



Tullamore Educate Together N.S.  
Ag foghlaim le chéile an Túlach CDhór

## Irish Exemption Policy

### 1. Policy Introduction

This policy has been set out in accordance with the provisions set out in Circular 54/2022, EXEMPTIONS FROM THE STUDY OF IRISH REVISING CIRCULAR 12/96.

The purpose of this policy is to advise parents and guardians, staff and other professionals of the revised arrangements for the exemption of pupils from the study of Irish. It supersedes our previous policy and references to Circulars 52/2019 and 12/96.

It should be noted that pupils have the option not to exercise the exemption granted, without any loss of the right to exercise it at a future time.

Existing exemptions from the study of Irish granted under Circular 12/96 & 52/2019 and held by pupils will continue to apply until the end of their post-primary education.

#### *1.1 Irish Exemptions recorded on Aladdin for Department of Education*

The Language component of the Primary Curriculum is for all pupils and comprises both Irish and English. In exceptional circumstances, some pupils may be granted an exemption from the study of Irish. In order for pupils who are exempt from the study of Irish to be recognised when the Department validates school enrolment returns for grant payment and teacher allocation purposes, schools will continue to be required to record data on pupils who are exempt from the study of Irish and the reason for that exemption on the Primary Online Database (POD).

#### *1.2 Principles of Policy*

As the first official language in Ireland, and for fundamental cultural and historical reasons which are inextricably linked to Irish identity, the study of the Irish language is a key aspect of the learning experiences that are considered appropriate for pupils in recognised schools in Ireland. For these reasons, Irish is a core subject in the curriculum determined by the Minister for recognised Irish schools.

The decision to exempt a pupil from the study of Irish has very significant implications for his/her future learning and potential employment opportunities. Pupils should therefore be given every reasonable opportunity to participate in the learning of Irish for as long as possible in keeping with the integrated approach to language learning in the Primary Language Curriculum and also acknowledging that pupils at a young age adapt and improve over time.

Normally, it is in the interests of the child to continue to study Irish at least to fifth or sixth class level before any decision is made to grant an exemption, so that he/she will have maximum opportunity to participate in the learning of Irish.

This policy reflects the aims of Circular 54/2022 to support schools in addressing a wide diversity of needs by providing a differentiated learning experience for pupils in an inclusive school environment. It is informed by the benefits of bilingualism for all pupils, as well as the principles of inclusion that underpin the Primary Language Curriculum.

### *1.3 Special classes in Tullamore ETNS*

Tullamore ETNS promotes the inclusive education of children with special educational needs in mainstream education. We have one category of Special Education Classes in Tullamore ETNS; Autism.

In the case of pupils in these special classes in Tullamore ETNS, in line with Circular 54/2022 a formal application for a Certificate of Exemption is not required. Pupils in our special classes will therefore be exempt without holding a Certificate of Exemption (see 2.2.4 for further details).

In line with the Department's policy, Tullamore ETNS provides all pupils, to the greatest extent possible and in a meaningful way, with opportunities to participate in Irish language and cultural activities at a level appropriate to their learning needs.

## **2. Granting an exemption from the study of Irish**

### *2.1 Exceptional circumstances required*

Exempting a pupil from the study of Irish is considered only in exceptional circumstances. The decision to exempt a pupil from the study of Irish is an important decision that has implications for his/her access to the curriculum and his/her future learning. The decision to grant an exemption from the study of Irish is made following detailed discussion with the pupil's parent(s)/guardian(s), the class teacher, special education teachers, and the pupil. A decision to grant an exemption is only considered in the circumstances set out below.

### *2.2 Circumstances permitting Irish Exemption*

Exemption from the study of Irish may be allowed in the following exceptional circumstances only:

#### *2.2.1 A pupil moving from a different country without previous experience of learning the Irish language*

An exemption from the study of Irish may be granted to a pupil whose education was received outside the State (for a minimum period of three consecutive years) where he/she did not have opportunity to engage in the study of Irish

**AND either (a) or (b)**

**(a)** who is not less than 12 years of age on the day of their enrolment or re-enrolment

**OR**

- (b) who is enrolling following the completion of the full course of primary education recognised by another state.

