NCCA

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

Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools

Report on the Consultation and Seminar

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Introduction

In the past two years, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has commissioned a review of literature, initiated a wide-ranging consultation with stakeholders, and co-hosted a seminar to inform Council's work in supporting the development of children's language and literacy in Irish-medium schools.

The document is organised in six main sections. Section one presents the final report on the consultation in Spring/Summer 2006. Section two presents the final report on the seminar in November 2006. The review of literature has been published separately for Council and is also available on the NCCA website.

Taken together, findings from these three strands of activity (literature review, consultation, seminar) provide the basis for the NCCA's proposals on supporting children's language and literacy in Irish-medium schools. Ultimately, they will inform the development of guidelines for teachers in gaelscoileanna and scoileanna sa ghaeltacht on introducing literacy in Irish and English in Irish-medium schools.

Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary schools: Report on the consultation

Overview of consultation

The paper *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools: Descriptions of Practice/Teanga agus Litearthacht Cuntais ar Chleachtas* (2006) provided the basis for the NCCA's consultation on language and literacy in Irish-medium schools. The NCCA developed the consultation paper from work undertaken with six Irish-medium primary schools - three in Gaeltacht areas and three Gaelscoileanna. The paper was designed to engage participants in identifying the principal issues emerging for Irish-medium primary schools as they developed their policy on the introduction of language and literacy. The five issues identified in the paper provided the basis for the consultation.

The consultation paper issued to all Irish-medium primary schools in June 2006. All members of the school community were invited to respond to an accompanying questionnaire which was produced in both Irish and English. The paper was sent to all post-primary schools in September. It was also sent to a range of organisations and individuals, and was published on the NCCA website. Submissions were sought in response to the issues highlighted.

A literature review, *Language and Literature in Irish-medium Primary Schools: Review of Literature* (2006) was commissioned to support Council's work in this area and was also published on the NCCA website.

The period of consultation closed at the end of September 2006. However, in recognition of the many demands on schools, we continued to receive and include material submitted up until October 27th 2006. Responses received were in the form of submissions and completed questionnaires. A copy of the questionnaire is enclosed in Appendix 1.

Submissions

Fourteen submissions were received representing

- An Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta

- Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge
- Conradh na Gaeilge
- Foras na Gaeilge
- Gael Linn
- Gaelscoileanna (x 4)
- Gaelscoileanna Teoranta
- Irish National Teachers Organisation
- Parent of a child in a Gaelscoil (x 1)
- St. Patrick's College of Education
- Údarás na Gaeltachta

Questionnaires

Questionnaires in English and Irish were sent to the 252 Irish-medium[1] primary schools along with the consultation paper. The number of questionnaires sent per school depended on school size. Copies of the questionnaire in both languages were also sent to the 720 post-primary schools (English- and Irish-medium). The questionnaire was published in Irish and English on the NCCA website.

A total of 613 completed questionnaires were returned by 27th October 2006 when the online questionnaire was closed. A total of 203 of responses were received on the hard copies of the questionnaire. Some schools requested further hard copies of the questionnaire and others photocopied the relevant sections and disseminated them among teachers, parents and students. The remaining 410 responses were submitted via the online questionnaire.

Completed questionnaires were received from 136 **teachers**. Of these 93 taught in a Gaelscoil, 29 taught in a Gaeltacht school and 14 taught in an English-medium primary school.

Questionnaires were received from 40 **principals**. Of these 22 were from a Gaelscoil, 15 were from a Gaeltacht school and three were principals of an English-medium primary school.

Responses were received from 52 members of **Boards of Management**. 35 were members of the Board of Management of a Gaelscoil, 15 were members of the Board

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[1] For the purpose of this questionnaire an Irish-medium primary school was defined as a school in which all instruction (except English) takes place through Irish.

of Management of a Gaeltacht school and 2 were members of the Board of Management of an English-medium school.

Questionnaires were received from 278 **parents/guardians**. Of this number, 273 were parents of children who attended Irish-medium primary schools. 241 were parents of children who attended a Gaelscoil and 32 were parents of children who attended a school in a Gaeltacht area. Five respondents were parents of children who attended English-medium primary schools.

Many respondents indicated that they belonged to more than one of the above categories, in the questionnaire. For example, some respondents were both teachers and parents or some principals were also parents, teachers and members of the Board of Management. A full breakdown of the multiple responses received is included in Appendix 2.

Questionnaires were received from 235 **students** with experience of primary school through the medium of Irish. Of this number, 205 were students who are currently in either fifth or sixth class in an Irish-medium primary school. 132 were students who are currently attending a Gaelscoil and 16 were students currently attending a Gaeltacht school. Many of the schools who distributed the questionnaire among their students photocopied Part 2 for them to complete. Without having filled in the relevant information on the cover page of the questionnaire we cannot say whether the remaining 57 children are attending Gaelscoileanna or Gaeltacht schools. Responses were received from 30 post-primary students who had attended Irish-medium primary schools, 17 of whom are now attending post-primary education through the medium of Irish.

Consultation Findings

A synthesis of the analysis of submissions and questionnaires is presented in this main section of the report. Findings are presented for the five issues which formed the basis for the consultation document: policy and planning, oral language, emergent reading and reading, writing and resources for language and literacy development. References to the commissioned review of literature are included as appropriate.

Policy and planning

Findings from submissions and questionnaires from parents and teachers concurred that the purpose of Irish-medium primary schools is to provide education to students through the Irish language. As one submission noted:

Is gá a thuiscint leis gurb iad príomhaidhmeanna gach gaelscoile ná	*It needs to be understood that the main aims of every Gaelscoil are*
a. *oideachas den chéad scoth a chur ar fail do gach gasúr trí mhéan na Gaeilge*	a. *to provide a first class education to every child through the medium of Irish*
b. *cur ar chumas gach páiste dul i ngleic leis an gcuraclam trí mheán na Gaeilge, ag tabhairt aird ar leith ar an gcúlra socheacnamaíoch agus teangeolaíoch atá ag gach duine acu.*	b. *to enable each child to access the curriculum through the medium of Irish, paying particular attention to the economic and language backgrounds of each one of them.*

Language revitalisation and maintenance

The submissions considered the purposes of language education including issues of language revitalisation[2] and language maintenance[3] and their impact on schools' policies. Some referred to Section 6 of the Education Act (1998), which outlines a language revitalisation/language maintenance function for schools and the particular responsibility for Gaeltacht schools in contributing to the vitality of the language of the community. Submissions noted, in the latter case, that the language policy of the school goes beyond mere curriculum issues. The submissions suggested that as the number of children coming to Gaeltacht schools with a high level of proficiency in the Irish language is dropping, these schools now have to deal with both language maintenance and language revitalisation. Gaelscoileanna, in the vast majority of cases, are dealing only with language revitalisation. This is noted by submissions as a significant difference between Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools.

It was accepted in all submissions that while schools do have a role to play in language maintenance and revival they cannot do either without support from the Government and the wider community. Respondents identified a variety of areas and activities that could be supported and strengthened. These included:

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[2] Language revitalisation involves restoring vitality or natural intergenerational transmission to a language already moribund or endangered or whose use has become contracted (Spolsky 1998:56 cited in Ó Laoire & Harris 2006:9)

[3] Language maintenance is defined as the continued use of the language in as many domains (social situations) as possible (King 2001:3 cited in Ó Laoire & Harris 2006:9)

- Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta (FNT)
- language classes for parents
- social activities outside of school through Irish
- psychological and health services through the medium of Irish.

Planning a Policy

Part three section A, of the questionnaire dealt specifically with issues pertaining to policy and planning. The first question in section A invited teachers to identify the important factors to consider in planning the language and literacy policy of the school. 132 teachers answered this question. Of that number 46% highlighted the importance of taking into account the level of oral language development (whether in English or Irish) of children beginning school. This was of particular concern to teachers of children who have a limited vocabulary in their home language when beginning school whether socio-economically related or otherwise.

28% of teachers who left further comments in relation to policy and planning noted the importance of parental involvement in the implementation of a school's language and literacy policy. To facilitate this role, they suggested that parents themselves might require greater support in the Irish language.

Two teachers from separate Gaeltacht schools provided different insights into the levels of Irish of children beginning school. One teacher from a Gaeltacht school said:

I gcás na Gaeilge i gceantar Gaeltachta – cén céadadán díobh a bhfuil an Ghaeilge ón gcliabhán acu? I gcás na scoile s'againne 0%! Múintear an Ghaeilge mar dhara teanga.

In the case of Irish in a Gaeltacht area – what percentage of them have Irish from the cradle? In the case of our school 0%! Irish is taught as a second language.

A teacher from another Gaeltacht school noted that:

Is scoil Gaeltachta oileáin é seo agus tá Gaeilge ag na gasúir ar fad a thagann ag an scoil seo.

This is an island school in the Gaeltacht and all the children who come to this school speak Irish

Immersion

Teachers expressed concern at the lack of guidelines on immersion[4] to assist them in making policy and planning decisions related to the introduction of language and literacy in Gaelscoileanna, and in particular in making decisions on the language in which reading should begin.

