An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Preliminary Report to Inform the Development of a Policy for the Irish-medium Sector Outside of the Gaeltacht

Irish-medium post-primary schools outside of the Gaeltacht: what inspectors had to say

April 2021

A review of inspection reports published on Gaelcholáistí from 2017 to 2020
The Inspectorate, Department of Education

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

An Irish-medium school or 'Gaelcholáiste' is a post-primary school in which the immersion education model is practised and where all activities are carried out through the medium of Irish, apart from the teaching of other languages. Currently, there are 29 Irish-medium post-primary schools outside of the Gaeltacht catering for 10,283 students[1].

This composite report is based on an analysis of the findings of evaluations carried out in Gaelcholáistí prior to the arrival of COVID-19 and the interruption of schooling as a result of the pandemic. It is based on an analysis of forty six inspection reports published on the Department of Education website between January 2017 and December 2020. These evaluations were carried out in twenty four Gaelcholáistí, which comprises 83% of the Irish-medium post-primary schools outside of the Gaeltacht. This report has as its evidence base reports from four different inspection models, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of inspections in the sample by model and year

Evaluation model	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Follow-through inspections	3	2	3	1	9
Programme evaluations (Transition Year)	0	2	1	3	6
Whole-school evaluations: management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL)	4	2	1	0	7
Subject inspections	6	7	4	7	24
Total	**13**	**13**	**9**	**11**	**46**

There were twenty four subject inspections carried out in the Gaelcholáistí over the period of this analysis and a breakdown of the range of subjects is outlined in Figure 1.

*Figure 1: The range of subjects evaluated during subject inspections (2017-2020)*

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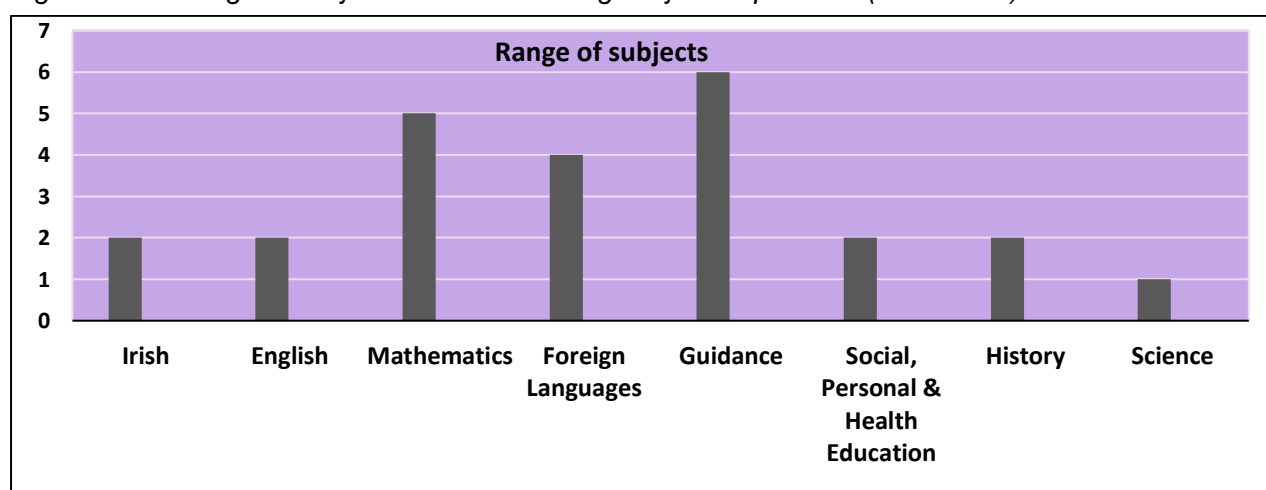
1 Enrolment in Irish-medium post-primary schools as per the Census date of 30 September 2020, which is subject to change once the final figures are published in June 2021.