*2.2.2 A pupil who experiences significant literacy difficulties which are an obstacle to their learning across the curriculum*

An exemption from the study of Irish may be granted to a pupil:

- (i) who has at least reached second class

**AND**

(ii) who presents with significant literacy difficulties that are persistent despite having had access to a differentiated approach to language and literacy learning in all subjects/across the curriculum and over time. Documentary evidence to this effect, held by the school, should include Student Support Plans detailing:

- regular reviews of learning needs as part of an ongoing cycle of assessment
- target-setting
- evidence-informed intervention and review, including test scores (Word Reading, Reading Comprehension, Spelling, other scores of language/literacy) at key points of review

**AND**

(iii) who, at the time of the application for exemption presents with a standardised score on a discrete test in either Word Reading, Reading Comprehension or Spelling at/below the 10th percentile.

Normally, pupils availing of an exemption under this category should be encouraged to engage with the study of oral Irish language for as long as possible in keeping with the integrated approach in the Primary Language Curriculum and acknowledging that pupils at a young age adapt and improve over time.

*2.2.3 A pupil who experiences a high level of multiple and persistent needs that are a significant barrier to the pupil's participation and engagement in their learning and school life*

It is recognised that there is a small cohort of pupils who have a high level of multiple and persistent needs that are a significant barrier to their participation and engagement in their learning and school life. In the case of these pupils, consideration may need to be given to adjusting the range of learning experiences to ensure that their needs are met and that they may engage purposefully in their learning in school. In very exceptional circumstances, this means that consideration may need to be given to exempting them from the study of Irish.

An exemption from the study of Irish may be granted to a pupil:

(i) who has at least reached second class

**AND**

(ii) who experiences a high level of multiple and persistent needs that are a very significant and continuing barrier to his/her participation and engagement in his/her learning and school life

**AND**

(iii) whose school has substantial written evidence that these needs persist despite targeted and individualised Student Support Plans to address those needs

**AND**

(iv) whose school has substantial written evidence that these individualised Student Support Plans have been implemented over not less than two school years, and have been monitored and reviewed by the school in collaboration with the parent(s)/guardian(s) and the pupil

**AND**

(v) who has been given every reasonable opportunity to participate in the learning of Irish in mainstream classes for as long as possible in keeping with the integrated approach in the Primary Language Curriculum and acknowledging that pupils at a young age adapt and improve over time

**AND**

(vi) the principal is satisfied that the granting of an exemption is in the overall best interests of the pupil concerned.

Normally, this will mean that the pupil will be expected to engage with the study of Irish at least to the end of fifth class. However, in very exceptional circumstances, where the principal is satisfied that an exemption is warranted to address the high level of multiple and persistent needs of the pupil and certifies that all of the conditions in (i) to (vi) above have been met, it may be granted at an earlier stage, but in no case may this be earlier than second class.

*2.2.4 A pupil in a recognised special school or class or who was previously enrolled in a recognised special school or class or who has a recommendation and has been deemed eligible for a place in a recognised special school and/or in a special class in a mainstream school*

(i) Where a pupil is currently enrolled in a recognised special school or special class in a mainstream school or who has previously been enrolled in a recognised special school or special class in a mainstream school and who is transitioning to mainstream provision, that pupil is automatically entitled to an exemption from the study of Irish without an application.

**OR**

(ii) Where a pupil has a recommendation and has been deemed eligible for a place in a recognised special school and/or in a special class in a mainstream school an application for an exemption from the study of Irish will be required.

Normally, pupils availing of an exemption under (i) OR (ii) of this category should be encouraged to engage with the study of oral Irish language for as long as possible in keeping with the integrated approach in the Primary Language Curriculum and acknowledging that pupils at a young age adapt and improve over time.

### *2.2.5 A pupil whose parent(s)/guardian(s) is/are diplomatic or consular representative(s) of another country to Ireland irrespective of age or educational history*

An exemption from the study of Irish may be granted to a pupil whose parent(s)/guardian(s) is/are diplomatic or consular representative(s) of another country to Ireland irrespective of age or educational history.

