

Pupil progression from Irish-medium primary to post-primary in the Republic of Ireland

Research Report for Gaeloideachas Teoranta

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Contents

A Executive Summary	4
Summary of main conclusion of the research	5
Provision of Irish-medium post-primary schools	5
The progression pathway in Irish-medium education	5
Reasons to continue with Irish-medium post-primary education	6
Reasons to continue with English-medium post-primary education	6
Parental participation	7
Transmission of information on Irish-medium education to parents.....	7
Main recommendations.....	8
Access to Irish-medium post-primary education.....	8
Parents’ knowledge and awareness of the of the language acquisition process	8
Catering to pupils’ special learning needs in Irish-medium education.....	9
Choice of subjects and academic reputation of Irish-medium post-primary schools	9
Parental participation	10
Relations between the Irish-medium primary and post-primary school.....	10
Review of Literature.....	11
Introduction	11
Challenges in measuring transfer rates	11
Progression in immersion education	11
Progression Internationally.....	13
Progression in Ireland	15
Parental participation	16
Conclusion.....	18
Methodologies.....	19
Introduction	19
Principals’ Questionnaire	19
Principals’ discussion forum.....	19
Pupils’ and Parents’ Questionnaires	20
Pupils’ Questionnaire.....	20
Demographic and linguistic background of the pupils	20
Principals’ Questionnaire	21
Parents’ interviews	22
Demographic and linguistic background of the parents.....	22
Conclusion.....	22
Outcomes of the research	23

Introduction	23
Use of Irish in the Parents’ Families.....	23
Ability and Language Use Among Parents	24
Use of Irish in the family	24
The Parents’ Experience of Irish-medium Education.....	25
Current transfer levels in Irish-medium education.....	27
When the decision is made.....	27
Who makes the decision?	29
“Natural” step on the progression pathway.....	30
Reasons to attend Irish-medium primary and post-primary education.....	31
Interest in bilingualism.....	32
The school’s academic reputation	33
Bonus points in the Leaving Certificate	34
School composition.....	34
Good reports about the post-primary school.....	35
School location and accommodation.....	36
Reasons to continue with English-medium post-primary education	37
The location of the English-medium post-primary school.....	37
Choice of subjects	38
The Irish-medium post-primary school is unsuitable for preparation for third level.....	39
The academic reputation of the English-medium post-primary school	39
Parents’ concern about weakening English	39
A family tradition of attending an English-medium post-primary school	40
Catering to pupils’ special learning needs in Irish-medium education.....	40
Participation of parents in their children’s education	41
Conclusion.....	42
Conclusions and Recommendations.....	43
Introduction	43
Conclusions	43
The use of Irish and Irish language ability in the family.....	43
The parents’ experience of Irish-medium education.....	43
The progression pathway in Irish-medium education	43
The age at which the decision is made to transfer	43
The current transfer rate from the Irish-medium primary school to the Irish-medium post- primary.....	44
Reasons to continue with Irish-medium post-primary education.....	44

Interest in Irish and bilingualism.....	44
The school’s academic reputation	44
School composition.....	45
Good reports about the post-primary school.....	45
Reasons to continue with English-medium post-primary education	45
The school’s good academic reputation	45
The Irish-medium provision unsuitable for third level	45
Concern about weakening English	46
Parental participation	46
Pupils’ special needs in the Irish-medium provision.....	46
Transmission of information on Irish-medium education to parents.....	47
Main recommendations.....	48
Introduction	48
Provision of Irish-medium post-primary schools.....	48
Participation.....	48
Choice of subjects and academic reputation of Irish-medium post-primary schools	49
Catering to pupils’ special learning needs in Irish-medium education.....	50
Knowledge and awareness of the parents of the language acquisition process.....	50
Relations between the Irish-medium primary and post-primary school.....	51
List of References.....	52
Appendix – Parents’ Questionnaire	56

Executive Summary

Research on the subject shows that there are significant disadvantages in the fall in pupil progression from Irish-medium primary to post-primary and that those disadvantages have an effect on the pupils and school community, and indeed that this low level in pupil progression might significantly harm immersion education in general (Duhamel, 1985; Kerbow, Azoitia & Buell, 2003).

There is a significant fall in pupil participation rates in immersion education from the time pupils are in the early teenage years and this pattern can be seen in Canada, Wales and the United States (Bourdreaux & Olivier, 2009; Cadez, 2006; Canadian Council for Learning, 2007; Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru 2010; Redknap 2006). As a result of this transfer, there is a decrease in the participation of pupils in immersion education and in their opportunities for language use, and consequently, in their modes of speech and their specific registers of speech are more limited (Ó Duibhir, Ó Cathalláin, Nig Uidhir, Ní Thuairisg & Cosgrove, 2015; Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru 2009; Llywodraeth Cymru, 2016).

There are many causes for this fall in progression, including: lack of qualified teachers; lack of teaching and learning facilities; a more suitable choice of subjects; the child's learning difficulties and parents believing that they cannot be properly catered for within an immersion education programme; the child's and the parent's personal outlook on immersion education; local authority's and individual schools policies and leadership (Bourdreaux, 2011; Cadez, 2006; Canadian Council for Learning, 2007; Ó Duibhir et al., 2015). In respect of these matters, it is believed that the satisfaction of the pupils' parents is central when discussing progression rates in a prevailing culture that often pulls pupils back from immersion education without beforehand expressing unease about the provision to the school authorities (Bourdreaux, 2011).

Ó Duibhir et al. showed that less than half of the 6th class pupils in 65% of Irish-medium primary schools in the country transferred to an Irish-medium secondary school (2015: 81). Among the causes for this low transfer rate, according to principals and parents who took part in that research, were: the pupil's learning difficulties and advice from a psychologist to seek another education option; support services which would be available to pupils with special learning needs; the pupil's own personal wish; the restricted level of support the parent could give and the difficulty level of the school subject rising, and the range of language accordingly; barrier to academic achievement; lack of a post-primary school in the catchment area or district.

This research project was undertaken to carry out a comprehensive audit of the transfer patterns prevailing in Irish-medium schools outside of the Gaeltacht in the Republic of Ireland and to carry

out an audit as well of what influences those patterns. It has been shown that there is a gap in the current research that explores the causes that parents choose Irish-medium education for their children, although certain projects have responded to this gap in regard to Irish-medium primary education. It is clear from national and international research on the subject that it is at the point of transfer between primary school and post-primary that the decrease in pupil participation in Irish-medium education is most prevalent. There is a need, therefore, to assess the opinions of participants in the system in order to explore the decrease in pupil transfer from Irish-medium primary to post-primary and to design strategies which would seek to reverse this decrease. This is the reason for this research.

Summary of main conclusion of the research

Provision of Irish-medium post-primary schools

In order to explore the transfer from Irish-medium primary school to Irish-medium secondary school, it was first necessary to inquire of principals who took part in the research if there was a post-primary school in their school catchment area. The results of the research show that 40% of the sample of Irish-medium primary schools did not have an Irish-medium post-primary school in their catchment area. These are areas where Irish-medium education is still developing and it is recognised that there is a danger that there is perhaps not the same population density in the area or in the schools that would support the demands for post-primary education at this time. Therefore, it is shown in this research that pupil progression is not a realistic option for 27.2% of parents, apart from those families that can afford to travel to the Irish-medium post-primary nearest to them. Certainly, this is a significant barrier to pupil progression that cannot be overcome without adding to the country's provision of post-primary schools.

The progression pathway in Irish-medium education

The results of this research show that Irish-medium post-primary education is a natural step on the pupil progression pathway for some parents who intend their children to participate in Irish-medium education from preschool to third level. From the random sample of 27 schools which took part in the research, we found that 40.2% of 6th class pupils in 2014 progressed to an Irish-medium post-primary school that year. However, when we differentiated between primary schools which had a post-primary school in their catchment area and those that did not, we found out that 53.6% of pupils went on to an Irish-medium post-primary school if there was one available in their catchment area. It is interesting that about half of parents make the decision to send their children on to an

Irish-medium post-primary school even before their child starts Irish-medium primary education. It is clear that there is a significant percentage of parents in Irish-medium schools who are very dedicated to Irish and to education through the medium of Irish. On the other hand, out of the parents who decided that their children would not continue with Irish-medium post-primary education, it was between fifth class and sixth class that more than half of them made this decision. This figure shows that these parents are in two minds with regard to the Irish-medium progression pathway for a significant period of time, a period in which the advantages of progression could be made clear to them.

Reasons to continue with Irish-medium post-primary education

Similarities were seen in the reasons parents had for starting Irish-medium education at primary level and post-primary level, with interest in Irish itself and in bilingualism driving the majority of the parents towards it. 76.9% of the parents wanted, when they were starting at an Irish-medium primary school, their children to be able to speak Irish, and this rose to 84.2% for the children transferring to the Irish-medium post-primary school. 61.7% of parents said that they chose an Irish-medium primary school because they wanted their children to be bilingual, and this rose to 74.7% at post-primary level. Other reasons parents had for their children continuing with Irish-medium education at post-primary level included: the academic reputation of the school; academic achievement in the Leaving Cert; the gender make-up of the school.

Reasons to continue with English-medium post-primary education

Regarding the reasons parents had to progress to English-medium education at post-primary, similarities can be seen in the reasons for their choice. It is likely that parents' choice often depends on the school catchment area and the post-primary provision available in that area. 63.2% of parents say that they intended to send their children to an English-medium post-primary school due to the good academic reputation of the school and 50.5% say that a more suitable school subject choice was the reason for their decision.

11.9% of parents indicated that they were worried that the Irish-medium post-primary school would not be suitable for preparing their children for third-level education since that would be provided in English. The value and practical purpose of Irish is greatly reduced in the mind of parents as a result of this. 14.6% of parents say that they are worried that their children's ability in English will decrease if they continue with Irish-medium education and some of them believe that this weakening is perceptible already at the end of primary education.

Parental participation

The majority of the parents who took part in this research said they are worried, especially in light of their own low ability in the language, about their ability to participate in their children's education. Ní Mhurchú (2008) also referred to this challenge, parents worried that their lack of ability in the Irish language would be an unavoidable barrier to participation. This has serious implications for parental self-effectiveness and for pupils' educational experience. Those parents intending their children to continue with Irish-medium post-primary education say they have no alternative other than withdrawing from participation in school work since they cannot give any practical assistance with the language itself. Those parents who continue with English-medium post-primary education say that this lack of participation is an unsurmountable obstacle for them. These parents see little role for themselves in the child's educational life and see themselves as separated from the Irish-medium education community as a result. Of course, this has a not inconsiderable impact on pupil progression from Irish-medium primary school to Irish-medium post-primary.

Transmission of information on Irish-medium education to parents

Parents express dissatisfaction at the lack of information shared with them on the operation of immersion education at primary and post-primary level, especially in respect of the impact that bilingual education would have on the educational development of children at third level. Parents describe the importance of open nights as occasions for the sharing of information but believe that some schools make little effort with these events. There is an urgent need, it is said, to take advantage of opportunities such as these to provide a more effective forum in which information could be shared with parents on Irish-medium education. Parents say that it is a mistake for Irish-medium post-primary schools to think that there is no need to share information with parents when their child is already registered with the school. They believe that there is a need to continuously share information on immersion education and bilingualism with parents and pupils from when they begin Irish-medium education. Parents indicated that they were concerned that it was mostly participants in the Irish-medium education sector who provided the information on the benefits of immersion education. Parents would like a neutral forum to be available in which the benefits and disadvantages of Irish-medium education for their children could be discussed openly with those who have an interest and expertise in the area.

Main recommendations

Access to Irish-medium post-primary education

From the whole sample of this research, 40% of Irish-medium primary schools in the Republic of Ireland, outside of the Gaeltacht, do not have access to an Irish-medium post-primary school. 27.2% of parents who have expressed an interest in and a commitment to Irish-medium education do not have access to the next step on the progression pathway for their children. Without this step an incomplete acquisition of Irish is what is destined for these children. It has been shown in this research and in international research on the same subject that a low rate in pupils' progression could have a harmful impact on immersion culture in general. It is necessary to consult with interested parties in the sector to show them the deficiencies in the current provision and to put in place a strategy which would support parents and pupils of Irish-medium primary schools who wish to undertake Irish-medium post-primary education. In light of the results of this research, it is recommended that Gaeloideachas Teoranta consult with the Department of Education and Skills on the importance of increasing the provision of Irish-medium post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland, and of designing a longterm staged strategy, and implementing it to respond to the current gap.

Parents' knowledge and awareness of the of the language acquisition process

Parents who have taken part in this research have indicated that they are concerned that Irish is harming their children's acquisition of English and that they wish to reverse this weakening by sending their children to an English-medium post-primary school. It is shown in the results of this research that parents' greatest motivations for engaging in Irish-medium education were an interest in bilingualism and that their children would be fluent in Irish. It is clearly evident, however, that there is a misunderstanding among parents as to the language acquisition process.

Continuously from the midpoint of primary education onwards it is recommended that this interest in bilingualism should be reinforced when the transfer is being discussed and the advantages of bilingualism at post-primary level be impressed upon parents. It is also necessary that parents be made aware that language acquisition is a longterm process which does not finish at the end of primary school. The children's parents have expressed a positive attitude and commitment until now towards bilingualism and it is recommended that the opportunity be seized to share research and practice based information with them to reinforce their trust in Irish-medium education provision. It would do no harm to increase the awareness of teachers in Irish-medium schools on these matters as well.

Catering to pupils' special learning needs in Irish-medium education

A significant number of parents indicated during this research that they were concerned that the Irish-medium post-primary school might not be able to cater properly to their children's special learning needs and that they had decided therefore not to continue with Irish-medium education. In spite of that, the majority of principals who took part in the research do not think that children's special learning needs would be a hindrance to pupil progression in the minds of parents.

It is recommended that research based and up to date information be made available to parents on the impact bilingual education will have on the educational development of their children, especially as it applies to special learning needs. As well as that, it is recommended that a training programme be undertaken with teachers and principals, primary schools and post-primary schools, to examine and discuss special learning needs in the context of immersion education. It is recommended that these strategies be undertaken as continuous partnership projects between the Department of Education and Skills and other Irish-medium education interested parties such as Gaeloideachas Teoranta and the Irish-medium schools at primary and post-primary level.

Choice of subjects and academic reputation of Irish-medium post-primary schools

It is shown in this research, out of the parents who chose an English-medium post-primary school, that it was dissatisfaction with the choice of subjects in the Irish-medium post-primary school which motivated 50.5% of them to make this decision. But, 80.6% of parents indicated that it was because of the good academic reputation of the Irish language post-primary school that they decided to continue with Irish-medium education at post-primary level. There is no doubt that Irish-medium post-primary schools have difficulties, due to a low number of pupils or limited resources, in providing a broad range of subjects, not to mention the large number of teachers needed to teach those subjects in Irish.

It is recommended to Irish-medium post-primary schools to influence parents and persuade them and their children, outside of the choice of subjects, of the academic benefits of the school. An information campaign for pupils and parents would help this, sharing knowledge on the Irish-medium schools' choice of subjects as well as sharing the academic success of the schools with parents and pupils from third class onwards.

Parental participation

It is recommended that parents should be encouraged to participate in their children's education. It is important that the opportunities for participation include events where all the parents are welcomed, regardless of language. It is shown in this research that parents lacking an ability in the language feel excluded from the school community and also from their child's education life since they cannot take part in the current participation models in place in Irish-medium primary schools. It is necessary to remodel the current participation model and design a new model in which parents would have an active role in the Irish-medium school community. This model would encompass supporting extracurricular activities, school networks, administration and other school activities in which the language is not central. It must be ensured, of course, that the design of this participation strategy is undertaken in the context of a language policy and the school's own ethos. It is understood this would be a new approach to participation and it is recommended therefore that a training service be made available to principals which would support them in integrating a structure of this kind in the school's participation practices.

