

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta



COMHAIRLE
NA GAELSCOLAÍOCHTA



Corporate Plan

2019-2021

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Corporate Plan 2019–2021

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1. Chairperson's Foreword

In 2020 we will be celebrating 20 years of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG,) the organisation established by the Department of Education in 2000 to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education. Although a number of schools were already established by then, the sector has progressed substantially, and in that period almost 100 providers, from pre-school to post-primary and units have been established.

In truth, it has been an eventful journey, which hasn't always been easy. There have been many struggles with the authorities; there has been stress and hardship. Undoubtedly, as we progress through the life-span of this Plan, CnaG and the wider IM sector will encounter similar challenges, but it is certain that we will prosper in the coming years, as we have done in the past. There is a significant growth in the numbers of parents choosing Irish-medium education for their children and numbers of pupils and schools are growing year on year. Through this Plan, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta will offer support and assistance to those wishing to establish new schools; provide direction to those working in or on behalf of existing schools and to show leadership to the wider IM sector.

We hope to relocate to new offices on Broadway early in the New Year, and I am certain, with our relocation to the heart of the Gaeltacht Quarter, that a new and exciting era is in store for IME in the coming years.

G.P.A. Adams, Cathaoirleach.

2. Chief Executive Officer's Foreword

As we look towards our Corporate Plan for the next three years, it is worth reflecting on the challenges that faced the organisation from 2015-19.

The Comhairle, during this time, reviewed and restructured the Board of Management, reducing it from 22 to 14 members, introduced new governance systems and carried out a major staff restructuring exercise. Through this period of change, the Comhairle continued to work for and represent the sector from Pre-school to Post-Primary, ensuring continued growth and development throughout the period. In 2015 there were 5,525 pupils overall in the Irish Medium Sector in the north. By 2019 that had increased to 6,519 a growth overall of 18%.

| <u>Growth in the Sector 2015-2019</u> | |
|--|---------------------|
| School Type | Growth Level |
| IM Pre-school | 8.3% |
| IM Primary School | 18.6% |
| IM Post-primary School | 24.8% |

Significantly, there has been a notable increase in demand for IME at Post-primary level, as more parents and pupils become convinced of the extra benefits that flow from Irish Medium Education and bilingualism in general.

Throughout this growth, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta has been representing the sector in the Area Planning Process, ensuring Development proposals for increased enrolments and required accommodation are brought forward and new settings planned for. Comhairle, through its IME Sectoral Plan, published in 2016, has been highlighting to the Department of Education the need for a range of improvements to the sector and the need for inequalities in educational supports, resources, accommodation and sites in the sector to be addressed urgently.

The next three year plan for Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, therefore, shall see a continued shift in emphasis to consolidation within the sector, strengthening the position of smaller schools to move towards sustainability. We have been strongly advocating for the sector to ensure the right resources are available to improve on the delivery of educational services to our young people and holding government accountable for the delivery of its statutory duties towards our schools and children.

Liam Ó Flannagáin, CEO

3. Introduction and Background

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (Comhairle / CnaG) is the organisation responsible for providing advice pertaining to the development and provision of Irish-medium Education (IME) to the Department of Education (DE). The Belfast Agreement, also known as the Good Friday Agreement, placed a statutory duty upon DE “to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education”. Article 89 of the 1998 Education (NI) Order that followed, contained provision to allow DE to pay grants to any “body appearing to the Department to have as an objective the encouragement or promotion of IME”. In 2000, DE established Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta to carry out this function.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta offers support and assistance to those involved in the IME sector in four broad areas;

- Support for current provision: Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta facilitates the development of existing Irish-medium provision at preschool, primary and post-primary levels;
- Planned Development: Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta facilitates the continued growth and development of the IME sector through the implementation of a spatial strategy for the development of IME in partnership and cooperation with other educational partners;
- Performing an advocacy and marketing role on behalf of the sector with voluntary, private and public sector bodies & agencies, politicians, political parties and the general public;
- Supporting families sending children to IME: providing support to the families and children attending IME in ways that will support their educational development outside the school setting which will contribute to their education outcomes.