## *2.3 Procedures for granting an exemption from the study of Irish*

### *2.3.1 Steps required for a valid application for an exemption from the study of Irish*

1. A parent/guardian must make an application in writing to the principal of the school for a Certificate of Exemption from the study of Irish on behalf of a pupil.
2. The school staff shall mark the date of receipt of the application on the application form and issue an acknowledgement to the parent(s)/guardian(s) upon receipt of the application.
3. At the earliest opportunity a school official should contact the applicant(s) and:
  - discuss the written application with the applicant(s) and confirm the sub-paragraph on which the application is based (as outlined in section 2.2 above) N.B. If a parent/guardian does not confirm the sub-paragraph under which the application is based, then the application is null and void and no further processing of the application will take place. Only criteria contained in this Circular can be considered as grounds for an exemption from the study of Irish and no other exceptional circumstances can be considered.
  - advise the applicant(s) of the steps involved in processing the application.
  - inform the parent(s)/guardian(s)/pupil of the implications of an exemption from the study of Irish for the pupil while in primary education and into the future.
4. The application should be fully processed and the outcome confirmed in writing within 21 school days of receipt of the application.
5. Where a decision is reached that an exemption from the study of Irish may be granted a signed Certificate of Exemption will be issued to the parent(s)/guardian(s) and a copy will be held by the school in the pupil's file. The record keeping requirements are outlined further below.
6. Where an application is refused, the principal must inform the applicant(s) in writing outlining the reasons for refusal and notifying the applicant(s) that the school's decision may be

appealed to the Irish Exemptions Appeal Committee within 30 calendar days of the date of the written decision.

### *2.3.2 Considering an application for exemption*

In considering an application for exemption from the study of Irish the principal will:

1. review the application and any documentation provided by the applicant(s);
2. consult with the pupil's class teacher;
3. consult with the special education teacher and the assigned teacher from the Visiting Teacher Service where relevant;
4. review school documentation for the evidence outlined above
5. consult the following as appropriate;
  - Exemptions from the Study of Irish: Guidelines for Primary Schools and the supporting documents maintained by the Department on the Government webpage on exemptions from the study of Irish: [www.gov.ie/en/service/irish-exemption/](http://www.gov.ie/en/service/irish-exemption/)
  - Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools developed by the National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS), the Inspectorate and Special Education Section, DES (2017): <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/edf64-guidelines-for-primary-schools-supporting-pupils-withspecial-educational-needs-in-mainstream-schools/>
  - Special Educational Needs: A Continuum of Support, NEPS (2007): <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/dca316-special-education-needs-a-continuum-of-support/>
  - Catalogue of Wellbeing Resources for Schools: gov.ie - Catalogue of Wellbeing Resources for Schools ([www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie))
  - Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties: A Continuum of Support: Guidelines for Teachers, NEPS (2010): <https://assets.gov.ie/40684/97bbea80d96b4057bf3f1f01107c7db4.pdf>
  - Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools, NCCA (2007): <https://curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/2b3eaa53-cb4b-4053-9d71-2d28d9d6c734/AssessmentGuidelines.pdf>

### *2.3.3 Recording the decision*

The outcome of the application process will be conveyed by the school in writing to the applicant.

**Where an exemption is granted**, a Certificate of Exemption, signed and dated by the school principal will be issued.

1. The Certificate of Exemption will state the name and address of the school, the school roll number, the pupil's name, date of birth and the sub-paragraph under which the exemption is being granted. A Certificate of Exemption is hyperlinked in the checklists within the Guidelines accompanying this Circular, published by the Department on the government website.

2. The arrangements for the pupil's learning will be explained to the parent(s)/guardian(s)/pupil.
3. It will be explained to the parent(s)/guardian(s) that incidental learning of Irish language may occur through engagement with greetings, phrases, festivals and that a positive attitude to Irish should be fostered by the parent(s)/guardian(s).
4. Parent(s)/guardian(s) and the pupil should be informed of the option not to exercise the exemption granted, without any loss of the right to exercise it at a future time.
5. The application form, all supporting documentation, and a copy of the Certificate of Exemption will be retained by the school in accordance with data protection legislation and will be made available for inspection by authorised officers of the Department. In maintaining such documentation, schools should ensure that they have obtained appropriate parental/guardian consent for the retention and use of such records.
6. In addition, where an exemption from the study of Irish is granted, the school should update the pupil's record on the Primary Online Database (POD) as soon as possible to include the reason for that exemption.

