

Interim Report Highlights Emerging Themes Relating to The Junior Cycle Irish Language Specifications (T1 & T2)

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Friday, 9 May: The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) welcomes the publication of *Staidéar agus Athbhreithniú Leantach ar Chur i bhfeidhm Shonraíochtaí Gaeilge na Sraithe Sóisearaí (T1 & T2)- Tuarascáil Eatramhach Céim a hAon /A Study and Continuing Review of the Implementation of Junior Cycle Irish Specifications (T1 & T2) – First Interim Report*. This is the first in a series of research reports on the implementation of Junior Cycle Irish Language Specifications (T1 & T2¹).

This mixed methods, multi-dimensional study builds on earlier research, particularly the *Early Enactment Review of Junior Cycle Irish T1 & T2* (Mac Gearailt & Ó Duibhir, 2023). It focuses on the updated September 2023 version of the Junior Cycle Irish specifications, with the aim of providing detailed insights, over a three-year period, into the experiences of schools working with the T1 and T2 specifications and the impact of the changes to the curriculum.

This first interim report focuses on interviews with 18 school leaders and focus groups with 42 teachers from 12 case-study schools nationwide and reveals several emerging themes. These schools included a mix of T1 and T2 schools, providing insights into the differentiated provision for Irish in different educational contexts.

Several positive elements of the Irish language specifications enactment were highlighted, including:

- **Teacher Planning and Collaboration:** Teachers have embraced collaborative planning. Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meetings were particularly valuable for supporting professional judgments.
- **Creativity in Teaching and Learning:** Teachers in both T1 and T2 schools have incorporated innovative strategies, especially in promoting oral language skills.
- **Diverse resources:** Teachers are using a variety of materials and resources, such as short films, stories, and a variety of texts to engage students and enhance their language and literacy skills.
- **Supports for Irish:** Both in-school and external supports have played a key role in promoting Irish language use. T1 schools, in particular, have fostered strong links with the Gaeltacht and local communities, while benefitting from

¹ The Teanga 1 (T1) specification is aimed at native speakers and learners in Gaeltacht schools and students in the Irish-medium sector (Gaelcholáistí and Irish-medium Units). The Teanga 2 (T2) specification is aimed primarily at students who are pursuing Irish as a second language, in English-medium schools.

resources developed by An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG). T2 schools referenced resources developed by TG4 Foghlaim and support schemes such as Gaelbhratach agus Gaeilge 24.

Despite these strengths, several challenges were noted:

- **Oral Irish Assessment:** Both teachers and school leaders recommended introducing an oral Irish exam at Junior Cycle to motivate students to use the language in real-life contexts and better prepare them for Senior Cycle assessments. The absence of an oral examination, similar to what is used in Leaving Certificate Irish, was seen as a barrier to improving oral language skills.
- **Experience of the Final Exam:** The current final exam, focusing mainly on reading and writing, was criticised for not being suitable for all learners of Irish. T1 teachers, in particular, reported that their students' results did not accurately reflect the oral language proficiency of the students and the high standard of spoken Irish they had acquired from home and/or school.
- **Inclusion:** The study found that more support is needed for students with additional learning needs and newcomer students in both T1 and T2 schools.
- **Transition from Primary to Post-Primary:** Teachers noted a gap in standards between primary and post-primary. It was reported that many students struggled with the transition from primary to post-primary education, finding it challenging to adapt to the increased focus on reading and writing in Irish.

The Irish language specifications are divided into two categories: T2 for English-medium schools teaching Irish as a second language, and T1 for Gaeltacht schools, Irish-medium schools, and post-primary schools with Irish-medium strands.

Welcoming the interim report, the CEO Arlene Forster highlighted: *'Building on the findings from the early enactment review in 2023, the report published today paves the way for better understanding teachers and school leaders' experiences of working with the Junior Cycle Irish T1 and T2 curriculum specifications. The study is uniquely placed to spotlight and evaluate the impact of the curriculum and assessment changes introduced in direct response to the 2023 review findings. The learning from today's and subsequent reports will help to shape NCCA's work on Irish and support wider educational discourse and policy development.'*

The interim report marks the beginning of a deeper investigation into the implementation of the Junior Cycle Irish specifications. Over the next two years, the study will expand to include a nationwide survey of teachers, focus groups with students, input from parents and guardians, and feedback from a broad range of stakeholders. The research will continue to monitor recent changes to the specifications, such as the reduction in the volume of literary texts to be engaged with in classrooms, Classroom-Based Assessments, and explore the evolving needs of both T1 and T2 schools.

Report: <https://ncca.ie/en/junior-cycle/curriculum-developments/gaeilge/>

Ends.