2. Context of the Irish-medium post-primary schools

Each Gaelcholáiste operates fully through Irish and operates in its own individual context. An Irish-medium feeder primary school (Gaelscoil) is located in the catchment area of each Gaelcholáiste. Two of the Irish-medium post-primary schools are participating in the *Programme for Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS), the Department of Education action plan for educational inclusion. The range of patrons of Gaelcholáistí is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Patronage of the Gaelcholáistí
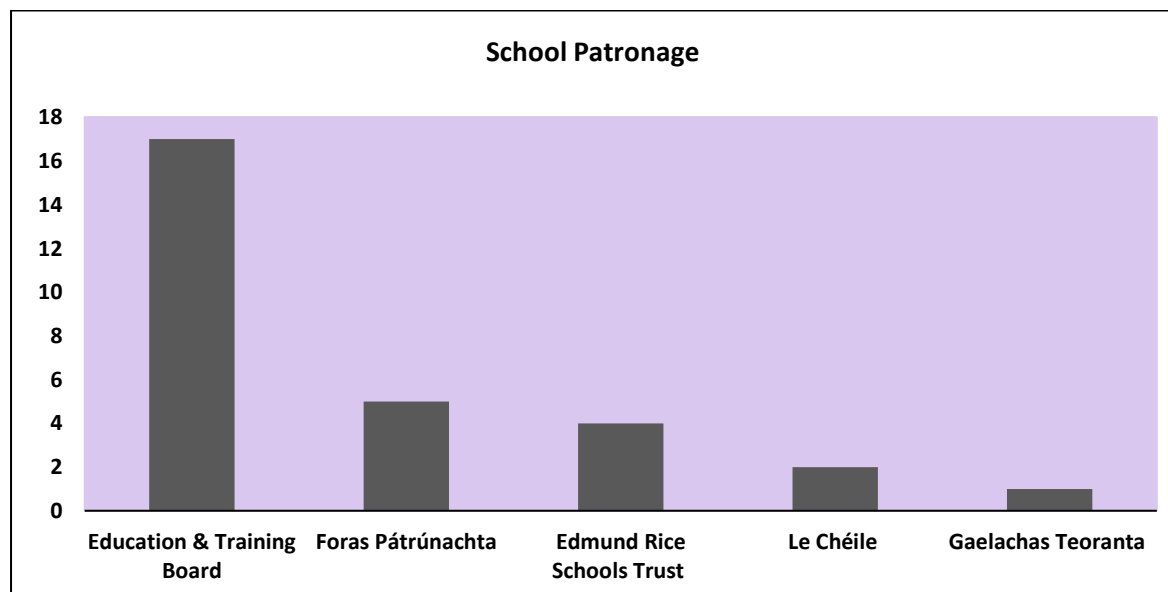
Approximately 9,084 students (up to 88% of the total number of students in the Irish-medium post-primary sector) were enrolled in the Gaelcholáistí where one or more school inspections were undertaken in the period between January 2017 and March 2020.

Table 2: Enrolment in the Gaelcholáistí outside the Gaeltacht evaluated in the period 2017 to 2020

Number of students	0-100	101-200	201-300	301-400	>400	Total
Number of schools	1	1	8	5	9	**24**
Percentage of schools	4%	4%	33%	21%	38%	**100%**

Similar to other post-primary schools countrywide, Gaelcholáistí have participated in the school self-evaluation process (SSE) since 2014.

3. Methodology

Inspection reports were analysed under eight areas of inquiry. These eight areas do not always align with the criteria set out in the different models of inspection. Section 4 of the report outlines the quality of educational provision in the following eight areas:

- Use of Irish
- Quality of students' learning
- Teachers' individual and collective practice
- Assessment
- Support for students
- Additional learning opportunities
- Leadership for learning, teaching and school development
- Partnership with parents and with the school community

The analysis of the eight areas of inquiry gave a comprehensive insight into aspects of the operation of Gaelcholáistí. Successful areas of educational provision were identified as well as areas requiring improvement. The main findings and recommendations arising from the analysis of the inspection reports published between 2017 and 2020 are set out in Part 5 of this report.

Table 3 provides the quantitative terms used in this report and the percentage range of each.

Table 3: Explanation of the quantitative terms used in this report

Quantitative terms	Percentage
Almost all	More than 90%
Most	75-90%
Majority / more than half	51-74%
Half	50%
Less than half / a significant minority	25-49%
A small number / less than a quarter	16-24%
A few	Up to 15%

When reporting, inspectors use a quality continuum as a reference framework for the quality of eductional provision across the various areas of practice. The continuum is adopted to assist inspectors to arrive at an evaluative evidence-based judgement and to give an accurate description of the standard of educational provision or of various aspects of provision. Table 4 provides an overview of the Inspectorate's Quality Continuum, as outlined in the *Guide to Inspection in Post-Primary Schools,* available here

Table 4: Overview of the Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

Level	Description
Very good	***Very good*** applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard.
Good	***Good*** applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement.
Satisfactory	***Satisfactory*** applies where the quality of provision is adequate.
Fair	***Fair*** applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist.
Weak	***Weak*** applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated.

