

<b>Preasráiteas</b>  Press Release  13.03.2019	<b>Tuilleadh eolais:</b>  <a href="mailto:gaeilgeiniorras@gmail.com">gaeilgeiniorras@gmail.com</a>  <b>085 250 3321</b>  <a href="http://www.gaeilgeiorrais.ie">www.gaeilgeiorrais.ie</a>	*Tá leagan Gaeilge den phreasráiteas seo ar fáil ar iarraidh.
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## Door is still open to participate in the Gaeltacht school recognition scheme

Did you know that the door is still open to participate in the Gaeltacht school recognition scheme? The extra resources, additional supports and many advantages associated with participation in this scheme were discussed at a public meeting which was organised by Údarás na Gaeltachta and an Roinn Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta and took place in the Broadhaven Bay Hotel Belmullet last Thursday night (07.03.2019). Representatives from the Aonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta / Department of Education and Skills, an Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta, Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta and Gaeilge Iorrais f/ch Chomharchumann Ionad Deirbhile were also in attendance. Four speakers from these organisations presented the most up to date information available regarding the benefits of this scheme and progress to date.

Huge emphasis was placed on the *extra* supports available for participating schools in the scheme (for example, between 5-25 extra teaching hours, cúntóir teanga or a supplementary Irish language support role, €1,200 Irish language resources allowance, practical support from department inspectorate and COGG, alongside continual professional development opportunities for teachers). Schools that are currently taking part in this scheme are progressing at their *own pace* and with these supports in place. Furthermore, Gaeilge Iorrais has been allocated an annual budget of €100,000 to employ an Irish language officer and begin the implementation phase of the North Mayo Gaeltacht language plan. This will provide

additional supports for Gaeltacht schools and create more opportunities to use the Irish language in the North Mayo Gaeltacht community.

Presently 7 out of 16 primary schools in the North Mayo Gaeltacht (Erris) are participating in this scheme, which represents c.34% of the primary school population in this Gaeltacht area. Gaelcholáiste Chomáin Ros Dumhach and both secondary schools in Belmullet are also enrolled in this scheme (representing all 3 of the post primary schools in the area). In other words, 9 out of 16 primary schools are not currently participating in this scheme, which represents c.66% of the primary school population in the North Mayo Gaeltacht area. This is in direct contrast to almost 80% primary school uptake in this scheme to date throughout all Gaeltacht areas and the strong demand nationwide for gaelscoileanna or Irish medium education.

Until the publication of the *Policy on Gaeltacht Education (2017-2022)* following extensive research and public consultation, a 'scoil Ghaeltachta' was determined as any school located within official Gaeltacht boundaries. However, this policy outlines the new requirements for status as a Gaeltacht school. When this policy was rolled out in 2017, Gaeltacht schools were required to consult with their local community to discuss these changes and make a decision regarding participation in the Gaeltacht school scheme. It was noted at Thursday's meeting that in some cases, this decision was made in haste and with limited information which led to fear, frustration and ambiguity regarding, for example, the immersion education model, exact supports available and provisions for students with special needs. It was also noted that despite efforts to the contrary, there was and still is a lack of accurate information and clarity surrounding this scheme in the wider community.

The Gaeltacht school recognition scheme is directly linked with the language planning process outlined in *Acht na Gaeltachta 2012*. This means that these changes will eventually have implications for the Gaeltacht status of North Mayo, specifically in relation to the provision of Irish medium education available in the area or lack thereof. Schools and the education system alone cannot secure the future of the Irish language or Gaeltacht status, but they do have an important role to play in this process.

It was also suggested at this public meeting that there is still a need for more open discussion about participation in this scheme, without judgement or pressure, possibly at school catchment area level and based on the most up to date information available on the requirements, supports, and additional benefits of participation in the Gaeltacht school recognition scheme. The door is still open to participate in this scheme. The deadline has been continually extended to welcome new schools into the scheme. COGG and Údarás na Gaeltachta clearly stated at this meeting that they're available and willing to revisit this area to conduct further meetings about this, if there is a demand. Ultimately it is hoped to encourage more schools to participate in the scheme if they so wish.

Coupled with all of this, according to national and international research, the many advantages of the immersion education model (which is one of the requirements of Gaeltacht school scheme) 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 info & research available on [www.gaelscoileanna.ie](http://www.gaelscoileanna.ie) ).

What does this mean for you, your child and your school community? What do you want to do? Whether you're a (future) parent, a teacher, or a concerned member of the community, we ask you to have a think about this and make your voice heard. Gaeilge Iorrais believes in a positive future for the North Mayo Gaeltacht and aims to maintain and develop North Mayo as a thriving Gaeltacht area. Get in touch with us at [gaeilgeiniorras@gmail.com](mailto:gaeilgeiniorras@gmail.com) (085 250 3321) if you have any further queries about this.

**End / Críoch**