



Briefing Paper – Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG)

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Briefing Paper – Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG)

Purpose

The purpose of this briefing paper is to provide the panel of the Independent Review of Education (IRE) with an outline of the key strengths and developmental needs of the Irish Medium (IM) sector, in line with the strands in the Terms of Reference of the IRE provided to CnaG. In order to assist the IRE with the process of information and evidence gathering, this paper also contains a number of recommendations, as well as an appendix containing references to a selection of the policies and research that guide the work of CnaG.

Background

Irish-medium education (IME) was established in 1971 in response to the growing and unmet demands of parents choosing to have their children educated through the medium of Irish. Originally refused official recognition and public funding, the administrative, governance, pastoral and pedagogical responsibilities associated with these emerging IM schools were voluntarily assumed by parents and the broader Irish language community for many years until their status was recognised in 1984. While this recognition enabled IM schools to access DE operational and capital funding, the DE moved very slowly over the following decades to recognise the developmental needs and aspirations of IME. It was not until the Education Order NI 1998, and as a direct result of a treaty-based commitment in the Belfast-Good Friday Agreement (GFA), that a statutory duty was introduced requiring the Department of Education (DE) to “encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium Education”. Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta was also set up in the wake of the Belfast Agreement and is the arm’s length body (ALB) responsible for providing advice, assistance and information pertaining to this statutory duty and the development and provision of IME to DE generally. In pursuance of these roles, CnaG supports communities seeking to develop or expand IM provision and with existing IM schools to ensure high-quality educational opportunities for young people in the sector.

It is unfortunate that, despite the introduction of the statutory duty and successive reiterations of the valued position of the Irish language in inter-governmental agreements, IME - and the Irish language more generally – continues to be under-valued and portrayed as a source of controversy by those who refuse to appreciate or accept international standards and best practice on the protection of minority and indigenous languages. The statutory duty on DE and its agencies to “promote and facilitate the development of Irish-medium Education”, and the designation of CnaG as a ALB, provides some measure of independence and protection for the IME sector so as to insulate it from a contested political landscape and focus on educational provision and outcomes.

IM schools, units and streams cut across all the more ‘traditional’ educational ‘fault-lines’, including the Integrated sector (first IM/Integrated provision emerged in 2021), leaving IME uniquely positioned, as well as being - critically - linguistically distinctive. The internationally recognised and established immersion model of language education provides pupils in IM schools with an experience that is unique, bringing additional depth to the education system as a whole. IM schools are fundamentally different from all English-medium (EM) schools in that the children are educated through a language that is not generally their first language. This presents an extensive range of needs and challenges that require

specific and tailored support in a whole range of areas. Many of these developmental needs and challenges are not currently being addressed or require significant attention to ensure that children in IM education are beneficiaries of an IME sector and statutory duty determined to place them on an equal standing with their EM counterparts. As a result, there are many fundamental issues that need to be addressed before it can be said that IME is being properly encouraged and facilitated.

Vision for IME in the 21st Century

The research-led model of immersion education (J. Cummins, 1998) delivered in IM schools, units and streams provides parents with the confidence that their children can develop their fluency as eventual bilinguals both in the Irish and English language, ‘providing a route to learning through one of Europe’s oldest indigenous languages (IME Review 2008: v). This model provides participating pupils with additional educational advantages – ‘fully proficient bilinguals outperform monolinguals in the areas of divergent thinking, pattern recognition, and problem solving’, for example (T.W.Fortune, 2012; J.Cummins, 1998).

CnaG’s vision for a 21st century education system is to create a new generation of well-educated, high-achieving and self-confident Irish speakers, who are valued and respected, both at home and on the international stage. We aim to support Irish speakers to create, shape and share, as active bilingual participating citizens, an ambitious and progressive future based on authenticity and sense of place. In this respect, CnaG shares many of the values expressed in the draft NI Executive Programme for Government. CnaG will remain committed to providing a high-quality immersion education for children living within existing, developing and future Irish speaking communities, as well as providing parents from all backgrounds with a distinctive and inclusive educational pathway for their children.

Enrolments in IME passed the 7,000 mark for the first time in the 2020/21 academic year; **it is currently the fastest-growing education sector and this growth trend looks set to continue.** Projections indicate that, based on current trends there is likely to be an 11.4% increase in the overall size of the primary sector and a 74% increase in the post primary sector over the next 5 years, (CnaG 1A, 2020: 17). Since the IM sector still only accounts for just over 2% of the school population there is much potential for the sector to continue to grow for many years to come.

Whilst currently small in the context of the overall school population, the vibrancy of IME is due in no small part to the energy, dedication and dynamism shown by principals, teachers, parents and supporting communities. Ultimately, this persistent and unique commitment should be considered the over-arching strength of IME as a whole. In this sense, IME embodies the sentiment expressed in DE’s school improvement document *Every School A Good School* and the *Sustainable Schools Policy* with regard to the importance of the connection of a school to its community (DE, 2008 and 2009 respectively).

Such growth and dynamism demands a rigorous application of DE’s statutory duty to support CnaG’s ambitions to improve and expand the IM schools estate in order to provide the best possible learning environment for the pupils in its care. CnaG will continue to advocate for, in the expectation of, improvements in all aspects of resourcing required to meet the many and varied learning needs of its pupils. CnaG is passionate in the belief there are real opportunities for growth and employment of students within the growing Irish-medium economy, such as in the public sector, media, European

Parliament, Third Sector and service industries, to name a few. . The rapid expansion the Welsh-medium economy in recent years is a prime example of the opportunities available if we appreciate, imagine and plan for the possibilities. With the expectation that legislation providing official status for Irish, alongside a Strategy to Protect and Enhance the Development of Irish, will be introduced in the not-too-distant future as set out in the *New Decade, New Approach* deal (Jan 2020), these opportunities are likely to expand in the decades ahead.

Ultimately, gaining fluency in an additional language is a skill, and an appreciation of the ‘nuts and bolts’ of how one acquires skills is of key importance when educating a future workforce within a skill-based economy. We believe the immersion model puts IM pupils at a considerable advantage in this workforce, not to mention the other well-documented advantages of early bilingualism.

Strand 1 – Education Journey and Improving Outcomes for Young People

Preparation of children for schooling in early years, childcare, pre-school, school starting age

Core issues

1) IM pre-schools introduce both children and their parents to IME, incorporating linguistic awareness, acquisition and competence into the standard pre-school curriculum. For this reason, IM pre-schools are much more critical in the Irish-medium primary sector than in the EM sector for building language fluency and competency in pupils (CnaG 1A, 2020: 23). This contributes to the unique school-community link, as referenced above, which sets IME apart. As it stands, there are IME specific developmental needs relating to inequalities in provision, curricular development, evaluations and resourcing which require action and are vital in preparing children adequately to engage fully with the enriched curriculum when they enter Primary 1.

Recommendations

1) ‘...differences in provision and associated inconsistencies should be ameliorated... to ensure equality in provision and the best outcomes possible for young Irish-medium learners. This could be facilitated...by ensuring appropriate continuing professional development and linguistic support for all pre-school settings and by increasing the number of statutory nursery settings’ (McClure Watters, 2019: 80);

2) ‘Bespoke pre-school curricular guidance which takes cognisance of the IM immersion contact should be developed by a collaborative group of stakeholders;

3) ‘An understanding of the principles and practices of pre-school education as well as a reasonable fluency in the Irish language should be a requirement of all those who evaluate the quality of provision and learning in IM pre-school settings’;

4) ‘DE to work closely with CnaG and Altram at a strategic and operational level’;

5) ‘DE should seek to ensure a more permanent arrangement for the future support and funding of the IM Early Years Sector’ (CnaG 1A, 2020: 58-60).