Relations between the Irish-medium primary and post-primary school

It is recommended that the relationship between Irish-medium primary and post-primary schools be strengthened so that this relationship is effective in enhance transfer patterns in Irish-medium education. It is important that this relationship be beneficial to the primary schools and the post-primary schools and be visible and accessible for parents and pupils. To that end, it is recommended that a strategy be designed which would encompass cooperative projects between Irish-medium primary and post-primary schools. These projects would include school visits; encouraging teacher networks in which Irish-medium primary and secondary school teachers would participate; designing participation strategies for parents; encouraging presence and participation in the primary and post-primary schools in the community. Activities of this kind would ensure that a permanent and continuing relationship would be fostered which would strengthen not only transfer patterns in Irish-medium education but in the Irish-medium education sector in general.

Review of Literature

Introduction

In this chapter a description is given of the current national and international literature concerning progression in education, especially as regards immersion education schools. Reference is made to norms in transfer rates and reasons for them and an attempt is made to locate progression in Irish-medium education in this context. A comparison is also made between progression in Irish-medium education in Ireland and immersion education contexts internationally, seeking to recognise variables that support or are obstacles to progression.

Challenges in measuring transfer rates

Although it is broadly accepted that progression is a problem for immersion education (Bourdreaux & Olivier, 2009; Kerbow, Azcoitia & Buell, 2003), it is difficult to assess transfer rates accurately (Culligan, 2010; Halsall, 1994; Morton, Lemieux, Diffey & Awender, 1999). There are many differences between one immersion education system and another, even those systems operating in the same country. The experience and the conditions are not the same in any particular school area and it is difficult therefore to make a generalisation from research results (Halsall, 1994). Another difficulty with evaluation is that an account is not kept of the transfer pathway of immersion education pupils from preschool level to third level (Culligan, 2010; Halsall, 1994). There are also many definitions of transfer, which is a practice that makes it difficult to get or give a precise view of the system in total (Estyn, 2014; Halsall, 1994). Although research is often done on drop out rates in immersion education on the fundamental understanding that progression rates will improve or increase if certain aspects connected to the provision are improved, that is not necessarily the case:

Although improvement of programs is in and of itself a worthwhile goal, it might be that because of the optional nature of immersion programs, it is not possible, or even desirable, to create higher enrolments. (Halsall, 1994: 315)

Even so, there are many reasons for the low level of progression in immersion education and it is worth investigating them to see if progression can be improved by amending aspects and practices. It would be useful in the first instance to examine immersion education itself and the impact of progression on the success of that system.

Progression in immersion education

There are many reasons parents have for choosing immersion education for their children, including: language is a skill which has economic and employment advantages; the language gives an insight to other cultures; it supports the identity of certain groups; it gives the advantages of bilingualism. The commitment to immersion education is often very strong at the start, with parents happy to choose

one school over others, even if those schools are more convenient to them. This commitment often continues from preschool to post-primary level (Hodges, 2011; Morton et al., 1999).

Despite this commitment, there is a fall in levels of participation in immersion education at different stages of the child's education pathway, especially in the transfer period between primary level to post-primary level (Bourdreaux, 2011; Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru, 2010; Makropoulos, 2010; Wesley & Baig, 2012).

As regards the fall in this period, it is also understood that some pupils withdraw from immersion education during primary and post-primary education. Ó Duibhir, Ó Cathalláin, Nig Uidhir, Ní Thuairisg and Cosgrove (2011), investigated in their research models of immersion education in Ireland, the drop out rate in primary schools and in post-primary schools on the island. It was shown in that research that the percentage of pupils who withdrew from immersion education during the period of schooling was very low, with 1.5% and 0.94% of pupils leaving Irish-medium primary schools in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland respectively. The rate was low also at post-primary level with 1.6% of pupils leaving Irish-medium post-primary schools in the Republic. Among the reasons for dropping out, according to the principals, were learning difficulties and advice from psychologists (Ó Duibhir et al., 2015: 82). Although dropping out is a practice which must be tackled at every stage of the education continuum, it is understood from the research of Ó Duibhir et al. (2015) and from international research on the subject that it is during the school transfer period that there is the greatest fall in participation. It is on this stage of the continuum that attention must be focussed in the main to improve progression in immersion education in Ireland.

There are many reasons that pupils do not continue in immersion education such as: the academic challenge associated with it; the lack of subject choice and special interest programmes for pupils; implications of the immersion education programme (and its characteristics) for third level education; a higher standard of teaching in the normal education system; the attitude that it is easier to gain good or higher marks in the mainstream education system; dissatisfaction with the subjects in the immersion education programme (Culligan 2010; Halsall, 1994; Lewis & Shapson, 1989; Obadia & Theriault, 1995; Ó Duibhir et al., 2015). Culligan (2010) carried out research on the experience of mathematics pupils who transferred from a French-medium course to an English-medium course, and the hope of pupils to gain higher marks and have an easier learning experience was the greatest reason for their decision (Culligan, 2010: 439). Also, according to the author, there was a strong influence from parents of the pupils when the decision was being made, an aspect which is discussed in finer detail below.

Another impediment to progression is the view among parents and pupils that immersion education would not be suitable for pupils with special educational needs, and there is a high drop out rate among those pupils (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Wise & Chen, 2009). According to Genesee (2007), a child with special needs can reach a fair level of ability in L2 with no harm to their ability in L1 (Genesee, 2007: 677). There is a danger, however, when children have special needs, that parents may be concerned about their educational and linguistic development and that they may decide not to continue with immersion education (Dillon, 2014). Lack of knowledge greatly increases this unease and it is easier at times for parents to reject immersion education than seek support and advice from the appropriate sources (Harding, 2012: 10).

There is a need for more research in this area, however, and it is not clear if there is an advantage for children transferring out of immersion education to the English-medium system, even if they have special educational needs. Although evidence can be found to support both sides of the argument, it is believed on the whole that there is not an extra learning challenge for a child with special needs participating in the immersion system (Genesee, 2007: 666).

Another reason for the fall in progression is the gap between the expectations parents have at first in respect of the outcome of immersion education, and how much happens in reality?? (Bourdreaux, 2011). Often, for instance, parents are unclear about the length of time it takes to effectively acquire a second language (Wesley & Baig, 2012). Bourdreaux (2011) draws on the business model of Hirsch (1980) when discussing the transfer:

[s]atisfied customers do not leave; however, dissatisfied customers must choose either to communicate their reasons for being dissatisfied (voice) or simply to leave (exit). Similarly, the dissatisfaction some immersion parents experience leads them to withdraw their child, often without first attempting to use their voice and make their frustrations known. Exploring the reasons why people are dissatisfied enough to withdraw their child from a program is important information if we are going to address the attrition challenge (Bourdreaux, 2011)

It is vitally important to gain an understanding of the expectations of parents in respect of immersion education as well as the the societal context of the decision to choose immersion education at the outset in order to foster and ensure progression (Bourdreaux, 2011).

Progression Internationally

Progression is a hindrance in immersion contexts throughout the world. In Scotland, Gaelic-medium primary school pupils often transfer to secondary schools where Gaelic is taught as a subject and all other subjects through English. Much less Gaelic is used as a means of communication outside of the classroom in the secondary schools and therefore it is not clear how continuous the pupils' linguistic experience is from primary level to secondary level (O'Hanlon, 2010). In the Basque Country there is not a widespread demand for Basque education at the post-primary level and this has an impact, of

course, on the provision of schools and teachers who would be trained to teach in Basque-medium schools. As well as that, some pupils for whom Basque is their second language believe that they do not have sufficient competence to gain a satisfactory academic attainment in Basque at second level (Lasagabaster 2001; Gardner, 2002). All these things have an impact on progression.

There is a major difficulty in this fall in progression in Canada, strongly evident again, as can be seen in other contexts, in the transfer from primary level to post-primary level (Canadian Parents for French, 2004; Makropoulos, 2010). The non-progression rate there stands between 20% and 80% with differences apparent in particular areas.

The non-progression rate is a cause for concern also in Wales. There is a fall in the number of pupils taking Welsh as a first language, especially when they transfer to post-primary school. Research shows that this is a continuous fall: in 2008 19.8% of pupils in Keystage 2 took Welsh as a first language. This figure fell to 16.3% in Keystage 3 in 2011 and to 15.3% in Keystage 4 in 2013. Because of this, their skills are not developed and a significant number of them take GCSE Welsh as a second language (Estyn, 2014). The post-primary schools are therefore failing to strengthen or build on the good work carried out during the preschool and primary school period (Williams, 2000: 131).

A large number of learners transfer at post-primary level to a bilingual system or they study a gradually smaller number of subjects through Welsh. For example, mathematics and science are often taught through Welsh at Keystage 2 (Redknap 2006; Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru, 2010). After that, pupils are given opportunities in some schools to choose different percentages of immersion education 'through a linguistic streaming system' (Estyn, 2014; Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru, 2010: 65). As a result, these pupils have less contact with Welsh and they lose opportunities to enrich their vocabulary (Estyn, 2014; Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru, 2010). This reduction is apparent in many regions in Wales, but the practice is more widespread in areas where Welsh is dominant as a community language (Redknap, 2006: 12).

Progression in immersion education is a major target in the *Welsh Medium Education Strategy* with linguistic progress in Welsh as a first language and opportunities to study in Welsh from the 14 years of age onwards to higher education level recognised as a priority by the Welsh Assembly Government (Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru, 2010). It is also an aim '*to ensure that all learners develop their Welsh-language skills to their full potential and encourage sound linguistic progression from one phase of education and training to the next*' (Llywodraeth Cymru, 2013: 13). To that end all local education authorities are asked to give an account of transfer rates from stage to stage in the education system. The result of the lack of progression is apparent in the number of pupils taking Welsh as a first language in A level exams, which is now at the lowest rate for ten years. It is shown

in the review of the strategy that there is a need for progression to A level and to higher education as a priority in the planning process to reverse this decline (Llywodraeth Cymru, 2015: 27). It is indicated in the latest review of the Strategy, however, that this drop out still exists (Llywodraeth Cymru, 2016).

Another difficulty in the discussion of progression in Wales is the lack of clarity in the definition of different levels of the provision (Estyn, 2014). Most of the post-primary schools in Wales are classified as bilingual schools and teaching is done in Welsh and in English, although this definition does not depend on the percentage of teaching in either of those two languages. Although a significant number of pupils and teaching provision can be brought under the umbrella of bilingual education, it is difficult to assess participation in immersion education, never mind progression.

Progression in Ireland

Ó Duibhir et al. (2015) investigated the transfer levels that existed between primary schools and post-primary schools in Ireland, north and south. Figure 1.1 shows that fewer than half of pupils in 65% of primary schools in the Republic (39 of 60 schools answered that question) and in 53% of primary schools in Northern Ireland (9 out of 20 schools that answered that question) transferred.

It is certain that the lack of provision is an obstacle to progression. In Ní Mhurchú's research (2008) on the wishes of parents in choosing Irish-medium education, 70% of parents reported that they would choose an Irish-medium post-primary school. Similarly, Kennedy (2011) indicates that 23.4% of parents would have chosen Irish-medium post-primary education for their children if an Irish-medium post-primary school had been near them (Kennedy, 2011: 298). Research by Ó Duibhir et al. (2015) shows that there was an Irish-medium post-primary school in the area of 59.4% of primary schools in the Republic but that only 30% of Northern Ireland Irish-medium primary schools had access to an Irish-medium post-primary school in the school area (Ó Duibhir et al., 2015: 78). As for the question of provision, other causes are also included for the non-progression, which are an obstacle to progression as shown by Ó Duibhir et al. (2015), including: the child's dissatisfaction with immersion education; the worry that the Irish-medium school would not be able to provide appropriate support for children with special needs; the supportive parental role narrowed due to the low level of ability they themselves have in Irish; a limited choice of subjects; difficulties with the recruitment of teachers; a narrow choice of textbooks; the ethnic homogeneity of the Irish-medium school.

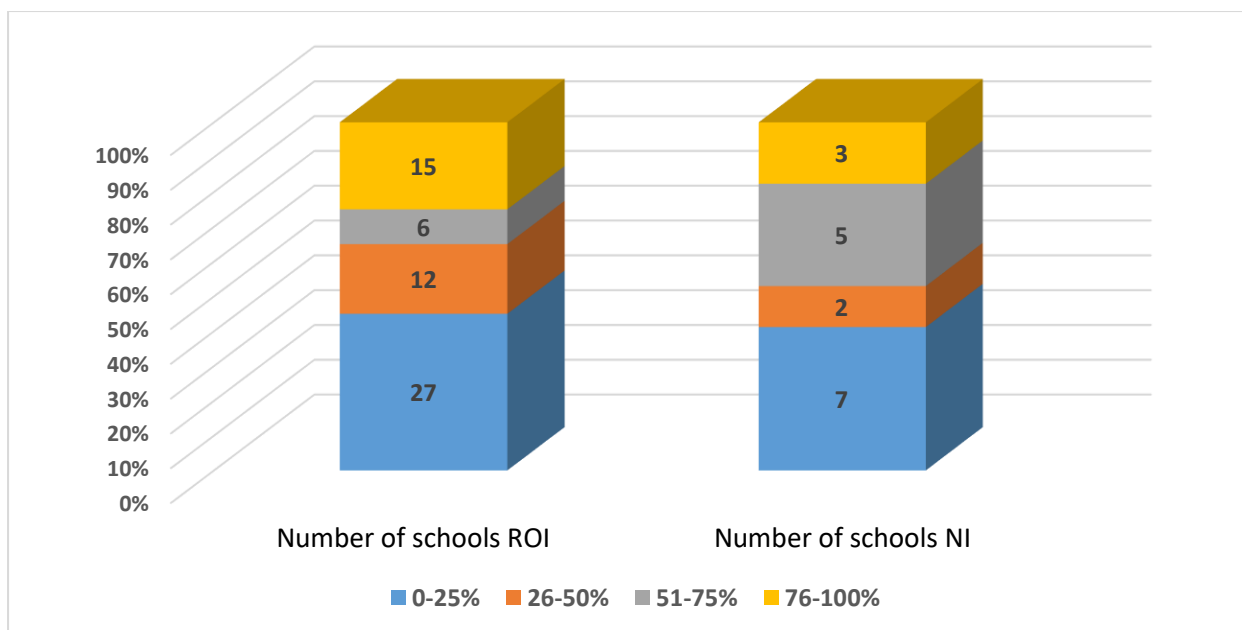


Figure 1.1 the transfer rate from Irish-medium primary schools to Irish-medium post-primary schools

In research by Ó Duibhir et al. (2015) some parents reported that they were concerned about the future of their children’s education at third level and the difficulties they might experience in English, after having taken their education in Irish. It was indicated that the value and importance of English increased as the child progressed through the education system and that a high level of literacy in English was vitally important at third level and in the employment market. This is a cause for concern which has been noted in other immersion education contexts as well (Manitoba: Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2007). Certainly, this is a significant reason for the parents who participated in this research and this subject is returned to below where parents’ experience is examined.

Parental participation

It is widely accepted that parental participation has a significant influence on children’s educational experience and academic success and it is believed, on the whole, that this is a positive influence (Bartram, 2006; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). There are many activities and practices that come under the umbrella of participation, including: help with homework; keeping an eye on the child’s progress; discussing school incidents and things relating to school; facilitating participation in activity that would support learning at school; and participation activities in the school itself (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). Participation is particularly important in the case of immersion education and parents can influence children’s positive or negative attitude towards language learning and motivation to learn (Ó Duibhir et al., 2015; Wesley & Baig, 2012). When this question is looked at in the discussion of Irish-medium

education, it is understood that parental participation has been a characteristic of that system from the time it was established (Mac Murchaidh, 2008)

Parental participation, according to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997; 2005), depends and is based on various features which arise from their own educational experience and from other external things (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Attention is directed to three features in particular: the view of the parent on their own role in the child's life; how effective the parent feels helping the child so that they will succeed at school; the invitations and opportunities for participation received by the parent, through the pupil or through the school itself (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

As for the parental role in Irish-medium immersion education, Kavanagh and Hickey (2013) showed that it did not appear to parents that there was a difference in their role there in comparison with the role they would have in English-medium education. Participation was the same for them especially when immersion education was being discussed, giving support to the children with and in the language itself, a practice which the majority of the parents are not able to carry out (Harris, Forde, Archer, Nic Fhearaile, O'Gorman, 2006). Indeed, there is the danger in this case that parents would be of the opinion that there would be more harm than good from participation in the child's school work (Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013: 446). This lack of ability is an obstacle to parental self-efficacy when immersion education is discussed.

