

Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce



Gaelic Immersion Advice Paper A Guide to good practice

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Background

This paper was written by a working group of Taobh na Pàirce staff for Education Scotland in Spring 2014. It contains sound advice on how to create and maintain a Gaelic language environment in the primary school. There is an expectation that the advice contained will be followed by all staff members.

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Creating a Gaelic environment:

For most pupils in GME, their main exposure to Gaelic language is within the school day. Every opportunity must be taken to create and maintain an environment where Gaelic is heard and seen so that all learners have good opportunities to reach fluency. At all stages, exposure to the language is paramount as gradually the progression from listening, to understanding, to engaging, to talking and to conversing in Gaelic occurs. At all stages there is a continuous focus on extending Gaelic language skills through both planned and unplanned opportunities.

Care must be taken to avoid translation to English, except when absolutely necessary.

This total immersion environment is achieved through:

- all staff taking responsibility for the development of all pupils' Gaelic. This involves getting to know learners on a conversational basis and taking every opportunity to speak to them in the passing
- being in the habit of creating and using opportunities for meaningful oral engagement throughout the school day where learners are encouraged and challenged to express themselves in Gaelic
- staff speaking Gaelic with the learners even where their parents are around
- praising and encouraging all learners for using their Gaelic, even if it is just one word
- greeting parents in Gaelic and supporting parent learners in trying out their Gaelic.
- creating an environment where staff converse in Gaelic as a matter of course, for example at breaks, lunch, in corridors, in the playground; holding staff meetings in Gaelic.
- celebrating the wide range of dialects/usage within the staff complement as a way of enriching the linguistic experience for all.
e.g.uisge/bùrn
- delivering every curriculum area through the medium of Gaelic
- following a policy and programme where older pupils act as models and support for younger learners
- creating a Gaelic hub within the school by hosting Gaelic playgroups, Gaelic classes etc
- providing, or working with partner providers to offer Gaelic before and after-school care
- working closely in partnership with local Gaelic groups such as Comunn nam Pàrant and building strong links with the wider Gaelic community - both locally and throughout Scotland and beyond
- providing learners with opportunities to speak to other Gaelic speakers beyond peers and staff

- using Gaelic-only signage in corridors, on doors etc; posters etc translated into Gaelic.
- creating Gaelic resources and translating resources into Gaelic
- giving Gaelic music and culture high status; maximizing the opportunities that local and national events such as mods offer and incorporating the preparation for these in whole class planning

e.g. all children working on storytelling; all children learning a poem

- making effective use of technology to engage and encourage pupils
- making full use of media to provide and create authentic texts. e.g. Gaelic websites, radio, television programmes, Scottish Book Trust Authors Live
- in Gaelic Medium units, physically grouping the Gaelic classes together to create a mini Gaelic environment
- in larger settings, considering how best to physically arrange classes so that younger pupils are hearing the spoken language and older pupils are given good reasons to use it

Achieving and sustaining total immersion

Early Level:

The nursery class:

As in other settings, the GME nursery playroom is a very child-centered environment, with opportunities for all kinds of play provided.

A very dynamic Gaelic language environment is layered on top of this with staff skillfully managing planned and unplanned opportunities for developing Gaelic language.

This approach involves:

- ensuring that Gaelic is heard in use around the playroom; staff with staff and staff with learners
using props, signs and gestures to assist with understanding, rather than using English
- creating many opportunities to converse with learners about everyday life, as often as possible
- using routines to practise key phrases daily
- making use of games, songs, stories to teach vocabulary and language patterns; repeating, revisiting, re-emphasising
- using words that are similar to English as a way in when teaching new vocabulary
e.g. pinc, càr, cat before dearg, rothair, cù
- planning and delivering daily small-group sessions for concentrated language input, where all learners have an opportunity to speak
- making effective use of visuals to support new language
- annotating displays, large and small, with Gaelic-only text.
- taking time to introduce vocabulary that supports current individual interests

C1:

At this stage there will most likely be a wide range of levels of linguistic competence in classes; fluent speakers, learners with two years of pre-school GME, learners with a little pre-school immersion and learners with no Gaelic at all. The approach here builds on nursery practice with the class teacher creating opportunities for developing fluency and understanding. When planning lessons, there will be learning intention for language as well as the one(s) for the curriculum area. Through regularly talking about their learning, learners will become increasingly aware of this. It is recognised that this is a very demanding stage for teachers, particularly with larger classes.