Transition from Primary to Post Primary

Core issues

1) The ‘establishment of a widely-available IME post-primary sector is probably the single most significant challenge currently facing the sector’ (CnaG 1A, 2020: 21);

2) Some areas do not have a post-primary option for the children who leave IM primary education (ibid., 21) meaning that transitioning pupils have little option but to transfer into the EM sector... more often than not, poorly equipped to continue to either build or maintain their fluency in the Irish language. As a result, many of the children who transfer from IM primary education into the EM system lose their competence in the language (ibid., 22);

3) 'In September 2019, 55% of children transferred from the IME primary setting into IME post-primary provision and the remainder transferred into the EM sector' (ibid., 22).

Recommendations

1) Statutory duty requires that a clear pathway is required for IM pupils as they journey from pre-school to primary and primary to post-primary, which should mean that all children, regardless of geographical location, have access to IME at every level;

2) To allow for a progressive development of the sector, immediate interim options are required for IM pupils who cannot currently access IM post-primary education in their area, e.g. EM post-primary schools should be encouraged to offer meaningful language support and development classes and initiatives to those pupils coming from IM primary schools;

3) Awareness raising is required in relation to the 'trajectory' of IM pupils throughout their educational journey within the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) and how it can differ to the trajectory of EM peers.

Experience of Pupils with SEN and Disabilities

1) SEN provision is currently focused almost exclusively on the EM sector only and does not take account of the bespoke needs of Irish-medium pupils learning in the immersion context. This is relevant across the board from Area Planning, assessment and diagnostic practices, access to support services and provision of resources.

Please see also Strand 2 below for more detail on SEN support.

Shared Education (SE)

Core issues

1) IME 'remains the least represented sector in the two current Shared Education projects' (CnaG, 1A, 2020: 57);

2) 'There is a lack of knowledge and understanding of IME in wider community' (ibid., 15) with the result that many schools are unwilling to 'share' with IM schools, particularly in the Controlled Sector. Due to the nature of the criteria with regard to Catholic/Protestant proportions, CCMS schools, for example, cannot share with IM schools;

3) 'Sharing' will inevitably be delivered through the medium of English. The immersion model of education relies on maximum hours of exposure to the target language to allow for optimum levels of language acquisition.

Recommendations

1) Bilingual shared sessions to become normal practice within SE partnerships;

2) 'Teacher/Governor sharing and exploration sessions.. to establish common ground and to debunk myths relating to the Irish language and Irish-medium education' (CnaG, 1A, 2020: 58);

- 3) 'Pupil sharing events to discover aspects of a shared cultural and linguistic heritage to include place names, surnames, myths and legends and basic Irish lessons' (ibid., 58);
- 4) DE/EA to review Shared Education opportunities for IM schools in consultation with CnaG and the sector;
- 5) Use of inclusive criteria during the application process to enable and support more IM schools to avail of future streams of SE funding and the opportunities for the school community therein (ibid., 44).
- 6) Resources should be made available as part of any future Shared Education Initiatives and associated criteria should allow for Gaelscoileanna to share on a North/South basis, in recognition of their linguistic uniqueness.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Core issues

1) Mental Health and Wellbeing have been identified as priority areas in recent years, and during Covid in particular. The EM sector has access to a variety of support services and resources, although it is acknowledged that these are also significantly underfunded and oversubscribed. IM pupils must access support services through English, thus compromising their immersion in the Irish language and placing additional burdens on IM teachers to translate and prepare their own resources. Resources to support mental health and wellbeing, to date, have been made available in English only.

Recommendations

- 1) DE/EA to develop a Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy that is inclusive of IM pupils and available in Irish;
- 2) Efforts are made to ensure support services, i.e. counselling services, can be made available through the medium of Irish;
- 3) All resources published by DE/EA are made available in Irish, simultaneous to their publication in English.

Meaningful participation of children and young people in decision-making about matters that affect them

Core issues

1) Opportunities for young people to meaningfully participate in structures which shape their educational experiences are few and far between. Despite a vibrant and growing Irish medium youth sector, Irish-medium representation is often excluded from such focus groups and consultation initiatives aiming to involve young people. This results in issues specific and reflective of the experiences of Irish-speaking young people being omitted from the broader 'responses from young people' and the overall decision-making process.

Recommendations

- 1) Irish-medium representation is actively sought and included in all such initiatives going forward.

2) Where possible, specific IM groups of young people are sought to provide feedback. In the context of IM schools, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta can support this and in the context of youth work, Fóram na nÓg can play a similar role.

Preparedness for training/employment

Core issues

- 1) Regarding the transition of young people into careers, FE and HE, 'there is a need to build an awareness of employment opportunities in the Irish-medium sector' (CnaG, 1A, 2020: 51) which are growing rapidly, with demand outstripping supply.
- 2) 'Universities and Colleges of Further Education have been slow to respond to the growing demand for courses that include an element of Irish language proficiency. For example, it is not possible to study Irish and Maths at QUB or UU' (ibid., 51).

Recommendations

- 1) The formation of a bespoke IM careers service guidance as required, for example, under DE/EA *Transformation Programme* (ibid., 51);
- 2) Links between faculties at third level institutions should be strengthened to facilitate the growing number of students from both EM and IM schools who would like to continue their studies in a particular area while developing their competence in Irish. This would also benefit the IME sector (ibid., 51/52);
- 3) DE should provide additional focused support for the Irish Medium sector in the form of educational resources, Initial Teacher Education (ITE), TPL and leadership training, (A Fair Start, 2021);
- 4) ITE providers and CnaG to work together to promote teaching within the Irish Medium sector as a career path in post-primary schools;
- 5) Third level institutions should provide residential schemes for Irish speaking students, as is common across these islands, to recognise the importance of immersion, encourage more pupils from IME to attend these institutions and to demonstrate that their language of choice is valued.

Remote learning experiences during Covid-19

Core issues

- 1) During Covid-19, DE policies were formulated on the basis of a monolingual education system and IME specific issues were not considered. In addition to the challenges faced by EM pupils, 'IM pupils faced the added burden of being removed from the immersion environment for prolonged periods. The immersion approach relies on sustained, incremental language development with pupils immersed in the language throughout the school environment (CnaG, 1A, 2020: 25). The majority of parents of IM pupils do not speak Irish in the home so the school environment for most pupils is the sole provision for language acquisition and linguistic development' (CnaG, 1B, 2021).

2) There were issues of digital exclusion in areas of high social deprivation where many IM schools are located. A wealth of resources and apps are available online for EM pupils, leaving IM pupils at a severe disadvantage when accessing materials from home... IM principals have consistently requested additional online resources and apps, appropriate for online learning across all Key Stages in the immersion context (Ibid). However, as at December 2021, IM schools are still awaiting many of the additional online resources, apps etc.

Recommendations

- 1) DE consults with all phases and stages of IME to ensure all guidance/initiatives/policies are suitable or adapted for immersion settings from the outset;
- 2) ETI should be commissioned to identify best practice on effective, synchronous learning replicating the immersion context online;
- 3) EA should provide bespoke TPL opportunities for the IM sector to support language recovery, as well as remote or blended learning, in the immersion context;
- 4) St. Mary's University College should be commissioned to provide further TPL opportunities that focus on alignment with the immersion context for IM practitioners across all phases and stages.