Respondents emphasised the importance of ensuring that an understanding of immersion was communicated to and understood by the whole school population including members of staff, boards of management, parents and children. Teachers suggested that planning a school's language and literacy policy should stem from this understanding of immersion and how it relates to the identified needs of the school community.

The need for continuous graded phonics, reading and oral language schemes in both languages throughout the school, Irish language learning support and assessments, and the availability of Irish language resources were noted as areas of concern.

Learning support

When asked to identify the requirements of Irish-medium schools when planning for the language and literacy needs of children with general or specific learning disabilities, respondents highlighted the following priorities:

- ascertaining the first language of the child
- exploring the level of support available from parents
- detecting learning difficulties through early intervention
- providing learning support and assessments through Irish, psychological services through Irish, and speech and language support in Irish if this is child's first language
- addressing professional development needs for teachers of students with specific learning disabilities through Irish
- emphasising the importance of the development of phonological and phonemic awareness in preparing the child for reading and writing, noting that this is good practice in all schools and is not just specific to Irish-medium primary schools.

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[4] Immersion education is taught through a child's second language, generally all subjects are taught through the second language and it is used as the language of communication of the school.

The submissions noted the dearth of research on the appropriateness of total immersion in the case of children with general or specific learning disabilities. Some international research (e.g., Bruck, 1978) indicates that children from all socioeconomic backgrounds and ability levels benefit from immersion education. It also suggests that children who encountered learning difficulties and were transferred to English-medium schools performed no better than their peers who remained in immersion education. *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Schools: Review of Literature (2006)* (p9) stresses that:

> *there is always the danger … of applying or transferring research methodologies or results legitimately obtained and sociolinguistically appropriate in one situation to an essentially different one.*

The submissions were in agreement that children with general or specific learning disabilities should be entitled to an Irish-medium education if Irish is their home language, provided that it is the choice of their parents and that appropriate learning supports are in place. Submissions noted the absence of learning support available through the medium of Irish, and the extent of parents' concern regarding this issue as well as their children's development in English. The lack of training given to teachers on the adoption of appropriate strategies for learning support in Irish was also acknowledged in a number of submissions..

One submission referred to recent research (Neil et al, 2000) which concluded that total immersion in junior infants does not inhibit the language development in English of children with special or general learning disabilities provided appropriate learning supports are available. The commissioned review of literature makes no reference to this research.

In the absence of research in the Irish context, many of the submissions rely heavily on international research. On-going research (Baker & Cline 2006) is cited to indicate that it is easier for children to engage with reading in a phonetically regular[5] language such as Irish than in English which is irregular phonetically,[6] and that the most important factor in the case of children with general or specific learning disabilities is that they experience a consistent approach and that the appropriate supports are available. It is also stated that when children develop reading skills in one language

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[5] A phonetically regular language is where the orthography of the written word regularly corresponds to the pronunciation of its segments.
[6] A phonetically irregular language is one where the orthography of the written word does not always correspond to the pronunciation of its segments.

their confidence as readers is fostered and that they transfer skills from one language to another. However, two phonetic systems should not be approached simultaneously. One submission referred to the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) as having;

> *…identified the key components of reading as: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension, and suggested that, instruction that provides substantial coverage in these key components of reading has clear benefits for language-minority students. It is recommended that these key components of reading should be integral in the school's approach to emergent literacy.*

Three of the four submissions received from Gaelscoileanna addressed the question of children whose language development is behind that of their peers or who experience general or specific learning disabilities. These submissions echoed the responses of the submissions from bodies with a particular concern for the revitalisation or maintenance of Irish.

Communication

The majority (99%) of parents of children in Irish-medium schools who responded reported their expectation that all subjects (except English) would be taught through Irish and that all school activities would be carried out through Irish. 58% of parents expressed a desire that communication with them should be in Irish **and** in English. A parent of a child in a Gaelscoil said:

> *Depending on fluency of parents and how important the discussion is, for full understanding both languages need to be used with parents.*

.In contrast,a parent of a child in a Gaeltacht school said:

Más i nGaeltacht atá mo pháiste tá mé ag súil go mbeidh oideachas lán Ghaeilge curtha ar fáil.

If my child is in the Gaeltacht I expect that education is through the medium of Irish.

67% of parents reported that they were aware of which language was introduced first to the children in school. A parent of a child in a Gaelscoil said:

> *Our school provides a great level of communication with parents and accessibility has always been easy.*

7% of parents emphasised their need to be more informed of the content of children's day-to-day learning in Irish. Another parent of a child in a Gaelscoil said:

If I knew more about what, and how, the children are learning Irish I could reinforce it at home with them.

Submissions concurred that the home is vital in relation to all learning, particularly so in the case of Irish. The submissions advocated that all schools should engage in a consultative process with the Parents' Association or with representative groups of parents when developing school policy and that the agreed policy should be disseminated to all parents. Findings also suggested that parents should be involved in the ongoing development of the policy and should be informed of any modifications made.

The submissions from the four Gaelscoileanna emphasised that parents who chose to send their children to a Gaelscoil, were involved in the development of the school language policy, were kept informed about changes to it, and that Parents' Associations had a central role in making the policy effective and in spreading good practice. One submission from a Gaelscoil stressed that when parents chose to send their children to a Gaelscoil the school's principal expectation was that they would wholeheartedly support the language policy of the school. Another Gaelscoil submission noted that a minority group of parents within their school did not support the school's language policy.

Less than 2% of parents cited fluency in the Irish language as the main reason for sending their children to an Irish-medium primary school. Contributing to the use of Irish as the language of the community, to be better language learners and to learn Irish in order to succeed well in Irish in their examinations later on were among the important factors considered by parents when deciding to send their children to Irish-medium schools. 51 parents responded to this question. 53% of these parents noted the child developing a knowledge and love for the Irish language and culture as being an important factor in sending their children to Irish-medium primary schools. This trend is also borne out in the descriptions of practice where a variety of reasons other than learning the Irish language were given by parents when asked why they chose to send their child to an Irish-medium primary school.

Oral Language
With regards to scoileanna Gaeltachta, the submissions acknowledged recent research (Mac Donnacha et al, 2005), which indicates that only 50% of children in infant classes are native Irish speakers, while the other children have varying levels of proficiency in the language. The submissions noted that the principal role of any

school is to provide the best possible education for the child and that this needs to be borne through in all school policies.

The submissions indicated that Naíonraí provide an advantage for children who proceed to primary education though the medium of Irish. However, it was also noted that not all children can avail of the opportunity to attend a Naíonra. There is also a difference in the proficiency levels in Irish of staff working in the Naíonraí in some areas, as was noted by School C in the consultative paper. Some advantages of pre-school education were noted in a submission referring to Johnstone (2002):

> …pre-school immersion helps young children to make more rapid progress than monolingual children in developing metalinguistic awareness and a more analytical approach to language.

The importance of exposure to the target language in Junior Infants was noted by a number of submissions in relation to enabling children to acquire sufficient language competence to access learning across the curriculum through Irish. In response to the questionnaires, 37% of parents said that children did not need to experience Irish at home and 49% of parents considered that children did not need to experience Irish in a in a pre-school setting before starting in Junior Infants. However they acknowledged that it would be an advantage if they did have this experience.
Submissions acknowledged that bilingualism is a process by which two languages are acquired together. They stated that children will not achieve the same standards of fluency or accuracy in both languages at the same time.

The extent to which pupils become fluent in both languages is dependent on a variety of contextual factors. According to a number of submissions, some of these requirements are not in place in Irish-medium primary schools throughout the country. These include:

- support for the language being taught at school in the wider community context
- teaching of oral Irish
- children's sense of active involvement as learners
- availability of a Cúntóir Teanga.

Strategies for Oral language development
The questionnaires asked teachers what strategies they have found effective in developing children's oral language in Irish and in English. Three principal strategies were noted: operating a policy of total immersion in Irish in the infant classes, engaging children in a variety of activities in both languages (e.g., drama, poetry, role

play, conversations, songs and group work) and organising lessons based on the child's own interests and experiences. Teachers also reported using multimedia resources such as DVDs, computer games, radio and TV in both Irish and English.

The following quotation from a teacher in a Gaelscoil illustrates the type of response received to this question:

Cur chuige cumarsáideach a úsáid – cluichí teanga, grúp – obair, obair beirte, páistí a bheith gníomhach agus riachtanas cumarsáide a chruthú; téamaí ar spéis leis na páistí a roghnú; éagsúlacht san gníomhachtaí meáin cumarsáide éagsúla a úsáid – cluichí ríomhairí, teilifís, dluthdioscaí, leabhair, srl le foclóir/struchtúir a fhoghlaim. I gcás na Gaeilge, spéis san teanga a chothú – teagmháil le cainteoirí ó dhúchais – páistí Gaeltachta; teagmháil le páistí eachtrannacha – bród sna dteanga féin; deiseanna a chruthú an teanga a úsáid lasmuigh den scoil.

Use a communicative approach – language games, group work, pair work, children being active, develop a need for communication; select themes which are of interest to the child; use different forms of multi-media activity to learn vocabulary and language structure – computer games, TV, CD's, books etc. In the case of Irish, develop an interest in the language, communicate with children from the Gaeltacht; communicate with children from foreign countries – develop pride in their own language; create opportunities to use the Irish language outside of the school.