This approach includes:

- all approaches listed for nursery class
- taking time in the first few months to prioritise the development of oral language skills, according to programme and policy
- spending a lot of time on routines where all have an opportunity to use their Gaelic
e.g. at register, milk,

- making effective use of stories, songs, poems to develop vocabulary; retelling with gaps
- challenging fluent speakers through differentiated questioning and effective use of resources
- creating opportunities for Gaelic speakers, including other students, to spend time with the learners in order to develop their linguistic competence
- providing early support for pupils who are struggling

First Level:

C.2 and C.3:

For the rest of the total immersion stage, usually to around the end of c.3, approaches used at Early Level will continue to be employed. As learners become more confident and fluent in their spoken Gaelic, the learning targets will become increasingly complex, in line with school programme.

C.4

The new focus on English literacy skills and the goal of achieving fluency in English reading results in a significant change in the GME classroom.

In this immersion phase, Gaelic continues to be the language of the classroom, with all subject areas, including English, being delivered in Gaelic. Gaelic resources continue to be used across the curriculum. From this stage, there will be less time spent on Gaelic literacy so there must be effective planning and delivery in place to ensure that pupils continue to consolidate and develop skills and extend their vocabulary.

Throughout the First Level:

Talking and listening activities are the starting point for all literacy tasks.

There is constant modeling of correct structure; every opportunity is used to develop competence in Gaelic language.

Texts of all kinds, written and spoken, are used increasingly as a core resource for extending vocabulary, teaching and illustrating grammatical structure including tenses and cases.

As well as within the core programme, grammar points are taught as required, in response to assessment information collected and in context of all activities.

Teaching points are reinforced and embedded through conversation and games, both formally and informally. (e.g. in planned activities, when lining up etc)

There is an expectation at first level for pupils to become more aware of lenition and when to apply it, for example in possessive structures, the past tense and in the dative case. However, it is accepted that Gaelic grammatical rules are complex for learners to understand and apply.

‘words sometimes change a bit in different kinds of sentences’

Learners will become familiar with the genitive case of common nouns, through learning them in contexts such as project work and poems, in phrase form.

e.g. ri taobh na mara

teas na grèine
sgal na gaoithe

Teachers will be aware of the need to provide exposure to nouns in all their cases, and in plural form, giving simple explanations. This will include beginning to develop an awareness that nouns belong to one of two groups (masculine and feminine) . Writing lessons will provide good contexts for focusing on grammar.

Walls will continue to be used as a learning resource; displaying target language and reinforcing learning.

There will be regular, planned visits from other classes to share the learning and to give effective feedback. At this stage, learners will fully engage with success criteria and will be more skilled in recognising what success looks like and sounds like.

Second Level:

At this level many pupils will have achieved a reasonable level of spoken fluency and most likely a good level of understanding. The challenge is to continue to engage the learners in the Gaelic language so that there is continued development of skills and vocabulary. Teachers will be more explicit with learners about the language learning that they are involved in. With support, the learner will become more skilled at recognising their own language needs and in finding the right pathway.

Approaches will include:

- Active Learning approaches, including Cooperative Learning strategies, storyline approach
- learners being involved in planning their own language learning, creating success criteria and assessments.
- learners being given regular opportunities to share their knowledge, ideas and skills in performances and presentations.
- peer and self assessment strategies being utilised to measure the use and quality of Gaelic within groups.
- appropriate praise of language use.
- increasing awareness of the role of body language and paralanguage.
- making good use of Gaelic-speaking visitors to create opportunities for language development
- taking opportunities to participate in projects such as John Muir Awards, SNH projects, local opportunities, media events etc where Gaelic is the medium
- planning explicitly to maximise cultural opportunities such as the National Mod

Progression through stages:

It is recognized that within any class there will be a range of abilities. However, the following is a description of what is typically expected.

Early Level:

By the end of c1 the aim is for pupils to be comfortable in the Gaelic language environment. The goal is for pupils to use their Gaelic, at a simple level, in classroom operations. This is primarily classroom and personal language.

By this stage we aim for pupils to know all single sounds and most digraphs, and to be able to read the first set of common words. In this way they can access information round the classroom, carry out activities reasonably independently. A reading scheme, along with other attractive Gaelic texts, is used with all children.