Educational outcomes attained by pupils in IM

Core issues

1) Socio-economic factors:

- i) Free School Meal (FSM) entitlement in Primary IME is 7% higher than in EM and is over 15% higher at Post-primary level
- ii) The percentage of children in the IM sector with Special Educational Needs is 21.9%, compared to 19.3% in the EM sector
- iii) 10 out of 32 Irish-medium Primary Schools are in the top 100 most deprived areas. In Belfast, 70% of IME schools are in the top 100 (74) most deprived areas (NISRA, 2021).

IM schools deliver high-quality, immersive education in a context where there is a higher than average deprivation in the school community. Additionally, the majority of children attending IM schools do not speak Irish at home, as a result, school plays a major role in building fluency, as well as vocabulary, to enable pupils to acquire their education (CnaG, 1A, 2020: 25) and the effective linguistic development of children is vitally important to their educational attainment (ibid., 14).

2) Educational Benefits Accruing from the Immersion Model

- i) Data shows that IM pupils at post-primary level out perform their EM peers (see appendix).
- ii) A number of researched benefits accrue to pupils who are educated in the immersion model of education (T.W. Fortune, 2019; S. May, 2008), resulting in 'enhanced educational outcomes' (CnaG, 1A, 2020: 18). Children learn a second language to a high level of fluency, 'whilst performing at least as well as their monolingual counterparts in their other curricular subjects. There is also a significant body of evidence that suggests improved cognitive thought and problem-solving abilities for children

who are early-years bilinguals. Recent research has also identified significant mental-health benefits in early-years bilinguals, including significantly delaying the onset of dementia' (ibid., 18/19).

Recommendations

1) Funding and human resourcing for IME are the primary challenges to raising educational outcomes at present. See below for a breakdown of these barriers and recommended solutions.

Purpose, nature and delivery of curriculum, assessment and qualifications

Core Issues

1) IME delivers the CCEA NI Curriculum within its schools, units and streams to deliver an effective educational experience to children (CnaG 1A, 2020: 32), therefore significant investment is required in mechanisms to promote immersion pedagogy and ensure IM pupils are supported social, emotionally and academically (ibid., 26). It cannot be over-emphasized that simply providing a translation of all current EM resources into Irish – which is not possible within current budgetary constraints - would be, at best, an unsatisfactory way to deal with the delivery of the CCEA Curriculum within an immersion pedagogy (ibid., 54). Whilst the Business Case for a language framework has recently been approved, the project remains at procurement stage. This work is expected to be completed in 2023.

2) At post-primary level, there is concern that IM pupils will not have full access to the Entitlement Framework, as private assessment providers appear unwilling to provide assessments in Irish. This is a particular concern with regard to vocational qualifications. Additionally, post-primary CCEA GCSE examination assessments are in some instances translated and marked by English-speaking examiners (ibid., 54). This has the potential to leave IM pupils at a disadvantage, in comparison with their EM peers and there is significant anecdotal evidence to suggest that this is the case, with many marks being amended when challenged. In essence, it means an interpretation of the work of the pupils is assessed and not the work itself.

Recommendations:

1) Creation of an immersion curriculum, rather than the current translated version of the NI Primary Curriculum which follows the learning trajectory of monolingual pupils;

2) Creation of bespoke assessment/diagnostic tools that are standardized on pupils learning in the immersion context, and cognizant of the additional skills associated with bilingual pupils as well as the trajectory of learning that takes place in an IM school to establish a baseline. This has also been identified in *A Fair Start (2021)* with a recommendation for DE to commission CCEA to progress development of its own diagnostic assessment tools for use in all schools (including Irish Medium) from KS1 to KS3 for schools; to be co-designed in partnership with educationalists and in consultation with teaching unions, using sample data for system level measures, including an agreed “value added” measure;

3) Exploration of possibilities to ensure every IM pupil has access to the full range of subjects and qualifications at post-primary level that are available to EM pupils;

- 4) Exploration of alternatives to bring an end to the current practice of translating exam scripts into English before marking, for example, a more flexible approach in relation to criteria for IM examiners, with incentives to attract suitably qualified teachers from the south;
- 5) Additional marks should be given to IM pupils sitting their exams through the medium of Irish equivalent to the 10% additional points awarded in ROI, in recognition of the additional challenges they face (lack of learning resources, translations of exams being assessed etc...);
- 6) Significant investment is required to develop and enhance the availability of IM teaching and learning resources and educational support materials to cover each area/subject within the NIC at all Key Stages;
- 7) Funding for IM resources from CCEA should be ring-fenced and agreed in collaboration with the sector;
- 8) An tÁisaonad (the Irish-medium resource centre based in St. Mary's University College Belfast) should also be in receipt of core funding from DE to allow them to produce vital literacy and numeracy resources for the IM sector, for example the Accelerated Reader and Math's programme are not currently available in Irish despite being widely used and acclaimed through English.

Pathways for learners

Core issues

- 1) Irish-medium schools are losing pupils from the sector due to critical gaps in educational provision. At present, there is no permanent Specialist Provision for IM pupils with SEN needs, despite the fact that some international research has shown that immersion settings can provide more benefits to SEN pupils than monolingual settings.
- 2) 60% of IM schools are in accommodation that are not fit-for-purpose which restricts their ability to adequately cater for pupils with physical disabilities.
- 3) Budgetary, resourcing and time restraints are preventing CnaG from working on pupil pathways for SEN, disabled and EOTAS pathways.

Recommendations:

- 1) See recommendations under Strand 2 – Support for Setting and Schools, Funding and Governance, Education Delivery

Strand 2 – Support for Setting and Schools, Funding and Governance

Education delivery

Core issues

There are substantial barriers in terms of support for IME schools, which creates an unique challenges on IM schools to maintain high standards of educational provision.

- 1) There is a ‘growing need for subject specific teachers with the appropriate subjects, high level competence Irish, specialist insights into immersion pedagogies and also the resources needed to implement these’ (CnaG 1A, 2020: 47). This constitutes an acute staff supply issue and requires ‘a strategic approach to teacher supply issues’ (ibid., 44). This is substantiated by a report by the Committee of Experts (2020) that observed that the ‘lack of teachers able to teach in Irish is systemic, reflective of a necessity to plan more strategically for the long-term need for more teachers’;
- 2) In terms of retaining teachers within IME and assuming a modest 4% drift out of profession this would create a need for additional FTE teaching posts per year, i.e. 60 FTEs within 5 years (CnaG 1A, 2020: 49). As the fastest-growing sector in education currently ‘a realistic scenario identifies that between now and 2025 that 60 teachers need to be trained annually, assuming a modest growth rate of 3.43% per annum’ (ibid., 47);
- 3) ‘Growing numbers of teachers are moving to other areas, including university lecturing, European parliament, translation services to the civil service and into the wider economy’ (Destination of Trainee IM Teachers Post-Graduation from St Mary’s University 2013-2015);
- 4) 64% of IM teaching graduates do not enter IME (CnaG 1A, 2020: 49);
- 5) Due to the dearth of suitable teaching and learning resources for the IM sector, IM practitioners have to spend additional time (beyond planning, assessment) translating and adapting resources for use in the IM setting. Additionally, in the absence of any linguistically appropriate pupil support services from EA, IM practitioners have to create bespoke support materials for SEN pupils. This additional workload takes a toll on IM practitioners over time with some choosing to leave the sector as a result;
- 6) The current model used for Area Based Planning does not assume growth in IM sector. This is substantiated by Justice Treacy legal rulings of 2011 and 2014 that this system ‘is not tailored to facilitate and encourage the development of either the Integrated or IM sectors’ (ibid., 13/14);
- 7) The highly negative impact of large class sizes on linguistic development without Classroom Assistants must be acknowledged (ibid., 14). In Scotland this is dealt with under the provisions of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act (2005) with a statutory cap at 25 pupils in Gaelic-medium schools; This should be lower again in the case of composite classes, where the additional immersive demands on IME teachers are even greater.
- 8) The small number of CnaG staff - only seven staff working on a very broad range of educational issues - limits the ability of CnaG to comprehensively meet the diverse needs of a growing sector. The number of staff employed by CnaG has decreased by over 25% during a time when the sector has experienced significant and prolonged growth (from 13 in 2015/16 to 10 in 2021/22). A greater emphasis on educational support, aimed at improving educational outcomes for young people in IME, means the

