or equivalent word in the home/English language if appropriate) → a simple sample sentence to show usage in context.
Use creative assignments to assess academic comprehension before continuing with written assignments.	Check comprehension orally (" Inis dom cad a tharla/Tell me what happened "), labelled illustrations, short oral summaries.
Give specific support to the morphology and syntax	Short mini-lessons on prefixes and suffixes (ath-, ró-, -ín), gender-related patterns of nouns, and subject-related forms of the verb.

Principle 6: Assessment as a basis for progress and inclusion

Assessment plays a key role in understanding the progress that students are making in learning Irish and English as additional languages, and in terms of the supports they need to participate fully in the curriculum. English-medium schools use PSAK (Primary School Assessment Kit) tools and CEFR-aligned tools to assess English as an Additional Language (EAL). Assessment in Irish as an Additional Language (IAL/GTB) is supported by teacher-designed tools and through existing continua and curriculum frameworks for Irish. These approaches complement the curriculum implementation at primary and post-primary level and allow teachers to build a detailed picture of students' language skills and their participation in the curriculum through Irish. Teachers' practice should be supported by continuous, low-risk, and formative assessment to plan further steps and ensure that students' learning is successful and that they gradually become confident in the use of Irish. In the case of post-primary schools, the Irish teacher will be best placed to carry out this monitoring, with the assistance of the support teacher as appropriate.

Table 6. Assessment as a basis for progress and inclusion

Possible actions	Examples in practice
Use checklists designed by the teacher to register the development of early literacy in Irish.	Simple checklists that give an insight into the student's understanding of following instructions, using common phrases, using basic terminology and vocabulary, participation in class routines.
Collect examples of the student's use of the language – oral, reading, writing – on a regular basis.	Small recordings of outcomes achieved during pair work; examples of writing with accompanying teacher observations, insights into the student's reading fluency and their decoding strategies.
Use the CEFR framework in Irish, where appropriate, to support the student's self-assessment.	Students complete statements demonstrating their ability in different areas of language use (e.g., " <i>Is féidir liom beannú do dhuine/I can greet someone</i> " or " <i>Is féidir liom cur síos a dhéanamh ar .../I can describe...</i> ", for example) as set out in the CEFR framework.
At primary level, the Progression Continua of the Primary Language Curriculum is used as a benchmark.	Use the Continuum as a guide to identify the student's current competence in oral language, reading, writing, as well as the next steps in the student's language development.

Record progress through observation notes linked to BICS and CALP.	An informal checklist noting development in conversation, use of academic terminology, sentence structure and expression of understanding.
Provide multilingual and multimodal avenues for students to demonstrate their understanding.	Students explain an oral concept in Irish with support; they make illustrations, they compose passages; they use key Irish words.
Review learning profiles regularly and update language goals.	End-of-term review with the class/subject teacher, special education teacher (if appropriate), and language support teacher to identify goals for the next term.
Use low-risk assessment tasks prior to 'heavy' tests and assessments.	Ask students to illustrate what they know by means of an oral summary (" Inis dom mar a dhéantar /Tell me how...") or to compose a visual representation/chart/illustrations to convey their understanding.
Involve the student in the assessment process.	Actively include the student voice in the assessment process through self-assessment, designing personal goals and having regular conversations with teachers. This valuable information will help staff — from subject teachers, coordinators, and learning support teachers to inform multilingual, differentiated, and responsive planning.

Principle 7: Literacy supporting learning across the curriculum

It is essential to develop strong literacy skills to support students' exploration of the Irish language. Literacy helps students search for meaning, develop vocabulary, understand language structures, and participate fully in the curriculum. Effective literacy teaching in an Irish-medium setting requires a balanced approach that integrates oral language, reading, and writing in a way that is clear, supportive, and developmentally appropriate.

All teachers—classroom teachers, subject teachers, and special education teachers—have a role to play in strengthening literacy. Irish-medium education offers rich opportunities for the development of general and subject-specific literacy skills, and these opportunities should be planned carefully to ensure they are effective.

A balanced approach to literacy learning includes the systematic development of Irish language skills, including discrete learning of oral language skills, and a clear knowledge of text structures as well as academic language. Activities that are engaging and linked to students' lives and interests should be provided to stimulate interest and support understanding.

Supporting principles for the development of literacy in Irish-medium settings

- **Oral skills first:** This is the cornerstone of reading and writing.
- **Transfer rather than repetition:** Skills learned from the family language (and English) will help the development of literacy in Irish.
- **Shaping and scaffolding:** Elucidating thinking, language structures, and the formulation of texts.
- **Meaningful goal:** The literacy tasks should go deeper than giving an explanation/meaning or completing an exercise.
- **Integration across the curriculum:** Literacy should be strengthened through all subjects and not just through Irish.

