**The Irish Medium School Leaders Working Group**

**Collaborative Practice to Drive School Improvement**

**Foreword**

In the context of a meeting on school leadership and management in June 2015, which included proposals from the recently completed work of Comhar na nGobhanróiri, the Minister for Education agreed to form a working group of Irish medium school leaders to develop proposals for a regional programme to facilitate the development and sharing of best practice in order to drive school improvement. This decision was taken in recognition of the significant differences between the developmental needs of English medium education and those of the Irish medium sector in terms of pupil needs, pedagogy and the development of sectorally specific capacity.

The Irish medium sector has, and continues to contend with sectorally specific challenges, including the relatively small size of Irish medium schools and the fact that the majority of these are led by teaching principals. These challenges necessarily impact on the development of an effective professional learning community within the sector and on effective utilisation of the skills and experiences of Irish medium school leaders and teachers.

The challenge, and the aim of the Working Group, was to set out practical and deliverable solutions to help drive school improvement in the Irish medium sector through for example collaborative practice.

Specifically, the Working Group was tasked to:

* Recommend how examples of effective practice might be identified and developed within the Irish medium sector.
* Propose mechanisms by which effective practice might be developed and shared.
* Make recommendations regarding CPD opportunities to enhance further the professional capacity of Irish medium educators.
* Consider the resourcing and funding implications of the proposals.
* Contextualise the proposals in respect of the distinctive challenges which Irish medium schools face.

**Membership of the Irish Medium School Leaders Working Group**

The members of the Working Group were:

Eilis Uí Néill Group Chair and Principal Scoil na Fuiseoige

Caitriona de Bleine Co-ordinator of IM Stream Coláiste Chaitriona

Pilib Misteil Principal Bunscoil an tSléibhe Dhuibh

Risteard MacDaibhéid Vice-Principal Gaelscoil na gCrann

Micheal Mac Giolla Ghunna Vice-Principal Coláiste Feirste

Tarlach Mac Giolla Bhride Senior Development Officer Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta

Eibhlin Mhic Aoidh Member of Board of Directors Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta

Emer Mhic an Fhaili SEN Coordinator Coláiste Feirste

Deirdre Nic Suibhne Principal Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí

**Other Attendees**

Jill Garland 0bserver Education and Training Inspectorate

June Neil Senior Adviser Project Management - EA

Máire Kerr Admin Support Advisory Teacher for Literacy in IME – EA

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**1. Irish Medium Education**

**1.1 A Definition**

Irish-medium education is a distinctive part of the education system within the North of Ireland. Effective practice in the delivery of Irish-medium education has evolved using a range of approaches adapted to meet local circumstances. Those currently in place include Irish-medium pre-school settings and nursery units, primary and post-primary schools, and Irish-medium units at primary and post-primary schools. The statutory definition of an Irish-medium school is provided in Article 3(2) of the 2006 Education Order, which states ‘‘… a school is an Irish speaking school if more than one half of the teaching of (a) Religious Education and (b) the minimum content of the areas of learning other than that called Language and Literacy, is conducted (wholly or partly) in Irish, and “school” includes part of a school.’

**1.2 Unrecognised Difference**

Irish-medium education, in common with all sectors of education, has its main focus on the children under its care, to nurture their educational, social, physical, emotional, personal, linguistic, developmental, intellectual and spiritual needs. However, Irish-medium education also develops bilingual pupils, proficient in both Irish and English.

Irish Medium Education differs fundamentally from all other sectors in that it provides an alternative system of education. The immersion/bilingual model of education espoused by IM schools is not replicated by any other sector and thus this entails major implications in terms of pupil need, pedagogy and sustained sectoral development.

There is a perception that something of a cavity has arisen between the sector and the relevant education authorities. Though DE has undertaken consultations with the sector, including IM Review, ESAGS and CRS policies, during which the developmental needs of the sector were identified repeatedly, there are concerns that without representation at appropriate levels and forums, these urgent needs are relegated. For example, during the ESAGS consultation period, the imperative issue of reading texts was raised and yet there are no graded reading texts for IM pupils beyond Year 3. One reading scheme for Foundation Stage now exists, which has been developed by practitioners in conjunction with the Áisaonad in recent years. This is most welcome but there are currently no plans or funding to take this forward to provide any other year group with suitable reading texts to develop their skills of bi-literacy and thus this remains a grave concern for all schools.

**1.3 Irish Medium Sector Growth**

The Irish medium education sector has been growing since its foundation in the establishment of the first Irish medium primary school in Belfast in 1971, which was recognised for grant aid by the Department in 1984.

This growth looks set to continue with new schools opening every year.  Most recently, a second post primary school opened in Dungiven serving the Irish Medium primary schools in County Derry. Currently there are a total of 44 nursery, 35 primary and 5 post primary units and schools providing Irish-medium Education to over 5,000 children.

Many of the schools are located in areas of high social deprivation with over 75% of the pupils attending qualifying for free school meals. The schools also have a high percentage of children with special educational needs.