focus in the organisation has shifted to consolidation, rather than development alone. Current staffing allocation does not reflect this evolving emphasis and is impacting staff wellbeing and morale, with potentially negative implications for long-term employment within the organisation and resulting loss of sectoral expertise.

Recommendations

- 1) With the continued growth of the sector and establishment of new provisions, there is a need to revise current places available at third level institutions and ensure they are catering for current and projected demand. It is, however, acknowledged that attrition rates are extremely high in the IM sector and therefore this must also be investigated and addressed accordingly to ensure teachers are supported to remain in the sector. Initiatives in Scotland have proved successful to this end and should be replicated for both the Irish and EM sectors. An increase on the numbers of places available on St Mary's University College B.Ed and PGCE Programme for IME Student Teachers per annum: B.Ed – increase from 12 to 18 and PGCE – increase from 20 to 25;
- 2) The creation of a pathway for EM subject specialists with spoken Irish to make transition to Irish-medium schools. Subject specialists who have conversational level of fluency in Irish could be funded to work in schools whilst at the same time supported to improve their Irish fluency as well as funding sabbaticals for teachers to learn Irish and return to schools to continue teaching in their subject areas (CnaG 1A, 2020: 50);
- 3) DE should provide a programme by which teachers who are fluent Irish speakers can retrain as subject specialists in target areas;
- 4) DE should fund and replicate a TPL scheme such as the Welsh Sabbatical Scheme: a language course for teachers and classroom assistants who wish to improve their Welsh and gain more confidence in using the language. This would enable teachers/classroom assistants who wish to teach through the medium of Irish to build the language competency to do so (ibid., 50-52);
- 5) Additional teaching allowances should be awarded to IM practitioners, similar to those available for teachers in Special Schools, in order to reflect and acknowledge the extra workload in the immersion setting due to lack of centrally available resources and pupil support services;
- 6) Additional staffing budget should be allocated to CnaG itself to enable its staff to continue to meet the unique challenges of development and consolidation which IME faces. An internal review carried out by the CEO identified several priority areas where additional human resources are required to meet the needs of expanding IM sector. This includes; Research, Marketing, Special Educational Needs and Area Planning.

Pupil Support – Support Services provided

Core Issues

Currently, pupil support services are available through the medium of English only. Support materials are also currently unavailable in Irish for IM pupils with additional needs. Additionally, these services offer interventions and support that are based on monolingual practices and in many instances are not appropriate for use with a pupil learning through the medium of Irish.

- 1) There is a clear disparity between pupil support services that are delivered in English to the EM sector and those that are delivered through the medium of Irish to the IM sector (CnaG 1A, 2020: 14);
- 2) There is a need for comprehensive youth service provision to provide ‘opportunities (for pupils) to develop their fluency outside school...in order to provide a social context for the language outside of school e.g. youth activities’ (ibid., 15).

Recommendations

- 1) EA develop a policy in relation to supporting IM pupils with additional needs;
- 2) EA to recruit a team of suitably qualified officers and advisory teachers with a working knowledge and background in IME to develop a programme of linguistically appropriate pupil support services for IM pupils;
- 3) EA to develop and deliver an annual programme of TPL for IM practitioners to support SEN pupils in an immersion setting through the medium of Irish;
- 4) SEN in the IM sector to form part of all ITE. This module should be delivered in collaboration with EA pupil support services (IME specific);
- 5) Expertise to facilitate support service provision lies within the current IM Teacher workforce. Therefore, this must be factored into teacher supply planning - if teachers are required to fill support service roles, then their positions need to be backfilled.

SEN services - range, level, consistency

Core issues

For a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the additional supports required by pupils with SEN in IM, north and south, please consult S. Andrews (2019).

There are significant and substantial barriers to delivery of and educational outcomes in the area of SEN services in order ‘to receive the pedagogic and language-specific support appropriate to an IM environment...This is further compounded by a lack of understanding and co-ordination among current responsible agencies to ensure adequate support for SENIM children’ (CnaG 1A, 2020: 44). Specific barriers identified include:

- 1) Access to specialist provision in mainstream schools is severely limited in the Irish-medium sector. Currently, one temporary provision exists at primary and post-primary level. Whilst one permanent provision is planned, it will not become available until 2023. The temporary nature of this provision is contrary to good practice and pupils are leaving the IM sector due to the lack of access to these specialist services. There are also significant geographical issues in that current provision is available in Belfast only;
- 2) Current assessment and diagnostic tools are available in English only and standardized on monolingual pupils;
- 3) Current practice by educational psychologists of assessing IM pupils in English is wholly inappropriate and does not accurately reflect or determine the needs of the pupil;

4) All SEN pupil support services, human resources and learning support materials are available through the medium of English only. This includes 'lack of additional support materials or their equivalent in Irish for those children with difficulties' - for example. Reading Recovery, Lexia, Catch up Maths etc' (ibid., 45);

5) There is no policy/framework for SEN pupils in the IM sector.

Recommendations

1) DE/EA to develop a specific policy to support SEN pupils in the IM sector. This must be created in consultation with the IM sector and should reflect international research and best practice.;

2) A 'regional network of Learning Support Centres' ensuring special provision through the medium of Irish (CnaG 1A, 2020: 44). This should be future-proofed by reflecting projected growth and emerging needs of the sector;

2) Adaption/creation of assessment and diagnostic tools to ensure they are fit-for-purpose when assessing pupils for special educational/additional needs in the IM context. The authors of 'A Fair Start' (2021) recommended that DE 'commission CCEA to progress development of its own diagnostic assessment tools for use in all schools (including Irish Medium) from KS1 to KS3 for schools' (DE, 2021: 3.2);

3) Serious consideration is given to secondment of IM teachers/SENCOs to retrain as educational psychologists – with nuances for immersion education - with pay for them and their replacements in the classroom. This was the approach taken in the EM sector initially and should be replicated within IM;

4) A skills audit and recruitment drive should be undertaken by EA in order to adequately supply the IM sector with Speech and Language therapists, advisory/support teachers for Numeracy, Literacy etc. (ibid., 46);

5) A specific ring-fenced budget to create support resources for IM pupils with specific or additional needs such as ASD, SEBD and Speed and Language etc. (ibid., 46).

Professional Development

Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and school improvement services

Core Issues

1) Currently, IM schools are working within the confines of ISEF documents that are designed for the monolingual setting with no cognisance of the added value and unique challenges presented by delivering an immersion curriculum.

2) There are currently only 2 IM Assessors in ETI. Many IM schools have District Inspectors without any knowledge of Irish or of immersion pedagogy, this is wholly unacceptable to IM Principals and Governors.