Table 7. Literacy to support learning across the curriculum

Possible actions	Examples in practice
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Start new topics with oral discussion to introduce vocabulary and sentence patterns.	The teacher begins a structured conversation with visual resources; students use sentence stems to talk about a topic before reading it.
Use co-reading to illustrate comprehension and decoding strategies.	Using large books (for young pupils), short texts, reading articles aloud together with the teacher as a model for the thought process (" N'fheadar /I wonder...", " Cad chuige, meas tú...? /Why do you think...?" " Conas is féidir? /How is it possible...?", " Cuireann sé seo X i gcuimhne dom /This reminds me of X)".
Develop reading in pairs or 'echo' reading to build confidence and fluency.	Fluent speakers read alongside new learners; The new learner echoes the sentences supported by pictures or highlighted text.
Support, through specific teaching, vocabulary development.	Expressions of words supported by pictures; minor illustration lessons (prefixes, suffixes, root words) and repetition of key terms.
Draw students' attention to structural similarities between Irish and the home language/English.	The teacher focuses students' attention on patterns (e.g., <i>fotaisintéis</i> / <i>photosynthesis</i>), to help them make connections with pre-learned knowledge.
Use Irish phonics to support decoding and early literacy, but within a balanced approach that emphasises oral language, vocabulary and comprehension.	Target sounds and spelling patterns are explored during short activities that emphasise oral language – sound identification games, rhymes, matching the sound with the symbol or decoding theme-based vocabulary in Irish. Have a systematic approach to support the learning and acquisition of the high-frequency words.
Provide writing scaffolding for Irish.	How to start a sentence (" Ar an gcéad dul síos /First of all...", " Creidim....mar.../I believe... because... ", " Fadó fadó /Long ago..."), how to structure a piece of writing; theme-based language mats that tie in with a specific genre (description, recounting, explaining, instructions, for example).
Include digital tools to support literacy.	Students design e-books, digital posters and slides using a combination of text, sound and video content.
Creation of personal literacy portfolios.	Students collect reading logs, writing samples, vocabulary lists, and work with notes showing progress over time.

Use formative assessment to guide the next steps in learning.	Briefly check students' comprehension by asking them to give an oral summary, or to complete detailed illustrations, or concise comprehension tasks before undertaking longer writing tasks independently.
Use multilingual tools strategically.	Using bilingual texts at home or for independent reading to develop reading comprehension skills. Make use of digital technology where appropriate.

Principle 8: Maintaining and valuing the student's home language

Recognising and supporting the student's home language is a crucial element of additive multilingualism. Maintaining a home language strengthens family bonds, identity, and self-confidence, and promotes long-term academic success. Research consistently shows that strong skills in a student's native language enhance their ability to learn new languages, including Irish and English, by transferring literacy and cognitive skills from one language to another.

Therefore, Irish-medium schools have an added responsibility to foster immersion education in Irish and, at the same time, to increase the language and cultural resources of students. Showing respect for the student's home language in school practices helps to boost the student's self-confidence and self-esteem.

Supporting the student's home language does not diminish the ethos of the school in terms of Irish. On the contrary, it strengthens the basic cognitive elements that enable students to learn Irish effectively.

Table 8. Maintaining and valuing the student's home language

Possible actions	Examples in practice
Show multilingual signage for important things in the classroom, greetings and routines.	Bilingual/multilingual labels with certain features displayed in Irish and in the students' home languages.
Reach out to families to provide cultural or linguistic resources.	Parents share a short greeting, song, or proverb in their home language; recordings are played during assemblies or used in class projects.
Use bilingual books and digital libraries where appropriate.	Reading in pairs with one copy in Irish and one copy in the student's native language; provide access to multilingual electronic libraries to facilitate independent reading.
Encourage the students to maintain a "My Languages" language learning portfolio.	Keep writing samples, drawings, dictionary lists, photographs, or milestones achieved in each of their languages during the school year.
Inform parents of the importance of maintaining and strengthening literacy in their native language.	Translated letters or short information meetings explaining the importance of reading in the native language as a support for learning Irish.

Record the learner's language proficiency in their learning profile and celebrate the use of this language.	When the learner can read or write in their native language, make a note of it; celebrate the achievement of literary milestones alongside progress in the Irish language.
Allow the student to use their home language strategically, where this contributes to learning or emotional wellbeing.	The student could draft ideas in his or her home language before undertaking the task in Irish. The special needs assistant (SNA) or a classmate may reaffirm the student's understanding in this language if they are able to do so.
Include occasional trans-language assignments in order to draw on all of the student's language resources.	Students create a multilingual poster, family tree, or project in which Irish is the primary language but links to the students' home languages are also recognised.

