

# Ceiliúradh na Gaelscolaíochta

A Celebration of Irish Medium Education 2018

The Trust for Irish Medium Education



Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta



Ó Neart go Neart  
From Strength to Strength





“ The people who set up náiscoileanna and bunscoileanna are transforming communities...”

## Fáilte - Welcome

This magazine has been put together to give the reader a brief taste of the continuous development of Irish Medium Education in the North over this past year or so. It offers a snapshot of the language as it is today, a central part of the educational experience of in excess of 6,000 pupils; where children, teaching staff and parents engage with each other in Irish on a daily basis. The development of a flourishing bilingual educational sector is something that the state should celebrate and encourage as adding value to its educational output.

However, things don't just happen; people make things happen. The people who set up náiscoileanna and bunscoileanna are transforming communities, with limited funding from my organisation, InaG and Foras na Gaeilge, along with support and advice from CnaG [Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta]. We have seen new IME [Irish Medium Education] projects in **Swatragh, Co. Derry, Toomebridge, Co. Antrim**, and in **Armagh city. Carryduff** will see its own náiscoil opening its doors in the coming year. To all of those who have played a part in getting these schemes up and running tá ár mbuíochas tuillte agaibh.

This is just part of the story. The majority of IME schools in the North were set up between 10 and 20 years ago – as educational institutions they are young. But they are maturing in terms of capacity, infrastructure and the delivery of a quality education. Coláiste Feirste in Belfast has just completed a £12m extension and new build to cater for the increased numbers seeking Irish post-primary education. Indeed, plans are now advanced for a North Belfast campus for Coláiste Feirste to ensure the school can meet the demand which is growing year on year.

Gaelcholáiste Dhoire is just coming to the end of its second year in **Dungiven**, trying manfully to meet the burgeoning demand for Irish post-primary in County Derry. Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin has now got a fantastic building on **Belfast's Cliftonville Road**, Gaelscoil na gCrann's newbuild is under construction in **Omagh**, while Gaelscoil Uí Néill, Gaelscoil Aodha Rua and Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh are at various stages in getting new buildings. In Belfast, Scoil an Droichid and Gaelscoil Éanna will have new fit-for-purpose buildings in the next few years.

These infrastructural changes show the system catching up with the robust growth of Irish schools over the past decade; that catching up process is by no means complete. But it shows Irish Medium Education is now an established part of the fabric of the educational system in the North.

We are getting bigger and better, more professional, with greater capacity and greater expertise. Bilingual education gives added value to those pupils who come through our schools and provides the framework to give them the skills and knowledge that can ensure they become fully participating citizens in this country in the 21st century and beyond.

### Pilib Ó Ruanáí (InaG)



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# Gaelcholáiste Dhoire Dungiven

# Alakazam!

It's back to 'cool' as much as back to school for the pupils of Gaelcholáiste Dhoire every time they head back to the classroom.

Who else gets to go to school in an imposing 200-year-old castle?

'Hogwarts na Gaeilge', as Dungiven Castle is now affectionately known.

"Sixteen pupils started when we opened in September 2015," says Principal Diarmuid Ua Bruadair. "We have increased that number five-fold to 82 students this term. In September we'll have 120 pupils. That's a ten-fold increase within three years."

Growing and expanding is a constant at Gaelcholáiste Dhoire — and not just for the pupils.

"We will have three or four new teachers coming in in the autumn. Fresh perspectives, different experiences, new skills," says Diarmuid. "And the school will also be growing dramatically in a physical sense.

"We'll soon have 120 pupils and that number will increase each year. So we'll need more space."

So, as they say in the the real Hogwarths, Alakazam!

And there you go, a brand new five-classroom extension build alongside Dungiven Castle.

Not so much down to Harry Potter wizardry as to a helping hand from Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta who have financed the new-build.

Iontaobhas recognises that Gaelcholáiste Dhoire is the most important development in Irish Medium Education in the last 25 years.

It is only the second independent Irish Medium post-primary in the North.

A third will open in North Belfast in the near future, when Coláiste Feirste opens a satellite school there.