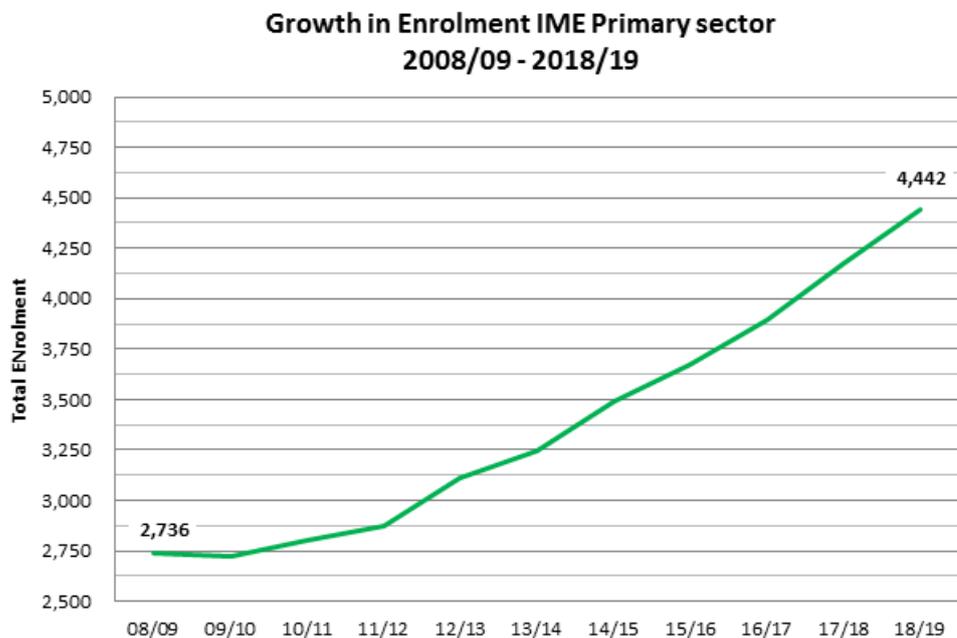
The IME Sector; Growth and Development

The IME sector in the north of Ireland started with the setting up of an independent Irish-medium primary school “Bunscoil Feirste” in 1971 and has grown significantly over the last 45 years. IME still only makes up a relatively small proportion of the education sector (c.2.5%) but this fact means that the sector’s potential to expand is significant.

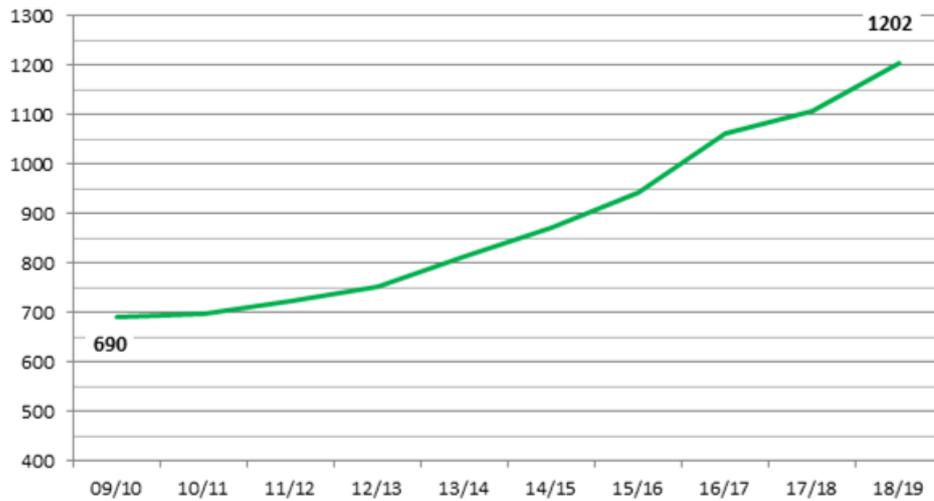
Historic and projected growth of the sector

Whilst growth within the sector has been steady over the past 45 years, the last ten years in particular have seen the speed of this expansion increase. This has meant that overall enrolments in the primary sector increased from 2,742 in September 2009 to a projected 4442 in September 2019. This represents a growth of approximately 65% in the sector over the decade. During the same timeframe, intakes into the sector have increased by almost 80% from 393 pupils in 2009 to an estimated 706 in September 2019.