4. Key findings in the eight areas of quality

4.1 Area A: Use of Irish

4.1.1 Use of Irish at whole-school level

The use of Irish at whole-school level was very good across all Gaelcholáistí. In each case, Irish was the language of the school at every operational level. The dedication and commitment of school leaders in developing and promoting the Irish language was often commended in inspection reports. Inspectors also referred to the dedication of the teaching staff towards the Irish language and their support for different projects and school events. This greatly helped the use of Irish amongst students and other members of the whole-school community. The inspectors also found that the students demonstrated a very positive disposition towards the Irish language and that they spoke enthusiastically and with pride about the opportunities that their proficiency in Irish would afford them in the future.

Most Gaelcholáistí had put measures in place to support the development of teachers' proficiency skills in Irish. Many teachers were working to improve their Irish-language skills, some by acquiring postgraduate qualifications in the language and others by pursuing a range of language-based activities to improve their competence in Irish. Inspectors reported that the recruitment of teachers, with adequate proficiency in Irish for the teaching of certain subjects, was an ongoing challenge. In a small number of inspection reports, It was also noted that not all teachers were appropriately qualified, nor did they have the necessary level of competence in the language to deliver certain subjects through the medium of Irish.

Inspectors recognised that the work of Gaelcholáistí in providing a high quality immersion education experience was very successful, particularly where the whole school worked together as a community of Irish speakers who use Irish daily. The fluent speakers of Irish, who had a high level of proficiency in Irish, were regarded as a valuable asset to the teaching staff of Gaelcholáistí. These fluent Irish-language speakers encouraged and assisted other teachers who were exploring ways to improve their own standard of Irish.

4.1.2 Use of Irish at classroom level

The evidence gathered by inspectors during lessons gave a deeper understanding of the strengths and areas for development in relation to the teaching and learning of curriculum subjects. In most lessons, the standard of Irish used as the language of classroom management and communication was of a very high quality. Irish was the language of communication for the teaching, learning and assessment of almost all subjects.

In the best examples of practice observed, students were given ample opportunities to engage with subject-specific vocabulary in a meaningful manner. This approach augmented students' language enrichment and language awareness. However, in most lessons inspectors reported that insufficient attention was given to the development of students' literacy skills in Irish. The necessary reflection required for lesson planning was not always undertaken in order to develop students' self awareness as language learners to enable them to speak and write the language accurately, and enrich their language skills. Whilst literacy was a common area of focus in the school self-evaluation processes (SSE) at whole-school level in each of the Gaelcholáistí, the most frequent recommendation made by inspectors was the need to revisit the six-step SSE process to foster the development of students' literacy skills in Irish through the implementation of effective strategies.

The following indicators of best practice in relation to the use of Irish were highlighted in inspection reports:

- appropriate attention given to basic language skills and to the frequent and generally excellent use of the target language
- the class work facilitated well by teachers whilst checking students' understanding as a core aspect of practice
- planning for success and for sufficient levels of challenge
- emphasis on key words and subject-specific terminology as well as appropriate attention given to grammar and pronunciation
- emphasis on the development of students' communication and oral language skills
- a wide range of very effective methodologies used to promote learning and to develop all language skills
- higher-order questioning skills of the students which indicated that they had acquired the subject content and the related Irish-language terminology.

4.2 Area B: Quality of students' learning

The standard of learning observed during inspections carried out in Gaelcholáistí was good overall. The inspection reports indicated that the quality of learning was good in more than half of lessons observed, very good or exemplary in a significant minority and satisfactory in a few cases (Figure 3). Active learning was to the fore in most lessons and it was evident that students greatly enjoyed their engagement with the subject content through the medium of Irish. In these lessons, appropriate emphasis was given to self-directed learning. Students were reported to be self-motivated and were able to communicate their ideas and knowledge through the medium of Irish orally with confidence.

