Policy on Exemption from Irish

Introduction:
This policy was drafted by staff and Board of Management (BoM) in response to updates in Circular 0054/2022.

Rationale:
The policy of the Department of Education is to provide for the inclusive education of children with special educational needs in mainstream education, other than in circumstances where it would not be in the best interest of the child, or the effective education of children with whom they are to be educated.[1] In line with the Department's policy schools are expected and encouraged to provide 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.

Relationship to the school Ethos:
This policy is in keeping with the mission statement of the school, which strives to enhance the self esteem of all through providing for the intellectual, physical, moral and cultural needs of all.

Aims and Objectives:

- To allow for pupils of differing abilities, interests and circumstances
- To enhance inclusivity within the school
- To enable children of all abilities to access the curriculum in a learner friendly manner
- To provide clarity and procedure for the process

Policy Content:
Exempting a pupil from the study of Irish will be considered only in those exceptional circumstances set out in section 2.2 of Circular 0054/2022. The decision to exempt a pupil from the study of Irish is an important decision that has implications for his/her future learning. The decision to grant an exemption from the study of Irish is made by the principal, but it must be 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 should only be considered in the circumstances set out in section 2.2 of the circular (see Appendix A).

Procedures:
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.
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.

Roles and Responsibilities:
The process of any exemption will involve the Principal, the In-School Leadership team, class teachers, parent(s) and the child.

The decision to grant an exemption or not will lie solely with the Principal.

Arrangements for pupils who are exempt from the study of Irish
The school will take account of the literacy learning needs of pupils who are exempt from the study of Irish when deploying available special education teaching resources.

To support inclusive practices, a pupil who is exempt from the study of Irish will be included in a meaningful way in aspects of Irish language and cultural activities in line with his/her ability and interests. Pupils exempt from Irish will still take part in the oral component of Irish. 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.

Success Criteria:

- Seamless integration of non-nationals and pupils with learning difficulties
- Happy and inclusive school learning environment
- Positive teacher/parental feedback

Policy ratified by the Board of Management on 18th April 2023.

Signed: _____ **Date:** 20/4/2023
Chairperson

Signed: _____ **Date:** 20/4/2023
Principal

Review:
This policy will be reviewed in the 2024/2025 academic year.

Appendix A

2.2 The circumstances in which a pupil may be granted an exemption from the study of Irish

An exemption from the study of Irish may be allowed in the following circumstances, 2.2.1, 2.2.2, 2.2.3, 2.2.4 or 2.2.5 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 a/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 a/are diplomatic or consular representative(s) of another country to Ireland irrespective of age or educational history.