3) In relation to School Improvement Services, at present EA employ one School Improvement Professional (SIP) who is fluent in Irish and has a background teaching in the IM sector. This person has other duties and is therefore only available in this capacity on a part-time basis.

Recommendations

- 1) ETI and EA develop an over-arching policy to encourage and promote overall school improvement within the IM sector;
- 2) ETI to include IM specific quality indicators on the ISEF documents at each phase;
- 3) ETI to recruit more Assessors for the IM sector, these individuals should have a working knowledge of and experience in the IM sector;
- 4) At least two full-time School Improvement Professionals are recruited by the EA to work exclusively with the IM sector to promote overall school improvement, identify and disseminate examples of best practice and to improve educational outcomes for IM pupils (CnaG 1A, 2020: 57).

Support services provided for teachers and leaders – Teacher Professional Learning (TPL)

Core issues

- 1) At pre-school level, there is significant variation in the training opportunities available to pre-school leaders and staff. This can have an impact on the consistency of experiences amongst children attending these settings;
- 2) At present, all TPL is aimed at the EM context and is not cognisant of immersion specific issues, nor reflective of leadership in an IM setting;
- 3) As a result of additional fixed period Covid funding, the EA has seconded an IM practitioner until March 2022 and they are currently delivering a specific programme of TPL for IM practitioners in the 21/22 academic year with a specific focus on language recovery as a result of Covid-19. CnaG has filled this void in the past at annual conferences and at other school improvement events and workshops.

Recommendations

- 1) At pre-school level (both statutory and voluntary levels), staff should be provided with both the required levels of curriculum and linguistic support and continuing professional development. This should include adequate training to NCFE Level 5 Diploma level;
- 2) EA to deliver a bespoke programme of TPL for the IM sector, designed in collaboration with the sector and aligned to international best practice on an annual basis;
- 3) DE ‘fund and replicate a TPL Scheme such as the Welsh Sabbatical Scheme, a language course for teachers and classroom assistants who wish to improve their Welsh and gain more confidence in using the language’ (CnaG 1A, 2020: 52);
- 4) Adequate annual funding for the IM Bursary Scheme, as part of the Learning Leaders strategy, to allow practitioners to avail of TPL opportunities (ibid., 57);
- 5) DE should fund additional focused support for the Irish-medium sector in the form of educational resources, Initial Teacher Education, TPL and leadership training’ (DE, 2021: 6.5);
- 6) Review current funding mechanism and current allocation to IM Early Years support agency, Altram and provide uplift to meet emerging needs of growing IM early years sector.

Funding - Factors Creating a Disparity in Funding or Service Levels Comparative to Rest of the UK

Core Issues

1) IM schools receive a minimal supplement to their budgets through the Common Funding Scheme; for example: in IM primary schools, children attract an extra £130.45 per annum, accounting for 0.13 % (£850,169) of the total Schools' Budget. Allowances are also awarded to groups of children in various other categories, for example, Traveller children attract an extra £1185.92 per annum, accounting for £1,455,120 (0.23%) of the total Aggregated Schools' Budget; Children of Service Personnel attract an extra £474.37 per annum, accounting for £210,619 (0.03%) of the total Aggregated Schools' Budget and Newcomer Children attract an extra £1185.92 per annum, accounting for £15,581,168 (2.47 %) of the total Aggregated Schools' Budget (Department of Education, 2021).

2) In Post-Primary education IM children attract an additional £485.89 per annum, accounting for £1,064,494 (0.14 %) of the total Aggregated Schools' Budget. Allowances are also awarded to groups of children in various other categories, for example: Traveller children attract an additional £1214.72 per annum, accounting for £674,168 (0.09%) of the total Aggregated Schools' Budget. Newcomer children attract an additional £1214.72 per annum, accounting for £4,704,600 (0.5%) of the total Aggregated Schools' Budget (Ibid.).

3) 'Irish-medium schools face additional costs linked to the provision of resources and curricular development in Irish which must be reflected in funding allocations' (CnaG 1A, 2020: 19 – identified in Salisbury Report, 2013).

Recommendations

1) The Salisbury report of 2013 highlighted a major discrepancy between the curricular and administrative IM post-primary and primary factors (of 0.014 and 0.055 respectively) and questioned the justification for a difference in IM Primary and Post Primary. Salisbury went on to recommend that this factor should be significantly increased for all IM schools stating "*Irish-medium schools face additional costs linked to the provision of resources and curricular development in Irish, which must be reflected in funding allocations*". CnaG strongly believes that this needs to be redressed through the application of at least the same uplifted factor to IM primary education i.e. 0.2;

2) CnaG is given additional resources/personnel to research funding models for immersion education in other parts of the UK and that due consideration will be given to redressing any identified shortfalls.

Resourcing requirements

Core Issues

1) Despite sectoral and geographical growth projection models (CnaG 1A, 2020: 34-41) showing realistic scenario of 3.43% p/a growth at primary level and a 60% increase at post-primary level by 2025/26, there is, a 'significant shortfall in tailor-made teaching resources within the IME' (ibid., 15);

2) Resources continue to be produced by DE-funded organisations in English only. Whilst CCEA produce a percentage of their resources bilingually, there is a number yet to be translated to Irish. Limited

resources have been made available by DE and EA in Irish but this tends to be on an ad hoc basis and, only then, as a result of sustained advocacy by CnaG. Additionally, the use of translation software is not an adequate or appropriate alternative to the translation/adaption of resources into Irish;

3) EM schools have access to a selection of levelled reading schemes to support literacy development amongst pupils. IM schools currently have access to one such scheme and it only extends as far as Primary 4. 'Insufficient funding is causing an unacceptable delay in the production and creation of an early-reading programme. A further programme is now needed to promote reading development...incorporating reading strategies and other resources to encourage children to be independent readers in Irish from as early an age as possible...' (ibid., 52);

4) The acute need for investment in teaching and learning resources for the IM sector was further highlighted by the Expert Panel on Underachievement in Northern Ireland in their Report 'A Fair Start' where it was stated: 'DE should provide additional focused support for the Irish Medium sector in the form of educational resources...' (DE: 2021: 6.5 ii).

Recommendations

1) IM funding for both CCEA and An t-Áisaonad should be ring-fenced, permanent, subject to ongoing review, in line with enrolment trends and emerging needs involving cross-border collaboration with COGG where appropriate (CnaG 1A, 2020: 53);

2) All DE funded resources should be made available in Irish, simultaneous with the English version. This should be ensured by a clear Irish language policy in both DE and EA;

3) Flexible funding for provision of essential resources to allow for long-term, strategic planning;

4) In order to capture the wealth of knowledge and expertise that exists amongst IM practitioners, DE should fund a bursary scheme to allow practitioners to create and disseminate resources across the sector. This would be especially beneficial in terms of specialist subjects at post-primary level and would serve as an interim solution until such resources are produced by CCEA or similar.

Infrastructure: Physical infrastructure

Core Issues

1) 60% of accommodation in the 'other maintained' IM sector comprises non-permanent buildings. A highly disproportionate number of IM schools do not have access to a sports/ assembly hall, and other ancillary accommodation as set out in the DE Building Handbook.

Recommendations

1) DE should act on positive trends/growth rates within IME and pro-actively address accommodation issues to be more reflective of anticipated growth and not current needs;

2) The creation of a specific ring-fenced fund to ensure that the sites and buildings in the sector are capable of dealing with the current and projected enrolment within IME (ibid.,20; Review of IME Report, 2008);

3) A comprehensive review of accommodation within IME, as was recommended in the Review of IM Education Report (2008:xv);

4) Regularly replenish the funding for Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta, which is vital for development of new IME provision and which has been exhausted as a result of the phenomenal growth of the sector since its establishment.