The growth in the sector has been both rapid and steady and the following graphs demonstrate the growth trend over the last 10 years, in Primary and Post-primary phases:



Growth in IM Post-Primary Enrolments 2009 - 2019



This pattern of growth demonstrates that even with a modest anticipated growth of 2% per annum (currently growing at an actual rate of 4.5% per annum,) this would result in an increase of 33% in pupil numbers in the sector over the next seven years.

It is vitally important therefore, to analyse the trends in relation to growing enrolments and to strategically plan for the expansion and improvement of existing provision to accommodate future growth, including the need for additional teachers, teaching resources, new accommodation etc.



Beneficiaries of the Irish-medium Education Bursary Scheme

Building Sustainable Enrolments within the Sector

Over the last five years CnaG has adopted a strategy of consolidation within the sector in order to increase the sustainability of existing schools. CnaG has not prioritised the setting up of new IM primary provision and has instead supported existing schools to build admissions and enrolment to improve their sustainability. This is illustrated by considering the average size of Primary 1 intakes which have increased from 14 pupils per class in 2009 to 20 pupils in 2018/19 – a growth of 43%.

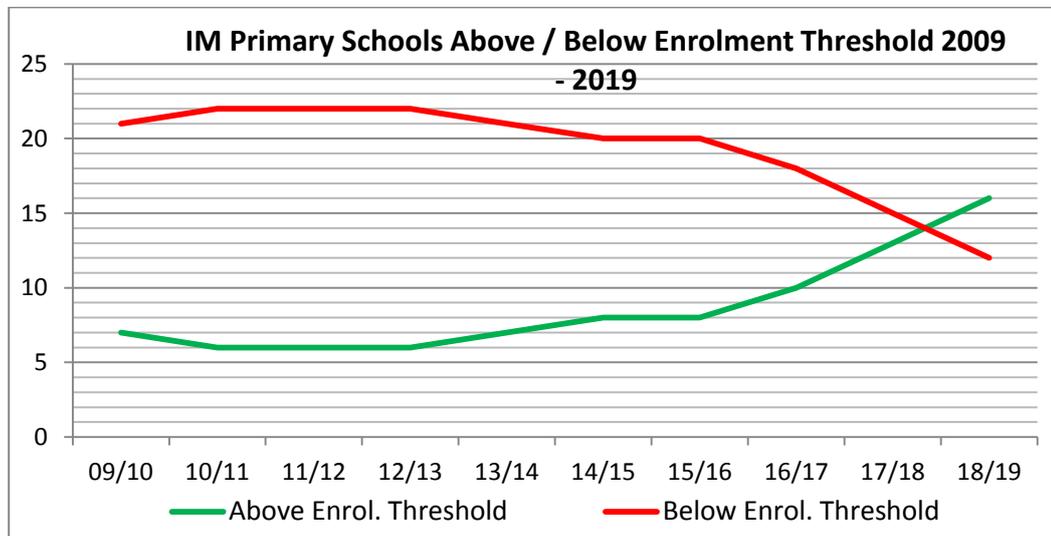
CnaG has been focussing on supporting schools to become sustainable, both in terms of the qualitative and the quantitative criteria and has been concentrating resources on schools and areas that have specific challenges or those have not yet met the target long-term enrolment threshold. CnaG's focus is to build a sustainable admissions pattern within schools that will, over the longer term, meet and surpass the minimum enrolment figures proposed, and continue to defend the position of strategic small schools.