And all the while demand for places in Irish Medium streams at St Malachy's High School, Castlewellan, Naomh Iósaef, Donaghmore, and St Catherine's Armagh is steady or indeed increasing.

Gaelcholáiste Dhoire's success is another sign that the rapid growth which has characterised the nursery and primary IME sector is now about to be replicated in the post-primary sector.

These are good times for the IME sector and Diarmuid is delighted to be involved,



particularly in bringing Irish back to an area where it was spoken as a native language within living memory.

Gaelcholáiste Dhoire is his dream job.

Born into the first urban Irish language community, Bóthar Seoighe in West Belfast, Diarmuid was himself brought up in an Irish speaking household, was among the first children to attend Bunscoil Phobal Feirste and later went on to work in the first IME secondary school, Coláiste Feirste.

Diarmuid links that first IME school, Bunscoil Phobal Feirste, and one of the newest schools, Gaelcholáiste Dhoire.

And recently the link was strengthened further when some of those who set up the Shaws Road Gaeltacht in Belfast came to visit Gaelcholáiste Dhoire to celebrate a sector which has gone from just 12 pupils to well over 6,000 within a generation.

Which is the fastest growing educational sector north and south.

They had a wonderful evening in Dungiven Castle.

Those pioneers from the early days of IME inspiring the pupils of today and in their turn inspired by the pupils of today.

Looking back at a great past, and forward to an even better future!



# 1-2-3

## It's elementary as Irish Medium continues to grow

### 1 Náiscoil na Fíobha Toomebridge

It's the Slaughterneil effect!

So says John Mulhern of Náiscoil na Fíobha as he muses on why last September, for the first time in many years, three new náiscoil, (Irish Medium pre-schools) opened their doors.

Náiscoil na Fíobha in Toomebridge, Náiscoil Ghreanacháin in Swatragh and Náiscoil na Caille in Armagh city.

For John, chair of Náiscoil na Fíobha committee, the explanation is clear.

"So many people are passionate now about the language, it is really striking.

"It's partly the Slaughterneil effect," he says, referring to the South Derry club which has had numerous Ulster and national success in recent years.

"It's clear that the revival of the language and culture in Slaughterneil has rejuvenated that community and area. A lot of the kids and adults there speak Irish as their first language. And it's something which we want to emulate here."

Since his four-year-old daughter Caelainn enrolled as one of the 16 pupils in Náiscoil Fíobha, John finds it's something of roles reversed after school.

"I've a bit of Irish but to be truthful I'm learning as much from her as I'm teaching her!

"Having said that, there are evening classes for parents, which is great, and the wider community has been very supportive, with so many individuals and groups organising fundraisers or helping in other ways — the local GAA in particular.

"So Náiscoil na Fíobha has very much a community feel to it, but that doesn't surprise me as I know a lot of the IME (Irish Medium Education) schools have that strong community participation."

Now that the náiscoil is going so well, an announcement is expected very soon about the opening of a Bunscoil in the Toome area.

### 2 Náiscoil na Caille Armagh City

In Armagh Náiscoil na Caille is the third náiscoil in the city, but the first independent one.

While náiscoil and bunscoil streams in local schools have helped meet the needs of IME until now, demand continues to soar.

Which led to the opening of Náiscoil na Caille last September.

Náiscoil na Caille has had a tremendous first year, so much so that a new standalone Bunscoil in Armagh is now due to open in 2019.

"The momentum is evident," says Náiscoil committee member Gearóid Ó Machail.

"Just look at the sterling work done in the Irish Medium streams in the local schools.