As for self-efficacy, it is not parental skills that are important but the confidence parents have in those skills and self efficacy is defined in the case of parental responsibility as the confidence they have to influence the development and learning of the child (Hoover-Dempsey, 1992). Parental participation rates decrease at post-primary school due to the decline in self-efficacy and the child's work becoming more difficult (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). It is the case that the difficulty would be increased with lack of linguistic understanding as well. This decline in self-efficacy has serious implications for progression in immersion education in Ireland.

Parental participation depends on the role apparent to them in the child's educational life and if the parent has decided in their mind that participation is central in the role, they will seek opportunities for participation (Hoover-Dempsey, 1997: 31). Participation depends also on the invitation available to them, and this is often a source of tension between the school and the parent (Barnard, 2004). Just as with self-efficacy, a low level of language is a significant obstacle to participation and another approach must be found which would promote participation in which use of the language would not be central (Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013: 448).

International research on this subject and the research which examines progression in Ireland shows that parents have thought deeply about the school their child will attend and often it is not just one factor which settles the final decision (Hodges, 2011). According to Ó Duibhir et al (2015), “the transfer rate from primary schools to post-primary schools is a cause for concern [and] further investigation of this question would be needed to find the reasons for it before this challenge can be faced” (Ó Duibhir et al., 2015: 84). This is the basis for this research project.

Conclusion

An insight was given in this part of the report into the literature relevant to progression in Irish-medium education in Ireland and immersion education abroad. It is seen that progression in Ireland mirrors these international norms although it is often difficult to make specific comparison due to differences in the provision of immersion education at post-primary level. This is seen especially in the widespread provision of bilingual education at post-primary level in North America and Wales. An examination was made also of the important parental role in children’s education and the influence of that parental participation on children’s educational continuum. It is clear that parents whose children are attending immersion education schools are often left out because they themselves feel that their low level of language ability is an obstacle. This and other variables are discussed in the examination of the results of the research in Chapter 4. The research methodologies used in this project are addressed in the next section.

Methodologies

Introduction

The participants of this research comprised three separate groups, i.e. principals in Irish-medium schools in the Republic of Ireland, primary 6 pupils in those schools, and their parents. Opinions and experience of the principals and the parents were collected via a questionnaire and also through a discussion forum and group interviews. Data from the pupils were collected by means of a questionnaire. An account is given here of these participants and the input they had in the current project.

Principals' Questionnaire

Questionnaires were selected that were distributed online to a random sample of 20% of all Irish-medium primary schools in the Republic of Ireland (143). The questionnaires were previously piloted with a sample of Irish-medium primary school principals to ensure that the questionnaire structure and material were suitable and easy to use. The questionnaire was distributed in October 2015 and 27 principals completed the questionnaire. The primary schools were situated in rural and urban areas throughout the Republic of Ireland and the principals reported that 60% of them had an Irish-medium post-primary school in their catchment area.

In these questionnaires features relevant to progression from Irish-medium primary school to Irish-medium post-primary school were investigated, such as:

- an Irish-medium post-primary school situated in the primary school catchment area;
- the general rate of progression to the Irish-medium post-primary school;
- relations between the Irish-medium primary school and post-primary school;
- the information shared with pupils and parents on progression and the various ways that information is shared; opinions of the principals on the reasons for transfer or non-transfer to Irish-medium post-primary school.

Principals' discussion forum

After we carried out a basic analysis of the questionnaires, Irish-medium primary school principals were invited to take part in a discussion forum on the theme of transfer. Twenty principals attended this forum and three other principals were interviewed individually because they were not able to attend the forum on the designated date.

The questions at the discussion forum were based on the main research themes (see Appendix), including:

- the consideration given in the family to progression;
- hindrances to transfer;
- the relations between primary schools and post-primary schools as they pertain to facilitating transfer.

Recurrent themes were sought and principals' experience of transfer and of Irish-medium education in general were analysed. During the interviews and the discussion, interesting details were gathered, considered to be valuable and relevant and these details are in consideration in the examination of the results of the research in the next chapter.

Pupils' and Parents' Questionnaires

After we carried out basic analysis of the principals' questionnaires they were contacted again to ask if they were willing for us to send questionnaires to sixth class pupils in the school and to parents. A representative sample of 20% of schools was selected and on the advice of the principal the parents' and pupils' questionnaires were distributed in one package to 6th class pupils. The pupils took the questionnaires home with them, they were filled in at home, and they brought them back to school in sealed envelopes. It was the school principals who then sent the packages back to the researchers.

In total 571 questionnaires were sent to pupils and parents. Of all of the pupils' questionnaires distributed, 284 were completed and sent back (49.7%) and 321 (56.2%) of the parents' questionnaires were completed and returned.

Pupils' Questionnaire

We wanted to investigate if the pupils intended to continue with Irish-medium education at post-primary level, and the reasons for that decision. Also investigated was the language that the pupils speak with their parents. A copy of the pupils' questionnaire is available in the appendices.

It was decided to send the questionnaire to 6th class pupils in Irish-medium primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. This group was selected since, on the whole, they would have made a decision on transfer and we would therefore have a clearer view of the current rate of transfer to Irish-medium education at post-primary level.

Demographic and linguistic background of the pupils

284 pupils took part in this research. Boys comprise 46.3% of the sample and girls 53.7%. 99.3% of the pupils were between 11 and 12 years of age.

As for their current language behaviour, 29.8% of pupils reported that they spoke English only at home, 43.4% spoke mostly English and with some Irish words and phrases, 21.9% spoke English and

Irish but more English, 2.6% spoke half English and half Irish, 0.8% spoke English and Irish but more Irish, 0.4% spoke mostly Irish and some English words and phrases, 0.4% spoke only Irish.

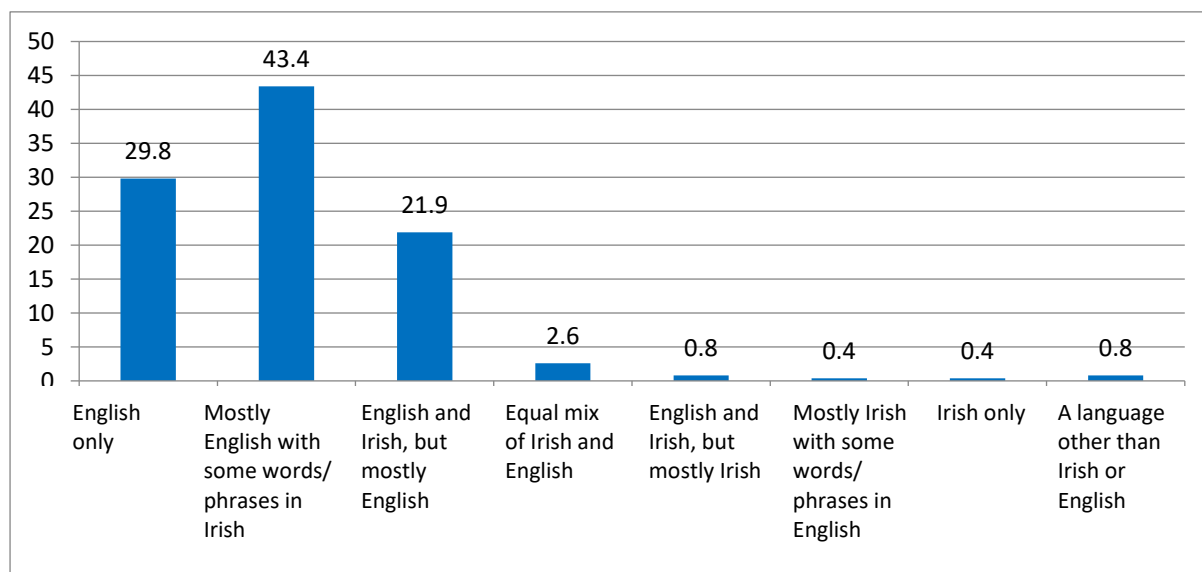


Figure 1.2 Language behaviour of the pupils with their parents

Principals' Questionnaire

In the case of the principals, various themes were investigated in the questionnaires, such as:

- the educational background of the parent;
- the parent's ability in Irish;
- the family's language behaviour; the reasons for deciding to send the child to an Irish-medium primary school;
- the level of parental satisfaction with the Irish-medium education to date;
- the support, if any, that was and is available to the parent with transfer;
- the process of making a decision on transfer;
- reasoning behind their decision to continue or not to continue with Irish-medium education at post-primary level.

The questionnaire was distributed to parents of 6th class children and 321 parents filled in the questionnaire sent out. 92.5% of the respondents were Irish and the rest of the sample were from a wide range of countries.

A copy of the questionnaire is available in the appendices and the answer percentages appear in the case of the questions.

Parents' interviews

We wanted to investigate in greater depth parents' experience and parents who filled in the questionnaire were invited to take part in the second part of the research, focus group interviews. 26 parents took part in these interviews which were run in the school areas as well as some individual interviews that were organised by telephone to cater for parents for whom the designated dates of the focus group interviews were not suitable. The interview questions were based on the main themes of the research (see Appendix). Recurrent themes were sought and parents' experience of Irish-medium at primary level were analysed, and also their experience of transfer from that system to Irish-medium and English-medium post-primary education. Their views are taken into consideration in the examination of the results of the research in the next chapter.

Demographic and linguistic background of the parents

It was mostly mothers (81.3%) who completed the questionnaire with 18.1% of fathers and 0.3% who had a carer or other relationship with the child and 0.3% where both the mother and father completed the questionnaire

Parents were asked about the highest level of education they had reached. 5.1% had reached junior post-primary school, 20.3% had reached senior post-primary level, 21% had reached a non-degree course at third level and 53.1% had reached a university degree. Most of the parents completed the questionnaire in English (85.9%) and 14.1% in Irish. The parents' language experience is reported below in the examination of the results of the survey.

Conclusion

In this part of the report the research approach and the methodologies used to gather information and also to carry out an accurate analysis of that information has been described. An account was given of participants of the research, i.e. principals in Irish-medium schools in the Republic of Ireland, sixth class pupils in those schools, and their parents. An insight was given into the research tools used to investigate the opinions and experiences of participants regarding progression in Irish-medium education, i.e.: questionnaires; a discussion group; focus groups. In the next chapter we deal with the information collected and the insights that information gives us on progression from Irish-medium primary school to Irish-medium post-primary school in the Republic of Ireland, outside of the Gaeltacht.

Research outcomes

Introduction

In this chapter an insight is given into the results of the research based on an analysis carried out on the principals', parents' and pupils' questionnaires and also on the principals' and parents' interviews. First of all, focus is directed at the participants and their experience to date of Irish-medium education. Then we report on the progression pathway among the pupils, looking at the variables having the greatest influence on their route to post-primary Irish-medium or English-medium education.

Use of Irish in the Parents' Families

Initially an investigation was carried out on the parents' linguistic background, as can be seen in the figure below.

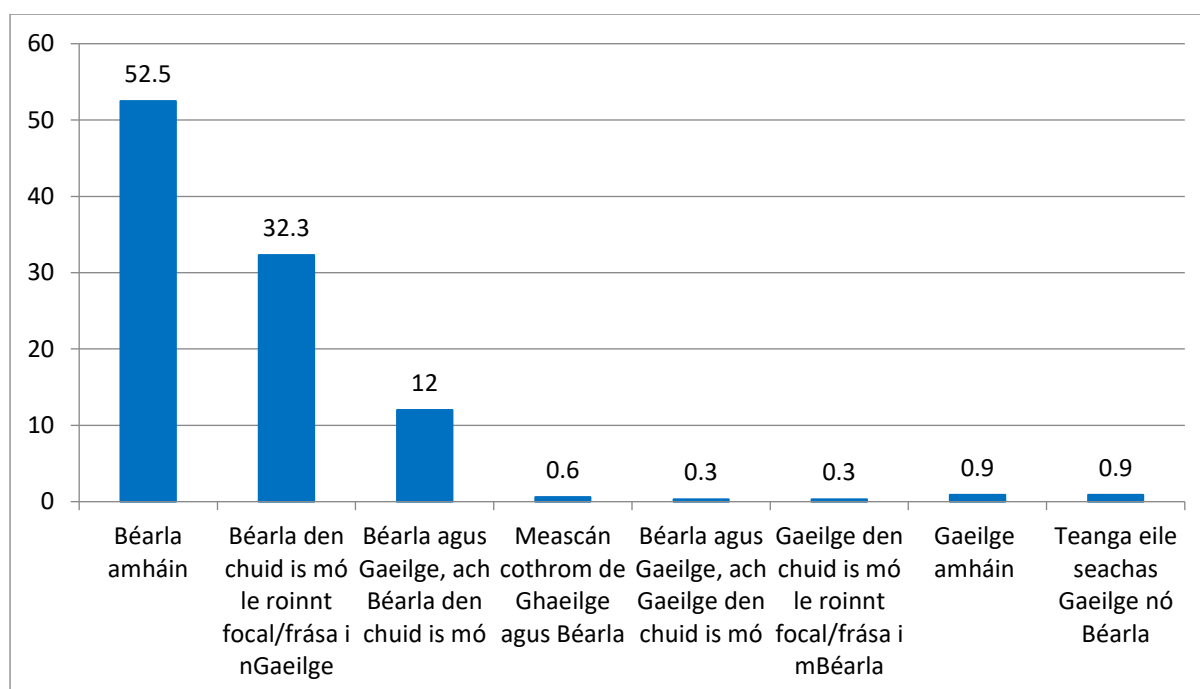


Figure 1.3 Linguistic background of the parents growing up

It is clear, based on the results, that they have little experience of Irish as a family language. 96.8% used English, or mostly used English, as a family language when growing up. 1.5% of the sample said that Irish, or mostly Irish, was used as a home language when they were growing up. Although this figure is low, it is understood that a particular growth in participation in Irish-medium education occurred in the 1980s (McAdory & Janmaat, 2015). It is unlikely, therefore, that a large number of ex-pupils from that time are at an age yet that children of theirs are transferring to post-primary education, and therefore participating in a project aimed at this particular demographic group.

The low figures suggest, however, that most of the parents have little experience of Irish as a family language and it is likely that it is difficult, therefore, to foster the habit of speaking Irish at home. There is the danger, of course, that this practice could influence the children’s attitude towards Irish as a functioning language outside of the school environment.

Ability and Language Use Among Parents

A topic of interest for this research is the levels of self-reported ability of the parents in Irish, especially in relation to the impact that would have of their ability to participate in the education of their children. The parents’ reports of that ability is seen in Figure 1.4 below.

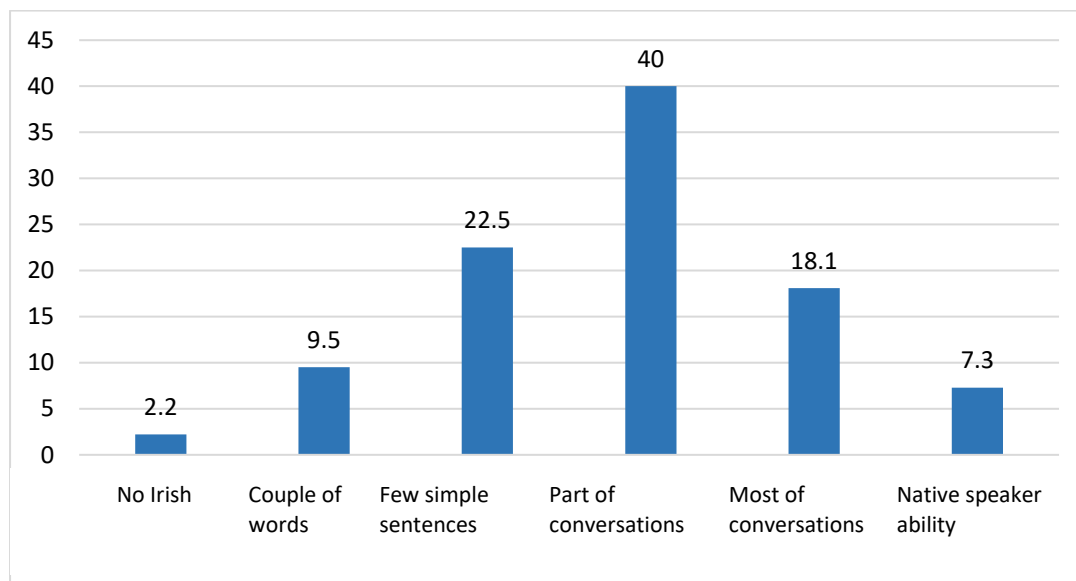


Figure 1.4 Self reported ability of the parents in speaking Irish

These figures show that 25.4% of parents have a functional ability in Irish and 62.5% have a moderate, but perhaps passive ability. It is interesting to note that in spite of nearly a quarter of the parents having a functional ability in the language, that ability does not transfer to the use of Irish as their normal family language. It can be seen in Figure 1.5 that it is English which is dominant as a family language in most of the families.