A vitally important part of this consolidation process is the delivery of the required buildings, sites and resources to provide a high quality learning environment to accommodate this level of admissions. Poor facilities, dilapidated buildings and lack of space to accommodate new pupils, unfortunately is still too prevalent in our sector and create major obstacles to schools being able to build their admissions and have the opposite effect of encouraging and facilitating Irish-medium Education. The improvement of the IM school estate will continue to be a key area of activity for CnaG.



Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin, North Belfast, New Build

Considerable progress has been made on building enrolments and admissions over the last 5 years. The number of IM schools with enrolments below the Sustainable Schools Policy minimum enrolment thresholds has fallen sharply from 21 in 2009 to 12 in the 2018/19 academic year; this represents an increase of 32% in the number of sustainable IM schools.



Other Key Challenges facing the IM Sector

A review of the policy and educational environment challenges facing the sector analysed in CnaG's *IME Sectoral Plan*, identifies a number of key areas where Comhairle will be focussing on driving improvements, along with key partners, including.

- Special Educational Needs (SEN) and the provision of Learning Support Centres
- Irish-medium School Support Services, particularly within the Education Authority
- Development of the Irish-medium Learning Community
- The implementation of a Teacher Supply Development Plan, including subject specialists at post-primary level
- Provision of Resources for IME schools including the new C2K roll-out, assessment tools and a language framework for IME
- Development and Support for the IM Pre-school and Early Years Sector
- Support for Boards of Governors in IM schools
- Cross-border Collaboration, particularly the reinstatement of the North-South Standing Committee



Meeting of the Irish-medium Principals' Forum, June, 2019

4. Current Organisational Structure

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is managed by a voluntary board of 14 directors. Membership of the Board of Directors is by nomination by named groups and organisations that have an interest in IME. Each of these nominating organisations is entitled to nominate one representative to the Board of Directors. The groups and their nominating entitlement are laid out in Figure 1.