Digital infrastructure – and role of technology in education to support learning

Core Issues

1) During Covid 19 and the extended period of home learning pupils and teachers alike ‘could not fully avail of the advantages of online learning platforms and the wealth of printed resources and the support of media outlets that their EM counterparts did’ (CnaG 1A, 2020: 26). As the immersion model ‘relies on sustained, incremental language development’ (ibid., 26), IME pupils were at an immediate disadvantage;

2) The current C2K contract does not include any provision for IME (ibid., 55). IM provision did not feature in the procurement of the current C2K contract. One ‘bolt-on’ was provided retrospectively - Seomra Nuachta (IM Version of C2K newsdesk). This service does not have parity with the EM version presently. Whilst IM recommendations have been made in advance of the procurement of the new contract, this remains many years behind schedule.

For an interesting discussion of the use of websites and apps within the IM sector please see - A. Harney, 2018.

Recommendations

1) Needs of IM schools and pupils must be factored into all procurement for online resources going forward. Many independent providers are willing to make their products available in Irish but this must be sought from the outset. Recent examples of such – Just2Easy (cited in *A Fair Start*) and *Read & Write* (assistive reading technology) (CnaG 1A, 2020: 55);

2) Additional funding from DE/EA to enhance the scope and capacity of Seomra Nuachta and other C2K provision. An increase in capacity would enhance IM resources for primary pupils and allow post-primary pupils to enjoy the same daily content as EM sector pupils (ibid., 55).

How innovative practice in teaching, governance and leadership can be harnessed and shared across the wider system.

Governance and Management

Core Issues

1) The majority of IM schools are ‘Other-maintained’, meaning that the Governors themselves are the ultimate managing and employing authority for the schools. This places enormous burdens on IM governors, particularly regarding issues around finance and human resources.

Recommendations

1) A number of ‘professional’ governors should be recruited by DE and EA, including those who could serve on a Board of Governors in an Irish-medium school. These professionals could be nominated by the EA or DE to sit on the Board of Governors of a new or developing school, or in a school that has experienced leadership difficulties etc, where the existing Board needs guidance, training or direction in managing their setting. These professional governors would work closely with the EA and in the case of IM schools, CnaG, in identifying and addressing the training and skills deficits of those boards of governors they are assigned to, and in the medium term, work with an individuals or groups, preparing them to eventually take over the strategic management of their schools.

2) The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in new and innovative ways of delivering training to those involved in education locally, including school governors. Recent EA online training for Irish-medium governors has proved very popular and the uptake has been significantly greater than when face-to-face training was still being used.

IM governors report that, not only was the sector-specific training an incentive for them to attend training sessions, but also that there was less time and travel involved in availing of the training. This is particularly true of the IM sector where a smaller number of schools are more widely geographically spread and where previous governor training often meant lengthy travel to their nearest provider. CnaG would like to see this model continued and extended, even in post-pandemic times, as well as an extension of the current EA IM-specific training programme for governors in the sector.

Innovative Practice in Teaching

Core issues

1) Irish-medium practitioners employ a range of innovative practice, especially in regards to literacy development and language learning and acquisition. Relevant education bodies fail to harness this expertise and share it across the system. For example, schools are welcoming a greater number of newcomer pupils – IM practitioners have the skills and expertise to support these pupils by employing immersion pedagogy.

Recommendations

1) The expertise of IM practitioners is acknowledged and celebrated in relevant fora and is shared when appropriate to enhance the delivery of education across the system.

Strand 3 – Effectiveness and Efficiency of Current System Level Design, Delivery and Administration (inefficiency and ineffectiveness in education delivery and quantification of cost/non-cost impact of these issues)

What are the inadequacies/gaps/structural issues of current system with relation to effectiveness and efficiency of delivery?

Core Issues

1) Human resources and funding are the greatest structural barriers to maintaining effective delivery for IME. No other organisation provides the specific and unique supporting role of CnaG across a very broad range of educational issues. Within both the team and board of CnaG we have IM teachers, Governors, parents and past-pupils – all of which bring a level of knowledge and experience not found in any other educational body. However CnaG has a small workforce of 10, with 3 dedicated to internal administration, leaving little room for inefficiency by CnaG in delivery and administration. Given such resourcing constraints, effective delivery is the prime concern for CnaG. This being directly and negatively impacted by inadequate funding levels during what has been a period of intense and rapid growth for the sector. This has placed a massive burden on the CnaG support that is required by schools to meet the specific and unique needs of IM learners.

Recommendations

1) In terms of enabling CnaG to improve its effectiveness, CnaG would require additional staff, primarily in the following areas:

- **Education:** Special Educational Needs, Primary, Post-primary, Continuous/TPL, School Improvement in the IM sector
- **Policy/Advocacy:** Research, Marketing/Outreach
- **Development:** Area Planning.

2) Review and uplift of the overall budget allocation to Education. The NI Executive Priorities rightly place an increasing emphasis on educational provision and high standard outcomes across all levels. However it is becoming increasingly difficult to do this in the context of diminishing budgets. Many schools, for instance, spend upwards of 95% of their entire budget just covering staffing costs. Resourcing must follow priorities.

The Role and Responsibilities of DE

Core Issues

1) Legal judgements subsequent to the 1998 Education Order have set out in law that the Statutory Duty upon DE to provide IME should have ‘practical consequences and legislative significance’ whereby DE (and other bodies tasked with carrying out functions on behalf of DE) can “facilitate and encourage ..by taking positive steps to or by removing obstacles which inhibit the statutory objective”. To date there

have been a number of notable refusals of Development Proposals for the development of IME Statutory Provision (CnaG 1a, 2020: 24) e.g. Gaelscoil/Naíscoil na mBeann;

2) The majority of IM schools are sustainable and above the sustainability thresholds (18 at present), however those schools that fall below (10, of which Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain, Gaelscoil An Lonnáin & Gaelscoil na Spéiríní are physically restricted by inadequacy of sites and poor quality accommodation. These are ‘major drag factors’ for schools being able to attract parents to send their children to the school’ (ibid., 29);

3) CnaG fully appreciates the need to amend DE policies to align with broader policy changes and emerging demographic realities in relation to Area Based Planning, however a uniformed approach for all sectors, with vastly different needs and at completely different stages of development is not, in our view, the most efficient or effective way to do this nor does it comply with the unique responsibilities of the statutory duty which only relates to IME and IE.

4) The primary policy document that set in train the process of Area Planning was the Bain Report, published in 2006. This document sets the context for the entire Area Planning process and the importance of planning for IME within this process. At that time, Bain acknowledged that rationalisation of schools was primarily about dealing with a shrinking sector and pointed out a flaw in the calculation of long term enrolment (LTE) figures within a declining education sector. In contrast, there is a need for a completely different approach within sectors where the school population is growing. Indeed this is explicitly acknowledged by Bain for the IME and Integrated sectors:

“Planning should take account of Schools for the Future: Funding, Strategy, Sharing the projected needs of all sectors based on a **consistent approach to estimating long-term enrolments (LTE). This means planning for anticipated rather than demonstrated demand in the Integrated and Irish-medium sectors.** Forecasts should consider all the relevant determinants of demand to the greatest practicable extent, including demographics, pupil movements, population shifts, economic development, parental choice and changes in school performance and sustainability.”