Principle 9: Prior learning and digital technology as a scaffolding for the language

Newcomer students often bring with them a rich foundation that incorporates a well-developed conceptual understanding and literacy experience from their previous learning. When schools use this pre-learning, they can focus students' cognitive effort on learning Irish vocabulary and structures rather than relearning existing concepts.

Effective support includes linking new learning through the medium of Irish with what students already know, rather than relearning material. Digital tools can be used to support this process by facilitating access to multimodal resources – multilingual dictionaries and personalised exercises that strengthen the learning of Irish while maintaining literacy in the home language.

An effective immersion education approach requires teachers to use a range of strategies to convey meaning and not to resort to translation to explain concepts and terms.

Table 9A. Pre-learning and digital technology as a scaffold for the language

Possible actions	Examples in practice
Find out the prior learning before the new material is presented.	Use a mind map/information chart to find out what students already know/have learnt – let students demonstrate their learning using drawings. Allow them to use their native language, English, or Irish for this purpose.
Identify prior knowledge using illustrations and contexts that the student understands.	Before the geography lesson begins, for example, display images of climate zones and ask students to identify similar features in their home country or language.
Link the new terminology in Irish to concepts that are already known.	The teacher presents <i>a bottle(buidéal), compass(compás), charcoal(gualach), circle(ciorcal), ball(liathróid)</i>, for example, by showing these ordinary objects and the student names them in their native language (or in English if they have English) and then learns the term in Irish. The language is presented to the student in a variety of ways – saying, showing the spelling, showing links to other words, providing sufficient space and time for the student to explore, practise and acquire the language.

Highlight language patterns (e.g., verb structures, sentences, spelling patterns) by modelling them, highlighting them in texts, displaying them on the walls, and encouraging students to use them again orally or in writing across the different subjects.	The mathematics teacher draws the students' attention to the language pattern associated with the use of prefixes such as ' corr ' (odd) before various nouns: corruimhir / corrdhuine / corruair and students are encouraged to come up with their own examples.
Allow students to use their choice of language for brainstorming or drafting opinions.	The students make a labelled picture or register their thoughts in their native language before creating sentences in Irish.
Use bilingual glossaries to secure key terms.	Create a shared glossary for the class with columns for Irish, (English) and the term in the native language of other students in the class; have illustrations for those who are not yet reading proficiently.

Table 9B. Digital tools for language scaffolding

Sample activities	Examples in practice
Use interactive bilingual glossaries or dictionary apps such as focloir.ie, teaglann.ie and tearma.ie .	Empower students in the use of terminology glossaries to access pictures and audio clips.
Provide multimodal content to support understanding.	Short videos with Irish subtitles; simple animation clips; audiobooks to teach concepts before lessons.
Encourage the students to develop their own personal dictionaries.	Each student keeps a digital booklet (e.g., Padlet) with images, audio clips, and sample sentences in Irish.
Use translation tools selectively to seek clarification.	The teacher allows students to clarify the meaning of the word through a reliable translation app, and then the meaning is repeated in Irish.
Provide platforms for students to express their learning in creative ways.	Students create digital posters, voiceovers, labelled illustrations, or short videos explaining concepts using Irish phrases with the support of the teacher.
Provide students with differentiated digital activities that help them practise the specialist vocabulary taught in class.	Give students the opportunity to use digital games and tools to practise the new terminology at their own level of learning.

Principle 10: Working in partnership with parents/guardians and the community

Strong co-operation between the home and the school is vital to support students who are learning Irish and English as additional languages. When parents understand the school's immersion approach and feel welcome, they are better able to support their child's learning and wellbeing. Clear, culturally responsive communication helps build trust, strengthens partnership between home and school and enhances the linguistic and cultural value of the family.

Collaboration with the wider community strengthens the linguistic impact of immersion education outside the classroom. Local libraries, cultural groups, and voluntary networks, for example, can create additional opportunities for immersion in the language.