The use of Irish in the family

As for their linguistic behaviour, it was investigated with parents and pupils which language they most used with each other at home. The answers are shown in the two figures below.

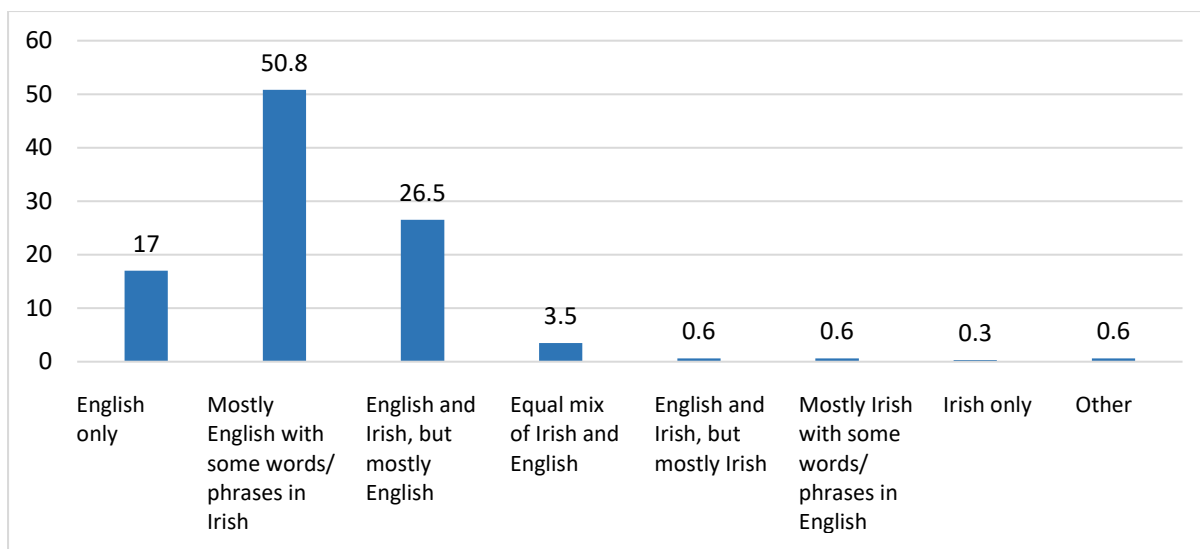


Figure 1.5 Current linguistic behaviour of the parents at home

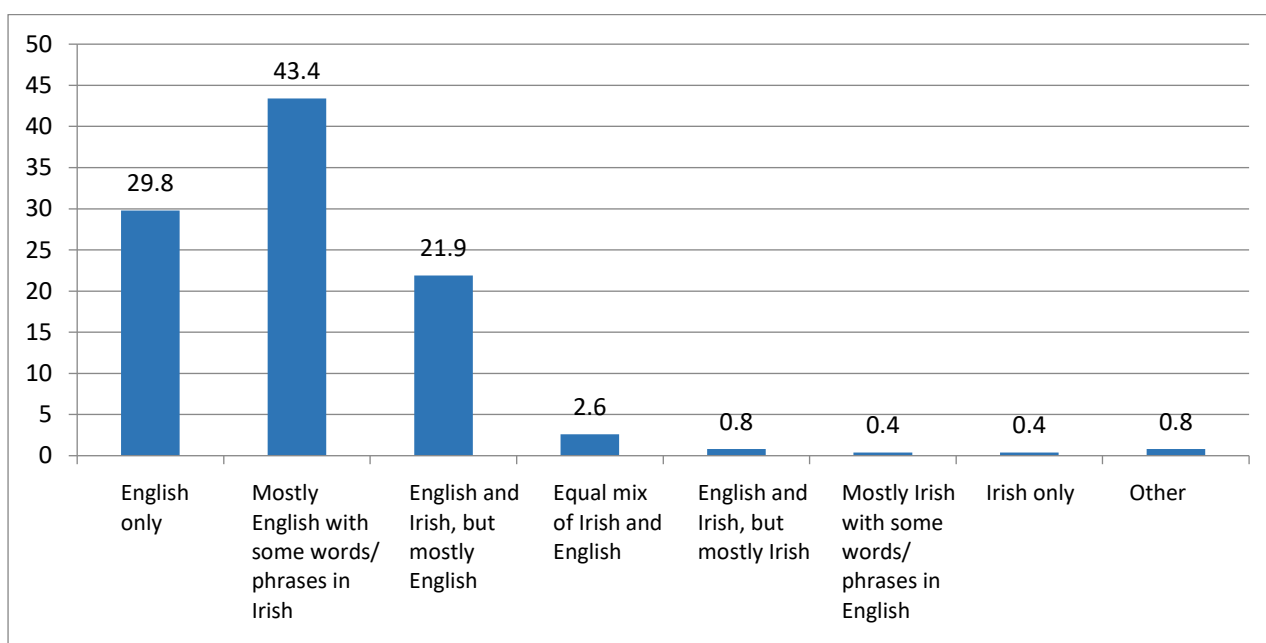


Figure 1.6 Spoken language of the pupils with their parents

When this account is compared with the parents' statements, when they were asked which language they spoke with their children, it is noticed that although there were some differences in the different sections, on the whole the experiences of the two groups agree. As outlined above, there is the danger that the parents' lack of practice in the use of Irish as a family language when they themselves were growing up is having an impact on their own family language behaviour.

[The Parents' Experience of Irish-medium Education](#)

The figures in Table 1.1 show that 30 (9.3%) parents attended an Irish-medium primary school and 27 (8.4%) an Irish-medium secondary school. As is understood from the present study and as

outlined in the literature review in chapter two, it would be expected that there would be a fall of this kind in progression based on current transfer habits (Bourdreaux, 2011; Ó Duibhir et al., 2015; Wesley & Baig, 2012). Of the 30 parents who attended an Irish-medium primary school, there were ten who did not continue with Irish-medium education. There were seven parents, however, who attended an Irish-medium post-primary school who had not attended an Irish-medium primary school. In summary, most of the parents (88.5%) have experience of the English-medium education system rather than Irish-medium.

Table 1.1 Attendance of the parents at Irish-medium education

	Number of Parents (%)
Irish-medium primary school and Irish-medium post-primary school	20 (6.2%)
Irish-medium primary-primary school but did not attend an Irish-medium post-primary school	10 (3.1%)
Irish-medium post-primary school but did not attend an Irish-medium primary school	7 (2.2%)
Total who attended an Irish-medium primary or post-primary school	37 (11.5%)

As we will see below, parents indicate that the lack of information they have on the operation of Irish-medium education it is a great impediment for them in progression , especially at post-primary level. This lack of information includes issues such as bilingualism, the function of the second language in the educational life of the pupil at third level, managing special learning needs in the second language and other matters. In light of the parents’ lack of experience of Irish-medium education at primary and post-primary level, it is vitally important that every effort be made to clearly and regularly explain the function of Irish-medium education and its benefits to the parents of the pupils, if their confidence and participation in the system is to continue.

As discussed earlier, there is often a strong association between parental participation in their children’s education and giving support in the language and with the language. Harris et al. (2006) showed that the majority of the parents in the Irish-medium education system (outside of the Gaeltacht) were not able to give that support due to lack of ability in the language. That said, the figures in this research show that in the case of Irish-medium schools parents it is probable that 25.4% of them have the competence to provide this support and although 62.5% of parents might not be able to give practical language support as envisaged in the stated approach, it is clear that they have a certain understanding of the language andof language use. It would be worthwhile, therefore, looking at other ways, as recommended by Halsall (1994) and Kavanagh and Hickey

(2013), to develop the model of support so that it would encompass a wide range of support practices, and not only support for the language. This is discussed in more detail in the examination of the parents' personal opinions on participation and support.

Current transfer levels in Irish-medium education

We asked the primary school principals about the number of 6th class pupils in 2014 who went on to an Irish-medium post-primary school. In total 40.2% of the pupils continued with Irish-medium education. However, when we differentiated between primary schools which had a post-primary school in their catchment area and those that did not, we found that 53.6% of pupils went on to an Irish-medium post-primary school. Not surprisingly, in the schools in which there was no post-primary school in the catchment area, only 8.0% continued with post-primary education through Irish.

Table 1.2 The transfer rate from the Irish-medium primary school to the Irish-medium post-primary

	Number of pupils in 6th class in 2014	Number of 6th class pupils in 2014 who went on to an Irish-medium post-primary school.	% transferred
All schools in the research	764	307	40.2%
Schools without an Irish-medium post-primary school in the catchment area	225	18	8.0%
Schools with an Irish-medium post-primary school in the catchment area	539	289	53.6%

49.8% of parents say that their children intend to attend an Irish-medium post-primary school. This figure is fairly close to the transfer rate (53.6%) reported by principals in Table 1.2 above. 42.1% of parents say that their children will not attend an Irish-medium post-primary school and 5.3% say that they do not know yet where their children will go to school or they left that question blank. It is understood from the analysis carried out on progression trends internationally that this rate compares with those norms (Llywodraeth Cymru, 2015; Makropoulos, 2010).

When the decision is made

It is notable that there is significant variation between the two groups of parents according to when this decision is made. As for those whose children intend to continue with Irish-medium post-primary education, it is indicated that the decision is made by 48.6% (24.6% + 11.2% + 12.8%) of

those parents before the children start at primary school, as seen in Figure 1.7. This is in accord with what was presented earlier about the progression pathway being in the parents' mind from the beginning.

When those who are undertaking English-medium post-primary are examined, it can be seen in Figure 1.8 that the school is chosen later. It is understood that the decision is made by 56.3% between fifth and sixth class and 40% in sixth class. This figure shows that the parents are in two minds as to the Irish-medium progression pathway for a significant amount of time, a period during which the benefits of progression could be made clear to them.

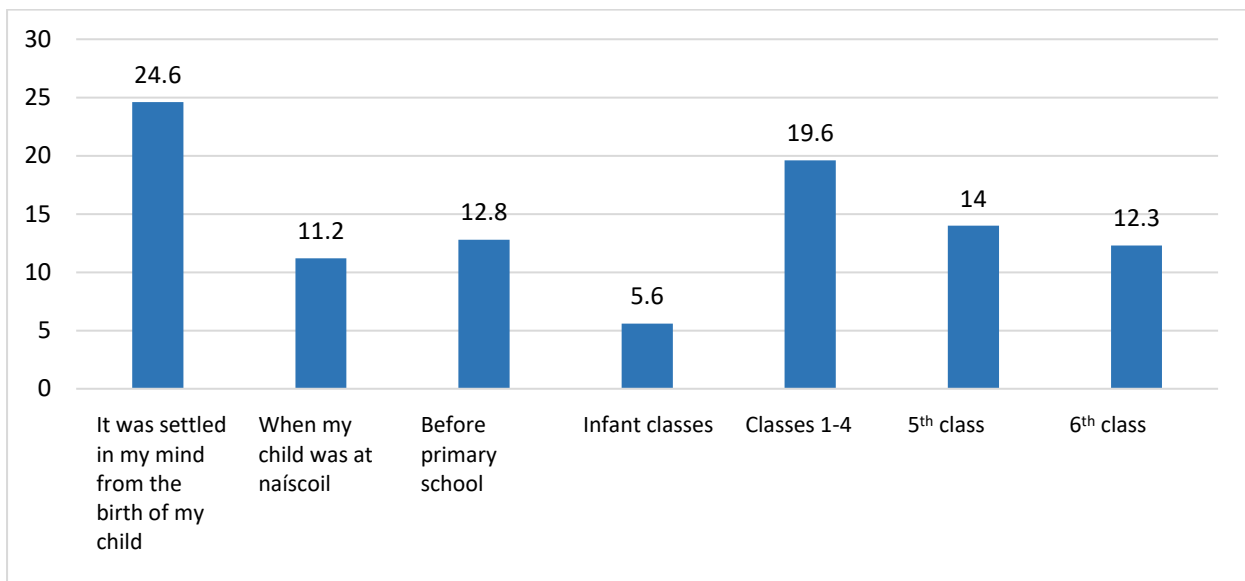


Figure 1.7 When parents made the decision to send their children to an Irish-medium post-primary school.

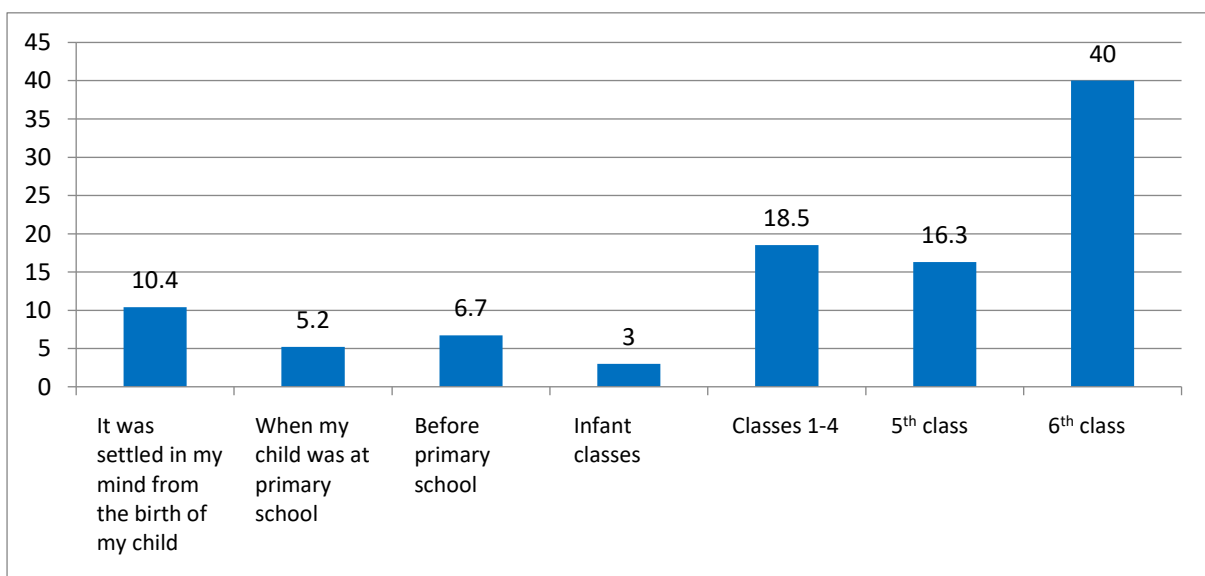


Figure 1.8 When parents made the decision to send their children to an English-medium post-primary school.

Principals in Irish-medium primary schools think it is “too late” to speak with pupils and parents in 6th class. The decision is already made at this point” and “If you want to influence them, you have to start earlier than that.” The principals recommend trying to influence pupils and parents in 3rd and 4th class if they are to be attracted towards Irish-medium post-primary school. Parents also recommend that information be shared on progression with the pupils and with parents regularly from a young age in order to ensure that an informed decision is made. This point is returned to below.

Who makes the decision?