Teachers were asked how they have used the three phases of language acquisition (pre-communication, communication, and post-communication) to improve children's use of idiomatic and grammatical forms in Irish. They reported using the strategies mentioned above, in particular during the pre-communication and communication phases of language acquisition. 39% of the 109 teachers who responded to this question noted that the post-communication phase is used for re-enforcing language rules learnt and for correcting mistakes made. 8% of these teachers stressed the fact that these three phases were used across all subjects of the curriculum in an Irish-medium school. A teacher in a Gaelscoil described the use of the three phases of language acquisition in the following way:

Úsáidtear na trí céim go mion minic chun cur le bun foclóir na daltaí: focal agus nathanna cainte a mhúineadh (réamhchumarsáid) comhrá a spreagadh i suíomhanna realaíoch (cumarsáid) agus athtreisiú (iarchumarsáid). Usáidtear na trí céim seo i ngach abhar a nGaelscoil i ndáiríre.

The three phases are used very regularly to develop children's basic vocabulary: teach words and expressions (pre-communication), encourage conversations to develop in realistic situations (communication) and re-enforcement (post-communication). Realistically these three phases are used in all subjects in a Gaelscoil.

The submissions noted the three phases of language acquisition as being pertinent to the acquisition of language in the initial years of immersion schooling. They also noted that once initial language acquisition has been achieved there is a need for a change of emphasis from meaning to language structure. As stated previously, 39% of teachers use the post-communication phase in order to improve children's grammatical use of the Irish language. A particular issue alluded to in this context was the way in which children translate directly from English into Irish resulting in the children speaking Irish in a grammatically incorrect manner. This is often referred to as negative transfer[7] from L1[8] to L2[9]. One submission suggested that in trying to overcome this challenge within language acquisition, educators should concentrate on language form, defined by Long and Robinson (1998) as follows:

> *Focus on form often consists of an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features – by the teacher and/or one or more students – triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production.*

Supporting oral language development at home

With regards to supporting their children's oral language development at home 90% of parents who responded to the questionnaire said that they had a good idea how to do this in both English and Irish. 2% of parents who responded said that they were not fully aware of how to develop their children's oral language development at home. The comments given in response to this question show that the availability of language resources in English, and, the fact that spoken English is widespread, throughout the country in various forms, gave parents more confidence in their ability to develop oral English as opposed to oral Irish.

A parent from a Gaelscoil qualified the fact that he/she felt better able to support and develop his/her child's oral language in English than in Irish in the following way:

> *Every book shop, the internet, toy/educational shop etc. has resources to support English language development, this is not the case for Irish.*

Parents were asked to rate how satisfied they were with the amount of Irish spoken by their children at home, in school and in the community. 38% of parents were satisfied with the amount of Irish their children spoke at home. 47% of parents were satisfied with the amount of Irish spoken by their children in school. 66% of parents

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[7] Negative transfer refers to aspects of an L1 which do not correctly transfer to an L2
[8] L1: First language
[9] L2: Second language

reported being dissatisfied with the amount of Irish children spoke in the community. As one parent noted:

Is í tabhairt na Gaeilge lasmuigh de bhallaí na scoile an dúshlán is mó.

The biggest challenge is in bringing the Irish language outside of the school walls.

The submissions were unanimous in saying that parents have a crucial role to play in the development of their children's oral language in both languages but in particular Irish.

Emergent Reading and Reading

The submissions noted that the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)* offered no explicit guidelines to Irish-medium schools regarding the language (Irish or English) in which emergent reading and reading should commence; it simply noted that reading should not commence in both languages at the same time. Ó Laoire and Harris in the review of literature note that there is no definitive research evidence to indicate whether it is better to commence with literacy in English, the first language of the great majority of children in Gaelscoileanna and of an increasing number of Gaeltacht pupils, or to commence with literacy in Irish the first language of many Gaeltacht children and the second language of the great majority of children in Gaelscoileanna.

A number of submissions noted that the acquisition of literacy cannot be separated from the other language skills (listening, oral language and reading), therefore practice in literacy should emanate from the school's overall language policy and should be followed through consistently at all class levels. The submissions noted literacy skills can transfer from one language to another; thus if a child in an Irish-medium school develops literacy skills in Irish then there is a common underlying proficiency principle that can enable him/her to transfer those skills to English.

When deciding on whether the child should be introduced to reading in the home language (English for the great majority of children in Gaelscoileanna) or in the language of the school, a submission referred to the importance of taking into account the type of immersion programme the school is implementing: a total immersion policy, a partial immersion policy, or a bilingual policy. Based on international research, it is argued that children in a total immersion situation can engage with literacy in the second language because their exposure to the first language is intense in the environment (Neil et al 2000:59 & Cummins 2000a). If, therefore, a school adopts a policy of total immersion in junior infants then the

introduction of literacy in Irish would appear to be the most appropriate. If it adopts a policy of partial immersion or a bilingual policy then it may be more appropriate to introduce literacy in English first.

The questionnaires showed that teachers differed in their responses when asked about the relevant factors in deciding whether a child's emergent reading and reading should be introduced in their home language or the language of the school (where the two are not the same). Of the 123 parents who answered this question, 43% considered that total immersion and beginning reading in Irish were important factors in the teaching of reading in Irish-medium schools. A teacher in a Gaelscoil said:

Is ceart tosú le teanga na scoile dar ndóigh má phioctar Gaelscoil seachas scoil Bhéarla. Ní mór cloí le ethos na scoile.	*It is right to begin with the language of the school if a Gaelscoil is chosen rather than an English-medium school. The ethos of the school must be adhered to.*

A teacher in another Gaelscoil explained:

Tosaíonn an dá theanga ag an am cheanna i naíonáin bheaga.	*The two languages are introduced at the same time in junior infants.*

9% of the 123 teachers who responded noted that it was the policy of the school to introduce reading in English first. One teacher in a Gaelscoil explained the reasons for this:

Tosaítear na páistí ar léitheoireacht i dteanga baile an pháiste – ie: Béarla, mar gurb ann atá an chumas is fearr. Oibríonn muid go crua ar chumas labhartha na bpáistí i nGaeilge agus ansin tosaíonn muid ar léitheoireacht Gaeilge. Níl maitheas ar bith léitheoireacht Gaeilge a dhéanamh muna bhfuil cumas maith labhartha ag an ngasúir.	*Children begin reading in their home language – i.e. English, because they have higher proficiency levels in this language. We work hard on the children's oral Irish and then we start Irish reading. There is no point in doing Irish reading unless the child has a good level of oral Irish.*

Teachers acknowledged that there were many factors to be taken into account when a school was developing a language and literacy policy. A similar sense of the lack of continuity between schools policies regarding emergent reading and reading was shown in parents' responses to questions about beginning reading.

In analysing questionnaires completed by parents, 53% of parents who responded indicated that Irish was the language in which they expected their child/children to learn to read in first. A parent of a child in a Gaelscoil said:

Caithfidh an páiste tús maith a dhéanamh sa sprioctheanga – an Ghaeilge. Bíonn daltaí in ann scileanna léitheoireachta a aistriú i dtreo an Bhéarla go réasúnta furasta sa 3ú/4ú bliain ar scoil.	*The child has to make a good start in the language of the school– Irish. Students can switch over their learning skills to English relatively easily in their 3rd/4th years at school.*

39% of parents said that English and Irish reading should begin at the same time. A member of a Board of Management who filled in this section of the questionnaire said the following:

> *Most children will have actually experienced English books and basics of reading in English at home – so I do not see any problem in starting both languages together.*

8% of parents considered that reading should begin in English first. A parent of a child in a Gaelscoil said the following:

> *Given that a certain oral, aural and visual vocabulary is prerequisite to reading it follows that reading should first be taught in the child's mother tongue. That said, however, I'm happy to follow school policy on that matter.*

Comments by parents in response to this question indicated that, parents believe that because English is so widespread in the media and society children will read in English more easily and earlier than they will read in Irish. A number of parents reported doing English reading at home with their children.

Emergent Literacy activities

When teachers were asked how they have used emergent literacy activities in Irish and English to prepare children for formal or independent reading, the following activities were listed:

- phonics, sight vocabulary
- print rich environment
- big books, poetry and rhymes
- handle books regularly
- oral language lessons based on topics of interest to the child.

International research (Ewart & Straw, 2001:196) suggests that the language of the initial introduction to reading is not in itself a determinant of academic outcomes, but

there is little or no evidence from the Irish context to confirm or contradict this. Indeed there is little or no evidence to indicate how well pupils achieve in the *National Assessments in Reading and Mathematics* (2006) in comparison with their peers in schools where English is the medium of instruction, since such pupils have not been included in sufficient numbers to enable conclusions to be drawn.

Respondents acknowledged that parents are important in supporting emergent reading and reading and noted that parents can be at a disadvantage when they do not have the proficiency in Irish to offer the support they would like, particularly as their children progress through school. Furthermore, parents indicated that they needed to be informed about the methodologies that are being used to address emergent literacy and literacy in school if they are to offer effective support for their children's learning.