All of the schools have been established by parents with a deep commitment to the Irish language and Irish cultural identity. The sense of common purpose across the school community, between governors, staff and parents, brings an enriching and highly motivating dynamic; builds community confidence and capacity and raises levels of achievement.

**1.4 Challenges**

* The IM sector has to compete for the Department’s attention amidst the challenging issues of the English Medium sector.
* The Department’s policy approach and initiatives are developed with the English Medium sector in mind and do not necessarily fit the Irish Medium Sector.
* Irish Medium schools, as pioneers of bilingual/immersion education, face unique challenges in the delivery of the NI school curriculum relating to pedagogy and practice, curriculum content and resources.
* Special Education Needs provision within the IM pedagogy is a key issue for the Irish Medium Sector at primary and post primary level.
* The availability of teachers across all curriculum subjects continues to be an issue due to the continuing rapid growth of the sector.
* The provision of teaching and learning resources for the IM sector does not meet the need. DE and CCEA have begun to address this challenge but we are still at the beginning of a process.
* There are currently no appropriate tools to accurately assess pupils’ progress within the IM sector.

Though this report contains certain proposals for the short-term, an overarching sectoral development and support plan is necessary if school improvement is to be advanced in a substantial way within the sector. Unless the myriad of issues and needs are accurately identified and a corresponding sectoral development plan is formulated and implemented, the Working Group consider that the sector will be impeded in its endeavour to effect real improvement and to ensure equality of access and resource for IM pupils.

The objective of this report is to set out proposals to develop practical and deliverable solutions to help drive school improvement in the Irish-Medium sector through collaborative practice. Such an approach is well founded.

*“We encountered collaborative practice wherever there are high-performing schools… Collaborative practices embed routines of instructional and leadership excellence in the teaching community, making classroom practice public, and develop teachers into coaches of their peers. These practices are, in turn, supported by an infrastructure of professional career pathways that not only enable teachers to chart their individual development course but also help to share their pedagogic skills throughout the system. Collaborative practices shift the drive for improvement away from the centre to the front lines of schools, helping to make it self-sustaining.”*

*McKinsey & Co, How the world’s most improved school systems keep getting better, 2010*

**2. Collaborative Practice to Drive School Improvement**

**2.1 Context**

At the outset it is important to state that collaborative practice will only be effective in the context of a comprehensive strategy and framework for IM, including appropriate structures within the Education Authority to support the sector’s unique needs.

The Education and Training Inspectorate, in their publication ‘A Guide to Collaborative Practice’ (2012) stated clearly the need for a framework and set of guiding principles if collaborative working is to be effective.

Within any pilot, they identified 4 key strands to describe effective collaborative practice

1. **Identifying a clear rationale and strategic approach to collaborative working.**

*The evidence indicates that collaborative working will have the most effective outcomes for learners when the participating schools have a clear concept of working together in partnership and an agreed rationale about the benefits and outcomes sought.*

1. **Deploying resources and agreeing shared responsibilities to enable the collaborative work to progress smoothly and to address any difficulties which may arise.**

*Deploying resources and achieving shared responsibility are the most important challenges in managing collaborative working projects effectively.*

1. **Building a collaborative ethos and school commitment to inclusive planning.**

*Building a set of indicators for collaborative working is an attempt to develop the concept of shared learning beyond the idea of schools working together for a limited time or a single event, to a position where pupils across schools share educational experiences as an effective way to meet their learning needs and promote their wellbeing.*

1. **Monitoring and evaluating the impact and establishing the sustainability of further collaborative action and outcomes**

*While acknowledging the critical role of a school’s commitment to shared learning, assessment of learning and evaluation of the outcomes need to be at the heart of decisions about effective collaborative working. Clarifying the aims and outcomes must ensure that working collaboratively will enhance and enrich what is already happening in schools and enable a profile of effective inclusive learning to develop.*

Monitoring and evaluating the impact of collaborative practice within the IM sector will be hindered substantially through the lack of fit for purpose standardised testing. (See section 5.1)

There is significant effective practice and expertise in IM schools as evidenced by ETI reports, however, schools and their practice are isolated both geographically and by the lack of opportunities for effective practitioners to share practice. Releasing effective practitioners from school duties to share and develop practice in other schools would be detrimental to the education of their pupils unless quality substitute cover is available. Given the rapid growth of IM schools there is at present a dearth of such substitute teachers. In addition, the newly qualified teachers available need good opportunities for professional development.

**2.2 Irish Medium Learning Community**

The Area Learning Community (ALC) approach has been an effective basis for collaborative practice between schools to share and develop good practice in a range of areas, including senior and middle leadership development, coaching, staff development, literacy, numeracy, STEM and CEIAG, common In-service days and in bringing teachers of subject areas together. ALCs are now beginning to look at cross-phase collaboration, developing practice and resources. There is no similar provision for Irish-medium.