Parents thought that there had been deeper reflection behind the decision about Irish-medium education when their children were transferring to the post-primary school than when they were starting primary school because there were variables such as third level education now central in the discussion, variables that were not considered at the start of primary school.

maybe the atmosphere and a nice feeling to the school is more important for primary school ... whereas you have a little bit more of an eye ... to the kind of results output even though I hate the kind of idea of the league table which I can't help having a quick glance.

I think you're just thinking short term really when they're starting school you know but when it gets nearer it's long term you're kind of trying to help them make the right decisions

The majority of parents stated that the decision on the choice of post-primary school was arrived at through conversations between parents and children looking to which school most fulfilled the wishes of each person for the comprehensive experience associated with time in post-primary school.

me in particular I would have loved her to continue with Irish and she was under no illusion about that and we've discussed it and debated it ... and we talked about it over and back so I really feel we've come to the right decision with her

It is no harm mentioning, however, that it is very clear in the interview results that it was the pupils who had the strongest influence in the process:

I didn't make the decision she made the decision, all along she's always just said “why would I go and learn everything again in English when I already know most in Irish, it seems like a lot of pointless hard work” and I was happy enough with that decision to be honest

Certainly, primary school principals also agree with this view and the central role, in their opinion, that the pupil has in the process. The question is raised, therefore, how many of the recruitment strategies of the post-primary schools focus specifically on the pupil? It would be worthwhile, based

on the results above, to integrate a particular marketing strategy in the approach of the primary schools and post-primary schools to ensure that the information is delivered effectively to the appropriate target group. This point is returned to when recommendations on transfer are presented in the next chapter.

It is worth casting an eye on the reasons for parents' decisions to progress or not to progress with Irish-medium education at post-primary level. To that end, it would be useful also to briefly look at the reasons parents had for starting Irish-medium education in the first instance at primary school level. It is interesting that similarities and differences are apparent in the variables which were important in the minds of parents during these two periods.

“Natural” step on the progression pathway

30% of parents say that the Irish-medium primary school is the next step on the progression pathway after their children attended Irish-medium nursery school and 68.2% of them say that they had Irish-medium post-primary school in mind as they choose Irish-medium primary school. As for those parents who have a child progressing with Irish-medium education at post-primary level, (n=160 in total), a significant number of them say, despite the concerns they had about the system, that it was a “natural” transfer for them:

we would have envisaged from the start that they would go onto the secondary school even when we were putting them into the primary school

when we put our children into an all-Irish primary school then the decision was made more or less going onto secondary school. Only if there was a problem in an all Irish school or if it really didn't suit the child you'd be thinking of another school really.

As the parent above mentions, however, it appears that it is a natural transfer in the case where neither the parent or the child had a negative experience of Irish-medium education up to that point or that there was no other significant obstacle to progression. Among those obstacles, as one parent shows, are special learning needs.

If I found there were issues in terms of Dyslexia or different other issues then obviously that would be a significant reason to sit down with I suppose the principal of the secondary school fortunately and thankfully those scenarios haven't arisen but if that was the case I'd think I'd have to review more

It is apparent, therefore, not only are there a significant number of pupils on the Irish-medium progression pathway by the time they are in primary school but that a high percentage of them are also coming to the school with participation in Irish-medium post-primary school already seen as a choice in the minds of parents. It is another question, as is shown below, the outcome of this preliminary reflection.

Reasons to attend Irish-medium primary and post-primary education

As shown by Ní Mhurchú (2008) parents report a high level of satisfaction with Irish-medium education, and this is also the case with participants in this research as well. 97.2% of all the parents who filled in the questionnaires say they are happy with the educational and linguistic experience their children received in Irish-medium primary education to date, regardless of where their children went at post-primary. This high figure is certainly an encouragement for all those working in the field of Irish-medium education and is a sign of hope for participation in the future.

The reasons parents had for undertaking Irish-medium education are described here. Although parents were asked specific questions on their reasons for progressing or not progressing with Irish-medium education, there are many variables which arose during the research process. As shown in the current research on the subject, it is rare that parents make this decision on only one variable (Buchanan & Fox, 2008; Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles & Wilson, 2009; Darmody, Smyth & McCoy, 2012).

As for those intending to continue with Irish-medium education, 160 of the 321 parents who took part in this research say that they intend to send their children to an Irish-medium post-primary school. The percentages in this report are based on those 160 parents.

Similarities are noted between the reasons parents had to send their children to the Irish-medium primary school in Figure 1.9 and to the Irish-medium post-primary schools in Figure 1.10. In the case of the majority of parents, as can be seen in international contexts of bilingual education (Hodges, 2011), it is the interest of the parents in the target language itself or the desire that their children be bilingual that originally motivated them to undertake Irish-medium education.

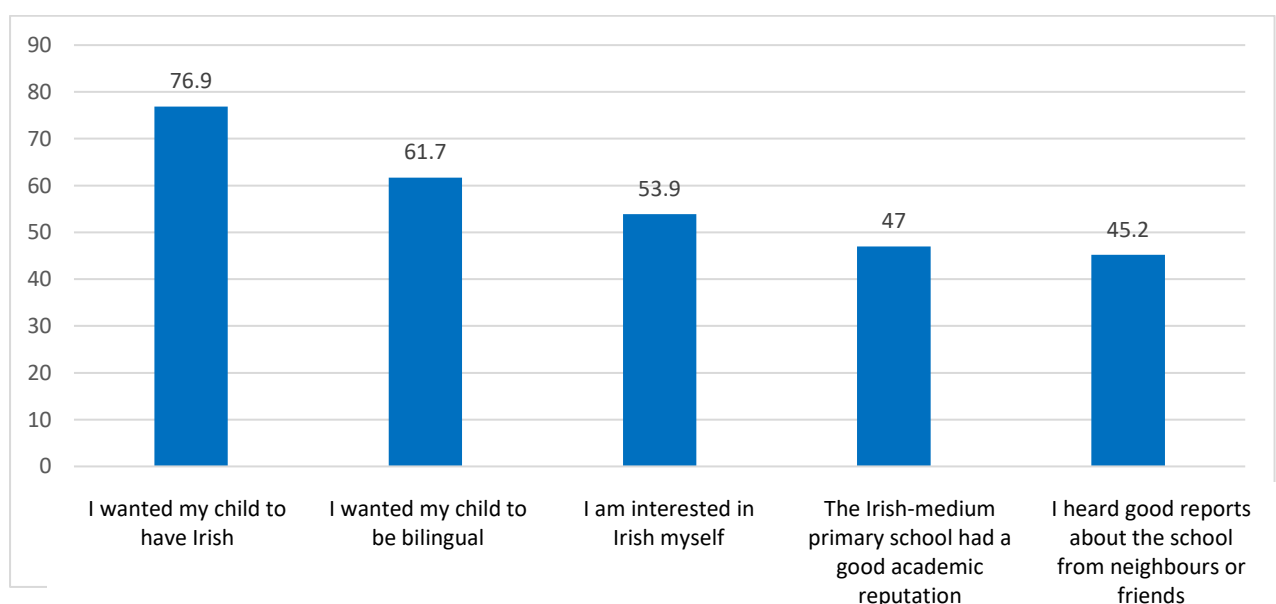


Figure 1.9 The greatest reasons parents stated that they chose an Irish-medium primary school (n=321)

It is clear from Figure 1.10 below that interest in the Irish language itself and in bilingualism were still strong motivations for parents and their children transferring to an Irish-medium post-primary school.

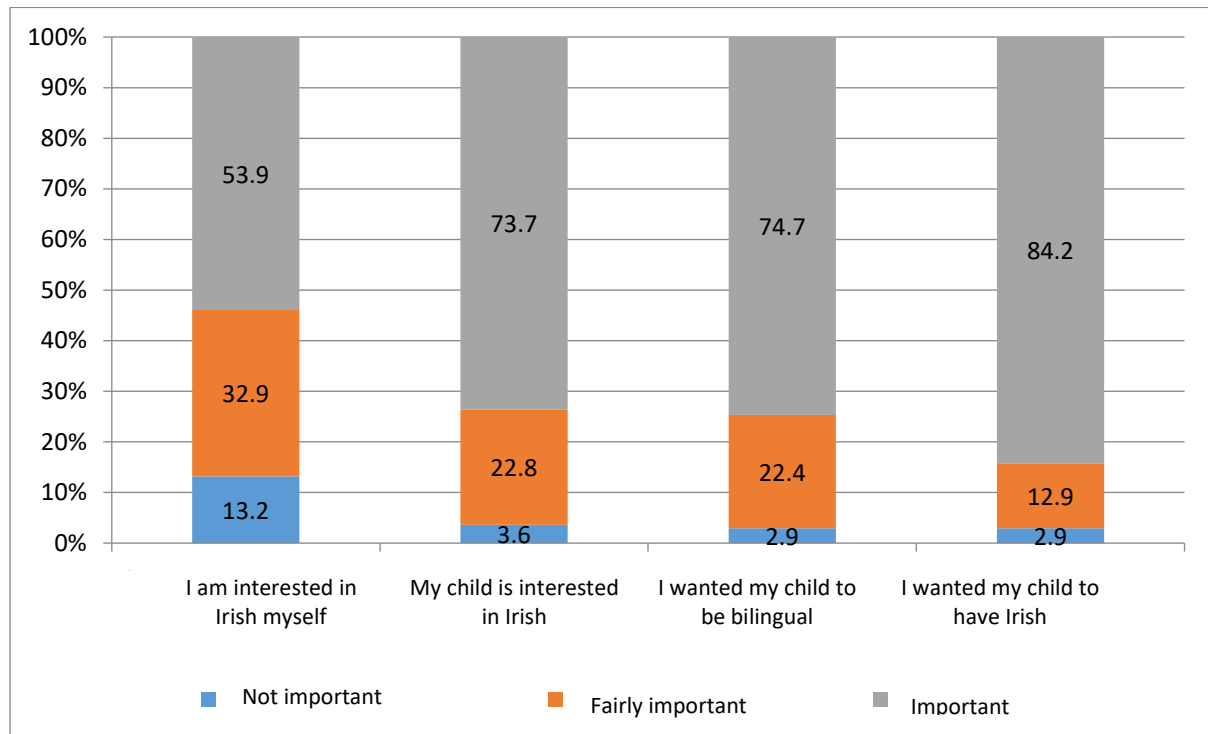


Figure 1.10 The greatest reasons parents stated that they chose an Irish-medium post-primary school (n=160)

Interest in bilingualism

It is clear from Figure 1.10 above that the pupils' parents are very interested in bilingualism and they want their children to have an ability in two languages. As for the pupil's interest in bilingualism, 50% of them say that they would like to be bilingual and 52.8% that they would like to be able to speak Irish. The interest that both parents and children have in bilingualism is a significant advantage for progression and for the Irish-medium education system in general. It is important, if parents' and children's wishes are to be influenced in regard to the goals they have in Irish-medium education, to take the opportunity to impress upon them that bilingualism is a lifelong process which does no harm to the acquisition of the first language, a concern that is apparent among parents at present.

Among the other reasons apart from the linguistic reasons parents had for choosing Irish-medium education at post-primary level, there were: the school's good academic reputation; attaining points

in Leaving Certificate examinations; a good choice of subjects; reports received on the positive experience of other parents and pupils in the system; the school composition.

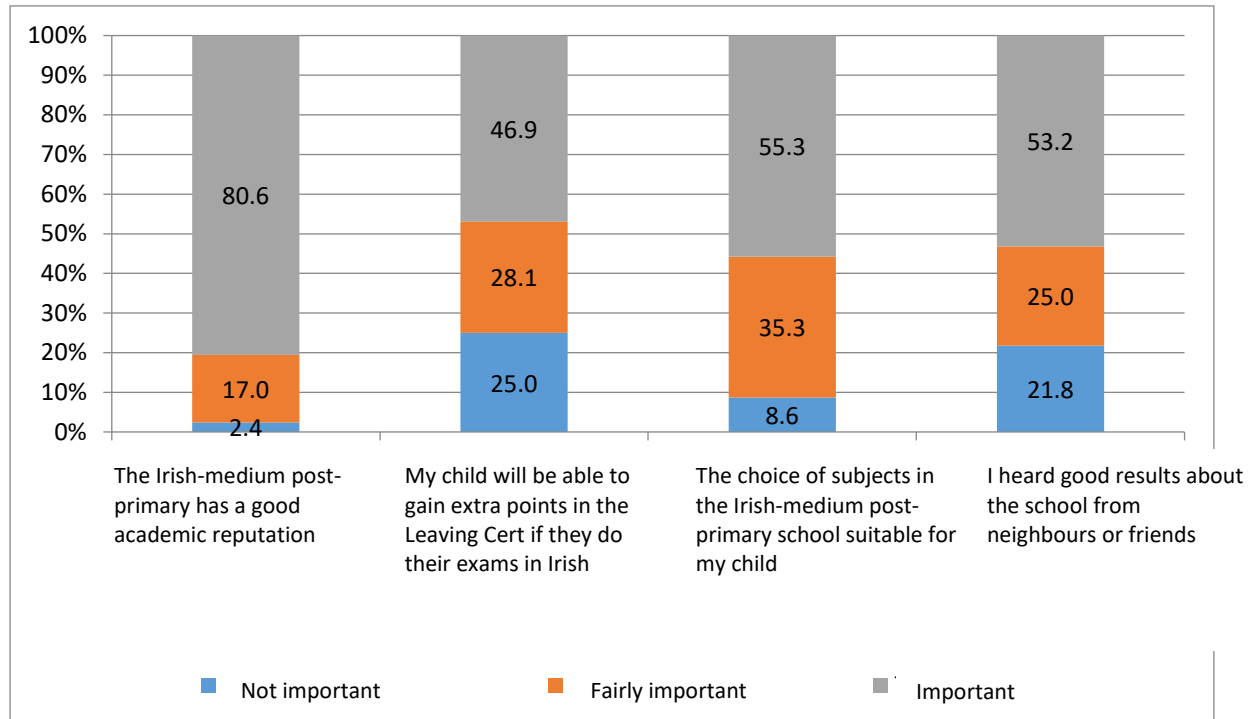


Figure 1.11 Other reasons parents stated that they chose an Irish-medium post-primary school (n=160)

The school’s academic reputation

This variable is very important among the parents in the present study and 80.6% of them are continuing with Irish-medium education at post-primary level because they believe that the local Irish-medium post-primary school has a good academic reputation.

I looked up the league tables for the school I have to admit

I’m sure people saw this on the Independent but I teach in another school and I was proud saying “oh look there’s the school my son goes to”

It is clear from the results, therefore, that there is a significant number of parents who think that Irish-medium education is a nourishing environment for their children’s academic progress and that their children’s academic progress would be better in that system than in the English-medium system.

The question of fees is connected with academic reputation, an aspect which often arises in urban areas where attendance at private post-primary schools is widespread and the Irish-medium post-primary schools are in competition with those schools. It is a significant advantage for parents in some cases that Irish-medium colleges are of the same standard in relation to academic reputation as fee paying schools. Hodges (2011) refers to the same practice occurring when parents chose Welsh-medium schools, with the same view that a private school ethos is available without having to pay (Hodges, 2011: 54).

Leaving Certificate bonus points

46.9% of parents report the importance of the extra points to be gained in the Leaving Certificate examination if pupils do the examinations in Irish. 33.1% of the pupils stated that there are 'more points to be gained in the Leaving Certificate if they do all the examinations in Irish' as a reason for them to choose an Irish-medium post-primary school. It is clear, however, from parents' statements that they are confused about the bonus points system for those pupils who take their examinations in Irish.

I think it's only an extra 20 points or something that they get for going through Irish so.

What is it I'm not well up on, is it 20 points overall or is it broken down or what way is it?

As far as I know is they get 60% in an exam, they get 10% of the mark they didn't get so they get 10% of 40 which would be 4.

In the case of one parent, this lack of clarity was strongly linked to the decision made not to continue with Irish-medium education at post-primary level:

We are not clear about the difference in the Leaving Certificate marking. Is education through Irish worth it if the Leaving Certificate is difficult enough through English.