One frequent recommendation made by inspectors was the need to differentiate classroom activities to address the various levels of students' ability so as to ensure that they all experienced an appropriate level of challenge in their learning experiences. Another recommendation that regularly featured in inspection reports was the need for students to engage in deeper reflection on their learning and draw on their own creative problem-solving skills independently of the teacher.

Figure 3: Quality of students' learning in Gaelcholáistí inspected in the period 2017-2020

Quality of learning

Satisfactory 2%
Very good 33%
Good 65%

The following indicators of best practice in relation to the quality of students' learning were highlighted in inspection reports:

- the learning intentions co-created with students at the start of lessons and the link between the learning intentions and the various steps in the lesson
- the manner in which the learning intentions were referenced at the end of the lesson following a joint reflection on the progress made in the teaching and learning
- students developing their levels of competence in Irish as they progressed in the subject
- creation of opportunities for students to reflect on their own individual learning, to share their thinking with others in groups and with the whole class, as part of the teacher's guided discussion
- students' research and using a range of modern contemporary resources, including the most up-to-date digital technology.

4.3 Area C: Teachers' individual and collective practice

The quality of teaching was generally positive across the range of subjects observed. The standard of teaching was good in more than half of the lessons observed and very good or exemplary in most of the other lessons (Figure 4). Practice was satisfactory in a few cases. Many inspection reports praised teachers' high expectations for the participation of students and the high level of diligence amongst students. There were many positive references in inspection reports to teachers' preparation, their co-operative planning, and to the impact of this prior reflection on the creation of meaningful learning experiences for the students.

In some instances, however, the teaching strategies chosen and the learning activities designed by teachers did not indicate adequate awareness of students' learning needs in the language. The inspection reports highlighted the need for greater creativity and more careful consideration of the choice of teaching resources and the manner in which the content was presented to the students.

Figure 4: Quality of teaching in Gaelcholáistí inspected (2017-2020)

Quality of teaching

Satisfactory
7%

Very good
31%

Good
62%
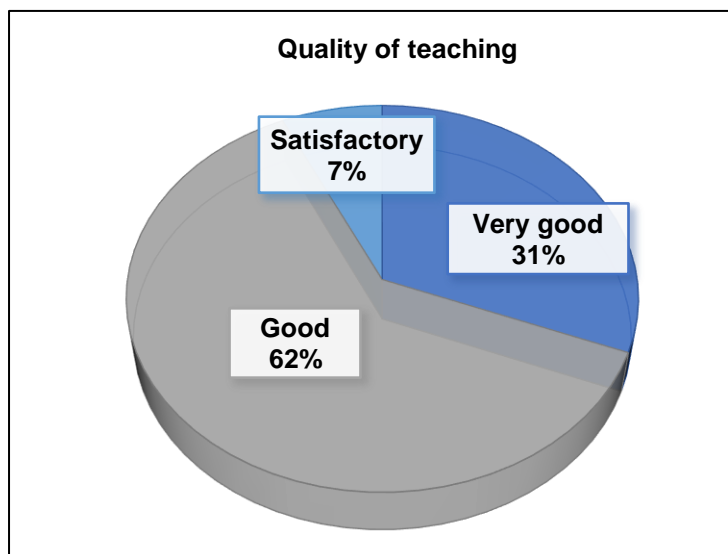
The following indicators of best practice in relation to teachers' individual and collective practice were highlighted in inspection reports:

- the integration of language-based criteria and the learning intentions to support the learning and teaching process through the medium of Irish
- the use of a wide range of resources and reference material, including digital technology, resulting in a lively teaching and learning experience
- a high level of teacher interest and specialist knowledge in subjects, which impacted positively on students' educational experiences
- some teachers' expertise in Irish and their ease with the terminology in the teaching of subjects through the medium of Irish
- aligning the learning outcomes, methodologies and assessment as well engaging in self-reflection to ensure success in the implementation of learning units
- maintaining reliable records of students' achievements across a range of skills which guided teachers' individidual planning and the planning at subject department level.

4.4 Area D: Assessment

The quality of assessment was good in less than half of the Gaelcholáistí and was either very good or satisfactory in the other schools. Whilst whole-school systems and procedures for summative assessment were good, inspectors reported that there was scope for improvement in relation to formative assessment practices. It was common practice for teachers to assess student achievement at the end of a unit of work or school term. Inspection reports, however, indicate a gradual increase in the variety of methods used to assess students' progress with less dependency on summative approaches as was the case previously.