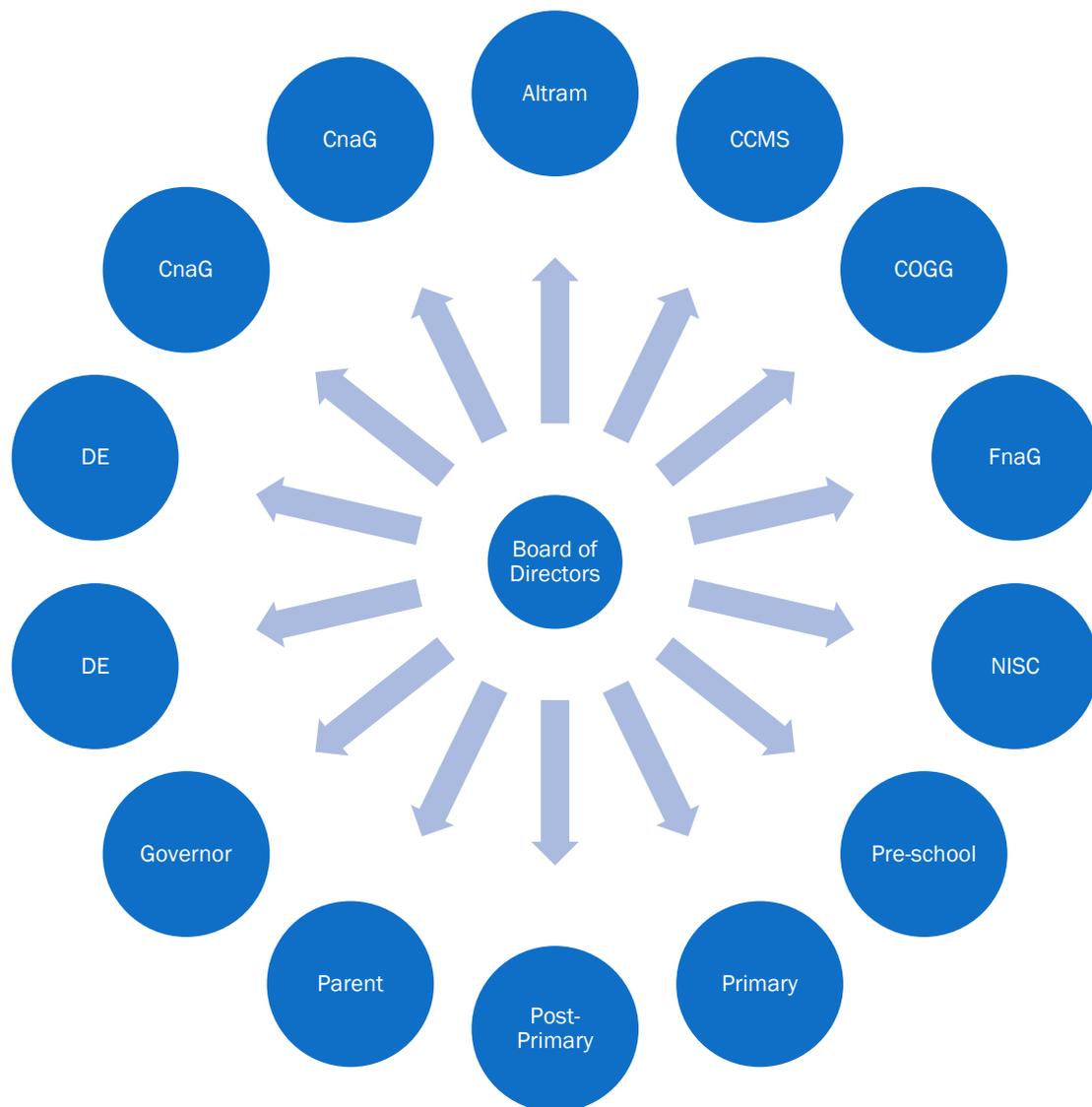


Fig. 1: *Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta Board of Directors*

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is managed on a day-to-day basis by its Chief Executive and four senior members of staff. In addition Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta employs three advisory officers and two administrative staff. The staffing structures are laid out below in Figure 2.