This indecision in parents shows that they do not have accurate knowledge about the bonus points system and have little experience of it as an aspect of Irish-medium education at post-primary level. It is clear that there is important information which is not being effectively delivered to parents, information which could have a strong influence on progression in Irish-medium education.

When transfer is being discussed it is interesting that a significant variable is friends of the pupil, with 31.7% of pupils reporting that their friends have an influence on the post-primary school they will attend. Only 19.2% of parents think that this has an influence on their children's transfer to Irish-medium post-primary school.

School composition

Darmody, Smyth agus McCoy (2012) describe the importance of school composition when parents are choosing a school for their children. Composition includes the ethnic and racial profile of the school, the pupils' and parents' socioeconomic profile and the gender mix of the pupils. Byrne,

McGinnity, Smyth agus Darmody (2010) showed in their research on immigration and school composition in Ireland that there was a low representation of immigrants in the country's Irish-medium schools since families who do not have English as a first language are reluctant to acquire another language.

8.7% of all the parents who took part in this research report that they chose an Irish-medium primary school because they were of the opinion that there would be a lower number of pupils in it from an immigrant background. In the case of post-primary school, this figure rises to 12% of parents reporting the same reason. It is noteworthy that this is quite a low figure in the context of all the reasons parents had for pursuing Irish-medium education.

Although there is reference at times, especially in the media, to single gender as an advantage in the mind of parents in choosing Irish-medium education, the results of this research do not support that particular discussion. There is little accurate evidence collected on this subject to date and the results of the present research show that there is little advantage on the whole for parents in choosing a single gender school.

Although parents were not asked a specific question on the gender mix of the school as an advantage or disadvantage for them in choosing a school for their children, a significant number of parents state the importance of gender mix at primary level:

It was also a co-ed school and I had a boy and a girl and wanted them in the same school.

The all-Irish primary school is the only primary school in the town which educates both boys and girls together.

Again, when discussing post-primary education, although parents were not specifically asked about the gender mix of the school, parents nevertheless referred to the advantage of the Irish-medium secondary school in regard to this mix:

most of the secondary schools in Cork are non-co-ed so the only ones that are co-ed in the bounds of Cork city let's say suburbs are the Church of Ireland school and the Gaelcholáistí

the good schools locally secondary schools would be single sexed and you know I just think it's such a relaxed school here and it's just really worked for both of my children and I think both of them could struggle to go to a same sexed now

Of course, this mix could be an obstacle as well at post-primary level depending on the parents' wishes and model of the ideal post-primary school mix.

[Good reports about the post-primary school](#)

53.2% of parents say they were influenced by good reports heard about Irish-medium education or about the Irish-medium post-primary school itself when they were choosing a post-primary school, and during the interviews the parents also described the importance of word of mouth:

I suppose where we live a lot of people within the estate go, a lot of children go so again it's chatting with a mother and it's that word to mouth...if you were getting bad indicators there then by all means that would influence my decision.

I would have been listening to people reports I'd been hearing and if I hadn't of heard those reports I probably would not have put him here to be very honest but I have to say I've been pleasantly surprised by his progression. I had anticipated maybe issues in certain subjects but I have to say it has all been very smooth so far

On the same subject, there is a danger that negative reports of the system may have an influence on decisions and parental attitude just as much. Parents describe the importance of the open days and nights in the school and the lack of opportunity they often have at these events to collect information on the practical functioning of Irish-medium education. Therefore, and also due to their own lack of experience of the system, especially at post-primary level, parents depend greatly on speculation and on the experience of other parents who are already involved in the system. It is important that Irish-medium primary schools and post-primary schools have an understanding of the kind of knowledge that parents need and deliver it regularly and in an effective and understandable way.

School location and accomodation

22.7% of the parents reported that the convenient location of the primary school was an advantage when they were choosing a school for their children. Of the 160 parents who say that they intend that their children would attend an Irish-medium post-primary school, 23.4% of them say that the location of that school is convenient for them.

Another factor which adds to the advantages of the location is that the pupil's brothers and sisters may already be attending the post-primary school. 27.1% of the parents reported that the primary school was chosen because the child's brothers or sisters were attending the school already. Of the 160 parents whose children are progressing to Irish-medium education post-primary, 23.4% say that this is a variable that attracted them to the Irish-medium post-primary school. For many reasons it is a significant advantage for the parents that their children attend the same school, including ease of travel and knowing the school context and staff:

In terms of the logistics the proximity to the school etc. and things like that are the key factors too and it's actually walking distance for us to send the children there which is good

Of course, it is difficult to ask parents to go against this custom except by trying to secure continuity among the families at primary level as soon as possible.

Despite prefabricated buildings at many of the Irish-medium post-primary schools the children intended to attend, parents think conditions such as this do not put them off as long as there is a

positive atmosphere in the school. This is a sign of hope, especially for those schools that are struggling with long-term accommodation challenges.

Reasons to progress with English-medium post-primary education

135 of the 321 parents say that they intend to send their children to an English-medium post-primary school and the percentages below are based on those 135 parents. It is understood that there are other variables causing concern to parents and children who decide to go into English-medium education at post-primary level, including: the location of the post-primary school; a more suitable choice of subjects for the pupil; the good academic reputation of the English-medium post-primary school; lack of interest in Irish-medium post-primary education; parents' concern that Irish-medium education will not prepare the child for education in English at third level.

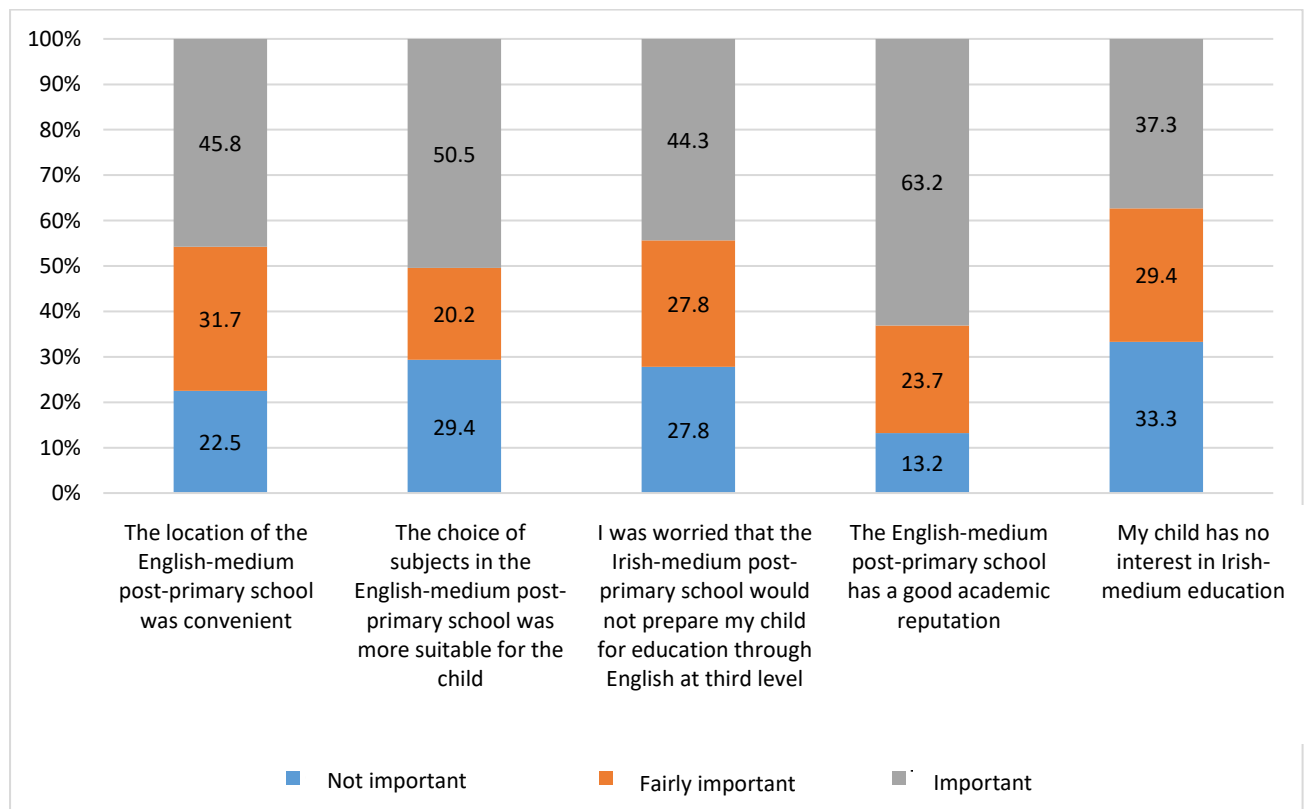


Figure 1.12 The most important things according to parents when making a decision for their children

The location of the English-medium post-primary school

As was seen when discussing the Irish-medium post-primary school, location is an advantage for the English-medium post-primary school as well, depending on the area in question. 45.8% of parents say that the English-medium post-primary school is located in a more convenient location for them:

the meánscoil, it's about 7 or 8 miles away from home, there is no bus stop near where we live so it was hard to get there that was a big factor for me

Another factor which greatly adds to the convenient location of the post-primary school is other members of the family attending it already, as was noticed when the advantages of Irish-medium post-primary schools were being examined above. 22.9% of parents state that a brother or sister is already attending the English-medium post-primary school and because of that they are continuing with English-medium education.

Choice of subjects

50.5% of parents reported that the choice of subjects in the post-primary school was an important factor in parents' choice whether to choose an Irish-medium or English-medium school. There is often commentary on difficulties in recruitment in minority language education, especially at post-primary level (Johnson & Swain, 1997). Parents that took part in this say themselves they are worried that there will not be teachers of various subjects available, or that they will not be trained to teach certain subjects:

it is difficult to find teachers to teach subjects through Irish (e.g. Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Biology, Business)

I mean it was well talked about that the calibre of the teachers was particularly poor, for example, in one subject there was a Geography Teacher who was told now you need to go and teach this in Irish as well so they weren't an Irish Teacher.

Closely related to the question of subjects, is the question of resources and the attitude among parents that a wider choice of subjects and resources is available in the English-medium post-primary school, often because the school itself is bigger:

Not enough practical subjects and poor facilities in the nearest all Irish Post Primary.

the building and choice of subjects offered in our local Gaelcholáiste is limited compared to the English medium post-primary School

It is also clear from parents' experience and statements that they are worried that there is not a high enough standard of language among teachers and that this has a strong influence on the teaching of the subjects. Some parents lose confidence in Irish-medium provision due to low levels of ability they believe to be perceptible in the system:

The real reason is that the standard of Irish of some of the teachers in the Irish-medium secondary school horrified me. My son attended the Gaelcholáiste for 3 years and I met the teachers.

I mean that's been a slight issue with me for the Secondary School ... that Teachers would not have a great standard of Irish

The Irish-medium post-primary school is unsuitable for preparation for third level

44.3% of parents indicated that they were worried that Irish-medium education would not prepare the child properly and bring him/her on to third level. The parents' statements certainly support this. It appears to them that the purpose of the post-primary school is to prepare the children for Irish-medium education and since it is not apparent to them that this training will be carried out in Irish at third level, the value and practical communicative purpose of Irish is greatly reduced:

There's only just one thing you know the follow on from secondary school into third level, I mean where do you go? [...] from 5 you're doing everything in Irish up to the age of 18 and then all of a sudden you're in college, I think it would be difficult

I could see her proceeding to do something in the science field or the medical field that won't be through the medium of Irish it will be through the medium of English in college you know and I think she made a very valid argument about that.

Actually. my own son said it to me a few times as well where he said I'm learning everything in maths in Irish at the moment how am I going to understand it if I want to study it further in third level? Now third level options are all through English

Closely connected to this subject is parent's concern that their children will not have access to English language terminology, despite, in their opinion, this terminology being extremely important, especially in practical subjects.

The academic reputation of the English-medium post-primary school

As was seen when the academic reputation of the Irish-medium post-primary school was being discussed above, 63.2% of the 135 parents intending to send their children to the English-medium post-primary school report that they were attracted to that provision by the good academic reputation of the school. 80.6% of the 160 parents whose children are to attend an Irish-medium post-primary school reported the same reason when they themselves are making a decision on transfer. Indeed, the choice of provision in different areas has an influence on this particular question, and of course parents place a high value on the child's academic success at third level as well.

Parents' concern about weakening English

34.8% of parents report that they are worried that their children's ability in English will decrease if they continue with Irish-medium education at post-primary level. According to some parents Irish-medium education has already harmed their children's ability in English and they want to correct this at post-primary level:

I strongly believe that my Children's English has suffered due to attending a Gaelscoil, particularly in spellings. This is a huge concern and was one reason why our third child is not going to a Gaelscoil.

The only reason I will be sending my children to English speaking secondary school is that I feel their English suffers after attending Irish primary school, there are already many words that they do not know in English and certain subjects like History may be more enjoyable.

It worth noting that this is a subject which worries all the parents and not only those who do not want to continue with Irish-medium education. The question is raised, therefore, how effective are language acquisition processes made known to parents as their children pursue their education in the second language.

[A tradition in the family of attending an English-medium post-primary school](#)

It is interesting that 9.2% of parents say that one parent at least attended a particular English-medium post-primary school and that they want the child to go to the same school. The Irish-medium post-primary schools are newly established schools for the most part in comparison with the English-medium post-primary schools and the attendance tradition is a custom which has not developed to the same level yet in the Irish-medium education system.

[Catering to pupils' special learning needs in Irish-medium education](#)

It is clear, especially among those whose children have special learning needs that they are worried about the competence of the Irish-medium education system to tackle those needs. 3.5% of pupils reported that they had this worry but 21.1% of parents indicated that they were worried about this:

My child has a speech and language difficulty and I think English post primary would benefit him greatly

My child has ADHD & dyspraxia, I would have loved him to attend an Irish-speaking school but between teachers' resources and myself it was decided it would be difficult for him.

My daughter is dyslexic and although very happy in an all-Irish primary school, I believe a post-primary English school is the best choice for her ability.

It is clear that there is a strong opinion among parents that Irish-medium education at post-primary level is not a realistic nor sensible option in the case of the child having special learning needs. It is interesting as this subject is under discussion that 64% of Irish-medium primary schools report that parents are not worried about the ability of the Irish-medium post-primary school to cater for the pupil's special learning needs. The above parents' opinions and experience indeed counter this. There is the danger, therefore, that principals are working on a basic understanding that pupils' special needs are not barriers to transfer to Irish-medium post-primary education. It is clear, however, that the uncertainty about how those needs are catered for in the Irish-medium post-primary school is a significant source of concern for parents. This is a source of concern as well for the parents sending their children to an Irish-medium post-primary school.

The question is raised, therefore, in the light of this confusion among parents as to how pupils' special needs are catered for as they pursue learning in the second language, is accurate information being sent to teachers and principals in the system about this? It is clear that the parents above are happy with Irish-medium education to date and that it is lack of information or concern about their

children's success which is mainly what drives them towards English-medium education at post-primary level. It is worthwhile filling this gap in information and in the delivery of this information.

Participation of parents in their children's education

One aspect of Irish-medium education at post-primary level which causes unease among all parents is the concern they feel about the pupils' homework and parents' participatory role, or the lack of it, in their education. This worry is seen among those whose children are continuing with Irish-medium education and with English-medium education. According to Ní Mhurchú (2008) the main challenge to parents of Irish-medium primary school pupils is "them feeling under pressure with their own standard of Irish, for example, helping the children with school work etc." (Ní Mhurchú, 2008:74).

There are many advantages to parental participation in their child's education and this pertains as much to language education (Wesley & Baig, 2012). As Kavanagh and Hickey (2013) and Harris et al. (2006) have shown there is a close link in the mind of parents between participation in Irish-medium education and help with Irish itself, the teaching language. As shown in this research, although nearly a quarter of the parents who took part in the present study have a functional ability, most have quite a passive ability. The parents themselves indicate that this lack of ability is a cause of concern to them, especially at post-primary level since they cannot give a helping hand with homework. It seems to them that things would be much more difficult at post-primary level.