In responding to question eight in section c of the questionnaire teachers considered the following strategies useful in encouraging the development of a reading culture in the home when, parents experience difficulties in supporting children's language and literacy needs:

- shared reading, paired reading, C.A.P.E.R (Children and parents enjoying reading together)
- library visits, book fairs, book month
- Irish language courses for parents
- explaining the reading process explicitly to parents, demonstrating it to them and offering suggestions for reading activities.

A principal in a Gaeltacht school enforced the importance of communicating with parents by saying:

Tuismitheoirí gach rang a cur ar an eolas faoi na straitéisí a úsáidtear ar scoil tré cruinniú a bheith ag gach múinteoir ranga lena chuid tuistí – cur ina luí orthu an tabhacht atá le léitheoireacht sa bhaile agus go gcaithfidh léitheoireacht a bheith ar siúl gach oíche. Sna bunranganna – na tuismitheoirí ag éisteacht leis na páistí agus á léamh leo in amanna leabharlanna na scoile agus an leabharlann áitiúl a úsáid.

Parents from every class should be informed by the teacher of the strategies used in school – impress on them the importance of reading at home and that reading needs to be done every night. In the lower classes – parents listening to the children and reading to them during library time in school and using the local library.

Primary school children were asked whether they preferred to read in English or in Irish or in one more than the other. Of those who responded to this question 63% said that they would rather read in English than in Irish. 8% of the children who responded said that they would rather read in Irish than English. The comments included below provide two different perspectives about reading in Irish from children in two different Gaelscoileanna.

A child from a Gaelscoil said the following about reading in Irish:

> *I prefer to read in English because I understand better and because it's more interesting in English.*

Ba mhaith liomsa dá mbeadh níos mó ar fáil as Gaeilge ach níl. Tá mo dhearthair beag i rang a haon. Tá an-chuid ar fail dó siúd nach raibh ar fáil domsa. Is breá leis daoine darbh ainm Liam agus Róisín. Níor chonaic mise iad sin nuair a bhí mise i rang beag.

I would like if there was more available in Irish but there isn't. My little brother is in first class. There is a lot available for him that wasn't available for me. He loves people called Liam and Róisín. I never saw them when I was in a small class.

Another child from a Gaelscoil said:

> *I think it's much more interesting reading in Irish particularly because it's a language that has very pretty and true sayings. Also it's more of a challenge. Ceapaim go bhfuil sé i bhfad níos suimiúla ag léamh as Gaeilge mar tá sé teanga álainn le alán seanfhocal fíora, agus tá sé níos deise. (child's own translation into Irish)*

Some submissions referred to international research (Ewart & Straw 2001) which suggests that the critical factor may not be the language in which the child commences literacy but the teaching methodology employed by the teacher. A recommendation was made by Ó Siaghail & Déiseach (2004) that Irish research is carried out in this area as there is little research in the Irish context to confirm this. The submissions stated that, even in the absence of such research this is an important consideration. They also acknowledged that guidelines will need to focus on the issue of addressing literacy in two languages and the problems that this entails, in terms of morphology, syntax, phonology, etc. In particular, guidelines will need to address the teaching of reading in Irish as a first language, including a broad programme for early literacy.

The need for pre-service and in-service professional development on immersion, the development of literacy skills through Irish and learning support through Irish was noted in some submissions and by a number of parents and teachers. One

submission stated that teachers who are fully qualified, able and knowledgeable in immersion education and teaching through Irish were the most valuable resource for Irish-medium schools.

Submissions highlighted three important issues that should be considered when a school is addressing the question of the language in which emergent reading and reading should begin. These were:

- the relationship between the policy on emergent reading and reading and the school's overall language policy
- the type of immersion programme the school pursues
- effective teaching strategies.

Writing

Responses from teachers drew attention to the importance of the connection between writing and oral language. Reference was made to the various skills involved in the writing process. Teachers stated that writing involves learning to use language in a more formal way in terms of vocabulary, grammar and syntax; writing enables children to reflect on language and can contribute to their use of more grammatical and idiomatic oral language.

A number of submissions and responses from parents and teachers referred to the importance of linking children's writing to their reading. The practice outlined in School F[10] (in particular) indicated the need for more reading materials, in a variety of genres through the medium of Irish for Irish-medium schools. The use of an attractive graded phonics scheme would be of benefit in developing children's writing skills. Teachers in schools who contributed to the development of descriptions of practice in the consultation document alluded to well-laid-out, and easy to understand workbooks as suitable writing materials for children. A submission from one of the Gaelscoileanna stressed the importance of the teacher following the approach to writing as described in the curriculum and of avoiding reliance on workbooks.

Development of writing skills

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[10] School F is described in *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools: Descriptions of Practice p.37*

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It has been noted by teachers in Irish-medium primary schools that children's writing in English is more expressive than their writing in Irish. Section D of Part 3 of the questionnaire concentrated on children's writing skills and how these might be developed. Teachers who responded listed the following oral language and reading activities as useful in supporting expression of ideas in children's writing:

- enrichment of oral language and vocabulary/ teach expressive phrases
- exposure to a wide variety of well written reading material
- allowing children to write on topics that are of interest to them or about their own personal experiences
- ensuring children can read to a variety of audiences
- displaying the children's writing around the school and class rooms
- ensuring that children write for different purposes and in different styles.

While teachers reported writing in a variety of styles with children, responses from students regarding what they write in Irish did not support teachers' self-reports. The main writing activity which children reported in Irish was writing stories (95%). Children also noted poems and rhymes (74%), letters (42%), postcards (26%) and finally e-mails (9%) as genres in which they wrote in Irish. In comparison the most common writing activity reported by children when writing in English was letters (90%), followed by stories (87%), postcards (82%), poems and rhymes (80%) and lastly e-mails. Writing e-mails (64%) was the least acknowledged form of writing in English, although more children said they wrote e-mails in English than in Irish. Text messaging, crosswords and anything written at home were also mentioned as forms of writing in English.

It was the view of many teachers that the introduction of more multi-media teaching and learning resources should be addressed when schools are reviewing their Irish literacy policies, in order to encourage children to communicate in Irish using similar methods to those they use communicating in English. Some parents also shared this view.

A second question on writing asked teachers to list the strategies they have found effective for engaging children in the writing process in the case of both Irish and English. The strategies identified included:

- introducing children to relevant vocabulary before writing
- reading well written stories and poems to the children
- concentrating on the imaginative and descriptive aspects of writing produced rather than technical elements such as spellings and grammar
- discussing ideas
- displaying children's work/ making sure it is viewed by a variety of audiences
- choosing topics of interest to the child.

The Language Experience Approach to writing and write a book projects were also mentioned by a few teachers.[11]

Very few responses referred to the actual processes of drafting, editing and re-drafting which are central to the writing process. This would appear to be in line with the findings from the *Primary Curriculum Review: Phase 1,* (2005), conducted by the NCCA the descriptions of practice in the six schools and the *Language and Literacy in Irish-Medium Primary Schools* questionnaires. For example, one submission stated that any professional development provided should be presented in a way that is not specific to either Irish or English; it should highlight the common elements of the writing process that can be applied to both languages based on learning objectives in both the English and the Irish curriculum.

The same submission emphasised the writing process as a means of developing children's writing skills and expressiveness in both Irish and English. It noted that the writing process should involve small group lessons on grammar/spelling/writing conventions when the child shows a readiness for learning such skills. Research has noted that implementing the writing process in Irish- medium primary schools could help address *the significant decline in Irish immersion pupils attaining mastery of some objectives relating to grammar and morphology (*Harris 2006*)*.

Resources for language and literacy development

Findings pointed to the lack of standardised assessment tests, both, *in* the Irish language for mathematics, and *for* the Irish language. Issues of providing learning support for the Irish language and for mathematics through Irish, as well as training

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[11] The Language Experience Approach is an approach to reading in which the child's own language and experience is used to create reading material (www.eckilkenny.ie/uploads/2)

teachers how to do so, were also cited in findings. Submissions differed concerning these issues.

Many of the submissions noted the lack of appropriate assessment tools for children in Gaeltacht and Irish medium schools. Submissions also noted that children in Irish-medium schools often spend more time in the early years developing literacy skills in Irish, and as a consequence development of their literacy skills in English can be delayed. This delay is a feature of bilingualism.

A number of submissions referred to studies (Bruck 1978/79, 1980, 1982) which suggest that switching to an English programme may damage a child's self-esteem and that a sense of failure may adversely affect the child's learning. Submissions noted that early and appropriate intervention in targeting children with learning difficulties to help them progress within an immersion programme is essential. Children can attain high levels of fluency in an immersion programme while taking longer to attain basic L1 literacy skills.

Findings from submissions and questionnaires differed concerning the language in which learning support should be given. A summary of perspectives represented in findings is presented below:

- Language and learning support should be offered in accordance with the school's language policy. If the policy is total immersion then language support should be offered in Irish. However, if children continue to have difficulty, learning support can be offered in the home language.

- Learning support should be provided in both Irish and English in Irish-medium schools to all pupils who require it, and learning support in mathematics should be provided in Irish or English depending on the needs of the child.