***Recommendation***

That a cross-phase Irish Medium Learning Community be established, funded and supported similar to the current Area Learning Communities.

* Linked to DE through the Standards Team
* Supported by EA through a Designated Senior Officer for IM at Advisor Officer Level who as part of his/her portfolio will oversee the coordination of the Irish Medium Learning Community. (see Recommendation 3.1)
* Supporting School Improvement through a Leaders Group, subject specific collaborative practice and an Impact Project for Literacy, Numeracy, ICT and SEN.

**2.3 Building Leadership Capacity through Collaborative Practice**

Within the IM sector leadership capacity has been developed at all levels rapidly in recent years as evidenced in various ETI reports. However given the continuing growth of the sector, the number of small and recently-established schools and the young age and experience profile of school leaders, it is important to continue to develop this capacity in a more systemic approach in order to sustain school improvement. Collaborative practice is an effective method for doing this.

***Recommendation***

That a Leadership Group be established within the IM Learning Community.

The role of the Leadership Group within the IM Learning Community would initially be to:

* Inform DE and EA on the pedagogical and other needs of the sector, including a sectorally-specific Professional Learning Strategy
* Identify, develop and disseminate effective practice in schools in relation to school development planning and self-evaluation (e.g. several principals working on school development planning together)
* Identify areas for school development in a collaborative way and to develop improvement action plans on a cluster or sectoral basis
* Develop progress on sectorally-specific benchmarking – the assessment, monitoring and target-setting process
* Develop clusters/subgroups for the dissemination and development of effective practice on specific issues at middle-leadership level (e.g. literacy, numeracy, ICT, SEN)
* Collaborate with other IM-related organisations on an all-Ireland basis to secure a research-informed approach to collaborative practice, the appropriate use and development of IM educational resources and to engage in professional development in language competence
* Facilitate coaching and mentoring and to give all principals the opportunity to work and develop at a strategic level (e.g. creating a support framework and network for new principals)
* Identify issues for joint School Development/In-service Days/other staff capacity building opportunities (e.g. ICT solutions)

**2.4 Building Teacher Capacity through Collaborative Practice**

Many teachers in the IM sector have worked in small schools from being newly-qualified and have not had access to a collaborative approach to the development of their capacity. In addition, outside of the small IM specific provision, the School Development Service has limited experience and specialist knowledge of IM pedagogical issues.

Opportunities for the dissemination and development of effective practice can be created through a collaborative approach.

***Recommendation***

That teachers are given the opportunity to come together collaboratively to share and develop practice on priorities identified by the Leaders Group within the IM Learning Community from their collaboration in school development planning on 4 key areas from pre-school to post primary: Literacy, Numeracy, ICT, SEN.

* Supported by Fronter, ESaGs.tv, good practice seminars
* Supported by the expertise of resourcing organisations related to IM provision
* With the support of a co-ordinator/experienced teacher/advisory officer.
* Under the strategic direction of the Leadership Group within the IM Learning Community, similar to the current ALCs’ role in agreeing, directing and managing working groups of middle leaders on a range of issues.

**2.5 IMPACT Project**

Within the context of the IM Learning Community and building teacher capacity through collaborative practice, significant progress would be achieved in driving school improvement, through releasing an experienced teacher in each of the core areas of Literacy, Numeracy, ICT and SEN; to support other less experienced teachers in the dissemination and development of effective practice.

***Recommendation***

* That effective practitioners be released to disseminate and develop good practice in the areas of Literacy, Numeracy, ICT and SEN – working with middle leaders and clusters on priorities identified by the Leadership Group within the IM Learning Community; and working in individual schools, clusters of schools and organising seminars for the dissemination of good practice.
* That this Project be developed from Year 1 (release of effective practitioners 1-2 days per week to scope out and plan for meeting the need) to Year 2 and 3 involving further release and implementation of the plans.
* The effective practitioners will be recruited through a selection process facilitated by EA, with the participation of ETI and the IM Learning Community Leaders Group.

While not wishing to be prescriptive, there follows indicative models of collaborative practice for the IMPACT Project within the IM Learning Community.

**2.5.1 Literacy and Numeracy (including Assessment)**

The challenges and issues in respect of teaching and learning in the IM setting with particular reference to Literacy and Numeracy have been repeatedly emphasised in previous DE Reports including the Review of Irish Medium Education (2008) and the Irish Medium Count, Read, Succeed Policy (2009-2011). The most crucial consideration therefore, must centre on how the recommendations previously and recurrently made might be brought forward.