I am a little bit worried that if she needs help with school work I won't understand or be able.

I feel that I will not have the Irish vocabulary to help with homework such as Science/tech groups

My own ability to be of assistance and understanding subjects through Irish.

This low level of ability usually leads to a really low level of self-efficacy among parents and they back away from participation in their children's educational life as a result (Hoover-Dempey & Sandler, 1997). The parents describe this stepping back which starts before the end of the primary school period.

because at the end of the day if he chose Irish I can't help him so he's on his own kind of when it comes to you know doing projects [...] and you're thinking sorry but you're on your own because I don't know what to do with that

Even if one parent has an ability in the language, that does not mean that there will be continuous help available to the child in Irish:

it's all very well my husband having the Irish but he's not there while they're doing their homework but the girl that's in Post-Primary now I've nothing to do with her homework. I might test her if she's having an exam or something in that way it doesn't really matter whether I know the terms or not.

One of the parents thinks that Irish-medium schools need to take into account the participation experience and wishes of those parents who have a low level of ability in Irish in the approach and relationship they have with the families and parents of pupils.

My three children went to an all Irish primary school with the intention to continue to post - primary school as I would have liked to have had that opportunity (my younger sisters did), however, my lack of understanding Irish I felt was not taken into account by the post-primary schools thus not encouraging a new generation

This is in line with what Halsall (1994) and Kavanagh and Hickey (2013) say about taking on a new approach which would remodel parental participation in the immersion education system, especially those parents who do not have an ability in the target language.

This is discussed in more detail when recommendations for transfer in Irish-medium education are examined in the next chapter.

Conclusion

In this part of the report the results arising out of the field research in connection with the project were discussed and an insight was given into the current context of transfer in the Republic of Ireland, outside of the Gaeltacht. It is a cause of hope for the sector in general that parental satisfaction with Irish-medium education to date is as high as it is and that this positive experience is driving 49% of them in the direction of Irish-medium post-primary education. It is clear, however, that there is a strong cause for concern among 42.1% of the parents and as a result they do not think that the provision at post-primary level is suitable for themselves, or for their children. In the case of some of these variables, interventions do not suit them, for example, a strong family tradition of attending a particular post-primary school. In the case of some others, the intervention exists but it is likely that there would be a long-term process to put it in place, as in the case of lack of provision. It is clear, however, when the experiences of all the parents are examined, the experiences of those intending to continue with Irish-medium education at post-primary level and those who do not, that they have some cause for concern in respect of transfer and that an intervention could be put in place to the benefit of the Irish-medium provision in general and progression in particular. Recommendations to that end are addressed in the next part of the report.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The main conclusions of this project are presented here as well as the recommendations the authors believe would be of benefit to Irish-medium education provision by increasing the transfer rates from Irish-medium primary schools to Irish-medium post-primary schools and also the experience of pupils and parents of that transfer.

Conclusions

The use of Irish and Irish language ability in the family

It is clear from the results of this research that the majority of the parents have little experience of Irish as a family language with 94.3% of parents who say that English is the dominant language in their family. Although a quarter of the parents who responded to the questionnaire say that they have a functional ability in Irish, it is understood that Irish is only used as a family language by 1.5%. This low level of ability and usage has a significant influence on pupils' experience of the language outside of the school environment with the practical function of Irish in society greatly reduced if this experience is not increased outside of the sphere of education. Combined with this, a low level of ability has a significant influence on parental participation in their childrens' education, a practice which is not to the benefit of the system or the pupil.

The parents' experience of Irish-medium education

11.5% (37) of parents say that they attended an Irish-medium primary or secondary school. That means the majority of them (88.5%) have experience of English-medium education at primary and post-primary level. As well as the recognition that is to be given to a use profile and language ability, participants in Irish-medium education must also recognise this lack of experience among parents relating to Irish-medium education provision.

The progression pathway in Irish-medium education

Progression is a "natural" step for a significant number of parents, with Irish-medium provision in their minds from preschool to post-primary school. 30.5% of parents chose Irish-medium primary school because an Irish-medium preschool had catered for their children and, out of the 161 parents who intend their children to attend an Irish-medium post-primary school, 48.6% of them say that they had this transfer in mind while they were choosing a primary school.

The age at which the decision is made on transfer

Parents and principals agree on this particular question, indicating that it is too late promoting Irish-medium post-primary education in the senior primary classes. Of the parents who decide to send their children to an Irish-medium post-primary school, 54.2% of them have decided to send their children to an Irish-medium post-primary school before the end of infants' classes. As for those

parents whose children are starting English-medium post-primary school, the decision is taken later. 56.3% of that group say that they made the decision between fifth and sixth class and 40% say that they made the decision in 6th class. There is a significant period of time available to stakeholders in Irish-medium education to make the advantages of progression known to these parents and children

The current transfer rate from the Irish-medium primary school to the Irish-medium post-primary

Based on the results of this research, on the whole, if there was a post-primary school in the catchment area, 53.6% of sixth class pupils continued on to the Irish-medium post-primary school in 2014. The results of this research show that 49.8% of parents intend to send their children to an Irish-medium post-primary school in the autumn of 2016. 42.1% of parents say that they intend to transfer to English-medium education with 5.3% saying that they do not know yet where their children will go to school or they left that question blank. There are many reasons parents and children give for this decision, as shown below.

Reasons to continue with Irish-medium post-primary education

Parents who intended for their children to attend an Irish-medium post-primary were asked what reasons they had for that decision, and these are presented below.

Interest in Irish and bilingualism

The greatest reason parents have for continuing with Irish-medium provision is interest in bilingualism (74.7%) or that their children would have Irish (84.2%). It is interesting that these were the greatest reasons that encouraged parents to choose Irish-medium provision at post primary level. If parents stated that they chose an Irish-medium primary school due to interest in the Irish language, there was a greater chance that they would choose post-primary education through Irish as well and this difference was statistically significant (chi-square=10.922, df=1, p = .001). The same pattern was visible in the case of parents who stated that they would like their children to be bilingual (chi-square=6.525, df=1, p = .011) and that their children would be able to speak Irish (chi-square=4.184, df=1, p = .041). Interest in Irish and bilingualism is strong among the pupils as well with 50.7% saying that they are interested in Irish and 50% saying that they would like to have two languages.

The school's academic reputation

As well as an interest in bilingualism, the greatest motivation parents had for choosing Irish-medium education for their children was the academic reputation of the post-primary school. 80.6% of parents say that the good academic reputation of the school attracted them with 46.9% saying that bonus points in the Leaving Certificate is an advantage to them, although there was lack of clarity

among them on the operation of the points system. 31.1% of pupils also emphasised this variable as an advantage which drew them towards Irish-medium education. It is clear therefore in the minds of the parents, and indeed in the minds of the children, that there is a strong link between Irish-medium education provision at the post-primary level and the pupil's academic progress. This is a sign for hope for the Irish-medium post-primary schools in the catchment areas of this research. It is a different question, as is discussed below, how effective these messages are made known to parents who are still undecided as to their post-primary school choice.

School composition

Although the question was not specifically asked of parents about the composition of the school, they indicated, however, that the composition of the Irish-medium post-primary school is an advantage for them, especially since most of them are mixed schools. It was also revealed that there were general advantages of a private school associated with certain Irish-medium post-primary schools although there were no fees to be paid, a practice which is evident in international immersion education contexts as well. This variable arose especially among parents who were living in urban areas.

Good reports about the school

53.2% of parents referred to the influence of good reports about the Irish-medium post-primary school on their decision to continue with the Irish-medium provision at post-primary level. In the same way, however, there is the danger that poor reports or indeed a lack of information would mitigate against progression, as will be discussed below.

Reasons to continue with English-medium post-primary education

Parents who intended their children to attend an English-medium post-primary were asked what reasons they had for that decision, and they are presented below.

The school's good academic reputation

Similar to those parents sending their children to an Irish-medium post-primary school because of the good academic reputation of that school, 63.2% of the parents who have chosen English-medium provision say that the good reputation of the school was an advantage to them. This of course often depends on the provision of all the schools in the catchment area.

The Irish-medium provision unsuitable for third level

44.3% of parents indicated that they were worried that there would be no practical use for Irish as a medium of learning at third level. As well as that, they indicated that Irish as a medium of teaching and learning is unsuitable at post-primary level since pupils aren't being prepared properly for the

next stage that will be taken on the educational continuum. According to the majority, the pupils will prepare for that particular stage in English. It is obvious looking at this fairly high figure that it appears to parents that the value and use of Irish as a practical language for life is greatly reduced at post-primary level. This could have a significant impact on the view of pupils on the use of the language outside of the sphere of education and in their lives in the future.

Concern about weakening English

Similarly, 34.8% say that they are concerned that the Irish-medium provision will harm their children's English language ability, an ability they will greatly need in future life. Indeed, some of the parents say they are afraid that some harm has already been done to their children's English ability at primary level as it is. It is clear that parents do not have the appropriate knowledge of the language acquisition process for the acquisition of both language from a young age and the relationship between these two languages. It also seems, based on parents' statements, that a decision is being made that one language must be chosen over the other, a practice which indicates again that there is a widespread lack of knowledge of language acquisition and bilingual education among them.

Parental participation

Most of the parents who took part in this research said they were worried about their ability to participate in their children's education, especially in light of their low ability in the language. Those parents intending their children to continue with Irish-medium post-primary education say they have no alternative other than frequently withdrawing from participation in school work since they cannot give any practical assistance with the language itself. Those parents who continue with English-medium post-primary education say that this lack of participation is an obstacle for them to continue with Irish-medium education. It is a source of concern that parents are of the opinion that they do not have an active role to play in the education of their children or in the life of the school due to their low ability in the language. This withdrawal is a loss to the system and certainly for the children.

Pupils' special needs in the Irish-medium provision

64% of principals say that parents are not worried about the ability of the Irish-medium post-primary school to cater for the pupil's special learning needs. When parents and pupils were asked, 21.1% of parents and 3.5% of pupils said that they were worried that the Irish-medium post-primary school would not be able to cater for their special learning needs. Parents indicate in their open answers and during interviews that this is a cause of concern for them and they are of the opinion that the Irish-medium provision is not a sensible choice as regards the education and language development of their children. This is a subject that all parents mention, even those sending their children to an

Irish-medium post-primary school. But as with the issues discussed thus far, and as discussed below, there is a significant gap in parents' knowledge of the function of Irish-medium education.

Transmission of information on Irish-medium education to parents

According to parents there is a gap between themselves and the administrators of Irish-medium education and they are unhappy with the lack of information shared with them on the operation of immersion education at primary and post-primary level, especially in respect to the impact bilingual education would have on the educational development of their children at third level. Parents describe the importance of open nights as occasions for the sharing of information but some schools make little effort with these events. There is an urgent need, in their opinion, to take advantage of opportunities such as these to provide a more effective forum in which information could be shared with parents on Irish-medium education. Parents say that Irish-medium post-primary schools which think that there is no need to share information with parents when their child is already registered with the school are mistaken. Often the child is registered when they are in fifth or sixth class and there are many things worrying parents during this period in respect of Irish-medium education. Parents feel strongly that information is not being made available to them and that there is no forum available in which they could get that information, openly and without prejudice, and discuss the things that worry them most with experts on the subject, including parents and pupils in the system.

Main recommendations

Introduction

The recommendations for progression in Irish-medium education in the Republic of Ireland, based on the conclusions of the research under discussion are presented below.

Provision of Irish-medium post-primary schools

The aim of this research initially was to investigate the rate of transfer from Irish-medium primary school to Irish-medium post-primary school in the Republic of Ireland. As a first step, research was undertaken with the country's Irish-medium primary schools, investigating transfer patterns as well as access to Irish-medium post-primary education in the primary school catchment area. Of the schools that took part in this first part of the research, 40% of them did not have access to an Irish-medium post-primary school in the school catchment area. It may be the case that there is not sufficient population density in these areas or in the Irish-medium schools in these areas that would support the demands for post-primary education at present. It is reported in the research that Irish-medium post-primary education is the choice of 72.8% of parents in the country. However, progression in Irish-medium education is not a realistic option for 27.2% of parents, other than those who for various reasons have decided to travel long distances to the nearest Irish-medium post-primary school. Based on the figures, it is clear that there is a significant gap in the provision at present and that a high percentage of parents and pupils do not have access to the next step on the Irish-medium education continuum. Without this step, an incomplete acquisition of Irish is in store for Irish-medium primary pupils who do not have access to an Irish-medium post-primary school. Although transfer rates could be improved, as shown below, the number of Irish-medium post-primary schools would need to be increased to strengthen progression in Irish-medium education and to strengthen the experience of pupils and parents of Irish as a functional language inside and outside of the educational sphere. It is recommended to Gaeloideachas Teoranta, in light of the results of this research, that they consult with the Department of Education and Skills on the importance of increasing provision of Irish-medium post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland and to design and implement a long-term step by step strategy to respond to the current gap.

Participation

This research and literature on the subject show that a low level of ability in the language is a significant hindrance to parental participation. Those parents who do not have an ability in the language indicate that they feel left out of the school community and also from their child's

educational life since they cannot take part in the current participation models in place in Irish-medium primary schools. Invitations to participate are vital if parental participation is to be increased.

It is recommended that encouragement and confidence be given to parents to participate in their children's education. It is also recommended, as done by Kavanagh & Hickey (2013), that a new approach be taken to participation. These invitations to participate should include a wide range of activities connected to children's education and school life in general, including support with extracurricular activities; support for school networks; administrative support; other school activities in which the language is not central. It is vital that a high ability in the language should not be a basic criterion for this participation and that value should be placed on the skills of parents beyond linguistic ability. It is vitally important, however, that this new participation strategy should be mindful of the school's ethos and school policy.

It is understood that this would be a new approach to participation and it is recommended therefore that training be made available to principals which would support them in integrating a structure of this kind in the school's parental participation practices.

Choice of subjects and academic reputation of Irish-medium post-primary schools

It was found in this research that 50.5% of parents have decided to send their children to an English-medium post-primary school because they were not happy with the choice of subjects of the Irish-medium post-primary school. On the other hand, 80.6% of parents indicated that it was because of the good academic reputation of the Irish language post-primary school that they decided to continue with Irish-medium education at post-primary level. There is no doubt that Irish-medium post-primary schools have difficulties, due to a low number of pupils or limited resources, in providing a broad range of subjects, not to mention the large number of teachers needed to teach those subjects in Irish.

It is recommended that Irish-medium post-primary schools inform parents of the school's good academic reputation, despite there not yet being a wide range of subjects available in them. Although it is accepted that the narrow range of subject choice is a lack in the provision, parents indicate that the good academic reputation of the school itself is more important on the whole. It is recommended to Irish-medium post-primary schools to influence parents and persuade parents and children of the academic benefits of the school, apart from the choice of subjects. An information campaign for pupils and parents would help this, sharing knowledge on the Irish-medium schools'

choice of subjects as well as sharing their academic success with parents and pupils from third class onwards.

Catering to pupils' special learning needs in Irish-medium education

A significant number of parents indicated during this research that they were concerned that the Irish-medium post-primary school might not be able to cater properly for their children's special learning needs and that they had decided therefore not to continue with Irish-medium education. In spite of this, the majority of principals who took part in the research do not think that children's special learning needs would be a hindrance to progression in the minds of parents. It is clear that principals misunderstand the information needed by parents on how their children's special learning needs are to be catered for at second level as they undertake their education through the medium of the second language.

It is recommended that research-based and up to date information is provided to parents and pupils on the impact of bilingual education on their children's educational development, especially as regards special learning needs. As well as that, it is recommended that a training programme be undertaken with teachers and principals to examine and discuss special learning needs in the context of immersion education. It is vitally important that teachers and principals are able to share accurate information on these questions with parents and pupils. It is important that this information is shared with parents from the moment learning challenges are identified in the child or continuously from 3rd Class onwards. A transfer strategy for pupils with special learning needs between primary school and post-primary school would be a great help to facilitate transfer and strengthen the confidence of parents in transfer. It is recommended that these strategies be undertaken as continuous partnership projects between the Department of Education and Skills and other stakeholders in Irish-medium education, such as, Gaeloideachas Teoranta and Irish-medium schools at primary and post-primary level.