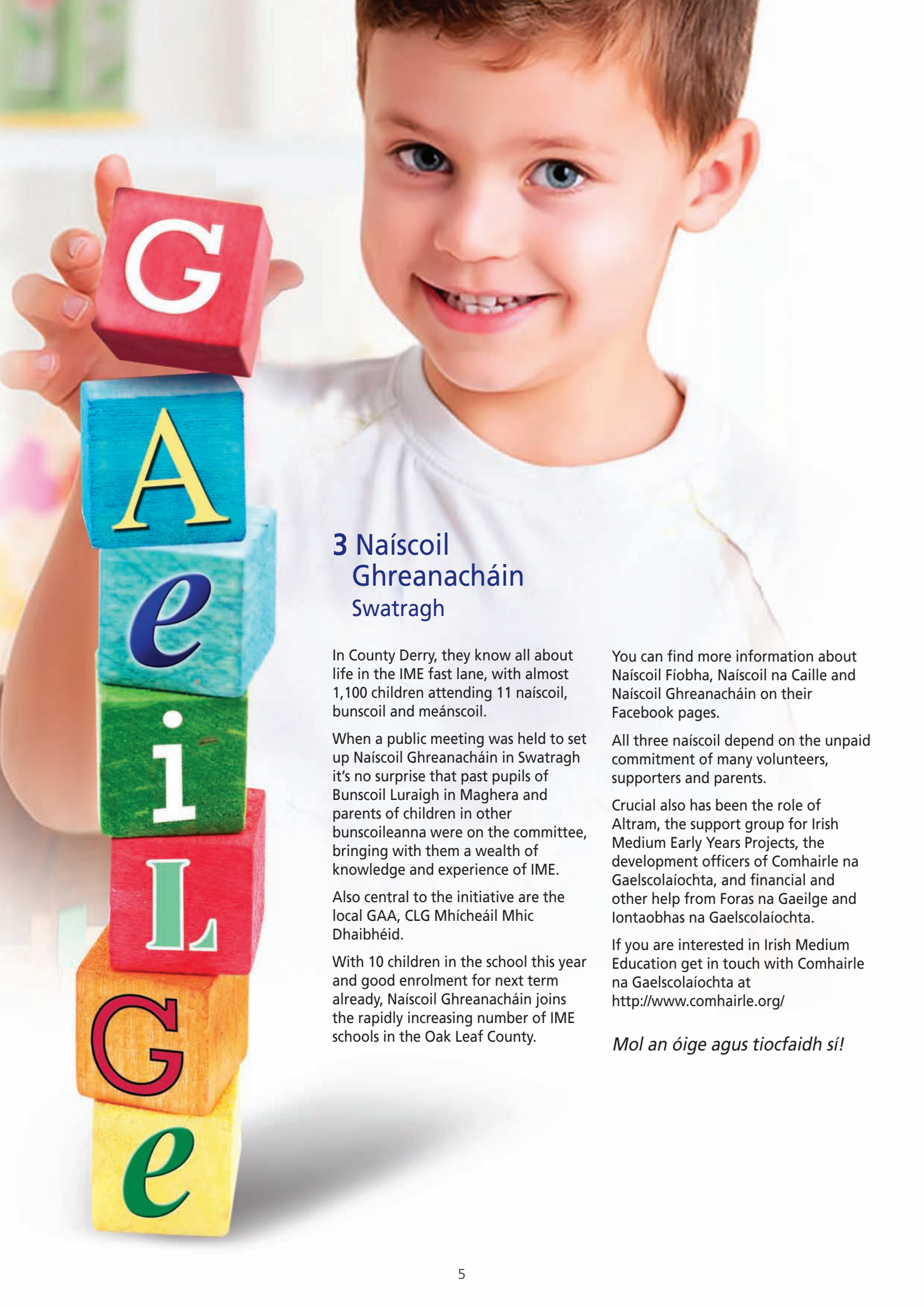
"Look at Gael-Linn here in Armagh, at Cleamairí Ard Mhacha, Piobairí Ard Mhacha, Cairde Teo.

"And of course, Aonach Mhacha, the Irish language cultural centre which is being developed on the site of the former fire station. And so much more.

"We've done a lot of work in Armagh to ensure that the Irish language is not seen as the exclusive domain of any one group or community.

"Widening access to IME (Irish Medium Education) is a logical progression. So, an Ghaeilge in Ard Mhacha is moving into the fast lane. Ar aghaidh linn!"





### 3 Naíscóil Ghreanacháin Swatragh

In County Derry, they know all about life in the IME fast lane, with almost 1,100 children attending 11 naíscóil, bunscoil and meánscoil.

When a public meeting was held to set up Naíscóil Ghreanacháin in Swatragh it's no surprise that past pupils of Bunscoil Luraigh in Maghera and parents of children in other bunscoileanna were on the committee, bringing with them a wealth of knowledge and experience of IME.

