

## Press Release

Tuesday, 3rd September 2019

### **An Foras Pátrúnachta welcomes new steps to increase access to Irish-medium education as part of the patronage process**

An Foras Pátrúnachta, the largest patron of gaelscoileanna in Ireland, has welcomed today's announcement by Minister McHugh that the Department of Education and Skills are taking steps to increase access to Irish-medium education.

Caoimhín Ó hEaghra, Ard-Rúnaí of An Foras Pátrúnachta, stated that "the steps as outlined by Minister McHugh reflected an appreciation and understanding of the demand for Irish-medium education (IME) by parents."

In future, if a new school is required due to demographic growth and there is no existing Irish-medium provision in an area, the new school will be a gaelscoil. Secondly, where a number of new primary schools are due to be established in the same school planning area at least one will be Irish-medium.

Mr. Ó hEaghra acknowledged the steps being taken by Minister McHugh and the Department in developing a framework to provide more opportunities to increase the provision of Irish-medium education. Other measures include:

- delivering two 8-classroom schools (one English-medium and one Irish-medium) rather than delivering one 16-classroom school.
- providing opportunities as part of the Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity process for existing schools to change from English-medium to Irish-medium.

Mr. Ó hEaghra added: "We commend the Minister and his Department officials for initiating the process of addressing the imbalance in the provision of Irish-medium education. An Foras Pátrúnachta has found an average demand of 26% from parents for Irish-Medium Education. This was supported by ESRI Research in 2015. These steps will result in supply better meeting demand and moving away from a situation where less than 5% of primary schools are Gaelscoileanna.

"Today's announcement is in line with the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language which continues to have cross party support. The principle adopted by the Department of providing IME to communities where it isn't available is a step towards achieving our stated national goals for the Irish Language and IME. However, more needs to be done."

"An Foras Pátrúnachta urges the Department to facilitate the acceleration of IME by applying this policy outlined by the Minister for areas of demographic growth, to two other areas:

- the provision of stand alone Gaelcholáistí across the country
- as part of the reconfiguration process at primary level

“It is already an issue for us that there is a need for more Gaelcholáistí, in that parents who choose a Gaelscoil at primary level also want total immersion for their children at second level. The lack of supply at second level is even more pronounced. That question hasn’t been addressed in today’s announcement.”

“If the Reconfiguration process resulted in providing families with the opportunity to send their child to a multi-denominational Gaelscoil where up to now they did not have one we would have a situation where parents and students had a true choice.”

“We want to thank Minister McHugh and his officials for implementing these measures to provide more choice for parents.”

**ENDS**

**Contact: Caoimhín Ó hEaghra, General Secretary on 01-6294110.**

**About An Foras Pátrúnachta:** An Foras Pátrúnachta is a national patron for both primary and second level schools, seeking to develop, strengthen and promote education through the medium of Irish throughout the country. It is a patron of 75 schools, educating over 17,000 students per annum. Schools under the patronage of An Foras Pátrúnachta are located in 22 counties around Ireland.