At classroom level, many assessment strategies were teacher-centred, for example teacher questioning, monitoring of progress and correction of students' work. In some cases, however, the use of these assessment methods constrained the development of students' self-editing skills, as they were not fully involved in reflecting on the standard of their own work. A frequent recommendation in inspection reports was the need for a wider range of assessment methods such as research projects, portfolios and oral presentations as well as the integration of digital technology in assessment methods employed.

The following indicators of best practice in relation to assessment were highlighted in inspection reports:

- a whole-school assessment policy with procedures agreed at subject department level
- differentiated questioning strategies, which showed an understanding of the learning needs, experience and the learning stage of individual students
- use of success criteria and other strategies which encouraged students to think about and assess the standard of their own work or that of their fellow students
- development of students' language awareness by focusing their attention on the accurate use of Irish and on examples of vocabulary enrichment
- the provision of formative feedback which enabled students to identify independently the next steps in learning.

4.5 Area E: Support for students

4.5.1 An insight into the provision of student care and welfare

In general, the quality of provision for student care and welfare was very positive in Gaelcholáistí. All Gaelcholáistí provided Guidance and most schools had a fully qualified guidance counsellor. The quality of planning for Guidance ranged from good to very good in all schools. There were frequent references to Gaelcholáistí organising specific thematic events to support the holistic development of students, for example, an anti-bullying week or a substance awareness week. In many cases, schools had also developed effective ways to enable students express a concern anonymously. It was also reported that a high-quality induction system was in place for first-year students in different schools. In addition, inspectors commended the positive student-teacher relationships developed in Gaelcholáistí and the supportive learning environments developed.

In a small number of Gaelcholáistí, the need to create a student-support team was recommended. In these schools, deficiencies were identified in relation to Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). There was a need to develop an RSE plan and to provide for RSE in senior cycle as well as ensuring the delivery of a suitable programme for students on drugs and alcohol-related issues. It was also recommended that measures be established to assist students in managing and reducing anxiety.

The following indicators of best practice in relation to the provision of student care and welfare were highlighted in inspection reports:

- a whole-school approach to the promotion of the welfare of students at all levels in the operation of the school
- very effective co-operation between the guidance department and the staff at whole-school level
- the excellent co-operation and good levels of partnership established between the care team and external agencies that provide specialised support and advice as needed.

4.5.2 An insight into provision for students with special educational needs

The quality of provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) in Gaelcholáistí was generally good. Different models of special education support were being provided in accordance with students' individual needs. The provision most frequently comprised of a blend of in-class support and withdrawal of students, depending on their strengths and areas of individual need. Some schools used psychometric instruments to increase teachers' knowledge of students' specific needs. A wide evidence base was used in order to achieve the most suitable classroom arrangements for the students.

There was an over-reliance on the withdrawal of students from the classroom in some cases. Inspectors were of the view that it would be beneficial if team teaching, in addition to other in-class supports, were used more widely to align practice with the principles of the continuum of support model. In a small number of cases, the school's special education department had not developed adequate organisational structures, for example, a special education coordinator or a core team had not been identified.

The following indicators of best practice in relation to provision for special education were highlighted in inspection reports:

- the individual plans outlined a specific support plan that demonstrated an understanding of the student's needs and of the most effective methods to provide support
- effective communication between the special educational needs department and mainstream teachers
- the continuous monitoring of students' progress, which was based on a range of feedback sources, including mainstream teachers' observations
- the effective use of digital technology as an administrative and class resource
- appropriate provision made in the relevant policies for students with special educational needs.

4.6 Area F: Additional learning opportunities

A wide range of additional learning opportunities were provided in most Gaelcholáistí. These activities provided opportunities for the students to promote the Irish language and develop their leadership skills. The activities also helped students to enjoy using Irish as a living language, and participation in these events supported their holistic development as learners. The students' frequent and natural use of spoken Irish during classroom observations was acknowledged in inspection reports. Notwithstanding this, inspectors reported that the promotion of the use of Irish as a means of communication among students outside the classroom was an ongoing challenge for school leaders in all Gaelcholáistí.

The inspectors reported that some Gaelcholáistí made good efforts to promote students' leadership skills, mainly through student councils and various committees. It was also reported that students indicated that they would like to have a greater input into decisions pertaining to school matters.