Key features would include:

* Work on agreed priorities strategically set by the Leadership Group within the IM Learning Community and informed by the documents, policies and research outlined above.
* In school support from experienced practitioner to disseminate effective practice.
* Regional cluster meetings led by experienced practitioner.
* Co-ordination and support by Irish-medium Officers in EA.
* Development of support and guidance materials
* CPD programme
* On-line support via ICT solutions such as Fronter, ESAGS /EA TV

**2.5.2 ICT**

A blended learning approach using ICT-rich opportunities to support other learning strategies is increasingly regarded as a best-practice model. ETI in conjunction with c2k have run a number of best practice events in recent years for the English-medium sector and one event for the Irish-medium sector, in order to develop ideas and pedagogy in this area and to offer school leaders the opportunity to hear about examples of good practice. ETI for example[[1]](#footnote-1) contend that ICT should be embedded in school work and life:

* in teaching and in learning
* in school management and decision-making
* in professional development

Under the IMPACT Project initiative recommended in this report, an effective practitioner would be released to deliver a programme of support, auditing, sharing and development of good practice and effective resources (including ICT skills through literacy and numeracy). This would support:

* the sharing and further development of best practice within the sector in relation to the use of ICT solutions,
* Effective e-learning.

This would be delivered through:

* In school support from experienced practitioner to disseminate effective practice.
* Regional cluster meetings led by experienced practitioner.
* Co-ordination and support by Irish-medium Officers in EA.
* On-line support via ICT solutions such as Fronter, ESAGS /EA TV

**2.5.3 Special Educational Needs**

The development of capacity through training and collaborative practice is crucial. Through this IMPACT Project a primary leading SENCO would be released to visit schools; say 5 days per supported school. The first day would encompass an audit of existing provision. The second day the supported school would visit the school of the SENCO Lead in order to observe practice. The third day the SENCO Lead would feedback on his/her review of current practice, make recommendations and discuss with the supported school how best to progress changes in practice. The fourth and fifth days would be distributed at intervals to allow ongoing engagement between the supported school and the SENCO Lead within the IM Learning Community.

While the above will undoubtedly improve the capacity and practice of SEN practitioners within the school environment, this will be undermined if the wider needs of Special Educational Needs provision within the IM sector are not addressed. (See section 5.2)

**2.6 Effective Collaboration in the Transition from Primary to Post Primary**

The effective transition of pupils from P.7 to Year 8 is recognised as very significant in the educational life of a child. In particular the effectiveness of the transition in curriculum can have a huge influence in a child’s achievement in their post primary education. There is a recognisable dip in educational performance for some children in Year 8. In Irish-medium education children make a specific transition in curriculum and face different challenges from that of English-medium. In order to minimise these challenges and make the transition as effective as possible it is important that teachers at KS3 and KS4 are collaborating effectively both in terms of pedagogy and of individual pupil need. In addition, collaborative practice between teachers at KS2 and KS3 will develop pedagogical practice, teacher competences and capacity.

***Recommendation***

That the present KS2 – KS3 CPD collaborative practice project be extended and supported for the IM sector.

**3. Delivery Structure**

**3.1 Designated Senior Officer within the Education Authority**

There is a strongly held view within the sector that there have been multiple reports on the development of Irish medium education but inadequate progress in implementing their recommendations.

***Recommendations***

* That there is a designated senior officer within the Education Authority at Advisor Officer level, based within the School Development Service, with full time responsibility for Irish medium education.
* That within this portfolio of responsibility for IM, he/she has specific responsibility for the coordination of the IM Learning Community and for the delivery of the recommendations within this report, particularly with regards the models of collaborative practice which will drive school improvement.
* That administrative support commensurate with the position is also provided.

**3.2 Operational Support Officers**

The IM Learning Community will require extensive day to day operational support.

***Recommendations***

* That the 2 current Assistant Advisory Officers for IM within the School Development Service report to the Advisor Officer with responsibility for IM outlined above and that their work is refocused to provide operational support to the IM Learning Community.
* That a third Assistant Advisory Officer is appointed with specific responsibility for SEN support. (See section 5.2 The SENIM Hub/Service)

**3.3 Backfill Support Teachers x 4**

The IM sector continues to grow at both primary and post-primary level, creating difficulties in recruiting high quality teachers and in covering for short-term absences due to courses and long-term absences particularly maternity leaves. The successful delivery of the collaborative practice models outlined in Section 2 will require additional measures to allow for the release of experienced practitioners to the IMPACT Project and the general participation of teachers in IM Learning Community workshops.

***Recommendations***

* That a team of 4 backfill non specialist teachers are appointed and given effective professional development opportunities as a group collaborating and supporting each other in a professional learning community using Fronter and other tools, and supported by the initial teacher training institution. The backfill support teachers will cover for the absence of the experienced practitioners who are leading the IMPACT Project in Literacy, Numeracy, ICT and SEN.
* That an additional exceptional closure day is provided for within the IM sector to facilitate professional development workshops within the IM Learning Community.

**3.4 Web Portal**

The Review of Irish Medium Education published by the Department in 2008 highlighted the importance of maximising the capability of ICT in delivering sustainable and high quality education. Significant advances have been made in recent years through the C2K initiative in harnessing ICT to enhance educational practice. The extension of these initiatives to the IM Learning Community offers the opportunity to expand, enrich and strengthen current practices and processes of teaching, learning and leadership.