Recommendations

1) Research is needed into the implementation of immersion models of education for minority languages, e.g. Wales, Scotland, ROI;

2) Area-Based Planning should reflect demographic reality and anticipated growth for IM provision not demonstrated demand;

3) 60% of IM schools are in temporary accommodation. This negatively impacts the ability to deliver appropriate SEN support in IM schools, as well as attracting new pupils to the sector etc. Consideration should therefore be given to a DE ringfenced budget to target the specific accommodation needs of IM sector within an over-arching mechanism which would inform how DE/EA give effect to the statutory duty for IME – the ‘Welsh in Education Strategic Plans’ mechanism might be used as a model in this regard;

4) Recognise the existing circumstances and challenges pertaining to IME as an emerging sector, acknowledged by the department in 1994, by adapting a bespoke policy to enable the development of the IME which reflects the experience of the sector and is gives material effect to the statutory duty;

- 5) Recognise the need not to view broad geographical definitions in relation to IME in absolute terms but to do so in a manner consistent with demographical reality i.e the IM schools often draw from a much broader area than a traditional 'catchment area';
- 6) DE introduce an operational support fund to help address the challenges of young and growing schools;
- 7) Every policy from DE and other educational bodies is 'Irish-medium' proofed, in consultation with CnaG, to ensure the particular needs of IM sector are reflected within;
- 8) Regarding 'outstanding recommendations of the Independent Review of Integrated Education (2017) or **any other relevant previous reports**', CnaG would like to draw attention to the Review of IME, published in 2008, and to the numerous outstanding recommendations therein, that are still to be actioned, including, amongst others, significant proposals to deal with:
 - Appropriate provision for children in IME with SEN
 - Supply of fit-for-purpose teaching and learning resources at all levels in the IME sector
 - Accommodation and infrastructure issues
 - Bespoke TPL for IM teachers

Role and Responsibilities of EA

Core Issues

- 1) At base, CnaG require IME specific support from the EA to ensure effective and optimum delivery of education to the pupils in its care. There is a substantial lack of awareness within education and health support organisations of the nuances of IM education, including the educational and cognitive benefits of immersion education, bilingualism and bi-literacy (CnaG 1A, 2020: 45).
- 2) DE and EA need to place an increasing emphasis on developing the EA's in-house expertise, skills and knowledge to enable them to directly support IM schools, rather than the current emphasis, which appears to be based largely on collaborative, peer to peer advice (ibid., 57).

Recommendations

- 1) Secondment/redeployment of excess human resourcing capacity – ideally with Irish language proficiency - within the EA to IME to assist with the substantive challenges facing the organisation. In any larger restructuring/rationalization process such a move might offset redundancies within the EA and provide support where it is needed;
- 2) Establishment of an IM Hub which employs officers with a working knowledge and experience in the IM sector. These officers should span all (relevant) directorates within EA and should be a point of contact between IM schools/CnaG and the wider organisational structure of the EA;
- 3) Creation of an agreed Memorandum of Understanding and accompanying protocols, between CnaG and EA, to set out a framework of co-operation between the two organisations and identify respective roles and responsibilities;
- 4) EA develop an over-arching policy, rooted in the statutory duty, which informs their approach to the development of IME across all areas of education under their responsibility.

The role and responsibilities of Dept for Economy (FE, HE, Vocational Education and Training)

Core Issues

1) Currently no policy or provision for IM pupils exists within the 14-19 strategy beyond the academic GCSE/A-Level provision. Vocational courses are not currently available through the medium of Irish although they did exist previously for certain subjects as part of a pilot scheme. It is essential that IM pupils are afforded the same access to the Entitlement Framework from ages 14-19 and any review of this must include IM versions of all vocational courses both applied and general.

2) There is a growing surplus of trained teachers in the EM sector according to Department for the Economy (2019), and there is a need for joined-up thinking between EA, CnaG and Department for the Economy regarding this to help alleviate teacher supply issues in IM.

Recommendations

1) Conduct a review of current provision of vocational courses at 14-19;

2) Put in place an IM strategy/policy which ensures parity of provision for IM pupils choosing vocational rather than academic routes. These courses must be available in Irish for IM pupils;

3) There is a need for research into, and the development of, a micro-economy based around the Irish language and rooted in place (F. Bradley and J. Kennelly, 2013). This would also create employment and careers pathways for IME pupils to move into upon leaving school.

Interaction between secondary providers and FE/HE/ITE

Core Issues

Lack of third level/vocational courses which are provided through the medium of Irish or alongside Irish, outside of courses on the Irish language itself. Many students leaving IM post-primary provision have sought degrees through Irish or alongside Irish (for example Law and Irish) but this is rarely, if ever, available. Similar courses are delivered alongside other languages however.

Recommendations

1) An additional officer to be appointed within CnaG to establish links with FE/HE in particular, and to look at IM provision at post-16 and beyond. This person would also be required to establish links with DOE who has responsibility for HE/ITE.

School management type in IM

Core Issues

1) IM schools are supported in terms of budget allocation by the EA and so do not manage their own budget like voluntary grammar schools and integrated schools. IME straddles all other educational sectors in the north therefore CnaG believe that any sectoral splits would be more usefully designated along linguistic lines. Here is a breakdown of school types within the IME:

- Pre-School - IM pre-schools are either statutory (attached to primary school) or voluntary, 1 integrated
- Primary - 36 Irish-medium primary schools; 27 in the 'other maintained' IM sector; 7 units in Maintained schools and 2 in the Controlled sector;
- Post-Primary – 2 free standing 'other maintained' post primary, 3 post-primary units are Catholic 'maintained' schools.

2) International best practice for excellence in immersion education favours full immersion, as opposed to streams or units within EM settings. However, the 2008 Review of Irish Medium Education recommended developing new provision through federation with another school, with a single BOG and Principal (2008: xiv): 'The federated model should not be set aside other than in the most exceptional circumstances' (2008:xv). Additionally, there is 'lack of a formal support organisation for parents' in IME (ibid., 15).

Recommendations

1) The current programme of capacity building for IM governors, which includes elements of mandatory child protection training; training on recruitment, selection, financial issues and issues specific to IME to be further developed by EA, in consultation with CnaG (ibid., 56);

2) Exploring possibilities to create parent support groups whose children are educated within immersion models within the UK and Ireland.

Other areas of segregation or fragmentation – and how does this impact delivery, outcomes and costs

Core Issues

1) Delivery of education and educational outcomes for IM pupils are being undermined by a lack of awareness of IME within the current system and a lack of understanding about the specific needs of the immersion education model. This occurs either as a result of an unwillingness to accept change or because IME is erroneously perceived as presenting a challenge to ideological or conventional assumptions about educational provision . Increased co-operation with education systems in Wales, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland - all engaged in immersion models of education - would greatly benefit delivery and outcomes and therefore cost effectiveness. Previous to 2015, there was a North-South body providing a forum for cross border collaboration for IME – An Coiste Thuaidh Theas. However, the EA officer who organized this forum lost their post in the EA and the forum was discontinued.

Recommendations

1) 'The development of cross-border collaboration' (CnaG 1A, 2020: 44) to support and enable development of IME in NI;

2) Building a network of contacts/working group across the UK and Ireland who have experience and expertise in dealing with the issues presenting in IME along the lines of the British-Irish Council and/or the North-South Bodies;

3) Additional funding streams and networks are established to support cross-border operation in relation to IME on an All-Ireland basis.

