

Advice on Gaelic Education

**Gaelic Medium Education: total immersion,
including assessment**

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Key messages:

- Children and young people need to experience high-quality **total immersion as part of Gaelic Medium Education until they have a secure foundation in the language and a level of fluency that will enable them to build on the progress made in Gaelic.**
- Teachers' monitoring and tracking of progress and achievement needs to ensure that children have received sufficient total immersion.
- A range of approaches are used in total immersion to enable children to hear and absorb high-quality Gaelic.
- In delivering learning in the total immersion playroom and classroom, staff need to make use of the principles of curriculum design to ensure **learning which is progressive and coherent.**
- The **Curriculum for Excellence Benchmarks for literacy and Gàidhlig** have a key role in helping children to demonstrate their progress with the curricular levels for literacy and Gàidhlig.

7.1 Children and young people need to experience high-quality **total immersion as part of Gaelic Medium Education until they have a secure foundation in the language and a level of fluency that will enable them to build on the progress made in Gaelic** while, at the same time, acquire skills in reading and writing English. In the most effective practice, this is determined by teachers' tracking of progress and achievement to take account of each child's learning and development needs. In most situations, total immersion continues until late in P3. Through professional judgements, based on robust assessment and moderation, teachers can assess children's progress in total immersion. This needs to be confirmed further by the arrangements for monitoring and tracking at whole-school level. In cases where classes are multi-composite, the total immersion experience may be extended to P4, for example, to take account of class arrangements. This enables younger children more time to develop their early fluency in Gaelic language without possible interference from English in the classroom.

7.2 During total immersion, there is a clear emphasis on **developing fluency in Gaelic** first and foremost within the framework of Curriculum for Excellence. This is to enable children to experience a broad education that develops key skills for learning, life and work. There is a strong focus on literacy, numeracy and the development of active and healthy lifestyles at the early stages of total immersion. To achieve this, learning will firstly have a very strong focus on listening and talking in Gaelic through a play-based immersion curriculum. This is widely evidenced to be the most appropriate approach for the development of young children's early learning. Adults in the play and learning room have a key responsibility to use high-quality Gaelic to each other and to the children, both within play and learning and beyond. Staff model high-quality Gaelic to children and play alongside the children as an effective approach to learning. This is while at the same time speaking Gaelic all of the time. Staff have many roles in the Gaelic Medium playroom and classroom: care and nurture, model Gaelic, play, acting and using prompts to aid understanding, learn and teach. Staff are important role models for children and create an environment where Gaelic is valued and used all the time. As children play, staff need to be working alongside and interacting with children to enable them to develop their knowledge and skills in Gaelic language, whilst also following their interests, being creative and curious.

7.3 There is also a key role for **planning and delivering group sessions** in the early level to ensure language is being developed in a progressive way. This may be centred around, for example, singing, games, including those to develop language, telling and discussing a story, using pictures, role-play, routines such as snacks and checking in activities. In this, there is an important emphasis on **developing children's social language** so that they can begin to speak Gaelic for real and purposeful reasons. Staff need to build children's confidence in the use of Gaelic by encouraging them in making requests and the use of social language at snack time, for

example. This is done alongside the development of academic language so that they are also accessing learning across the curriculum. The development of social language helps develop language that can be used in the home. By encouraging parents to be involved in immersion play sessions, they can be supported in knowing what language may be used at home. It is also recognised in Gaelic Medium Education, while advisable and to be encouraged, that not all parents are able to speak Gaelic to their children.

7.4 Through play, children will access all areas of the curriculum, building their knowledge and skills through the medium of Gaelic. The regular changing of contexts for play, both indoors and outdoors, ensures that children's language and vocabulary is being extended. While children are free to play, adults interact with them, also playing and developing lines of imagination while building vocabulary and phrases through the use of the Gaelic language. Staff talk constantly providing commentaries in as much Gaelic as they can. For this, they ask questions, explain what they are doing in everyday routines and when engaging in activities with children such as arts and crafts. They intentionally enable children to hear language all of the time to help them absorb Gaelic. Children will initially listen a lot to Gaelic to build their understanding and may respond in their mother tongue. It is also helpful to model Gaelic. In other words, repeating to children in Gaelic in a sensitive way what they are saying in their mother tongue to help them learn Gaelic.

7.5 The role of reading stories aloud, sound files, singing songs, language games and the use of rhymes is very important in the immersion early learning and childcare setting. These should be used as part of group activities and for children to access independently. This helps children learn set phrases, which they absorb and then apply on a more independent basis. Children should be encouraged to watch, listen and interact with programmes on radio and the internet where they will hear Gaelic. It is also useful to be discussing these programmes with children. While listening to programmes is encouraged, this is not to be an approach that encourages learners to be passive. Children should be encouraged to retell stories, talk about illustrations and make up their own stories.

7.6 Initially children who enrol in early learning and childcare settings with no previous knowledge of Gaelic will devote a lot of time to **listening and absorbing Gaelic**. At the early stages, children will not immediately show understanding of all that is said to them through the medium of Gaelic. Their understanding is developing and should be aided with good language techniques such as prompting, rephrasing, acting and the use of pictures. They then start using common phrases and Gaelic that is heard in structured activities such as singing. Children will still initially express their feelings and thoughts in English with staff using a lot of repetition and prompting, and modelling in Gaelic of what children say in English.

7.7 It would be easy to adopt the ineffective practice of translating from Gaelic to English for a child who is learning through immersion. However, this is only denying children an opportunity to learn. In this situation, children are just learning that by waiting they will receive a translation rather than do the working out themselves. Having written text through the medium of Gaelic displayed around the school/ELC setting is also useful to developing fluency and creating an ethos for Gaelic. As the children develop skills in reading, bilingual text also denies an opportunity to learn. In this situation, children are likely to read the English version of the texts rather than do the working out for themselves.