Knowledge and awareness of the parents of the language acquisition process

In the light of the lack of parental experience of Irish-medium education, parents depend greatly on the system itself to share with them information on the operation of bilingual education and also the educational and linguistic advantages and challenges associated with it for their children. It is vitally important that this gap in the experience and awareness of the parents is catered for, especially as regards acquisition of the second language. Parents who have taken part in this research indicated that they are concerned that Irish is harming their children's acquisition of English and that they wish

to reverse this weakness by sending their children to an English-medium post-primary school. The results of this research revealed that interest in bilingualism was the greatest motivation parents had to engage in Irish-medium education. It is clearly evident, however, that there is a misunderstanding among parents as to the language acquisition process itself.

It is recommended that this interest in bilingualism is reinforced when the transfer is being discussed and that parents are continuously made aware of the advantages of bilingualism at post-primary level from the midpoint of primary onwards. It is also necessary that parents are made aware that language acquisition is a long-term process which does not finish at the end of primary school. Parents have expressed a positive and committed attitude to bilingualism up to this point and it is recommended that the opportunity be seized to share with them research and practice-based information with them to reinforce their trust in Irish-medium education provision. It is recommended that Gaeloideachas Teoranta, principals and teachers in Irish-medium schools undertake an awareness campaign to this end.

[Relations between the Irish-medium primary school and post-primary school](#)

Although most of the principals say that there is a relationship between the Irish-medium primary and post-primary school, some parents indicated that they did not know that there was any relationship between schools, and that sometimes the primary school pupils had little contact or experience of the post-primary school environment or staff.

It is recommended that Irish-medium primary school and post-primary school principals foster relationships that would facilitate the transmission of information among teachers, pupils and parents which would facilitate progression in the Irish-medium provision. It is vitally important that this interschool relationship be beneficial to all the relevant stakeholders and be visible and accessible especially for parents and pupils.

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Aguisín – Ceistneoir na dTuismitheoirí

Glactar leis má chomhlánaíonn tú an ceistneoir seo go dtuigeann tú cuspóirí an taighde agus go dtoilíonn tú páirt a ghlacadh sa tionscadal de do dheoin féin.

Is féidir formhór na gceisteanna a fhreagairt trí (✓) a chur i mbosca.

CÚLRA

1. Cén gaol atá agat leis an bpáiste a thug an ceistneoir seo abhaile?

(i) Máthair	81.3%
(ii) Athair	18.1%
(iii) Caomhnóir	0.3%
(iv) Eile	0.3%

2. Cén tír inar rugadh tú? In Éirinn 95.8% Eile 4.2%

3. Nuair a bhí tusa ag fás aníos cén teanga(cha) a labhraítí sa bhaile?

(i) Béarla amháin	52.5%
(ii) Béarla den chuid is mó le roinnt focal/frása i nGaeilge	32.3%
(iii) Béarla agus Gaeilge, ach Béarla den chuid is mó	12%
(iv) Meascán cothrom de Ghaeilge agus Béarla	0.6%
(v) Béarla agus Gaeilge, ach Gaeilge den chuid is mó	0.3%
(vi) Gaeilge den chuid is mó le roinnt focal/frása i mBéarla	0.3%
(vii) Gaeilge amháin	0.9%
(viii) Eile	0.9%

Más eile, sonraigh le do thoil. _____

4. Cuir tic ✓ leis an leibhéal is airde oideachais atá bainte amach agat.

(i) Bunoidéachas (gan oideachas foirmiúil san áireamh)	0.6%
(ii) Iar-bhunoideachas sóisir (Meánteistiméireacht nó Teastas Sóisearach/O-Leibhéal/TGMO)	5.1%
(iii) Iar-bhunoideachas sinsir (Ardteistiméireacht/A-Leibhéal/AS/A2)	20.3%
(iv) An tríú leibhéal is ísle (2 bhliain, Dioplóma)	21%
(v) An tríú leibhéal íseal, leibhéal Baitsiléara (Céim)	32.1%
(vi) An tríú leibhéal ard, leibhéal Máistreachta	17.5%
(vii) An tríú leibhéal ard, PhD (leibhéal Dochtúireachta)	3.5%
(viii) Ní fios	<input type="checkbox"/>
(ix) Eile	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. An ndeachaigh tú chuig bunscoil lán-Ghaeilge?

Chuaigh	9.4%
Ní dheachaigh	90.6%

6. An ndeachaigh tú chuig iar-bhunscoil lán-Ghaeilge?

Chuaigh	8.4%
Ní dheachaigh	91.6%

7. Conas a chuirfeá síos ar do chumas Gaeilge a labhairt?

(i)	Gan aon Ghaeilge	2.2%
(ii)	Corrfhocal	9.5%
(iii)	Roinnt abairtí simplí	22.5%
(iv)	Codanna de chomhráite	40%
(v)	An chuid is mó de chomhráite	18.1%
(vi)	Cumas cainteora dúchais	7.3%
(vii)	Ní bhaineann	0.3%

DO PHÁISTE AGUS AN GHAEILGE

8. Cén teanga(cha) a labhraíonn tú le do pháiste?

(i)	Béarla amháin	17%
(ii)	Béarla den chuid is mó le roinnt focal/frása i nGaeilge	50.8%
(iii)	Béarla agus Gaeilge, ach Béarla den chuid is mó	26.5%
(iv)	Meascán cothrom de Ghaeilge agus Béarla	3.5%
(v)	Béarla agus Gaeilge, ach Gaeilge den chuid is mó	0.6%
(vi)	Gaeilge den chuid is mó le roinnt focal/frása i mBéarla	0.6%
(vii)	Gaeilge amháin	0.3%
(viii)	Eile	0.6%

Más eile, sonraigh le do thoil. _____

9. Cén fáth gur shocraigh tú do pháiste a chur chuig bunscoil lán-Ghaeilge? (Cuir tic le gach bosca a bhaineann)

(i)	D'fhreastail mo pháiste ar naíonra lán-Ghaeilge	30.5%
(ii)	Tá suim agam féin sa Ghaeilge	53.9%
(iii)	Tá suim ag mo pháiste sa Ghaeilge	21.9%
(iv)	Theastaigh uaim go mbeadh mo pháiste dátheangach	61.7%
(v)	Bhí suíomh na bunscoile lán-Ghaeilge áisiúil	27.9%
(vi)	Tá mo pháiste á thógáil le Gaeilge	3.1%
(vii)	Ní raibh áit ar fáil san bhunscoil Bhéarla	0.6%
(viii)	Bhí cairde mo pháiste ag freastal ar an scoil chéanna	2.5%
(ix)	D'fhreastail tuismitheoir / caomhnóir mo pháiste ar an scoil chéanna	2.8%
(x)	Bhí deartháir / deirfiúr mo pháiste ag freastal ar an scoil	27.2%
(xi)	Theastaigh uaim go mbeadh an Ghaeilge ag mo pháiste	76.9%
(xii)	Bhí cáil mhaith acadúil ar an mbunscoil lán-Ghaeilge	47%
(xiii)	Chuala mé dea-thuiriscí faoin scoil ó chomharsana nó cairde	45.2%
(xiv)	D'fhreastail tuismitheoir / caomhnóir mo pháiste ar scoil lán-Ghaeilge	5.3%
(xv)	Bhí líon níos lú páistí ó chúlra imirceoirí sa scoil lán-Ghaeilge	8.7%

Cuir leis an liosta seo más mian leat

10. An bhfuil tú sásta leis an eispéireas oideachais agus teanga a bhí ag do pháiste go dtí seo?

Tá 99% Níl 1%

11. An ndearna tú machnamh ar an oideachas lán-Ghaeilge ag an iar-bhunleibhéal nuair a shocraigh tú do pháiste a chur chuige bunscoil lán-Ghaeilge?

Rinne 70.4% Ní dhearna 29.6%

12. An bhfuil tú sásta go raibh go leor eolais agus comhairle ar fáil duit le cabhrú leat cinneadh a dhéanamh faoin iar-bhunscolaíocht lán-Ghaeilge?

Tá 86.8% Níl 13.2%

Tabhair míniú breise anseo más mian leat

13. An mbeidh do pháiste ag freastal ar iar-bhunscoil lán-Ghaeilge?

Tá Níl Níl fhios agam

Má fhreagraíonn tú TÁ do Cheist 13, lean ort chuig **Ceist 14**.
Má fhreagraíonn tú NÍL, téigh chuig **Ceist 19** le do thoil.

Mura bhfuil a fhios agat. Téigh chuig **Ceist 21** le do thoil.

14. Cé chomh tábhachtach is a bhí na nithe seo a leanas sa chinneadh a rinne tú do pháiste a chur chuige iar-bhunscoil lán-Ghaeilge? (Cuir tic sa bhosca cúí)

		Gan a bheith tábhachtach	Measartha tábhachtach	Tábhachtach
(i)	Tá suim agam féin sa Ghaeilge	13.2%	32.9%	53.9%
(ii)	Tá suim ag mo pháiste sa Ghaeilge	3.6%	22.8%	73.7%
(iii)	Theastaigh uaim go mbeadh mo pháiste dátheangach	2.9%	22.4%	74.7%
(iv)	Tá suíomh na hiar-bhunscoile lán-Ghaeilge áisiúil	44.2%	32.5%	23.4%
(v)	Tá rogha ábhar na hiar-bhunscoile lán-Ghaeilge oiriúnach do mo pháiste	9.2%	35.5%	55.3%
(vi)	Tá mo pháiste á thógáil le Gaeilge	68.8%	24.1%	7.1%
(vii)	Ní raibh áit ar fáil do mo pháiste san iar-bhunscoil Bhéarla	94%	6%	0%
(viii)	Tá cairde mo pháiste ag freastal ar an scoil chéanna	51%	29.8%	19.2%
(ix)	D'fhreastail tuismitheoir / caomhnóir an pháiste ar an scoil chéanna	85.8%	6.7%	7.5%
(x)	Tá deartháir / deirfiúr an pháiste ag freastal ar an scoil chéanna	47.1%	12.3%	40.6%
(xi)	Theastaigh uaim go mbeadh an Ghaeilge ag mo pháiste	2.9%	12.9%	46.9%
(xii)	Tá cáil mhaith acadúil ar an iar-bhunscoil lán-Ghaeilge	2.4%	17%	84.2%
(xiii)	Beidh ar chumas mo pháiste breis pointí a bhaint amach san Ardteistiméireacht má dhéanann sé / sí a scrúduithe i nGaeilge	25%	28.1%	46.9%
(xiv)	Mhol foireann na bunscoile do mo pháiste freastal ar iar-bhunscoil lán-Ghaeilge	49.3%	27.1%	23.6%
(xv)	Chuala mé dea-thuiriscí faoin scoil ó chomharsana nó chairde	21.8%	25%	53.2%
(xvi)	D'fhreastail tuismitheoir / caomhnóir mo pháiste ar scoil lán-Ghaeilge	79.9%	8.2%	11.9%
(xvii)	Tá líon níos lú páistí ó chúlra inimirceoirí san iar-bhunscoil lán-Ghaeilge	81%	7%	12%

Cuir leis an liosta seo más mian leat

15. Cén uair ar shocraigh tú gur theastaigh uait go ndéanfadh do pháiste freastal ar iar-bhunscoil lán-Ghaeilge?

(i)	Bhí sé socraithe i m'aigne ón uair a rugadh an páiste	24.5%
(ii)	Nuair a bhí mo pháiste ag freastal ar naíscoil	11.2%
(iii)	Roimh an mbunscoil	12.8%
(iv)	Ranganna na naíonán	5.6%
(v)	Ranganna 1-4	19.6%
(vi)	Rang a 5	14%
(vii)	Rang a 6	12.3%

16. Cé na buntáistí is mó a bhfuil tú ag súil leo agus do pháiste ag freastal ar iar-bhunscoil lán-Ghaeilge?

17. An bhfuil rud ar bith ag déanamh imní duit agus do pháiste ag freastal ar iar-bhunscoil lán-Ghaeilge?

18. Ar mhaith leat aon rud eile a rá faoi aistriú do pháiste ón mbunscoil lán-Ghaeilge chuig an iar-bhunscoil lán-Ghaeilge, nó faoin oideachas lán-Ghaeilge i gcoitinne?

Má fhreagair tú NÍL do Cheist 13, lean ort le Ceist 19 le do thoil

19. Cén uair ar shocraigh tú gur theastaigh uait go ndéanfadh do pháiste freastal ar iar-bhunscoil Bhéarla?

(i)	Bhí sé socraithe i m'aigne ón uair a rugadh an páiste	10.4%
(ii)	Nuair a bhí mo pháiste ag freastal ar an mbunscoil	5.2%
(iii)	Roimh an mbunscoil	6.7
(iv)	Ranganna na naíonán	3%
(v)	Ranganna 1-4	18.5%
(vi)	Rang a 5	16.3%
(vii)	Rang a 6	40%

20. Cé chomh tábhachtach is a bhí na nithe seo a leanas sa chinneadh a rinne tú do pháiste a chur chuig iar-bhunscoil Bhéarla? (Cuir tic sa bhosca cuí)

	Gan a bheith tábhachtach	Measartha tábhachtach	Tábhachtach
(i) Bhí suíomh na hiar-bhunscoile Bhéarla áisiúil	22.5%	31.7%	45.8%
(ii) Níl iar-bhunscoil lán-Ghaeilge cóngarach go leor dom	45.6%	27.2%	27.2%
(iii) Bhí rogha ábhar na hiar-bhunscoile Béarla níos oiriúnaí don pháiste	29.4%	20.2%	50.5%
(iv) Bhí mé buartha nach n-ullmhódh an iar-bhunscolaíocht lán-Ghaeilge mo pháiste don oideachas trí Bhéarla ag an tríú leibhéal	27.8%	27.8%	44.3%
(v) Bhí imní orm go dtiocfadh lagú ar chumas mo pháiste sa Bhéarla dá leanfaí leis an iar-bhunscolaíocht lán-Ghaeilge	40.9%	24.3%	34.8%
(vi) Ní raibh áit ar fáil do mo pháiste san iar-bhunscoil lán-Ghaeilge	77.8%	8.1%	14.1%
(vii) Beidh sé níos éasca ar mo pháiste pointí níos airde a bhaint amach san Ardteistiméireacht má dhéanann sé na scrúduithe i mBéarla	47.1%	21.6%	31.4%
(viii) Tá cairde mo pháiste ag freastal ar an iar-bhunscoil Bhéarla chéanna	54.8%	23.1%	21.2%
(ix) D'fhreastail tuismitheoir / caomhnóir an pháiste ar an scoil Bhéarla	85.7%	5.1%	9.2%
(x) Tá deartháir / deirfiúr an pháiste ag freastal (nó d'fhreastail) ar an scoil	65.7%	11.4%	22.9%
(xi) Tá cáil acadúil mhaith ar an iar-bhunscoil Bhéarla	13.2%	23.7%	63.2%
(xii) Mhol foireann na bunscoile do mo pháiste freastal ar iar-bhunscoil Bhéarla	73.2%	15.5%	11.3%
(xiii) Níl suim ag mo pháiste san oideachas lán-Ghaeilge	33.3%	29.4%	37.3%
(xiv) Níl suim agam san oideachas lán-Ghaeilge	58.9%	24.2%	16.8%
(xv) Chuala me droch-thuairiscí faoin scoil ó chomharsana nó chairde	74.4%	12.2%	13.3%
(xvi) Tá mé buartha nach mbeadh an scoil lán-Ghaeilge ábalta freastal ar riachtanais speisialta fhoghlama mo pháiste	69.5%	9.5%	21.1%

Cuir leis an liosta seo más mian leat

21. Ar mhaith leat aon rud eile a rá faoi aistriú do pháiste ón mbunscoil lán-Ghaeilge chuig an iar-bhunscoil, nó faoin oideachas lán-Ghaeilge i gcoitinne?

Go raibh míle maith agat as an am a ghlac tú leis an gceistneoir seo a líonadh