***Recommendation***

That an IM Learning Community Web Portal be created as part of the continued development of C2K. The web portal will support the IM Learning Community through:

* An online library of resources developed by the IM Learning Community lead practitioners.
* Discussion fora.
* Short videos.
* On line access to the Learning Community’s meeting papers.

**4. Indicative Costs £**

**Fulltime Designated Senior Officer at Advisor Level** 61,854

**Commensurate Administrative Support** 15,000

**Additional Asst. Advisory Officer x 1** 54,118

**Backfill Support Teachers x 4** (Spinal point M1)105,432

**Resources**

* Computer equipment and associated software (non-recurrent) 10,000
* Leaders Group Workshops x 3 3,000
* Subject specific Workshops x 3 12,000

in each of Literacy, Numeracy, ICT, SEN

* Lead Practitioners’ Resource Costs 8,000
* Lead Practitioners’ Mileage Costs 11,520

(Say 8 practitioners x 2 days x 36 weeks x 50miles @ 40p)

**Web Portal** (Non-recurrent £20,000)25,000

**Total Cost £305,924**

**Cost Allocation**

Management and Operational support 130,972

IMPACT Project (2-3 years) 124,952

IM Learning Community Resources 20,000

Non-recurrent set up costs 30,000

**5. Other Areas for Development in Support of School Improvement**

**5.1 Assessment**

Recent recommendations by OECD highlight the need for the education sector as a whole to engage in an amalgam of assessments and break out of the narrow view currently held by DE which focuses on Key Stage results and GCSE results. This has practical implications for the English medium sector whilst providing particular challenges to IM Education.

**5.1.1 Assessment for Learning**

This involves observation of teaching, monitoring of work, peer teaching, peer learning, skills to self-evaluate, marking, feedback, and differentiation (not an exhaustive list). The IMPACT Project can deliver through Assessment for Learning strands in Literacy and Numeracy. This will share the required systemic and aspirational nature of this area by looking to highly effective practices and practitioners and disseminating through the project. (See section 2.5)

**5.1.2 Assessment of learning**

Non-verbal or cognitive testing takes place to guide teachers and schools and parents in terms of attainment and more specifically tackling under-achievement. All of these are only available in English, thus calling into question the confidence in the tool especially in KS1.

Standardised testing is the most common method for this, and is widely used. IM schools also use these assessments, however their application is nevertheless controversial as they are in English, and the confidence levels are not as empirical as they are in the English Medium sector.

An old assessment in Mathematics was translated by individual schools, and is still well used however, it is more than 15 years out of date. Drumcondra (Dublin based tool) is used as well, however, it works of Sten instead of Stanine, which causes difficulties regarding validity and transference of standardised data.

Other methods include reading ages (all English), Marie Clay (foundation stage), Comet (foundation Stage), NILA AND NINA (computer based assessment developed by DE), internal school assessments such as spelling.

DE rely heavily on end of Key Stage (1&2) in primary and GCSE in post primary. In primary, English Medium schools are again at an advantage in that all the tasks that exemplify the levels were immediately available to them. In Irish Medium schools some tasks have been translated by CCEA, however, most remain in English only, rendering an inequality, again. At post primary in the IM sector, the exam papers of children doing GCSE examinations are in some instances translated and marked by English-speaking examiners.

In 2012 a DE sponsored report concluded that there was no need for high end diagnostic assessments in IM education. This was and is not accepted by the sector.

***Recommendation***

* That DE employ the services of the Áisionad to take forward bi-lingual and Irish Medium assessments and a tailored diagnostic tool to assess Mathematics, English, Irish and cognitive ability.

**5.2 Special Educational Needs**

This section sets out the rationale for a new articulation of policy to underpin IME excellence, which must include sectorally sensitive special educational needs provision. A key deliveryobjective is the creation of a coherent and well-coordinated system of services through EA to cater for the unique needs of SENIM (Special Educational Needs: Irish Medium).

Despite a number of reports and initiatives, including the *Review of Irish Medium Education 2009*, there still remain significant barriers to SENIM provision to ensure that all pupils receive the pedagogic-specific and language-specific support appropriate to an Irish-medium environment. This is further compounded by a lack of understanding and co-ordination among current responsible agencies to ensure adequate support for SENIM children. A tailored SENIM policy is urgently required, along with the creation of a coherent and well-coordinated system of SENIM services through EA which will result in children fulfilling their potential.

The Department of Education recently launched a consultation in relation to draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations which cites the need to put in place a new SEN Framework:

*“The new SEN and Inclusion Framework will continue to focus on inclusion, early identification, assessment and intervention for children with SEN through a more equitable framework in which all children with SEN should be able to get the support they need when they need it.”*

That the principles of equity, inclusion, early identification, assessment and intervention are referenced is welcome. However, even in terms of the current framework, the Irish-medium sector faces a number of sector-specific challenges not faced by the English-medium sector. These challenges are extensive, and of such a nature, that the current support framework for SEN children in the IM sector clearly does not ensure equity, inclusion, early identification, assessment and intervention.

