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New policy on Gaeltacht education: Information meeting in Belmullet for Mayo Gaeltacht school communities

The recent *Policy on Gaeltacht Education (2017-2022)* outlines the new requirements for status as a 'scoil Ghaeltachta' or Gaeltacht school. Until the publication of this new policy last October, following extensive research and public consultation, 'scoil Ghaeltachta' was determined as any school located within official Gaeltacht boundaries. Now, however, Gaeltacht school status will be achieved through (i) a two-year total-immersion programme in the infant cycle during which no English will be taught (ii) all subjects apart from English are taught through the medium of Irish (iii) high quality educational experiences through Irish for all students, including the different language needs of native Irish speakers and learners of Irish (iv) priority being given to the use of Irish in communicating with parents and the local community. Further information about the Gaeltacht school recognition scheme is outlined in circular 0033/2017 which is available on the Department of Education and Skills website.

According to national and international research, the many advantages of this immersion education model (including education through the medium of Irish) include cognitive advantages and greater academic success, extra employment and economic opportunities as well as further linguistic, social and communicative benefits of fluency in an additional language. Moreover, the Educational Research Institute in Ireland reports that the standard of English and Maths in Irish-medium primary schools is well above the national average (further information and research is available at www.gaelscoileanna.ie, also see information handbook for parents about Gaeltacht school recognition scheme at

<https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Policy-on-Gaeltacht-Education-2017-2022/Brochure-for-Parents-Information-for-Parents.pdf>).

The implementation of the new *Policy on Gaeltacht Education* will begin in schools on a phased basis during the 2017/18 school year. Schools will have a period of up to 5 years to qualify and extra resources and supports will be provided for those schools seeking to maintain/obtain 'Gaeltacht' status over this five year period. All Gaeltacht schools are required to consult with their local community to discuss these changes and make a decision together regarding their future. Following from this, schools have until 15th June 2017 to register their expression of interest to participate in the Gaeltacht school recognition scheme.

This process is also linked with the new language planning process which is underway in Gaeltacht communities. Under *Acht na Gaeltachta 2012* every Gaeltacht community must now prepare and implement a plan to support and develop Irish language use in their area. If they don't do this, they could potentially lose their Gaeltacht status. *Acht na Gaeltachta* also presents enormous opportunities for each community to shape and sustain their linguistic and Gaeltacht future on their own terms, with the aim of ensuring that the Irish language is strengthened as a community and family language for years to come.

Gaeiloideachas (national body for Irish medium education) is hosting an information meeting and discussion about this for all school communities in the Mayo Gaeltachtaí, in the Broadhaven Bay Hotel, Belmullet on **Tuesday 30th May 2017 at 7pm**. If you're a parent, teacher, patron, member of board of management and/or parent's council and have queries about this or would like to hear more from a panel of speakers about this, please come along to this important event. Translation services will be available on the night if there is a demand and there will be an expert available to answer questions about the immersion education model. First hand experiences will also be shared from local school principals using the immersion model. RSVP eolas@gaelscoileanna.ie

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