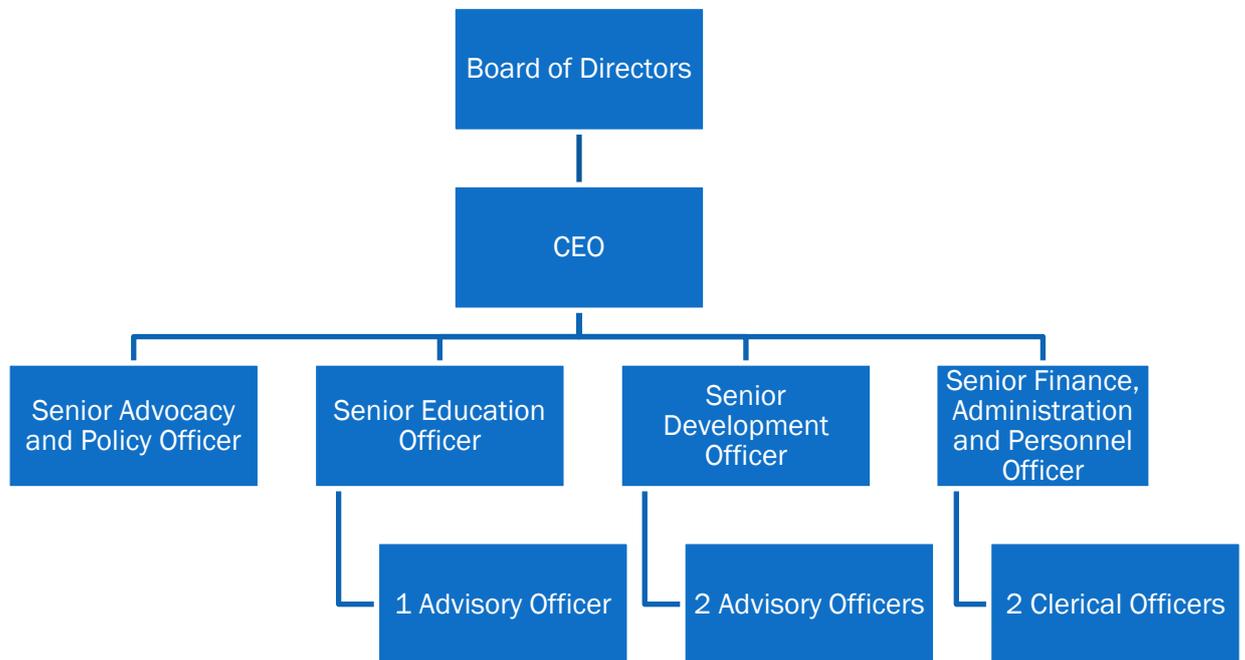


Fig. 2: *Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta Organisational Structure*

This Corporate Plan contains a set of agreed aims and objectives that will direct the work of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta for the next three years. All Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta business will be carried out within the framework of the Corporate Plan. This will help to facilitate the organisational decision-making processes, providing the opportunity to achieve maximum efficiency.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta delegates Board responsibility to four permanent sub-committees that provide Directors with a forum to analyse and debate particular issues before making recommendations to the Board for ratification. Figure 3 illustrates the sub-committee structure.

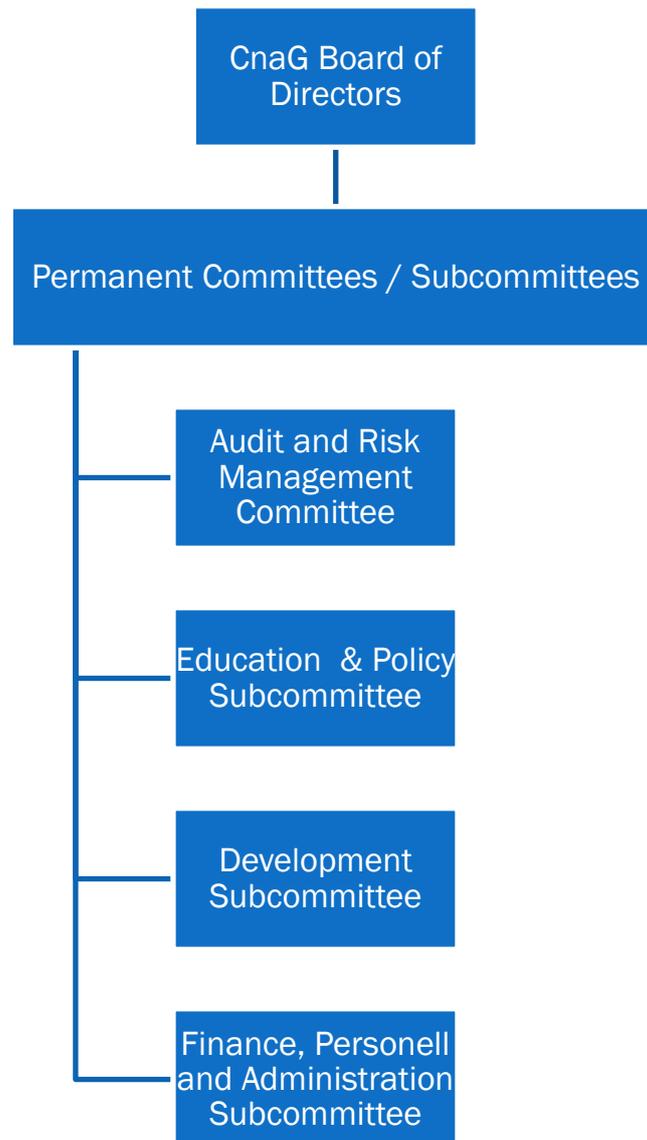


Fig. 3: *Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta Sub-committee Structure*

5. Vision, Mission and Key Strategic Aims

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta's **vision** for the Irish-medium sector is;

A network of vibrant, viable Irish-medium schools, from pre-school to post-primary, providing excellence in education, at the heart of developing Irish Language communities.