Also central to the initiative are the local GAA, CLG Mhícheáil Mhic Dhaibhéid.

With 10 children in the school this year and good enrolment for next term already, Naíscóil Ghreanacháin joins the rapidly increasing number of IME schools in the Oak Leaf County.

You can find more information about Naíscóil Fíobha, Naíscóil na Caille and Naíscóil Ghreanacháin on their Facebook pages.

All three naíscóil depend on the unpaid commitment of many volunteers, supporters and parents.

Crucial also has been the role of Altram, the support group for Irish Medium Early Years Projects, the development officers of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, and financial and other help from Foras na Gaeilge and Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta.

If you are interested in Irish Medium Education get in touch with Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta at <http://www.comhairle.org/>

*Mol an óige agus tiocfaidh sí!*

Gaelscoil na gCrann Omagh

# Take a leaf out of our book



Omagh didn't have any Irish Medium schools 15 years ago.

Back then who could have imagined that today 180 children would be attending Gaelscoil and Naíscóil na gCrann on Killyclogher Road?

Just 10 years ago who would have forecast that the Department of Education would invest £2.3m in a brick-build seven-classroom state-of-the-art brand new building for Gaelscoil na gCrann?

Almost everything is in place and the hope is that work will start this year; estimated build time once the green light is given, 60 weeks.

Secondary-level Irish Medium Education is well served at Scoil Iósaef, St Joseph's Grammar School in Donaghmore.

However, with the rapid growth of Gaelscoil na gCrann in Omagh and Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh in Strabane, along with the renewed impetus in the Gaelscoileanna in Derry, a new Irish Medium secondary nearer to Omagh seems inevitable some time in the future.

However minimalist expectations for Irish Medium Education in Omagh have been in the past, no one expects anything but more growth and significant development for IME in years to come.

"There is a growing demand for IME in Omagh for sure," says Risteard Mac Daibhéid, Vice-Principal of Gaelscoil na gCrann. "We are lucky to have a lot of really great schools in the Omagh area and Gaelscoil na gCrann is one of them.

But with bilingual education we do offer something quite distinctive and I think a lot more parents are seeing the unique advantages of that.

"The new school building, when it comes, will add to that momentum but the trend here and throughout the North has seen the numbers choosing Irish Medium Education increasing year on year.

"I think that in Omagh IME is in safe hands."

A past winner of Primary Teacher of the Year Northern Ireland and with over 20 years of experience teaching in the IME sector, Risteard might well be referring to himself as 'safe hands'.

But he's in fact referring to the new generation of IME teachers, particularly those he sees around him in Gaelscoil na gCrann.

"I love teaching in Irish Medium schools. There is just something about the language itself, it's a great spur to children learning.

"The young generation of teachers in this school, they are as passionate and enthusiastic and capable as I and my fellow teachers were when we started off 20 years ago.

"They're great. They believe in IME, in their vocation.

"They put in incredibly long hours and they are an inspiration. So I do think IME here is safe in their hands."

But the Strabane man does have some pedigree when it comes to all-Ireland titles.

A few years back he wrote the school play, which pupils performed at the Féile Scoil-drámaíochta, the All-Ireland Schools Drama Festival in Mullingar.

In total, 44 schools took part, but Gaelscoil na gCrann was overall winner, bringing one of the most coveted accolades in Irish school drama to the North for the first time ever. What about the future?

"To try to be the best school in Omagh, then in Tyrone, then in Ireland," he says jokingly.

"That was special," says Risteard. "We do put a big emphasis on extra-curricular activities, drama, music, sport and many others. And to win an all-Ireland title was just fantastic for everyone."

When visiting the school and announcing that the Department was to invest in a new building for Gaelscoil na gCrann, then Minister John O'Dowd commented: "This school has flourished as a result of strong leadership and community involvement."

That was a formula for success in the past.

And undoubtedly it will be a formula for success in the future.



## An environment to match its ambitions

Upbeat is a default setting at Coláiste Feirste.

And they have a lot of reasons to be upbeat.