The following indicators of best practice in relation to additional learning opportunities were highlighted in inspection reports:

- high levels of student satisfaction in relation to the provision of a very comprehensive range of co-curricular and extra-curricular events
- recognition by the students themselves of the leadership and self-development opportunities arising from their participation in additional activities
- the role of student councils and their positive input to policy development, and the significant leadership role of head prefects as role models for their fellow students
- opportunities provided for mentors and prefects in fifth and sixth year to act as "buddies" for first and second-year students
- students taking opportunities to promote and strengthen the use of the Irish language within the school through in-school and external projects such as an Irish language

committee, Irish-language leadership role, a competition for best Irish speaker in the class, trips to the Gaeltacht and participation in Gaelbhratach[2].

4.7 Area G: Leadership for learning, teaching and school development

The quality of leadership was very good in most of the Gaelcholáistí and good in the remaining minority of cases. The boards of management, senior management and other members of the school community were fully dedicated to immersion education, to the preservation of the language and to the achievement of very high standards in the certificate examinations. Most subject and programme inspection reports indicated that whole-school provision and supports for subjects and for transition year were of a very high standard and that the supports were of good quality in the remaining significant minority. A positive feature of practice related to the focus on continuing professional development (CPD) programmes in Gaelcholáistí in order to keep teachers informed about developments in education and to support the promotion of teaching and learning in the school. In almost all reports, inspectors referred to the encouragement and support provided for teachers to engage in CPD in various ways. This included the sharing of expertise at whole-school level, as well as attendance at workshops provided by the Department of Education support services.

Inspectors identified the need to develop leadership capacity at middle management level and the need for a staff CPD programme based on action research on the school's identified needs in relation to teaching and learning. There was also a need to extend the use of team teaching as well as other co-operative approaches such as peer observation of one another's practice.

The quality of participation in the school self-evaluation (SSE) process in Gaelcholáistí was good overall, and schools' engagement in SSE ranged from satisfactory to excellent. The development of literacy and numeracy at whole-school level was a common area of focus in all Gaelcholáistí. It was acknowledged that school communities displayed a commitment to school improvement and had high levels of capacity to reach the highest standards possible in all aspects of educational provision. There was good progress at a whole-school level in relation to the implementation of recommendations arising from previous inspections carried out in Gaelcholáistí. It was recommended frequently that the schools ensure that they had realistic and measurable targets for improvement identified as part of the SSE process.

The following indicators of best practice in relation to leading for learning, teaching and school development were highlighted in inspection reports:

- the dedication of staff in their efforts to provide a high quality of education through the medium of Irish for students
- very good leadership demonstrated with regard to the use of Irish and the fostering of goodwill towards the language among the school community
- good structures in place to implement the activities outlined in the school plan relating to vision, curriculum, student care, subject departments, teaching, learning and assessment as well as in the promotion of a team spirit
- promotion by senior management, of innovative teaching and learning strategies, including an emphasis on the enrichment of students' holistic learning experiences

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[2] A school based initiative, organised by Gael Linn with the support of Conradh na Gaeilge and Glór na nGael, to promote the use of the Irish language among the student population.

- teachers' participation in leadership and mentoring projects such as Forbairt[3], TL21[4], the Droichead[5] induction programme, postgraduate studies and other training courses.

4.8 Area H: Partnership with parents and with the school community

The partnership fostered between Gaelcholáistí and parents was of a very good quality. Effective communication systems were in place to keep parents informed of their children's progress. Parents' associations (PAs) were established in all of the Gaelcholáistí evaluated and they supported the work of schools in a meaningful way. Most of the Gaelcholáistí consulted with the PAs with regard to policy development and in other cases the school administered questionnaires to the parent community to garner their opinions. Inspection reports also indicated positive partnerships between Gaelcholáistí and their wider school communities.

In most of the WSE-MLL inspection reports, it was recognised that there was scope for further input from parents in relation to decision-making and that there was a need to consolidate and strengthen communication between all of the stakeholders through the publication of an annual report on the implementation of SSE plans.