- If the medium of instruction in mathematics is Irish then learning support should be provided through Irish as well.

- In deciding on a policy for learning support the submissions suggested that a number of factors should be taken into account, including

    - the child's home language

- the school's language policy
- the child's language proficiency
- the child's general development
- the particular peer group of the child
- the learning support available.

The lack of learning support *for* Irish and of learning support for mathematics *through* Irish was noted in the descriptions of practice from the six schools and in responses received from teachers.

When asked what strategies they found effective in supporting language and literacy development in Irish-medium primary schools teachers identified the following:
- oral work
- graded phonics schemes
- parental involvement
- language assistants
- immersion
- building on the child's proficiency in first language.

When asked what issues relating to Learning Support should be considered for the Irish-medium primary school teachers who responded highlighted the need for:

- standardised tests in Irish
- learning support in mathematics through Irish
- learning support for Irish
- psychological and speech and language services through Irish
- appropriate books across all curricular areas through Irish.

Findings indicated that 5% of the 96 teachers who responded felt that attending an Irish-medium school should not hamper a child's ability to learn. 9% reported that they were not sure what the effects of attending an Irish-medium school would be. The following quote from a teacher in a Gaelscoil is typical of a number of responses that were given:

Caighdeán agus cumas an pháiste; Deachrachtaí an pháiste, Cumas teangan – Gaeilge & Béarla. N.B. Tacaíocht foghlama i gcomhrá Gaeilge

Level and ability of the child; The child's difficulties, Language proficiency levels in Irish and English. N.B. Learning support for oral Irish and Irish reading if

agus léamh Gaeilge má tá siad mall ag sealbhú na teangan. I gcás páistí le deachrachtaí ar Leith teangan (Specific Language Disability) an ualach ró-throm é an dátheangachas?

they are slow in acquiring the language. In the case of children with a Specific Language Disability is bilingualism too much for them?

The submissions suggested that these uncertainties need to be clarified through research in the context of the Irish education system.

Of the post-primary students who responded to the questionnaire 94% indicated that their Irish-medium primary schooling had prepared them well enough for the learning of English. 100% indicated that their Irish-medium primary schooling had prepared them well enough for learning Irish and 91% for learning other subjects through the medium of Irish at post-primary level. 6% reported that it had not been helpful in relation to learning English and 10% considered that it had not been helpful in relation to learning other subjects at post-primary level. No student reported that their Irish-medium primary schooling had not prepared him/her well enough for learning Irish at post-primary level.

Table 1: Post – primary respondents' views on their Irish medium primary schooling

	Very well	Well enough	Not well enough	Not well
How well did your study of Irish prepare you for the study of Irish at post-primary level?	80%	20%	0%	0%
How well did your primary education through Irish prepare you for the study of other subjects at post-primary level through the medium of Irish?	50%	42%	0%	0%
How well did your study of English prepare you for the study of English at post-primary level?	54%	40%	3%	3%

Teachers were asked to comment on standards achieved in English and Irish (oral, reading and writing) by children in Irish-medium primary schools. Of the 119 teachers who responded 61% noted that children reach a high standard in both languages. 10% of the teachers commented that some children's standards of writing are not as high in Irish as in English. With regards to English, 20% of the teachers considered that standards are as high as those reached by children in English-medium schools.

Teachers attributed this to the fact that children encounter English in various forms on a daily basis - through English reading material and multi-media resources.

7% of the teachers noted that the home background of the child and parental interest in the child's education had much to do with the standard achieved by children in both Irish and English in primary school.

Summary of findings

This presentation of findings focused on the following issues pertaining to language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools:

- policy and planning
- oral language
- emergent reading and reading
- writing
- resources for language and literacy development.

Key findings included:

- A degree of flexibility with regards to school policies and practices on emergent literacy and literacy should be acceptable. This does not negate, however the need for guidance and structure for Irish-medium schools in relation to literacy
- There is a requirement for professional development in relation to immersion education at pre-service, induction and in-service levels.
- Writing in Irish should be approached as writing in the first language using the writing process in Irish-medium primary schools.
- The acknowledgement of the dearth of assessment tools and resources for use in Irish-medium primary schools.
- There is a need for Irish-based research into the above issues

The next section of this document reports on the seminar co-hosted by NCCA and by An Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) in November 2006.

Language and Literacy in Irish-medium schools: Report on the Seminar

Overview of seminar

Following the consultation process described in the previous section of this report,, the NCCA organised an invitational seminar, *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools* which was co-hosted by An Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG), in the Gresham Hotel on the 22nd of November 2006. The seminar was opened by Dr. Anne Looney of the NCCA and Muireann Ní Mhóráin of COGG. The seminar was attended by over 60 people. Section Two of the document gives an account of the day and a synthesis of findings and ideas shared. The seminar was designed to engage participants in the discussion on findings and initial mapping of next steps in the development of guidelines on the introduction of language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools.

Information on the findings focused on responses from parents, teachers, and students and the areas of concern which emerged from the responses received. The information was considered in the context of the review of literature and of the submissions received.

Findings were presented in six cross-cutting themes. These six themes relate to the themes discussed in the consultation document:

- oral language
- emergent literacy and literacy
- language and literacy difficulties
- parental involvement
- assessment and resources
- continuous professional development for teachers.

Development of guidelines

The NCCA introduced a number of possible scenarios or Cásanna to be considered as an initial step in the development of guidelines for schools. The Cásanna would consider a range of contexts for language and literacy development in primary schools in Ireland. Five cásanna are outlined below. These are not exhaustive.

Cás 1: L1[12] education through the medium of Irish

- discrete time for Gaeilge: 3 hours
- English is taught as an L2[13] for 2 ½ hours per week in Infant classes

Cás 2: immersion for all/part of Junior Infants. English is introduced at some stage in this year

- the language medium of the school is Irish
- discrete time for Gaeilge: 3 hours per week, as outlined in the *Suggested minimum weekly time framework* in the Primary School Curriculum (1999)[14] for L1
- discrete time for English (when introduced): 2 ½ hours per week, as outlined in the *Suggested minimum weekly time framework* in the Primary School Curriculum (1999) for L2

Cás 3: partial immersion. Discrete time for English from the beginning

- the language medium of the school is Irish
- discrete time for English: 2 ½ hours per week, as outlined in the *Suggested minimum weekly time framework* in the Primary School Curriculum (1999).

Cás 4: Irish or English-medium schools.

- schools adopt a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach, where a subject (excluding a language) is taught through the medium of a language that is not that of the school
- a subject could be taught through a modern language in the case of an Irish-medium school and Irish or a modern language in an English-medium school.

Cás 5: English-medium schools. Discrete time for Irish from the beginning

- Irish is taught as L2 from junior infants for 2 ½ hours per week, as outlined in the *Suggested minimum weekly time framework* in the Primary School Curriculum (1999).

Cásanna 1,2 and 3 were considered during two workshop sessions.

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[12] L1: First language
[13] L2: Second language
[14] Department of Education and Science (1999), *Primary School Curriculum,* Dublin, The Stationary Office.

Workshops

Dr. Sarah FitzPatrick provided a brief introduction to scenario thinking and planning as the key context for the workshop activity[15]. Groups were invited to use scenario thinking to harness the power of creative foresight in describing language policy and practice in Irish-medium schools in 2010. Activity worksheets for each Cás provided skeletal information on this school's language and literacy policy and practice. Each group was invited to turn this information into a description of a school's policy and practice in the future. In the year of formal implementation of the drama curriculum in primary schools, she invited participants not to hold back in describing the six cross cutting themes outlined above, in the context of their particular Cás. (Appendix 1)

Each group was invited to identify challenges encountered by schools in implementing policies, implications of policy development and possible implications for the work of the NCCA.

Oral language, emergent literacy and literacy and language and literacy difficulties were considered during workshop 1. Resources and assessment, parental involvement and continuous professional development were considered during workshop 2.

The outcomes of the deliberations on the Cásanna are presented below. Voices of the participants are acknowledged throughout the commentary on Cás 1, 2 and 3 by the use of italics. Information presented in these sections which has not been italicised has been paraphrased during analysis.

As a final task the challenges a school encountered in progressing to where they are in 2010, in the context of the Cás they were considering, were reflected upon. These reflections are presented together in Table 2.

Since the feedback from discussions on the themes of continuous professional development and resources and assessment was similar from all groups this is presented separately later in the paper.

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[15] Scenario thinking is a structured process of thinking about and anticipating the unknown future, without pretence of being able to predict the future or being able to influence the environment in a major way. (Scenariothinking.org)

Cás 1: First language education through the medium of Irish

Cás 1 was considered by one group. Participants in this group comprised to a large extent people who work in or have an interest in education in Gaeltacht areas. Feedback from this group on the cross-cutting themes of oral language, emergent literacy and literacy, language and literacy difficulties and parental involvement and implications for the school's language policy and for the work of the NCCA is presented below.

1. Oral language

The group identified the necessity to differentiate between schools where the majority of children speak Irish at home and those where up to 50% of children come from non-Irish speaking homes. They also noted the impact of the levels of Irish language spoken in the community.