An analysis of areas of best practice, innovation, sharing and collaboration in the current system and an assessment of their potential for broader application

Core issues

1) The sharing of best practice, innovation and collaboration is currently focused on monolingual practice. The Irish-medium sector has much to share, given the opportunity.

2)The IM sector is the only sector to have established provision in all other sectors with Controlled, Maintained and Integrated provision. When striving for an inclusive and diverse education system, the Irish-medium sector is an exemplar of such a system.

3) The innovation of parents and members of the community in establishing IM schools means the sector has established strong, organic links with the local community, one of the four pillars of *Every School a Good School*.

Recommendations

1) Irish-medium representation must be ensured in all relevant fora, not only to ensure the needs of the sector are acknowledged, but to ensure that the experience and expertise of the IM sector is shared and utilised.

2) IME has developed a highly successful model of organic, community-led development and has led the way in terms of community genesis of education provision, which could be shared across education. DE to commission a research report into this for the benefit of other sectors.

An assessment of resource intensive services within education delivery and identification of priority areas for further investment

Core issues

1) The Irish-medium sector is severely limited in regards to the services it can access. Currently, all services are available through English only. Whilst acknowledging that more generic services such as Human Resources are applicable in both languages, pupil support services are in English only. There is a dearth of provision across all education and health services to support IM pupils.

Recommendations

1) When assessing current resource intensive services, cognisance is given to the lack of Irish-medium services and this is identified as a priority area for further investment.

Consideration of appropriate measures and indicators to determine performance of the education system

Core issues

- 1) CnaG believes that a more holistic approach should be taken to determining the performance of the education system and that less emphasis should be placed on academic achievement.
- 2) Emphasis should be placed on supporting pupils to identify appropriate pathways that celebrate and utilise their unique and diverse skills and abilities.

Recommendations

- 1) In 2018/19 every pupil leaving Coláiste Feirste, the first Irish-medium post-primary school, entered into employment, training or further education. Case studies like this should be explored and documented as examples of best practice in ensuring pupils leave school with opportunities, regardless of their academic achievement;
- 2) The Entitlement Framework should be reviewed to ensure all pupils have access to a wide range of subjects which will enable them to fill key roles in society. In the Irish-medium context, IM pupils must have access to these subjects through the medium of Irish;
- 3) The shift in focus towards supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing should be strengthened and promoted.

Single education system - Options available and likely impact of anticipated outcomes

What would the characteristics of a new single education system look like:

CnaG's small workforce is committed to its task and has gathered valuable sector-specific expertise not available elsewhere within the education system pertaining to immersion education. We would have no issue with – in principle - working within a single system, subject to the following criteria:

- 1) Any new system accepts and treats IME as an equal partner, with equitable treatment, in board level decision making.. Such a relationship would require that the CnaG CEO sit on any new board to ensure that the voice of IME is heard clearly at the highest levels. CnaG is currently an Arms Lengths Body and some mechanism must ensure that IME maintains its singular focus of maintaining and improving educational provision and outcomes free of political interference;
- 2) The linguistic integrity of the organisation is fully maintained and respected. CnaG works through the medium of Irish, which is crucial, and mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that this method of working is recognized, valued and maintained. CnaG recommends that, in finding a new model, that the Independent Review considers the administrative model used in Wales for administration of Welsh medium schools and streams. There is a 'Welsh in Education' unit, with a Strategic Advisory Board, within the Welsh Language Division of the Welsh Government which works with local education authorities to ensure statutory duties are met with regard to Welsh language provision within these authorities. Section 84 of The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act legally requires local authorities to prepare a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (Welsh Government, 2021). For additional background information on the Welsh system please see Mercator Research, 2014;
- 3) Similarly, to follow the approach adapted in Wales where the Government has a Welsh-medium Education Strategy in place, working alongside governing bodies, unions, diocesan authorities etc. to pro-actively increase the number of children being educated through the medium of Welsh, increase awareness of the benefits of Welsh-medium education etc. The Welsh Government also ensures that there is a strong legislative basis for the teaching and learning of Welsh, covering all areas of education from pre-school to curriculum and that the development of Welsh in the education system is included as a central part of the new assessment and evaluation framework for system-wide development and improvement.
- 4) All government policies, initiatives, protocols etc. which have any impact on IME should be subject to 'Irish proofing' - that is, that the effect of any and all policies, initiatives and protocols should be scrutinized with regard to the effect these would have on IME.

Conclusions/Recommendations

This briefing paper has presented the core issues with relation to IME, making specific reference to the Independent Review of Education's own Terms of Reference. The challenges facing effective and optimum delivery of IME are substantial and the delivery of solutions to these are located outside scope of CnaG's remit, structure and - more pertinently - its budget allocation. This paper has also presented a number of strategic recommendations which, if implemented, CnaG believes will:

- 1) Raise standards and improve outcomes for all children within IME setting;
- 2) Improve support to the IME setting and IM practitioners at all levels to improve the learning environment and outcomes for children and young people;
- 3) Improve the design of education and efficiency of delivery towards more effective, sustainable, streamlined delivery model (single education system).
- 4) Give effect to the Statutory duty for IME as described in high court rulings in 2011 and 2014; essentially that the duty has 'practical consequences and legislative significance' and is not merely 'aspirational'.

APPENDIX 1 - EVIDENCE BASE/RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (2020) 1A IME Sectoral Development Plan (Draft) (includes trends/projections for the IM sector) - <https://www.comhairle.org/english/about/publications/>

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Fortune, T. W. (2012) What The Research Says About Immersion Education - https://carla.umn.edu/immersion/documents/ImmersionResearch_TaraFortune.html

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RSM McClure Watters (Consulting) Ltd/ Department of Education (2019) - Research on the Educational Outcomes of Pre-School Irish Medium Education <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/irish-medium-pre-school-research>

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (2021) 1B The Impact of Covid-19 on the Irish-medium Sector <https://www.comhairle.org/english/about/publications/>

NISRA (2021) Irish Medium Education 2020-2021 - <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/support/geography/northern-ireland-super-output-areas>

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(2016) Destination of Trainee IM Teachers Post-Graduation from St Mary's University 2013-2015

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Department of Education (2021) A Fair Start: Final Report and Action Plan

Department of Education (2021) Common Funding Scheme, 2021-22 <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/common-funding-scheme-2021-2022>

1C) Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (2019)

Salisbury Report (2013), Independent Review of the Common Funding Scheme <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/independent-review-common-funding-scheme-1>

Harney, A. (2018) A review and report on the effectiveness of apps and web games in the area of education through Irish or in the teaching of Irish - <https://www.cogg.ie/wp-content/uploads/A-review-and-report-on-the-effectiveness-of-apps-and-web-games-in-the-area-of-education-through-Irish-or-in-the-teaching-of-Irish.pdf>

Department for the Economy (2019) Skills Barometer

Bradley, F. and Kennelly, J. (2013) The Irish Edge: How Enterprises Compete on Authenticity and Place, Orpen Press, Dublin

Welsh Government (2021) Guidance on Welsh in Education Strategic Plans

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-02/guidance-welsh-in-education-strategic-plan.pdf>

European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning (2014), 'Welsh: The Welsh Language in Education in the UK (2nd Edition)

https://www.mercator-research.eu/fileadmin/mercator/documents/regional_dossiers/welsh_in_the_uk_2nd.pdf

Not referred to but possibly of use - Department of Education (2012) Needs Assessment and Feasibility Study for the Development of High-Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish for Children with Special Educational Needs in the Irish-medium Sector