While SENIM education does, of course, have much in common with that in the EM sector, there are also significant difficulties in terms of context, research, support, expertise. The following areas are those where SENIM is most different from EM SEN:

* The lack of diagnostic tools reflecting an immersion context;
* The lack of accessible research to support good practice;
* The lack of expertise within interfacing or support agencies with regard to immersion;
* The overall resource deficiencies – reading resources in particular;
* The lack of SEN-specific materials to support learning in SEN pupils;
* The experience profile in the sector in general terms and in relation to SEN in particular;
* The lack of IM specific ITT and CPD modules to support practitioners, teachers and classroom assistants;
* Deficiencies in the Peripatetic Service in staff numbers, IM expertise, Irish language skills;
* The challenges of embedding immersion methodology and pedagogy effectively throughout SENIM on a cross phase basis.

***Recommendations***

* *Collaborative Practice:* The development of capacity through training and collaborative practice within SENIM is crucial. A deliverable programme is required; where a primary leading SENCO would be released to visit schools perhaps 5 days per identified school. (See section 2.5.3)

It is also recommended that a structure is established to disseminate good practice in SENIM from excelling schools, as identified by the ETI. A recent exemplar being the recognition of a Bunscoil whose SEN provision is built around the core values of: **E**arly identification, **E**ffective intervention, On-going **e**valuation and Personal **e**xpertise. (See section 2.4)

The success of this process of dissemination depends on structure, resourcing, finance and time and it is therefore recommended that a **SENIM Framework** is established in which DE explains and outlines its role to IM stakeholders as a foundation to the development of such a framework. No one is currently responsible for this.

* *The SENIM Hub/Sevice:* Through the existing SEN network of external support, some excellent professional relationships have developed, and many children have received far-reaching support. However, this varies significantly in a regional context. In some cases, staff turnover, an inconsistent approach or budgeting restraints means that the professionals’ understanding of the SENIM child is often lost. No uniform, language specific support exists in SENIM for a range of needs and services such as ASD, educational psychology, behaviour, counselling, speech therapy and family services. In addition, many IM Principals and SENCOs find that professionals do not understand the nature and profile of the SENIM child, and assessments are either inconclusive or misleading.

NB. We anticipate the upskilling of existing and new SENCOs through the training and guidance within the collaborative practice model. However, our SENCOs, having identified particular SEN concerns, will still not have access to sectorally specific support. In anticipation of a SENIM hub, we recommend the immediate appointment of an Assistant Advisory Officer who will be tasked with responding to and supporting the needs of our IM school SENCOs. (See section 3.2)

It is recommended that a Hub/Service is created to develop a system-led approach to identification, intervention and support to meet the needs of the IM child.

* This could be accessed at Stage 3 of The Code of Practice (COP) by parents and professionals from nursery onwards.
* Monitoring this system will indicate that intervention has helped and thereby stem the flow of abstract or invalid referrals to Stage 3 Psychology, representing both a more responsive service to the child and an efficiency saving in the long-term.
* This Hub should be staffed/supported by experienced SENIM professionals with an understanding of IM;
* The operational structure of this Hub must be coordinated from within the proposed IM infrastructure within EA.
* A network of SENIM professionals which schools can access through outreach.
* *Nurture:* It is essential that a network for IM specific Nurture centres or nurture supportis developed. This development will feed back into the understanding of teachers in mainstream, thereby delivering optimum outcomes for all pupils. By employing the best practice models that exist in English-medium, we must collectively decide: “what is an IM nurturing school?” Consideration must be given to:
* An IM sensitive approach to measure the need for nurture through use of existing data (similar to the index of multiple deprivation) and diagnostic tools (similar to the Boxall profile);
* The modelling of good nurture practice and policy, as identified by the ETI;
* An explicit understanding that nurture units are not to be treated or allowed to lapse into behavioural centres, or avenues towards exclusion;
* Nurture through SENIM operating as a medium to facilitate the re-integration of the children back into the mainstream setting;
* Action based research to assess the benefit of SENIM Nurture.
* Review of SEN modules: It is apparent that newly qualified teachers continue to face particular challenges in relation to SEN issues and have to develop their capacity very quickly. As a result, the following should be considered:
* IM BEd/PGCE students receive sector-specific SEN training;
* The ITE portfolio includes a complement of compulsory generic SEN modules (content not IM based);
* Research opportunities for doctorate level psychology students in IM areas will not only develop our understanding, but would allow EA to incorporate Educational Psychologists with a high command of the Irish language.
* In terms of CPD, the development of a diploma/MEd specific to SENIM in order to further develop expertise in the sector.
* In order to address these recommendations, long term funding will be required to facilitate part-time courses which could be offered by our HE colleges (including Stranmillis and St. Mary’s).
* Models of Intervention:IM schools are ever willing to utilise successful EM models of intervention and support to promote learning. At times, unavailability, a time-bound plan or lack of funding is often cited as an excuse to block access to these models. In terms of literacy support, SENIM pupils cannot access English language peripatetic support in literacy until P5; though no robust research exists to suggest that the literacy needs of our learners should not be addressed earlier. In relation to SLD, the sector has suffered because of the element of ‘removal’ for support from the Bunscoil to outside EM support. This contravenes the principle of inclusion, as supported by the implementation of SENDA (the Special Educational Needs & Disability Act) 2001. It is therefore recommend that existing and emerging models are made available on a regional basis.