7.8 In delivering learning in the total immersion playroom and classroom, staff need to make use of the principles of curriculum design to ensure **learning which is progressive and coherent**. The planning for learning involves grouping Curriculum for Excellence Experiences and Outcomes together to give opportunities firstly to listen to, understand and then talk in Gaelic. Learning approaches prioritise opportunities for children to hear and use Gaelic. The modelling of high-quality Gaelic language by adults is important in enabling children to absorb the language. As learners master these skills, they will then be introduced to reading and writing in Gaelic at the primary stages. As children become comfortable with being immersed in the language their learning broadens to the outcomes of other curricular areas, such as numeracy and mathematics

and the expressive arts. Over time, as learners become secure in their fluency of Gaelic, all skills will be developed together in an integrated way, using grouping of Curriculum for Excellence Experiences and Outcomes across the curriculum. This will include a range of approaches to learning and teaching, for example, play, projects, learning outdoors and role-play.

7.9 Within the total immersion stage, **assessing literacy skills comes later** as learners become confident in their mastery of Gaelic. The processes involved in developing fluency in Gaelic embed literacy skills and, through time, learners will show readiness to demonstrate their progress in these skills.

7.10 The **Curriculum for Excellence Benchmarks for literacy and Gàidhlig** have a key role in helping children to demonstrate their progress with the curricular levels for literacy and Gàidhlig. By the end of P1, children who have been immersed in Gaelic in early learning and childcare centres should be able to demonstrate their progress within the early level and by the end of P4 the first level. Due to the initial focus on language development, children learning through the medium of Gaelic will not be taking forward the Curriculum for Excellence Experiences and Outcomes across the curricular areas in the same order and way as their peers in English medium education. They will demonstrate equal competency, if not better, by the end of P7. The Curriculum for Excellence Experiences and Outcomes for literacy and English are not at all covered during the total immersion phase.

7.11 *Building the curriculum 5: A framework for assessment*¹ helps define the principles of ‘robust assessment’ on which to base monitoring and tracking of children’s and young people’s progress and achievement. It highlights that assessment practices should be seen from the perspective of the learner. Learners should be engaged in all aspects of assessment processes and be afforded an element of choice and personalisation in showing that they have achieved the intended outcomes. As learners move through the curriculum, they will experience a range of approaches to assessment articulated to the medium in which they learn - Gaelic.

HM Inspectors have identified the following key features of highly effective practice in [assessment](#).

<p>1 Strong leadership and direction in the use of assessment. Senior leaders have a clear strategy for promoting assessment as an integral part of learning and teaching.</p>	<p>3 A range of well-considered and carefully planned approaches to moderation, including those using the National Benchmarks within and across schools, supports staff to make confident and accurate judgements. This also increases the reliability of assessment data and is leading to improved outcomes for learners.</p>	<p>5 Skilled analysis and interpretation of high-quality assessment data supports robust tracking and monitoring of learners' progress. It ensures that next steps in learning for individuals and groups of learners are identified accurately.</p>
<p>2 A range of assessment data is used very effectively to identify learners' needs and plan learning across the school, specifically for targeted groups of learners.</p>	<p>4 High-quality professional learning which builds teachers' and practitioners' confidence and increases their skills in accurate assessment of learners' progress.</p>	<p>6 Children and young people are fully involved in the assessment of learning. High-quality feedback and learning conversations ensure that children and young people have sound knowledge of themselves as learners. They understand what is expected of them, their strengths and the areas where they need to improve.</p>

Pupil level data, as recorded by teacher professional judgement, will be collected for children in Gaelic Medium Education who are in P1, P4 and P7, *and for young people in S3 studying literacy and Gàidhlig (Gàidhlig)* and those studying a subject/context of the curriculum through the medium of Gaelic *as part of Gaelic Medium Education*. The data collected will be the most recent level achieved (including up to Curriculum for Excellence fourth level), in line with National Benchmarks on Achievement of a level.

In the case of Gaelic Medium Education, assessment, moderation and recording of the achievement of a level works with the principles of immersion as described in this Advice.

¹ [Building the Curriculum 5](#) (2011)

In the case of literacy and English language, the performance of children in Gaelic Medium Education should not be compared with that of their counter parts in English medium education before the end of P7. By this stage in Gaelic Medium Education children will have studied enough English language for comparisons to be drawn. It also means that other assessments, such as those for numeracy, may need to be made available through the medium of Gaelic so that English is not a language barrier for children and young people in demonstrating their skills, knowledge and understanding. In translating such assessments, a check also needs to be made on whether the assessments match to the developmental stage of concepts in Gaelic. Direct translation in itself is not sufficient and does not automatically lead to parity of assessing knowledge, skills and understanding through Gaelic and/or English. This, however, is not to replace the correct use of assessment in Gaelic Medium Education.

7.12 When **Gaelic and English Medium provision are together in the one school, all children need to have an opportunity to learn Gaelic and learn about Gaelic culture and heritage as part of Scotland's identity**. The 1+2 Approach to language learning presents such opportunities for learning Gaelic. Gaelic needs to be heard and visible all of the time within classrooms, beyond the classroom and outdoors. Those doing Gaelic Learner Education also practise their Gaelic to help develop their fluency and to give real-life opportunities to apply their Gaelic. Gaelic is used in whole-school events and venues. Gaelic is visible, for example in signage and in communications such as letters and emails. This embeds Gaelic out with the classroom.

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