Implications for the language policy of the school

In considering a setting of 2010 the school is a bi-lingual community, parents are familiar with and supportive of the schools language policy, all subjects are taught through Irish, Irish is the language of communication of the school and oral English begins at the end of Junior Infants or the beginning of Senior Infants.

Implications for the NCCA

The group considered that the implications for the work of the NCCA were the need for the development of comprehensive guidelines on approaches to language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools similar to those presented in the English Curriculum. The guidelines would include information on the teaching of English as a second language in Gaeltacht schools.

2. Emergent literacy and literacy and language and literacy difficulties

In considering these two cross-cutting themes this group concentrated on the implications of these themes, in the context of Cás 1, on the school's language policy and also implications for the work of the NCCA.

Implications for the language policy of the school

In the year 2010 emergent reading and reading activities are introduced in Irish first, formal Irish begins in Senior Infants and formal English does not begin before First Class.

In 2010, the comprehensive guidelines are cognisant of how to address language and literacy difficulties from Junior Infants to Sixth Class in the context of a school's language policy.

The importance of understanding the fact that language acquisition will not occur simultaneously for Irish and English and therefore children will attain language at different rates as they progress through the school was highlighted. It was suggested that this information would be disseminated to parents.

Implications for the NCCA

The comprehensive guidelines mentioned previously would provide advice on when formal English reading should begin in Gaeltacht schools.

3. Parental involvement

The critical importance of parental involvement in the development and implementation of the language policy of the school was recognised. In discussing parental involvement this group concentrated on the implications the issue of parental involvement could have on work being carried out by the NCCA in the year 2010.

Implications for the NCCA

In the year 2010 the implementation of the comprehensive guidelines, means that parents are aware of the sound educational, research based reasons for the implementation of the language policy of the school. The role of Gaeltacht schools in maintaining the Irish language is seen as a priority. The importance of piloting the initial implementation of the guidelines was also highlighted.

Cás 2: Immersion education for all or part of Junior Infants

Immersion education as pertains to Cás 2 is immersion for all or part of Junior Infants. Discrete time for English when it is introduced is 2 ½ hours per week.
Cás 2 was discussed by two groups. Their findings are presented below.

1. Oral language

In 2010, Irish is the language of communication of the school and children are encouraged to speak Irish from the earliest stages. This is facilitated by the

availability of language assistants in all Irish-medium primary schools (Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools).

The language policy of the school has been developed in conjunction with parents; all parents are familiar with the language policy and agree to support it.

In Cás 2 schools listening, comprehension and speaking skills are developed through immersion in the Irish language, teaching of the curriculum through Irish and the use of discrete time for teacher-pupil, pupil-pupil interaction.

English

Comments made on the introduction of language and literacy in English were confined to noting a reduction in the amount of workbooks in use in the year 2010.

Further discussion on oral language in relation to this Cás referred to the development of a national plan on languages in education and the organisation of annual meetings with parents to inform them on the school's policy relating to language and literacy.

In 2010 Irish based research has been commissioned, there is improvement in resources, technology and support available in Irish and definite guidelines on immersion education have been developed.

2. Emergent literacy and literacy

In 2010 emergent literacy activities are through Irish, oral language in English is introduced at the end of Senior Infants and formal English begins in First Class. There is a wide selection of books available at all class levels and there is also a wide selection of textbooks in the different canúintí.

The importance of the role of parents in literacy activities is acknowledged. *Shared reading schemes and sending home books on CD Rom are ways in which this is done. Parents are also engaged in supporting each other.*

3. Language and literacy difficulties

Differences between reading and literacy were highlighted and the importance of an awareness that there are certain conditions which relate specifically to the teaching of literacy in an immersion setting.

Schools adopting Cás 2 as an approach in 2010 have early intervention policies in place; recognise the cognitive development of the child through the medium of Irish, employ language assistants for English in Senior Infants and learning support teachers work in the infant classes. Account is also taken of children who arrive at school speaking neither English nor Irish.

4. Parental involvement
In schools which adopted a Cás 2 approach parental involvement occurs where parents are involved in supporting their children's learning through shared reading, helping with homework, providing assistance within the classroom and helping with after school activities. Parents also participate in developing school polices.

Implications for the language policy of the school
The need to clarify the role of parents in the development of school policy and the need to assist parents in supporting their child's learning are implications which need to be considered by schools classified as Cás 2 in the year 2010.

Implications for the NCCA
The importance of ensuring that all education partners have a clear understanding of immersion education should be noted. The NCCA should recognise that parents choose Cás 2 schools because of their policies on immersion. The importance of the need for Irish based research in guiding the work of the NCCA was also highlighted.

Cás 3 Partial Immersion

Partial immersion as pertains to Cás 3 occurs in an Irish-medium school where the discrete time for English is provided from the beginning of Junior Infants. This Cás was discussed by two groups; one group chose to begin reading in Irish and the other chose to begin reading in English. However other concerns and opinions expressed by the groups were similar.

1. Oral language
In the year 2010, there is a clear differentiation made between Irish and English oral language lessons and the socio-economic and linguistic background of the children are important considerations in the development of a school's oral language policy.

One group is adhering to an immersion policy where all lessons are conducted through Irish, except for the last half hour of the day in which structured English

lessons based around rhymes, stories and poems take place in the infant classes. However the emphasis is on pre-literacy and literacy being taught in Irish first and it is considered that Irish only should be visible in the school environment. The importance of children being given opportunities to speak Irish to each other is emphasised throughout the school.

The second group begins with the formal development of oral language in English first.

Implications for the language policy of the school
In 2010 it is important that the Irish language is prioritised within the school at all times, parents are asked and encouraged to use as much Irish as they can.

Implications for the NCCA
The need for longitudinal and comparative research to be carried out in Irish-medium primary schools was cited as an implication for the work of the NCCA as was the need for a certain amount of flexibility for schools in order to allow them to function in their own context. It was also proposed that it would be necessary to provide support for schools in implementing any Cás.

2. Emergent literacy and literacy

Schools developing children's literacy skills in English first begin English in November in Junior Infants and Irish at the end of Senior Infants.

The importance of sending books home to be read with parents regardless of what language they are in was noted. It was considered that the development of literacy skills was of great importance whichever language was introduced first due to the transfer of skills learnt in one language to the second language. A concern voiced was how Irish could be maintained as the language of the school when English is so prevalent in the community.

Implications for the language policy of the school
In the year 2010 a school's language policy takes into account that the Irish language will not be acquired as quickly as the English language and therefore different levels of fluency in the languages are to be expected. It also considers the importance of the time of day English is taught especially at infant level. Other implications to be considered in developing a school's language policy are enabling parents to help

their children develop literacy skills, keeping children interested and engaged in the reading process through Irish and the use of an Irish phonics scheme in the infant classes.

Implications for the NCCA

It is imperative that any guidelines produced by the NCCA have a sound educational basis to them.

3. Language and literacy difficulties

In 2010 language and literacy difficulties are identified as early as possible. Early intervention and Reading Recovery through English are available alongside learning support for the Irish language.

Criteria are developed and are made available to parents and teachers to enable them to make an informed decision on the type of learning support which would best suit the child. Schools have the flexibility and resources to provide appropriate learning support in English and in Irish depending on a child's particular needs.

An important factor in deciding upon the language of instruction of learning support is ascertaining whether for example a child is experiencing learning difficulties in mathematics or in learning mathematics through Irish.

The question of whether or not some children experiencing language and literacy difficulties perform better if they are moved to English-medium primary schools has been explored and an important consideration to take into account here is how much more support would the child be getting if they were to move school.

Implications for the NCCA

The importance of engaging in Irish-based research into the area of learning difficulties and how best these might be addressed in Irish-medium primary schools was noted. *This research should make particular reference to learning support through Irish and the need for speech and language therapists and psychologists who can work through the medium of Irish.*

4. Parental involvement

Parental involvement in the development and implementation of school policies is viewed as important by schools in the year 2010. Parents are made aware of a school's language policy upon enrolling their child in the school. They are kept up-to-date with amendments made to the policy. Parents are supportive of the school's language policy.

Parent associations, Irish language classes and parent groups are positive ways of involving parents in school life.

Implications for schools language policy
Bilingualism is welcomed as a feature of the wider school community while at the same time the underlying ethos and philosophy of the school, as an Irish-medium school is maintained.

Implications for the NCCA
Guidelines produced should have a sound, educational basis.

