

## THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF POLICY ON EXEMPTIONS FROM THE STUDY OF IRISH

### Welcome to the Survey

In this short survey you will be asked for your views on the key changes proposed to primary and post-primary circulars that guide school authorities in considering applications for exemption from the study of Irish. As part of this, you are also asked to consider the role of learning Irish in pupils'/students' learning experiences in our schools.

Ideally, you should attempt to complete the survey and to give any additional feedback you may wish in one sitting. However, it is possible to leave the survey and re-enter it again at a later time in order to continue where you left off. The survey comprises two sections. In Section 1 you will be asked to respond to a series of statements based on key changes proposed in the draft revised circulars. You should simply click on the answer that best reflects your opinion. There are no right or wrong answers. It is your perspectives that matter. In most instances, the choice of response to each statement is: "strongly disagree"; "disagree"; "neutral"; "agree"; "strongly agree". When you complete Section 1 Part D, you will be given the option to exit the survey or proceed to Section 2 and offer your observations on the draft revised circulars. A small number of prompts is provided in this section based on key changes and you may also offer additional observations.

Once you click the "next" button below, you will be directed to the survey. Initially you will be asked to indicate the capacity in which you are completing the survey and you will then be routed to the relevant statements.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey.

### Part A: The Respondent

**Please select the option(s) that best describes you:**

**Other** (i.e. not primary, post—primary, third level, aonad/sruth, home education)

**Please tell us a little about yourself (e.g., do you represent an organisation?). Please do not exceed 50 words.**

IPPN is the professional body for Irish primary school leaders. Recognised by the Minister as an official Education Partner, IPPN works with the DES, the NPC, management bodies, unions, education agencies, colleges and children's charities towards the advancement of primary education. IPPN articulates the collective knowledge and professional experience of over 6,500 Principals and Deputy Principals.

**Which language medium applies to your educational setting as indicated in question 1a. above?**

Not applicable

## Part B: Learning Irish in School

THIS PART OF THE SURVEY OUTLINES THE PROPOSED KEY CHANGES TO THE CONTEXTS, CIRCUMSTANCES AND CRITERIA FOR GRANTING EXEMPTIONS FROM THE STUDY OF IRISH. FOR EACH OF THE STATEMENTS PRESENTED IN ITALICS BELOW, PLEASE SELECT THE OPTION THAT BEST REPRESENTS YOUR VIEWS.

### The language of instruction in the school

**Exemption from the study of Irish should only be available to pupils/students in schools where all subjects except Irish are taught through the medium of English.**

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      **Strongly Agree**

### The circumstances in which a pupil/student may be granted an exemption from the study of Irish

Exempting a pupil/student from the study of Irish should be considered only in rare and exceptional circumstances. The decision to exempt a pupil/student from the study of Irish is an important decision that has implications for his/her access to the curriculum and his/her future learning.

#### (a) Pupils/students who received their education outside the State.

**Pupils/students who have received their education outside the State (where they did not have opportunity to study Irish) and who have completed the final year of their primary education or have reached age 12 years may be granted an exemption from the study of Irish.**

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      **Strongly Agree**

#### b) Pupils/students who are re-enrolling in school following a period abroad

**Pupils/students who are re-enrolling following a period of at least three consecutive years abroad (and where they did not have opportunity to study Irish) and who are at least 12 years of age on re-enrolment may be granted an exemption from the study of Irish.**

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neutral      **Agree**      Strongly Agree

#### c) Irish in special schools and in special classes in mainstream schools

**The draft revised circulars recognise the authority devolved to the authorities of special schools and mainstream schools where there are special classes in decision making concerning pupils'/students' Irish language learning needs.**

**(i) Pupils/students in special schools or classes should not have to apply for an official exemption from the study of Irish.**

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neutral      **Agree**      Strongly Agree

**4. The draft revised circulars propose that where a pupil/student presents with significant and persistent learning difficulties, decisions to grant an exemption should only be considered in the case of:**

i. Pupils who have at least reached third class

and

ii. present with significant learning difficulties that are persistent despite having had access to a differentiated approach to language and literacy learning in both Irish and English over time.