* These models cannot be stand-alone, but must be integrated into school practice in regard to pupil tracking.
* As cited, examples of current use of existing models should be shared through collaborative practice through the training and the dissemination network.
* Highly successful models such as Reading Partnership, Accelerated Reading, Mathletics, Reading Recovery and Writing Partnership integrated into programmes of support.

**5.3 Continuing Professional Development**

**5.3.1 Current Provision**

Teacher education for Irish-medium schools has been developed at St Mary’s University College in a higher education-schools professional partnership model.

Initial teacher education for Irish-medium primary schools was introduced in 1995, based at St Mary’s University College. That provision has subsequently been expanded to include initial teacher education for the post-primary sector. This investment in the foundations of teacher competence is highly relevant to the strategic planning of continuing professional development (CPD) for the sector. Newly qualified teachers with the TICO (IM PGCE) qualification, already have M-level credits and are very aware of the benefits of developing professional competences within an M-level framework. In a sector where staff accelerate into leadership roles at a robust pace, the CPD of staff needs to be supported by high academic as well as professional standards and should not be reduced to a more limited format.

In 2011 the college expanded Irish-medium provision through a programme of CPD for teachers in Irish-medium schools which addresses both the pedagogical and linguistic needs of teachers within its M-level programme. A linguistic enhancement course for classroom assistants and ancillary staff in IME schools was also initiated in 2011. These CPD courses for teachers and for classroom assistants and ancillary staff are funded by the IME bursary scheme provided by the Department of Education and administered by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

Some academic research on bilingualism, immersion and Irish-medium education and on Irish language issues is carried out by staff at St Mary’s, St Patrick’s Drumcondra and other HE providers across Ireland. Much of this research has practical application in developing effective practice in the IM classroom. The continuation and expansion of this work is important to the continued development of effective practice in the sector.

Irish-medium educational resources and materials are also available to full-time and part-time students including the most up to date productions from the Irish-medium resource unit (Áisaonad Lán-Ghaeilge) which is based in St Mary’s University College. CCEA could also assist in this work given their role in the translation of resources for Irish-medium and their role in curriculum development generally.

**5.3.2 A Support Framework for Collaborative Practice**

For the collaborative practice model to be effective in sharing and developing practice for school improvement, it must be supported by a sectorally-specific framework. Teacher capacity and competences must be developed in parallel to practice in order to validate and develop the practice.

Initial Teacher Education

A sectorally unique element of IME is that many beginning and Early Professional Development (EPD) teachers find themselves in new or growing schools without senior leaders and carrying out tasks and roles beyond their capacity and experience. They regularly carry out the following:

* Curricular development
* Working with a management committee or Board of Governors
* Working with parents
* Policy development
* Safeguarding
* Pastoral care
* Human resources

The outworking of this is that many teachers must focus on school development and sustainability instead of their own CPD.  This has led in the past to issues with standards and achievements.

***Recommendations***

* Beginning and Early Professional Development (EPD) stage teachers should have access to appropriately experienced and qualified senior leader's support.
* IM specific pedagogical development is required in the beginning teacher and early professional development stages.

Longer Qualified Teachers

In terms of the continuing professional development of longer qualified teachers, it is important that they have opportunities to develop their understanding of and practice in the IM-specific learning context and the pedagogical questions that arise. Otherwise collaborative practice will occur in a pedagogical vacuum and there will be no basis for assuming that the practice being shared and developed is *best practice* for IM children.

There have been some developments in IM-specific initial teacher education and CPD over the last two decades, however DE’s *Review of Irish-medium Education* 2009 concluded that more actions were required and made some recommendations – which remain to be completed.

This Report makes the following recommendations.

***Recommendations:***

* Continuation and extension of the IM bursary scheme for Diploma and Masters-level courses;
* Bursaries for PhD research into pedagogical issues identified by the IM sector through the Leadership Group within the IM Learning Community;
* Structured and sustainable partnership arrangements for the delivery of CPD between Initial Teacher Education providers, EA and IM schools;
* CPD for the Irish-medium sector to be supported by a higher education framework, addressing the need for the highest academic standards as well as the need to build the capacity of classroom-based researchers.