The following indicators of best practice in relation to partnership with parents and with the school community were highlighted in inspection reports:

- parents having access to a live record of their children's school attendance and progress in academic, personal and social skills
- the positive approach to partnership with parents as a means of supporting students' learning and welfare
- reports to parents on their children's progress on a very regular basis, up to six times a year in certain cases
- good links developed between the Gaelcholáiste and the community in the school catchment area
- organisation of career guidance events for parents through the use of networks and professional contacts
- a dedicated space/section on the school website for parents
- parents supporting positive publicity for the Irish language and for the Gaelcholáiste in the local community
- partnership with past students, organisations who support Irish-medium education, professional networks and other partners.

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[3] Forbairt is a Leadership Development programme for school leadership teams, comprising the principal, deputy principal and another teacher leader.
[4] The TL21 Programme is a workshop-based continuing professional development programme for teachers and school leaders that promotes innovative practice and professional learning communities in post-primary schools.
[5] The Droichead programme is an integrated professional induction framework for newly qualified teachers.

5. Overview of findings and key recommendations for Irish-medium post-primary schools outside of the Gaeltacht

5.1 The main findings for Irish-medium post-primary schools

- The use of Irish at a whole-school level was of a very high standard in the Gaelcholáistí inspected. Reference was frequently made in WSE-MLL inspection reports to the strong vision of the school community in relation to Irish-medium education and to the promotion of the Irish language in the school and in the community generally. Inspection reports referred to the worthwhile efforts of teachers to use Irish only during lessons, although, in most lessons, there was a need for a greater focus on developing students' language accuracy and enriching their vocabulary on a cross-curricular basis.
- Irish was spoken frequently and naturally by students during the course of the inspections. Notwithstanding that, Gaelcholáistí faced a continuing challenge in promoting the use of Irish as the medium of communication among students outside the classroom.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good in most Gaelcholáistí. In a minority of cases, inspectors referred to exemplary practice where appropriate recognition was given to the student voice during lesson activities. Areas requiring improvement include the management of learning activities, the use of learning intentions and success criteria, and the use of digital technology.
- The quality of assessment in Gaelcholáistí was generally good. The aspects of assessment most needing improvement include the use of different types of assessment strategies, the provision of formal feedback and a whole-school approach to promoting accuracy in the use of the language.
- The quality of student care and welfare was reported to be very good generally in the inspections which focused on this area of provision. The care and welfare of students was an integral part of every aspect of the operation of Gaelcholáistí.
- The quality of provision for students with special educational needs was good overall. In the best practice observed, students were well catered for through the use of a flexible support model, appropriate psychometric instruments, effective team teaching, and individual plans which addressed students' learning needs. In a small number of Gaelcholáistí, the areas requiring improvement included the need for the more effective use of differentiation in learning, and the need for improved record-keeping and the management of supports generally.
- A wide range of additional learning opportunities were provided in Gaelcholáistí and in a small number of instances the activities organised were of a very high standard. Students demonstrated a high level of willingness to participate in the key leadership and self-development opportunities afforded to them during these additional activities. Students also indicated that they would like to have more input into decisions on school affairs.
- The quality of leadership was very good in most of the Gaelcholáistí and good in the remainder. In most cases, the senior management, the board of management and members of the school community displayed a high level of commitment to the preservation of the Irish language and to the provision of immersion education.
- The emphasis in continuing professional development programmes in Gaelcholáistí was focused on ensuring that teachers were kept up-to-date with developments in education and in teaching and learning. To support these endeavors, a blend of approaches including the sharing of expertise as well as workshops from the support services were implemented in most Gaelcholáistí.

- Overall, the quality of schools' engagement with the SSE process was good and the practice at individual school level ranged from satisfactory to very good. The staff of Gaelcholáistí showed a high level of commitment and capacity in relation to school improvement. Inspectors identified scope for the further development of the SSE process through the setting of realistic and measurable targets for improvement and the regular monitoring of progress.
- Partnership between the Gaelcholáistí and parents was of a very good quality and effective communication systems were in place. Parents' committees were established in all Gaelcholáistí evaluated, and they displayed a high level of commitment and played an active part in supporting the work of Gaelcholáistí.

5.2 Key recommendations for Irish-medium post-primary schools outside of the Gaeltacht

These recommendations are based on circumstances as they existed in Gaelcholáistí prior to the arrival of the pandemic and the subsequent interruption to schooling and to the immersion education experiences of students.