CnaG's **mission** is;

To contribute to the development of vibrant Irish-speaking communities by ensuring access to high quality Irish-medium education to those who desire it.



Students and Staff of Gaelcholáiste Dhoire

Key Strategic Aims

Aim 1

To be a highly effective sectoral support body from pre-school to post-primary and including IM units, ensuring the fullest implementation of the Statutory Duty to IME and to tackle inequalities of provision.

Aim 2

To develop and consolidate the IM sector to ensure sustainability of schools and the provision of high quality resources for IME including accommodation, facilities, teaching and learning resources, SENIM and teacher supply and support.



Launch of new Irish Language nursery schools

Aim 3

To encourage collegiality and sharing of good practice within the IM sector and to work with support agencies outside of the sector, regarding school improvement and governance issues, specific to Irish-medium education.

Aim 4

To contribute to the development of Irish-speaking families and communities through the effective promotion of the benefits of IME, the Irish language and bilingualism in general, and to encourage networking with other Irish language and community organisations, locally and on an all-Ireland basis.



Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta Annual Conference

Aim 5

To encourage and facilitate high-quality provision in all phases of Irish-medium education and to advocate effectively across all agencies that contribute to the achievement of excellence within the sector, ensuring the best possible educational outcomes for our children.



Celebration of Irish-medium Education, City Hall, April, 2019

6. Guiding Principles

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta will be guided in all its activity by a number of guiding principles.

- a. **The interests of the Child:** CnaG will ensure that it serves the interests and rights of the child in all that it does.
- b. **Irish-language ethos:** CnaG will seek to promote a strong Irish-language ethos and an understanding of the principles of language planning and immersion language learning at all levels within the sector.
- c. **Sector-Driven:** CnaG shall seek to continually improve its engagement with the sector to ensure it represents accurately its views, aspirations and concerns.
- d. **Accountability:** CnaG's governance and management will be accountable to the IM sector organisations, to parents and to the Department of Education in respect of its responsibilities in delivering on its vision and in relation to the expenditure of public funds.
- e. **Courage and Integrity:** CnaG shall show courage and integrity in standing up for the interests of our pupils, staff and families in its dealings with government and other powerful interests.
- f. **Partnership & Inclusiveness:** Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta will promote inclusiveness in its activities and will work towards creating partnerships within the community and voluntary sector, and across the range of statutory, political and private-sector organisations that can potentially have an impact upon Irish-medium education.

7. Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta Board of Directors, 2019

| Name | Office | Nominating Authority |
|-----------------------|--------|----------------------|
| Gerard P Adams | Chair | DE |
| Gillian McGrath | | CCMS |
| Muireann Ní Mhóráin | | COGG |
| Seosamh Ó Coinne | | Foras na Gaeilge |
| Seán Mac Corraidh | | NISC |
| Diarmaid Ua Bruadair | | Post-primary |
| Máire Uí Dhochartaigh | | Primary |
| Áine-Máire Uí Néill | | Pre-school |
| Pádraig Ó Mianáin | | Parent |
| Niall Ó Catháin | | Governor |
| Áine Andrews | | Altram |
| Alison Mc Crudden | | DE |
| Pauline O'Hare | | CnaG |
| Pádraig Ó Tiarnaigh | | CnaG |

8. Partner Organisations

Below is a (non-exhaustive) list of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta's main partner organisations:

- Altram
- An tÁisaonad
- Area Planning; Local, Steering and Working Groups
- C2k
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)
- Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)
- Childcare Partnerships
- An Comhairle Um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)
- Conradh na Gaeilge
- Department of Education
- Education Authority
- Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)
- Fóram na nÓg
- Foras na Gaeilge
- Gaeloideachas
- Gaelchultúr
- Gael Linn
- Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta
- Irish-medium Learning Community
- Northern Ireland Council for Children and Youth (NICCY)
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)
- Political Parties
- Pre-school Education Group (PEG)
- St Mary's University College
- University of Ulster