**Appendix I**

**Irish Medium Schools Geographical Distribution in Northern Ireland**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **COUNCIL AREA** | **NURSERY/****Naíscoil**  | **PRIMARY/****Bunscoil** | **POST-PRIMARY/****Iar-bhunscoil** |
| **1 - BELFAST** |  | 9 | 1 |
| **2 - NORTH DOWN AND ARDS, NEWRY MOURNE AND DOWN** |  | 5 | 1 |
| **3 - ARMAGH BANBRIDGE AND CRAIGAVON, LISBURN AND CASTLEREAGH** |  | 3 | 1 |
| **4 - MID ULSTER, FERMANAGH AND OMAGH** |  | 9 | 1 |
| **5 - ANTRIM AND NEWTOWNABBEY, MID AND EAST ANTRIM** |  | 2 | 0 |
| **6 - DERRY CITY AND STRABANE, CAUSEWAY COAST AND GLENS** |  | 7 | 1 |
| **TOTAL: 84 Schools**  | **44** | **35** | **5** |

|  |
| --- |
| **1 - BELFAST** |
| **PRIMARY** |
| Bunscoil an tSléibhe Dhuibh | Co. Aontroma |
| Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin | Co. Aontroma |
| Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain | Co. Aontroma |
| Bunscoil Phobal Feirste | Co. Aontroma |
| Gaelscoil an Lonnáin | Co. Aontroma |
| Gaelscoil na bhFál | Co. Aontroma |
| Gaelscoil na Móna | Co. Aontroma |
| Scoil an Droichid | Co. Aontroma |
| Scoil na Fuiseoige | Co. Aontroma |
| **POST-PRIMARY** |
| Coláiste Feirste | Co Aontroma |
|  |
| **2 - NORTH DOWN AND ARDS, NEWRY MOURNE AND DOWN** |
| **PRIMARY** |
| Bunscoil an Iúir | Co. an Dúin |
| Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche | Co. an Dúin |
| Gaelscoil na mBeann | Co. an Dúin |
| Gaelscoil Phádraig Naofa - **IM Unit** *(St Patrick’s PS, Crossmaglen)* | Co. Ard Mhacha |
| Scoil Mhuire & Phádraig - **IM Unit** *(Our Lady and St Patrick PS, Downpatrick)* | Co. an Dúin |
| **POST-PRIMARY** |
| Ardscoil Mhaolmhaodhóg Caisleán Uidhilín - **IM Unit***(St Malachy’s HS, Castlewellan)* | Co. an Dúin |
|  |
| **3 - ARMAGH BANBRIDGE AND CRAIGAVON, LISBURN AND CASTLEREAGH** |
| **PRIMARY** |
| Bunscoil na mB C **IM Unit** *(CBS Primary School, Green Park)* | Co. Ard Mhacha |
| Bunscoil Eoin Baiste **IM Unit** *(St John the Baptist PS)* | Co. Ard Mhacha |
| Bunscoil Naomh Proinsias - **IM Unit**  *(St Francis Primary School)* | Co. Ard Mhacha |
| **POST-PRIMARY** |
| Coláiste Chaitríona **IM Unit** *(St Catherine’s College)* | Co Ard Mhacha |
|  |
| **4 - MID ULSTER, FERMANAGH AND OMAGH** |
| **PRIMARY** |
| Bunscoil an Traonaigh | Co. Fhear Manach |
| Bunscoil Naomh Bríd - **IM Unit** *(St Brigid’s PS, Maghera)* | Co. Dhoire |
| Bunscoil Naomh Colmcille - **IM Unit** *(St Colmcille’s PS, Carrickmore)* | Co. Thír Eoghain |
| Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí | Co. Dhoire |
| Gaelscoil Aodha Rua | Co. Thír Eoghain |
| Gaelscoil Eoghain | Co.Thír Eoghain |
| Gaelscoil na gCrann | Co. Thír Eoghain |
| Gaelscoil na Speiríní | Co. Dhoire |
| Gaelscoil Uí Néill | Co. Thír Eoghain |
| **POST-PRIMARY** |
| Scoil Iósaef *(St Joseph’s Grammar School, Donaghmore)* | Co. Thír Eoghain |
|  |
| **5 - ANTRIM AND NEWTOWNABBEY, MID AND EAST ANTRIM** |
| **PRIMARY** |
| Gaelscoil Éanna | Co. Aontroma |
| Gaelscoil Ghleann Darach | Co. Aontroma |
| **POST-PRIMARY** |
| None |
|  |
| **6 - DERRY CITY AND STRABANE, CAUSEWAY COAST AND GLENS** |
| **PRIMARY** |
| Bunscoil Cholmcille | Co. Dhoire |
| Gaelscoil an Chaistil | Co. Aontroma |
| Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir | Co. Dhoire |
| Gaelscoil Léim an Mhadaidh | Co. Dhoire |
| Gaelscoil na Daróige | Co. Dhoire |
| Gaelscoil Neachtain | Co. Dhoire |
| Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh | Co. Thír Eoghain |
| **POST-PRIMARY** |
| Gaelcholáiste Dhoire | Co Dhoire |

1. John Anderson, Managing Inspector, C2k conference: ***Integrating eLearning benefits and challenges***, 2 June 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)