**Where an application is refused**, a copy of the application form, together with the letter of refusal and all supporting documentation, will be retained by the school in accordance with data protection legislation. The school should maintain the records for at least the duration of the pupil's enrolment in the school. In maintaining such documentation, schools should ensure that they have obtained appropriate parental/guardian consent for the retention and use of such records.

#### *2.4 Appeal*

Where the application for exemption from the study of Irish is refused, an applicant can appeal the school's decision to the Irish Exemptions Appeals Committee (IEAC). The IEAC will comprise three persons who shall be selected from a panel of persons established and maintained by the Minister, having regard to the need for each IEAC to have available to it:

- Experience and skills in the provision of or inspection of special education in schools
- Experience and skills in educational psychology and/or child and adolescent wellbeing and mental health
- Experience and skills in the leadership and administration of schools
- Experience and skills in the initial or continuing education of teachers of pupils with special educational needs.

The IEAC will decide on whether the exemption should be granted or not, inform the school of the decision and require the school to give effect to their decision. In deciding the IEAC will consider the decision of the school and the grounds given for refusing the application, the criteria set out in this Circular and any supporting documentation that was available to the school, contained in the Student Support Plan(s) and any supplementary information provided to the school by the applicant. The appeal should be made on the appropriate form published on the Department's website.

The appeal must be lodged within 30 calendar days from the date of the written decision of the school not to grant an exemption was notified in writing to the applicant. Irish Exemption Appeal

Form and Guidelines for Primary Schools can be accessed at [www.gov.ie/en/service/irish-exemption/](http://www.gov.ie/en/service/irish-exemption/)

### **3. Standardised Test Used for Irish Exemption**

In Tullamore ETNS the discrete standardised test used is the Wide Range Attainment Test, Fifth Edition (WRAT 5). It is individually administered by a member of the Support Team to a child.

### **4. Arrangements for pupils who are exempt from the study of Irish**

To support the inclusive practices of our school, it is policy that pupils who are exempt from the study of Irish be allowed to remain in the class during the Irish lesson. This allows for the pupil to be included in a meaningful way in aspects of Irish language and cultural activities in line with his/her ability and interests. It provides an opportunity to gain a knowledge of spoken Irish and to participate in the learning activities.

Tullamore ETNS will take account of the literacy learning needs of pupils who are exempt from the study of Irish when deploying available special educational needs resources.

Only under exceptional circumstances, may other suitable arrangement be made such as allocating school work on other subject areas.

- In such exceptional circumstances, a Continuum of Support (COS) plan will indicate if that child's needs impedes his/her ability to learn Irish and therefore participate in Irish lessons
- Extra work will be assigned collaboratively by Class teacher and SET teacher for the child
- Withdrawal of the child during Irish lessons is detailed in child's support plan

***Children with an Irish exemption are exempt from completing Irish homework.***

### **5. Supports for pupils who have no understanding of English when enrolled**

A pupil who has no understanding of English when enrolled and whose education up to 12 years of age or up to the final year of his/her primary education was received outside the state, are provided with intensive English as an Additional Language (EAL) in preparation for his/her full engagement with the Primary Language Curriculum at a level commensurate with his/her ability.

### **6. Reporting on exemptions granted to the Department**

For pupils who are exempt from the study of Irish to be recognised by the Department, for grant payment and teacher allocation purposes, schools will be required on a monthly basis to record data on pupils who are exempt from the study of Irish and the reason for that exemption on the Primary Online Database (POD).

As set out in subsection 2.3 above, a copy of the Certificate of Exemption must also be given to the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the pupil being exempted.

### **7. Pupils transitioning to other schools**

It is the responsibility of the parent(s)/guardian(s) to ensure that a copy of the pupil's Certificate of Exemption is made available to the receiving school.

It is recommended that schools use the Education Passport materials developed by the NCCA, to provide information on a pupil's engagement with the study of Irish including details of the granting of an exemption from the study of Irish. The passport is retained in the primary school until the post-primary school principal or designated person with responsibility for initiating pupil information transfers, sends a written request for the pupil's report cards

## **8. Monitoring & reviewing the Policy**

Tullamore ETNS will review this policy in line with Department of Education and Skills guidelines.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson of the BOM

Date: **11<sup>th</sup> May 2026**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal

Date: **11<sup>th</sup> May 2026**