Challenges and solutions for a school in 2010

Table 2 provides a synthesis of the challenges faced by schools adhering to Cás 1, Cás 2 and Cás 3 in developing and implementing their language policies in the year 2010. The challenges are presented under the following headings

- oral language
- immersion
- guidelines/continuous professional development (CPD)
- resources and assessment

Table 2: Challenges faced by schools in arriving at language policies in place in 2010

Cásanna	Cás 1	Cás 2	Cás 3
Oral language	*Varying levels of oral language of children in Junior infants.* *Promoting the use of Irish in the school environment*		*Implementing Irish as a majority language.* *Ensuring children leave primary school with satisfactory levels of the Irish language.*
Immersion	*Lack of formal Government recognition*	*Provision of training for parents on immersion*	As Cás 1

	of immersion as a valid method of instruction in Irish-medium schools.	*education.*	

Guidelines / CPD	*Teachers and parents need to be aware that the same levels of competence in English and Irish should not be expected too early.*	*Lack of suitable pre-service, induction and CPD courses pertaining to Irish-medium schools The lack of guidance, research and understanding with regards to immersion education and the beginning of literacy as well as the availability of precise practical guidelines for parents*	As Cás 2 *Lack of guidelines on the sequencing of the introduction of English and Irish literacy activities.*
Resources and assessment	*The lack of standardised assessments for children in the Gaeltacht*		*The lack of teaching and assessment resources.* *The lack of interesting age appropriate resources for children* *Support services such as psychologists, therapists and social services are not available through the medium of Irish.* *There is no area of the inspectorate assigned to dealing specifically with issues pertaining to teaching in Irish-medium primary schools.*

The dearth of Irish-based research into this area was also noted as a challenge in schools developing and implementing school policies in the year 2010. The following is a list of suggested solutions to some of the above challenges:

- the implementation of immersion education
- the development of comprehensive guidelines on policy making, literacy issues and communication with parents
- the introduction of professional development for all teachers in Irish –medium schools including learning support and resource teachers.
- the development of assessments for Irish and through Irish for mathematics

Responses to issues pertaining to the cross-cutting themes of continuous professional development and resources and assessment were similar cross all groups. Feedback on these two themes is presented below.

Continuous professional development

All groups identified the need for appropriate pre-service education, induction and in-service for teachers in Irish-medium primary schools. These courses should make particular reference to immersion education, teacher fluency, competence and confidence in using the Irish language, language and literacy acquisition, transfer of skills and interlanguage. Professional development should be continuous. Discrete time for in school professional development should be provided each year. Consideration should be given to the awarding of a certificate in teaching through Irish.

Participants also identified the need for adequately trained learning support teachers who would be competent in identifying and working with difficulties children may be experiencing through the medium of Irish.

Resources and assessment

The welcome arrival of Séidéan Sí was noted but it was also stated that there is an urgent need for the development of a broad range of reading books and text books (in different canúintí) for all class levels as well as the development of software and media resources through the language of Irish.

The need for the development of standardised tests for Irish and mathematics through Irish was agreed by all.

Participants were informed that the NCCA has already provided advice to the Minister on standardised testing and on the situation relating to Gaelscoileanna and scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht in April 2005 in the report entitled *Supporting Assessment in Schools -3, Standardised Testing in Compulsory Schooling*

Plenary session

Discussion during the plenary session focused on the challenges the groups had identified above in arriving at the year 2010 and solutions to these challenges. Muireann Ní Mhóráin of An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) chaired the session.
Panel members were

- Dr. Richard Johnstone, University of Strathclyde,
- Bláthnaid Uí Ghréacháin, Ardfheidhmeannnach, Gaelscoileanna
- Deirbhle Nic Craith, INTO
- Seosamh Mac Donnacha, ONEG
- Hilary Roche, Director, Curriculum and Assessment, NCCA

Members of the panel were invited to share their observations on the development of Cásanna and on the focus of discussion during the day.

Dr. Richard Johnstone welcomed the proposal of the introduction of a range of cásanna which would allow schools to identify the Cás which would most closely relate to the situation in which they work. Deirbhle Nic Craith noted the challenge of drafting guidelines which would be practical yet flexible enough to allow for the different cásanna. Bláthnaid Ní Ghréacháin emphasised that it would be important that any guidelines drafted should be considered as interim and would be piloted in schools.

Benefits that might emerge from the development of networking arrangements between schools adopting similar cásanna were alluded to by Richard Johnstone who also alluded to ongoing work in Scotland and Wales.

Deirbhle Nic Craith reiterated the need for appropriate pre-service and induction for teachers and emphasised the importance of continuous professional development.

Seosamh Mac Donnacha stressed the importance of not making the assumption that children with Irish as a first language will have poor English skills. However he noted that it is important to differentiate in this group, between children experiencing actual reading difficulties and those who are slow to pick up English reading skills. Bearing these differences in mind is an important consideration when discussing learning support for these children through English.

The importance of Irish-medium second level education was noted by a participant. This was supported by Bláthnaid Ní Ghréacháin speaking about the development of a national plan with regards to Irish language education.

It was noted by a participant that Gaeltacht schools have a certain responsibility towards the maintenance and preservation of the Irish language. In order for teachers to be able to do this the issues of support and continuous professional development for teachers were raised.

The NCCA will provide advice to the Minister in early 2007. Work on the development of guidelines for schools will then commence. The NCCA will work with schools during the school year 2007-2008.

In closing the seminar Catherine Byrne, Vice- Chairperson of NCCA expressed great pleasure that participants had engaged with the challenges of the day so readily. This was an important development for Irish-medium primary schooling. Participants were thanked for travelling from great distances to attend the day.

Conclusion

The reports on the consultation and the seminar presented in this document provide the basis for the NCCA's proposals on supporting children's language and literacy development in Irish-medium schools. These proposals focus on the identification of different *múnlaí* (models). These *múnlaí* provide a framework for Irish-medium schools in describing school policy and practice on introducing language and literacy in Irish and English. The potential of the múnlaí to shape language and literacy policy and practice in *English-medium schools* will also be examined in the NCCA's proposals. These proposals provide the genesis for the development of guidelines by the Council to support children's language and literacy in Irish-medium schools.

Given the NCCA commissioned review of literature, feedback on key issues provided in questionnaires, submissions and at the seminar, and discussions at enabling structures of Council, it is clear that further research on the acquisition of language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools is necessary. Such research would complement and extend discussion of the five issues outlined in this document by providing an analysis of the outcomes, impacts and effects of different approaches to introducing language and literacy on the language learning and development of children in Irish-medium primary schools. The proposed research would focus on dual literacy[16] with particular reference to the effective transfer of literacy skills acquired in one language to another language. The NCCA recommends that this research would be undertaken as soon as is practical, given the urgency and importance of the issues discussed in this paper.

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[16] Dual literacy involves the acquisition and development of literacy skills in two languages

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Appendix 2

Profile of respondents: Questionnaire on *Language and Literacy in Irish-Medium Primary Schools*

Respondents were invited to indicate to which category/categories they belonged to. Some respondents belonged to more than one category. The categories were:

- Parent/Guardian of a child in a Gaelscoil, Gaeltacht school or English medium school
- teacher, principal or Member of a Board of Management in a Gaelscoil, Gaeltacht school or an English-medium school.

The following is a breakdown of what category respondents belonged to:

- 9 respondents were a parent/guardian of a child/ren in a Gaelscoil, a teacher in a Gaelscoil, principal of a Gaelscoil and a member of the Board of Management in a Gaelscoil
- 6 respondents were a parent/guardian of a child/ren in a Gaelscoil and a teacher in a Gaelscoil
- 1 respondent was a parent/guardian of a child/ren in a Gaelscoil, a teacher in and principal of a Gaelscoil
- 2 respondents were a parent/guardian of a child/ren in a Gaelscoil, teacher in an English-medium school and a member of a Board of Management in a Gaelscoil
- 7 respondents were a parent/guardian of a child/ren in a Gaelscoil and a member of a Board of Management in a Gaelscoil
- 7 respondents were a parent/guardian of a child/ren in a Gaelscoil and a teacher in an English medium school
- 3 respondents were a parent/guardian of a child/ren in an English-medium school and a teacher in an English medium-school
- 5 respondents were a teacher and a member of the Board of Management in a Gaelscoil.
- 1 respondent was a parent/guardian of a child/ren in a Gaelscoil, a teacher in a Gaelscoil, principal of an English-medium school and a member of the Board of Management in an English-medium school
- 1 respondent was a parent/guardian in a Gaelscoil and a principal in a Gaelscoil

- 1 respondent was a principal in a Gaelscoil and a member of the Board of Management of a Gaelscoil
- 1 respondent was a teacher in a Gaelscoil, a principal in a Gaelscoil and a member of the Board of Management of a Gaelscoil
- 4 respondents were a teacher and a Principal in a Gaelscoil
- 1 respondent was a teacher, principal and member of the Board of Management in an English-medium school.
- 1 respondent was a parent/guardian, teacher and member of the Board of Management in a Gaelscoil
- 4 respondents were a parent/guardian of a child/ren in a Gaeltacht school, a teacher, principal and a member of the Board of Management in a Gaeltacht school
- 1 respondent was a parent/guardian of a child/ren in a Gaeltacht school and as a teacher in a Gaeltacht school
- 4 respondents were a parent/guardian of a child/ren in a Gaeltacht school, a teacher and a member of the Board of Management in a Gaeltacht school
- 2 respondents were a parent/guardian of a child/ren in a Gaeltacht school and a member of the Board of Management in a Gaeltacht school
- 1 respondent was a teacher and a member of the Board of Management in a Gaeltacht school
- 1 respondent was a teacher, principal and a member of the Board of Management in a Gaeltacht school
- 1 respondent was a parent/guardian of a child/ren in a Gaeltacht school, principal and a member of the Board of Management in a Gaeltacht school.

