

Response from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta

C1

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta welcomes the basic principles. We agree that these arrangements should focus on the welfare of the child. From the census we recognise that the Irish speaking ‘community’ is based all over the region. We understand that there will be more cooperation between schools as a result of the requirements of the new curriculum in Northern Ireland. The amount of flexibility that schools must have in order to complete their entrance criterion must not be allowed to develop into academic selection. It is to be understood, therefore, that a school must not be allowed to use the standard of Irish as an entrance criteria. Also, the requirements associated with the organisation ‘Senco’ must also be included when entrance arrangements are being discussed.

C2

The lay out of the annual Pupil Profile must include the particular characteristics of immersion education. Amongst those are translanguaging, literary and numeracy skills in both languages. The awarding of levels could also be a problem. We are also concerned about the extra pressures the arrangements regarding the compilation of profiling place on primary schools. We do not believe that the Post-primary school should be allowed request the Profile in order to choose.

C3

The primary schools will have to have confidence in the assessment and profiling arrangements. The teachers and principals will have specialist role in providing the appropriate information. They will be giving general advice which is not specialised to the parents. This could be a problem for some parents as they struggle to find the appropriate school for their children- and perhaps also specialist schools in the selection choice.

C4

Whatever ‘speciality’ that the school has (or that the Post primary school will have) should be part of the information. One must remember whatever requirement the Post primary school has to meet with parents coming, that there will be substantial time available from the post primary schools as they try to implement the new curriculum. There is a possibility that this will place a very heavy burden on the Post primary schools.

We are of the opinion that attendance at this type of meeting between a Post primary school and parent(s) would not be necessary. Parents who are disadvantaged could feel uncomfortable and it is certain that their children should not be disadvantaged in the transfer system because of this.

C5

Most of this advice will be factual and non-controversial. Post primary schools should get support in the form of both facilities and training (in-service) from the Department and from BELB in order to facilitate this process.

C6

It is essential that good advice as regards Careers guide this process. The preparation of the school for the authoritative framework and its communication with Post primary schools must be developed in a way that would facilitate any change in the educational path.

C7

This stands to reason and logic except for the interdiscussional sessions with expectant students and their parents (November). We also think that the Department of Education has a central role in fostering the spirit of cooperation between schools.

C8

It is possible that it is necessary to attend an Irish medium Post primary school or an English medium Post primary school with an Irish medium Unit or provide Irish medium schooling. For example, in the case of a child who attended an Irish medium primary school transferring to English medium Post primary, he/she should be able to transfer to Post primary school with the best Irish medium provision available (for example, provision of Key Stage 3, A levels). The other extraordinary cases are appropriate.

C9

This should be the case on the understanding that the extra appropriate facilities are made available.

C10

The Boards of Governors should firstly judge these cases, and provide the appropriate support/information from BELB (for example, education, social services, medical, law). When this is not feasible, the central panel should revise these cases. The size and membership of these panels would be decided by the BELB.

C11

Pupils who have special educational statements should already be included within the maximum limit entry number before beginning the transfer process. Those who possess a statement while the process is in place should be extra to the upper limit number and more facilities should be awarded on account of that.

C12

It is evident from table 2 that great use is made of the criterion which is focussed on the family and they should be placed on a programme of selection.

C13

The importance associated with schools serving community/communities is illustrated in the chapter regarding principles and objectives. The definition of a community should be broad enough to include the Irish speaking community, even when this community is all over the region. There are dangers associated with the list of serving primary schools- and included here there is a danger that certain schools will be exempt from the list- for example Irish medium schools and other schools that are in the 'periphery' as serving primary schools.

The new co operational, non-competitive communication between schools should be of help to the employment authorities in dictating a community criterion.

C14

It is possible that these criterion may be full of difficulties, for example, political, religious, social and primary school language. (Irish medium

schools as serving primary schools even when there is a substantial enough difference involved (for example Downpatrick to Belfast). The criteria as regards school area focussed on the child, and on the needs of the child (Irish Language needs included) is what best suits the philosophy of the process.

(b) It would be difficult to use the upper limit percentage on a practical level.

C15

It is likely that the afore mentioned entrance requirements cover most of the students already. Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta will not be happy with the suggestion of random selection. This would not be in any way fair or usable. As well as that interviews should not be used (as we explained in question 4, as we do not believe that standardisation has been done) which would give fair play as regards class, educational or professional background and support for the schooling of the child.

It is much better to use the “How close the pupil’s house is to the school”. This can be accurately assessed but we think that the Department of Education should inform the schools one way or another about how to do this and that this should be agreed by all partners involved.

C16

This is difficult to assess and it would be helpful were the Department to do research on all of this for all partners. The Department should provide models which would show all of this working. As has been stated, the Pupil Profile should not be used to choose ‘de facto’ nor should the interview be used to do the same.

C17

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is of the opinion that priority should be given to the criterion which recognises the necessity to serve local community/communities. We also recognise that other criterion including Family, Community, School Area give recognition to the basic principles as is described in this document, which we agree with. (Paragraphs 2.2/2.3)

The Central Panel could be used as is recommended in Question 10 in order to avoid/overcome problems.

C18

There should be an agreement regarding the rules associated with the membership of these Appeal Tribunals. There should be at least one person who is knowledgeable of the area and the various particular circumstances as a member of the Tribunal. These Tribunals should come together in the areas of the parents and in a neutral place.

C19

The Department of Education should ensure that proof of address is mentioned in the entrance forms. To conclude, these are the most important points from our point of view:

- : that the standard of the Irish Language cannot be used as entrance criterion
- : that the Pupil Profile is not allowed to be used as a 'De Facto' selection
- : that the interview may not be used in order to choose a child- implications as regards classification, etc. mentioned
- : that a child from an Irish medium education background be permitted to transfer to the nearest post primary school with the best Irish language provision
- : serving schools:- but that certain schools will not be left out of the list because they are Irish medium schools or because they are on the periphery.