

Advice on Gaelic Education

Gaelic Medium Education: total immersion

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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 **'significant aspects of learning' and associated progression statements 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 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 curriculum, which 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 the play and learning and beyond. Staff model high-quality Gaelic to children and play alongside the children as an effective approach to learning, 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 of 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 while 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

speaking 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 which can be used in the home. By encouraging parents to be involved in 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 in as much Gaelic as they can, ask questions, explain what they are doing in everyday routines and when engaging in activities with children such as arts and crafts. They are aiming to enable children to hear language all of the time to help them absorb Gaelic. Children will initially listen a lot to build their understanding and 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, group games and the use of rhymes is very important in the immersion early learning and childcare centre. 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 which 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 centres 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 understand 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 which 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 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 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 **‘significant aspects of learning’ and associated progression statements 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 working at the same rate of learning and progress as their peers in English medium education through the Curriculum for Excellence Experiences and Outcomes across the curricular areas. They will demonstrate equal competency, if not better, by the end of P7. The Curriculum for Excellence Experiences and Outcomes for English and literacy 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. In some cases, local authorities use standardised assessments to measure performance. In the case of 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

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

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 outwith the classroom.