Documentary evidence to this effect, held by the school, should include Student Support Plans detailing:

- regular reviews of learning needs as part of an ongoing cycle of assessment.
- target setting.
- evidence-informed intervention and review, including test scores (word reading, reading comprehension, spelling, other scores of language/literacy) at key points of review.

and

iii. at the time of the application for exemption present with a Standardised Score on a discrete test in Word Reading or Reading Comprehension at/below the 10th percentile.

Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Neutral      **Agree**      Strongly Agree

## **Part D: Application and appeals processes**

### **5. Students who have reached age 18 years**

**Students who have reached age 18 years may make their own application for an exemption from the study of Irish.**

Strongly Disagree      **Disagree**      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

*[Selected 'Disagree' as this depends on the circumstances. For example, they may be 18 years of age, however their cognitive ability may be at a lower level.]*

### **6. Appeals mechanism**

**The draft revised circulars set out that applications for exemption from the study of Irish are in the first instance made to the school principal. Where an application is declined, and where parents/guardians/students wish to challenge that decision, an appeal should be addressed to the board of management using the school's appeals mechanism.**

**Strongly Disagree**      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly Agree

## SECTION 2: YOUR OBSERVATIONS/COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT REVISED CIRCULARS

Please note that all responses and submissions received may be released under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Acts, 1997–2014. The Department retains the right to publish responses provided in whole or in part. Further information in relation to the Department’s Data Protection policy is available at: <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Data-Protection/gdpr/>

### 1. The circumstances in which a pupil/student may be granted an exemption from the study of Irish (120 words max).

Where the school is of the opinion that it is best for the pupil not to study/continue to study Irish owing to significant learning needs, an extended period abroad or a diagnosed medical/other condition that would make it overly challenging for the pupil.

A key concern that arises is the legal implications of such a decision such as access to third-level courses, and qualifications for state employment. If a school supports a parent’s request to grant an exemption, due to stipulated criteria, should there be any recourse for the child or the parents to claim that this was done in bad faith, when the consequences of the decision to grant an exemption become an issue.

### 2. The most appropriate age/stage in a pupil’s/student’s education at which to consider granting an exemption from the study of Irish (120 words max).

No later than the end of primary schooling, or 12 years, whichever is the later. If a pupil has the ability to study of Irish in sixth class, there is no reason not to continue studying the subject at second level.

### 3. Criteria for granting an exemption from the study of Irish in the case of pupils/students with significant and persistent learning difficulties (120 words max).

The Criteria should be linked directly to the to the level of proficiency of basic language skills in English. Use of standardised tests, school/class-based tests and the tests already developed to assess the ‘English Language Proficiency Levels’ (EAL) should inform the decision to grant an exemption. The combination of the above could be used irrespective of the underlying cause.

### 4. Exemptions from the study of Irish in special schools or special classes in mainstream schools (120 words max).

IPPN agrees with the draft proposals that *‘students in special schools or special classes attached to mainstream schools will not be required to apply for an exemption. The autonomy and discretion of the school authorities in tailoring the curriculum to best meet the needs of individual students continues to be recognised.’*

They should be automatically exempt unless they request otherwise

### 5. Other comments on the draft revised circulars (120 words max).

The role and responsibilities of school personnel in managing exemption criteria must be clearly defined. Teachers cannot diagnose a condition or determine a child’s medical/psychological ability

to learn a language. Their professional opinions should be part of the decision-making process as they engage with the child in a professional capacity.

Other than teachers, members of Boards of Management are not sufficiently qualified to review or contribute to an appeals process. DES Inspectors are best positioned to provide objective input and expertise to appeals.

Parents' responsibilities must also be very clear, in order to avoid litigation down the line when the pupil may seek third-level courses requiring Irish, or may wish to apply for state employment requiring Irish.