Table 10. Working in partnership with parents/guardians and the community

Possible actions	Examples in practice
Explain the school's Irish-medium ethos in a clear and welcoming way.	A short video message from the principal with captions; a simple welcome leaflet describing immersion education, the school's approach to immersion education, and the benefits of it for their child.
Communicate regularly with parents using language that is accessible to them.	Translated letters, pictures with labels/information notes, brief explanatory notes outlining aspects of school life (approach to homework, upcoming school events, for example) in a simple and understandable way.
Create a multilingual welcome pack for newcomer families.	Information on school procedures and routines, school uniforms, lunch routines, keywords in Irish/English/home language, contacts for support. Create an opportunity for parents to visit the school or, where they are unable to do so, provide them with photos/videos of the school.
Provide informal opportunities for parents to hear or learn Irish in school.	Workshops for parents where simple phrases are taught (" Dia duit /Hello", " Oíche mhaith /Good night", " Ádh mór ort /Good luck"), or open mornings where parents can gain an insight into immersion education.
Establish a parental partnership system if possible.	Make a 'buddy' arrangement between the newcomers and families where Irish is used at

	home, so that they can receive informal support as they get used to the school's procedures.
Work in partnership with community agencies to create rich language experiences.	Express an interest in bilingual storytelling sessions to the local cultural centre/library; contact arts groups organising multicultural workshops; seek out music groups or GAA clubs welcoming new members of the community.
Regularly share their child's progress with parents in an understandable way – both multilingually and visually.	Quarterly updates or newsletters showing progress in Irish and other languages, as well as photos of class activities.
Involve parents in culturally responsive school activities.	Celebrations or gatherings where students share songs, greetings, or stories from diverse cultures, with Irish as the main language of the event.
Give guidance to parents on how they can support learning at home even if they do not speak Irish.	Give small suggestions on the merits of reading to each other in the home language, talking to each other about school subjects and going back over new vocabulary with the help of illustrations.

Appendix: Additional guidance and resources

This section provides an overview of the key frameworks, research reports, and practical tools that can support schools in planning for the promotion of students' learning of Irish and English as additional languages. The use of these resources is in line with national policies, research on immersion education and best practice in inclusive, bilingual and multilingual education.

Like the examples provided in the tables throughout the document, this is not an exhaustive or prescriptive list. Schools are encouraged to choose the tools that fit their own contexts in terms of staff capacity and the needs of their students.

Further guidance from the Irish context

The principles set out in this guidance — collaborative planning, responsive teaching and learner-centred assessment — are in line with the principles for inclusion in the

- [Indicators of Effective Practice for Primary Schools \(Supporting Children in Mainstream Classes with Special Educational Needs\)](#) and in the
- [Indicators of Effective Practice for Post Primary Schools \(Supporting Young People in Mainstream Classes with Special Educational Needs\)](#), published by the Department of Education.

While these indicators focus on special educational needs, the same structures help to provide effectively for students learning Irish and English as additional languages. Although additional language requirements are not, in themselves, special educational needs, use of the same systems of co-ordination and planning at the whole school level is beneficial.

Department of Education and Youth

- [Meeting Additional Language Needs: Whole-school and Classroom Approaches for Inclusive Language Learning Findings from Primary and Post-primary school inspections of English as an Additional Language](#)
- The research carried out to inform [Policy for Irish-Medium Education outside of the Gaeltacht](#) reaffirmed that schools that operate through the medium of Irish are suitable and beneficial for all learners, including people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It shows that immersion education settings—when properly

resourced and supported for inclusion—create effective language, cognitive and wellbeing outcomes for students, and therefore should be accessible to all children, regardless of their background.

Oide

- [Leading and supporting the inclusion of EAL learners](#) Professional learning booklet 2025–2026.
- Irish as an additional language online workshop [Learning Materials:](#)
 - [Irish as an additional language online learning session 1](#)
 - [Irish as an additional language online learning session 2](#)
- Supporting the inclusion of EAL learners in primary schools – Online PLE. https://oide.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/2025-PPT-EAL-Online-PLE-2025_2026.pdf
- [Feidhmeanna Teanga 16.12.2025](#) (A resource to support the teaching of the functions of the language in Irish)

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)

- The [Primary Language Curriculum](#) has been carefully designed to be accessible to all students. It supports the student to progress from his/her own starting point, whatever language experiences they have had in the past.
- [Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School: Guidelines for Schools](#)
- [Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools](#)

Further reading from the international context

- Baker, C., & Wright, W. (2017). Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism. Multilingual Matters.
- Cummins, J. (2000). Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire. Multilingual Matters.
- Cummins, J. (2021). Rethinking the education of multilingual learners. Multilingual Matters.
- Genesee, F., & Lindholm-Leary, K. (2013). The suitability of dual-language programs for ethnically diverse students. Bilingual Research Journal, 36(2), 324-341.
- [Translanguaging Guides | CUNY-NYSIEB](#). City University of New York – New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals 2014: Strategies and guidance for teachers working with bilingual/multilingual pupils.

Binogi is a multilingual learning digital platform designed to support language learning.

- [Jim Cummins speaking on language identity](#): Binogi Forum (2018)
- [Dr. Jim Cummins on using digital technologies to facilitate curriculum access for multilingual learners](#): Binogi Forum (2023)