Appendix 3

Seminar Template

Teanga agus Litearthacht i scoileanna ina bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar mheán

Céadaoin 22 Samhain 2006

Óstán Gresham
Baile Átha Cliath

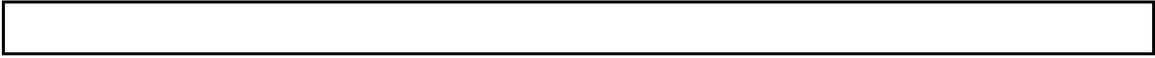| **Bord** _____	
Ainm	

1. Smaoinigh ar: Teanga labhartha

Samhlaigh go bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar mheán teagaisc i do scoilse. Tá tú féin agus an fhoireann scoile tar éis teacht le chéile chun forbairt teanga labhartha na bpáistí a phlé agus chun cinneadh ar pholasaí teanga na scoile. I dtús báire déanann sibh cur síos ar an cruth atá ar foghlaim na bpáistí sa scoil i leith teanga labhartha …

Bain úsáid as an spás thíos faoi seo chun cur síos ar mhúineadh agus ar fhoghlaim na teanga labhartha i do scoilse.

- Cad atá ag tarlú i leith forbairt teanga labhartha i *nGaeilge,* sa seomra ranga, sa scoil, sa chlós, le tuismitheoirí? Eile?
- Cad atá ag tarlú i leith forbairt teanga labhartha i *mBéarla* sa seomra ranga, sa scoil, sa chlós, le tuismitheoirí? Eile?

Cad iad na himpleachtaí do Pholasaí Teanga na Scoile? Cad ba chóir a bheith san áireamh ann?

Cad iad na himpleachtaí atá ann d'obair na CNCM i bhforbairt treoirlínte ar thús na teanga agus na litearthachta i do scoilse? Cad ba chóir a bheith san áireamh sna treoirlínte?

2. Smaoinigh ar: Tús na litearthacht agus litearthacht

Samhlaigh go bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar mheán teagaisc i do scoilse. Tá tú féin agus an fhoireann scoile tar éis teacht le chéile chun conas is féidir tacú le tús na litearthachta agus litearthacht na bpáistí a phlé agus chun cinneadh ar pholasaí teanga na scoile. I dtús báire, déanann sibh cur síos ar an cruth atá ar thús na litearthachta agus litearthacht in bhur scoilse …

Bain úsáid as an spás thíos faoi seo chun cur síos ar thús agus ar fhoghlaim na litearthachta i do scoilse.

- Cad é an cur chuige i leith tús na litearthachta agus litearthacht *i nGaeilge,* sa seomra ranga, sa scoil, sa chlós, le tuismitheoirí? Cathain?
- Cad é an cur chuige i leith tús na litearthachta agus litearthacht *i mBéarla,* sa seomra ranga, sa scoil, sa chlós, le tuismitheoirí? Cathain?

Cad iad na himpleachtaí do Pholasaí Teanga na Scoile? Cad ba chóir a bheith san áireamh ann?

Cad iad na himpleachtaí atá ann d'obair na CNCM i bhforbairt treoirlínte ar thús na teanga agus na litearthachta i do scoilse? Cad ba chóir a bheith san áireamh sna treoirlínte?

3. Smaoinigh ar: Deacrachtaí teanga agus litearthachta

Samhlaigh go bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar mheán teagaisc i do scoilse. Tá tú féin agus an fhoireann scoile tar éis teacht le chéile chun conas is féidir tacú le páistí a bhfuil deacrachtaí teanga agus litearthachta acu a phlé agus chun cinneadh ar pholasaí teanga na scoile. I dtús báire, déanann sibh cur síos ar an cruth atá ar thús na litearthachta agus litearthacht in bhur scoilse …

Bain úsáid as an spás thíos faoi seo chun cur síos ar conas a chuirtear tacaíocht ar fáil do pháistí le deacrachtaí teanga agus litearthachta i do scoilse.

- Cad é an cur chuige i leith dul i ngleic le deacrachtaí teanga agus litearthachta *i nGaeilge,* sa seomra ranga, sa scoil, sa chlós, le tuismitheoirí? Cathain?
- Cad é an cur chuige i leith dul i ngleic le deacrachtaí teanga agus litearthachta *i mBéarla,* sa seomra ranga, sa scoil, sa chlós, le tuismitheoirí? Cathain?
- Cad iad na dúshláin do dhifreáil sa seomra ranga? Conas mar atáthar ag dul i ngleic leo?

Cad iad na himpleachtaí do Pholasaí Teanga na Scoile? Cad ba chóir a bheith san áireamh ann?

Cad iad na himpleachtaí atá ann d'obair na CNCM i bhforbairt treoirlínte ar thús na teanga agus na litearthachta i do scoilse? Cad ba chóir a bheith san áireamh sna treoirlínte?

4. Smaoinigh ar : Rannpháirtíocht na dtuismitheoirí
Samhlaigh go bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar mheán teagaisc i do scoilse. Tá tú féin agus an fhoireann scoile tar éis teacht le chéile chun rannpháirtíocht na dtuismitheoirí a phlé agus chun cinneadh ar pholasaí teanga na scoile. I dtús báire, déanann sibh cur síos ar an cruth atá ar rannpháirtíocht na dtuismitheoirí in bhur scoilse … *Bain úsáid as an spás thíos faoi seo chun cur síos ar an tacaíocht a thugtar do thuismitheoirí ina rannpháirtíocht i bhfoghlaim na bpáistí i do scoilse.* ▪ Is ar na bealaí seo atá tuismitheoirí rannpháirteach i bhfoghlaim a bpáistí: ▪ Is iad seo na dúshláin a bhaineann le tacaíocht a thabhairt do rannpháirtíocht na dtuismitheoirí i gcomhthéacs ár scoilse:
Cad iad na himpleachtaí do Pholasaí Teanga na Scoile? Cad ba chóir a bheith san áireamh ann?

5. Smaoinigh ar: Measúnú agus acmhainní
Samhlaigh go bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar mheán teagaisc i do scoilse. Tá tú féin agus an fhoireann scoile tar éis teacht le chéile chun conas is féidir tacú le páistí a bhfuil deacrachtaí teanga agus litearthachta acu a phlé agus chun cinneadh ar pholasaí teanga na scoile. I dtús báire, déanann sibh cur síos ar mar a úsáidtear measúnú agus acmhainní in bhur scoilse …   *Bain úsáid as an spás thíos faoi seo chun cur síos ar mar a úsáideann múinteoirí agus paistí measúnú agus acmhainní i do scoilse.*   ▪ Is é seo an cur chuige a úsáidtear i do scoilse maidir le húsáid an mheasúnaithe agus acmhainní …   ▪ Ag na leibhéil sóisearacha sa scoil úsáidimid … (don Ghaeilge, don Bhéarla, don Mhatamaitic, srl.)   ▪ De réir mar a dhéanann an páiste dul chun cinn, úsáidimid …(don Ghaeilge, don Bhéarla, don Mhatamaitic, srl.)
Cad iad na himpleachtaí do Pholasaí Teanga na Scoile? Cad ba chóir a bheith san áireamh ann?
Cad iad na himpleachtaí atá ann d'obair na CNCM i bhforbairt treoirlínte ar thús na teanga agus na litearthachta i do scoilse? Cad ba chóir a bheith san áireamh sna treoirlínte?

6. Smaoinigh ar: Forbairt Ghairmiúil Leanúnach

Samhlaigh go bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar mheán teagaisc i do scoilse. Tá tú féin agus an fhoireann scoile tar éis teacht le chéile chun forbairt ghairmiúil leanúnach do mhúinteoirí a phlé agus chun cinneadh ar pholasaí ina leith. I dtús báire, déanann sibh cur síos ar an cruth atá ar fhorbairt ghairmiúil leanúnach in bhur scoilse …

Bain úsáid as an spás thíos faoi seo chun cur síos mar a chuirtear tacaíocht ar fáil do mhúinteoirí trína bhforbairt ghairmiúil leanúnach i leith tús na teanga agus na litearhachta i do scoilse.

- Is é an cur chuige atá agaibh maidir le haithint riachtanais fhorbartha ghairmiúla …
- Cuirimid na gnéithe a leanas san áireamh…

Cad iad na himpleachtaí do Pholasaí Teanga na Scoile? Cad ba chóir a bheith san áireamh ann?

Cad iad na himpleachtaí atá ann d'obair na CNCM i bhforbairt treoirlínte ar thús na teanga agus na litearthachta i do scoilse? Cad ba chóir a bheith san áireamh sna treoirlínte?

Machnamh ar na dúshláin…

Táim cinnte go bhfuil machnamh déanta agaibh ar chuid de na dúshláin ar thug sibh aghaidh orthu chun teacht ar an gcur chuige atá agaibh faoi láthair maidir leis an gcruth atá ar theanga agus litearthacht in bhur scoilse

Smaoinigh ar na dúshláin ba mhó agus san spás thíos ainmnigh dhá cheann nó trí de na dúshláin a raibh ort aghaidh a thabhairt orthu agus conas a sháraigh tú iad.

Dúshlán	Conas a saraíodh é
1.	
2.	
3.	