Routines, retelling, revisiting of songs, stories, poems will help pupils to make connections with previous learning and apply learning in a range of situations. Pupils are making progress with managing correct responses to questions, and staff are sensitive to the difficulties this presents (responding with the verb, tenses, irregularities).

Most learners will follow this progression:

1. Child responds in English (this demonstrates understanding of question)
Teacher models the Gaelic response in a positive, enthusiastic way
2. Child begins to give the Gaelic response, perhaps with support.
3. Child responds in Gaelic, with minimum support required

First Level:

C.2:

By the end of C2 the aim is for learners to be using their Gaelic with increased confidence and with less of a need to resort to English words and phrases.

By end of C2 most learners will be able to read all the common words in seata 2 and spell all words in seata 1 accurately (Facal is Fuaim). Most will be able to write in a coherent manner; using simple logical sentences that make sense to the reader. They will be making progress in spelling common words accurately and will be beginning to add more detail to their texts by using adjectives.

C.3:

By the end of C.3 the aim is for learners to be reasonably fluent, confident and relaxed in their Gaelic usage. There will be evidence of further development of writing and spelling skills and most will be able to read simple texts fluently.

C4:

In C4 most pupils will be working towards fluency in English reading. This means that a habit of two languages developing together is established. There is less time for Gaelic literacy so teachers will take opportunities across the curriculum to consolidate previous Gaelic language learning and build on it. Learners will now be engaging in

extended conversations with peers and adults while taking part in the day-to-day life of the class. All curriculum areas continue to be delivered in Gaelic.

Pupils in c4 take on a mentoring/buddying role with younger classes. This is planned and implemented in line with policy. This change in role aims to help keep learners motivated towards continuous improvement and gives them good reasons to use their Gaelic.

Second Level:

C5:

In C5 the C4 approach is consolidated and developed. Gaelic texts will be used as much as possible, across the curriculum but learners will at times work with English texts as sources for Gaelic language tasks, for example in project work. This can be complex and so skills and approaches will be demonstrated and taught.

There will be some understanding that literal translations are not always appropriate and that each language is unique in the way words are structured to convey meaning.

Learners will identify new vocabulary, idiom and grammar that they encounter during oral language activities and through reading. All curriculum areas continue to be delivered in Gaelic.

C6 and7:

In the senior phase, most learners will be able to engage in extended conversations with peers and adults while taking part in active learning and cooperative learning tasks that involve discussion, debate, questioning etc.

Literacy lessons will focus on developing Gaelic language skills to as high a level as possible. Literacy lessons will typically be delivered as whole class lessons with a focus on comprehension and language structure and patterns. A wide range of texts will be used, the focus often on short sections. Learners will be able to identify when they need to learn new vocabulary, idiom and grammar.

Across the curriculum, learners will continue to work with texts in both languages, further developing the skills and approaches used in C4 and 5. All curriculum areas continue to be delivered in Gaelic.

Additional Support for Learning for language learning:

- The Support for Learning teacher has a key role in identifying pupils with difficulties and in putting appropriate support in place.
- Gaelic language assistants, if available, are timetabled to support learners with language difficulties and to provide extension opportunities for fluent speakers
- Other fluent speakers, including volunteers, may be used to provide extension opportunities for fluent speakers

The teaching of English Literacy

In most cases, English language skills are taught through the medium of Gaelic. However, where a non-Gaelic teacher spends time in a GME class, for example to provide non-teaching time, then this is the preferred curriculum area for him/her to deliver.

English is introduced end of c3 in the form of a structured phonics programme. This is delivered to all pupils, even though a significant number will be fluent English readers already. This avoids gaps in knowledge and aids competence in spelling.

In c4, children begin reading in Gaelic. There is typically a wide range of ability and so there is a need for appropriately differentiated approaches and resources from early level reading schemes to complex novels. Prompt support for those presenting with phonological difficulties should be provided.

In c4, there will be a focus on achieving fluency in English reading.

However, teachers will ensure that momentum in developing Gaelic reading skills are at least maintained in this first session.

C5-7 approx. 60 percent Gaelic 40 percent English balance should be aimed for in **literacy** lessons across the session. This should be delivered in blocks. However, for a minority of children, with reading difficulties, Gaelic and English reading must run in parallel.

In c4, children begin writing in Gaelic. The balance between Gaelic and English tasks alters over the four years.