- Schools will now need to re-engage in self-evaluation to identify and address any deficits or gaps in students' learning and monitor their progress on an ongoing basis, due to the exceptional circumstances caused by the pandemic.
- The management of Gaelcholáistí should revisit the six-step process of SSE to ensure that the primary aim of the whole-school process is on the development of students' literacy skills in Irish in classrooms. It is necessary to develop students' language awareness so that they understand the importance of the accurate use of the Irish language, in both spoken and written formats. To facilitate this, schools need to gather more evidence of students' language needs through the use of appropriate assessment tools. This evidence should be used to inform the teaching of all subjects, to ensure that every student embarks on a language journey suited to their identified learning needs.
- In order to implement a school improvement plan that seeks to improve students' literacy skills, the school's continuing professional development plan should provide for the development of the pedagogical and language needs of the teaching staff. There is a need to promote collaborative approaches such as identifying and sharing the expertise and experience of staff members with each other through the use of peer observation of practice and the more widespread use of team teaching.
- Whole-school activities should be organised to address the challenge of ensuring that Irish is the language of socialisation among students outside the classroom. Designated roles in relation to the promotion of spoken Irish should be agreed with students in order to implement an improvement plan regarding this core element of immersion education.
- Teachers should be afforded opportunities to develop their leadership skills by giving them responsibility to contribute collaboratively to school development.
- Lessons should include content-based and language-based learning intentions and the learning intentions and success criteria should be formulated in collaboration with the students.
- Classroom activities should be differentiated to suit the varying levels of ability among students so as to ensure a suitable level of challenge in the learning experience for all. Such an approach would also encourage students to think more deeply and draw on their own creativity and problem-solving skills independently of the teacher.

- There was a need for greater variety in the assessment methodologies employed in classrooms, particularly in relation to assessment activities that develop students' self-awareness as language learners through the extended use of digital technologies.
- An opportunity exists for Irish-medium school communities to promote the Irish language and culture in the locality, develop networks and Irish-language hubs, and create opportunities to use the language in the community outside of the school context. This will help pupils to appreciate Irish as a living language that is relevant to their lives and their communities.

Appendix – Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools

(*Looking at Our School 2016*, pg. 12)

	Domains	Standards
TEACHING AND LEARNING	**Learner outcomes**	Students: • enjoy their learning, are motivated to learn, and expect to achieve as learners • have the necessary knowledge and skills to understand themselves and their relationships • demonstrate the knowledge, skills and understanding required by the post-primary curriculum • attain the stated learning outcomes for each subject, course and programme
	Learner experiences	Students: • engage purposefully in meaningful learning activities • grow as learners through respectful interactions and experiences that are challenging and supportive • reflect on their progress as learners and develop a sense of ownership of and responsibility for their learning • experience opportunities to develop the skills and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning
	Teachers' individual practice	The teacher: • has the requisite subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and classroom management skills • selects and uses planning, preparation and assessment practices that progress students' learning • selects and uses teaching approaches appropriate to the learning objectives and to students' learning needs • responds to individual learning needs and differentiates teaching and learning activities as necessary
	Teachers' collective / collaborative practice	Teachers: • value and engage in professional development and professional collaboration • work together to devise learning opportunities for students across and beyond the curriculum • collectively develop and implement consistent and dependable formative and summative assessment practices • contribute to building whole-staff capacity by sharing their expertise

	Domains	Standards
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	**Leading learning and teaching**	School leaders: • promote a culture of improvement, collaboration, innovation and creativity in learning, teaching and assessment • foster a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of each student • manage the planning and implementation of the curriculum • foster teacher professional development that enriches teachers' and students' learning
	Managing the organisation	School leaders: • establish an orderly, secure and healthy learning environment, and maintain it through effective communication • manage the school's human, physical and financial resources so as to create and maintain a learning organisation • manage challenging and complex situations in a manner that demonstrates equality, fairness and justice • develop and implement a system to promote professional responsibility and accountability
	Leading school development	School leaders: • communicate the guiding vision for the school and lead its realisation • lead the school's engagement in a continuous process of self-evaluation • build and maintain relationships with parents, with other schools, and with the wider community • manage, lead and mediate change to respond to the evolving needs of the school and to changes in education
	Developing leadership capacity	School leaders: • critique their practice as leaders and develop their understanding of effective and sustainable leadership • empower staff to take on and carry out leadership roles • promote and facilitate the development of students voice, student participation, and student leadership • build professional networks with other school leaders