C4: 60/40

C5: 70/30

C.6: 60/40

C.7: 50/50

Assessment:

A range of assessments is used to confirm that key learning has been achieved, in line with the Gaelic language programme.

At the end of term 1 in C2 a literacy assessment is used with all c1 pupils; this focuses on phonological awareness.

Spelling:

Spelling is taught systematically for both languages. The approach involves:

- common words lists
- Gaelic and English spelling schemes
- personal dictionaries
- homework

This is delivered as part of the literacy blocks.

Managing homework

Homework can be a source of anxiety for non- Gaelic speaking parents. Useful approaches include:

- Using the Gaelic4kids website which provides excellent support for Storyworlds reading scheme
- Providing phonics support ; e.g. website, workshop
- From c4, using homework tasks as an opportunity to practise/extend English literacy skills

The role of Gaelic culture

It is recognised that Gaelic songs and poetry can provide excellent contexts for language development, from sgoil-àraich to C7. They can be used for a range of purposes. These include:

- teaching simple phrases
- teaching lists of days, numbers etc
- developing concept of rhyme
- extending vocabulary
- teaching grammatical patterns
- developing *blas*
- teaching history

When well chosen, they can give great pleasure and enjoyment to learners.

Key resources for exploring Gaelic culture include:

- local and national mods songs, poetry
- Tobar an Dualchais
- living writers
- Am Baile

Building Vocabulary:

An integral part of everyday life in GME

An essential part of any lesson is to teach the relevant new vocabulary, while avoiding translation to English. This happens across the whole curriculum. It is important that students learn the language for talking about learning; key questions, Bloom's Taxonomy as a framework etc

Key approaches to building vocabulary include:

- displaying specialist vocabulary in class to support pupils and staff (e.g. maths)
- translating all key vocabulary to Gaelic, using other staff members' expertise, dictionaries, databases, Stòrlann etc as required
- being conscious of need for variety in vocabulary; exposing pupils to alternatives/more specific terminology
- using bites of written texts as a focus for work on vocabulary
- reading to class on a daily basis; careful selection of novels, abridging as necessary to create texts at appropriate level of difficulty
- identifying novels for use as class novels at each stage; these will be slightly more challenging than what they could read independently, but still accessible
- exposing learners to a wide range of idiom, including from different dialects

Drama and Storytelling

Storytelling is an excellent context for introducing and reinforcing oral language. Having a storytelling chair or a magic carpet that takes children to imaginary places is always popular with younger classes.

Stories modelled by the teacher gives learners a language structure they can use to retell their own stories. The stories can be factual texts that relate events or experiences.eg. news time, circle time, they can be retelling familiar traditional stories or new imaginative story can be created using props to make the various threads of the tale visible.

Predictable texts with lots of repetition or actions e.g. fingerplay stories, encourage children to participate in telling the story. Resources such as pictures, cartoon strips and animations help to support meaning and help children follow the sequence of the story.

Sharing stories with peers and other classes provides an audience so that children gain competence and confidence in their own abilities. Digital storytelling is popular with older children who enjoy using their IT skills to create a story to share with peers or with younger children.

Drama and role play also gives children the opportunity to try out language that they may not have used previously and to recycle language they have learnt in other contexts. Props, puppets and a dressing up box will encourage children to retell stories they are familiar with and to use their imagination to develop their own stories. Drama techniques such as *hot seating* or *freeze-frame* encourage children to respond to role play and make relevant comments. Drama engages children's interest and attention and helps them to develop their language skills in a holistic, fun way.

Transition

Nursery to C1:

The nursery transition report will include a short statement on understanding and usage of Gaelic.

- ‘demonstrates very little understanding ‘
- ‘demonstrates a basic understanding of instructions’
- ‘is beginning to reply to simple questions in Gaelic’
- ‘is beginning to speak in whole sentence and phrases’
- ‘is using Gaelic fluently’

This provides a starting point for C1 teachers in planning for progression.

C7 to S1:

For learners transferring from primary to secondary, transition will be carefully planned with secondary colleagues, and will vary from setting to setting.

The transition period may include:

- information night at secondary school specifically for Gaelic families
- Gaelic staff from secondary inputting in c7
- samples of Gaelic writing being collected for secondary, to provide a starting point for planning for progression
- formal oral assessment of Gaelic language competence, to provide a starting point for planning for progression

For pupils moving to an English medium high school, preparations must be made for dealing with English specialist vocabulary, particularly in maths and English grammar.