The latest £16.5m capital investment in new buildings, classrooms and stunning sports facilities has left Coláiste Feirste with a first class school campus.

It's a milestone moment, giving the school the facilities and environment to match its ambitions.

Adding even further to the attraction of a school which since the day it opened in 1991 with nine children has seen pupil numbers increase year on year to the point that it now has 650 pupils.

There is such demand for places at Coláiste Feirste that in the near future they will open a satellite in North Belfast, bringing post-primary IME to that part of the city for the first time.

A reflection of the high esteem in which Coláiste Feirste and its educational model is held.

"The numbers keep growing and they are a confirmation of the confidence which the community has in us," says Principal Garaí Mac Roibéaird.

"The new buildings, the excellent academic results, the community involvement in the school and their use of school facilities, these are all elements which have helped the school succeed and will continue to help us as we move to the next phase," he added.

"The governors have also been central to the success story.

"And the very strong school community.

"We value every child. We make them aware of that. We make them aware that they have something very valuable to contribute,

"And the thing that most unites us all is actually the Irish language.

"There is an extra edge to an IME school because of the language itself as an educational tool and as the normal language of communication."

Academically, Coláiste Feirste matches or exceeds the standards in similar English-medium schools.

In particular achievements in GCSE Maths, English and Gaeilge are consistently well above the three-year average for similar schools.

The school also has an excellent reputation for drama and art, for sport, for media studies and for wider cultural activities.

Children with learning difficulties benefit from specific IME support strategies through the school's innovative Learning Support Centre.

Alongside all of this Coláiste Feirste is situated in the burgeoning Gaeltacht Quarter, an area which has seen continuing investment and increasing profile, with the emphasis on promoting jobs and enterprise for Irish speakers.

As the Irish language community continues to grow former pupils of Coláiste Feirste are in leadership roles in Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich, in Raidió Fáilte, in Glór na Móna, in Gael Ionad Mhic Goill, in Conradh na Gaeilge, in An Dream Dearg and many other organisations and groups.



Coláiste Feirste is a co-educational, non-denominational school which caters for pupils of all abilities.

The most up-to-date technology is used in classrooms where pupils are taught the full curriculum to A-level, from Science and Maths to Home Economics.

Class sizes are kept at between 25-30 as Irish Medium works best in a language-rich immersion context.

"Our aim," says Garaí Mac Roibéaird, "is to develop highly educated and confident young people who have excellent choices in life.

"When I started here in 1994 I wanted to be part of the 'ideal' IME school.

"I used to discuss with others what such a school should look like.

"Now looking around us today, I know what that 'ideal' IME school would look like.

"It would look like Coláiste Feirste."



# The North Wind blows...



The 'Beast from the East' closed the school for a few days.

But then only something totally exceptional could make the children of Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin in North Belfast miss school.

They love their school! They loved Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin even when they were in cramped, ageing classrooms in their old school building at Wyndham Drive.

Then they were 'bowled over' in 2016 when they moved to their five new-build classrooms on the old Cricket Ground at Cliftonville Road, where they also share floodlit 3G pitches with local sports clubs. Yee-hah!

The nursery school, the náiscoil, which has had statutory status since 2012, is now oversubscribed. And such is the demand for IME in the area that the Department has agreed to allow the Bunscoil to increase its first year intake. With 163 pupils at the Bunscoil and Náiscoil at present, and with that number to increase this autumn, plans to add new classrooms are afoot.

And plans are well advanced to open a satellite school of Coláiste Feirste in North Belfast in the near future.

"Our children and our community deserve the very best education, care and facilities and that is what we are giving them," says Máire Uí Éigeartaigh, Principal of Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin.

"We have seen a significant increase in enrolment since we moved to the new school.

"There is no doubt, buildings are important. But what happens inside the buildings is also very important.

"For almost 20 years we were in accommodation in Wyndham Drive which was clearly unsuitable as the school numbers increased.

"Even so, we had a great school with great spirit, with high standards and with happy, well-educated children.

"Now on our new site we have the opportunity, with enhanced facilities, to improve things even more."

Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin was set up in 1994 in an old Church of Ireland building at Wyndham Drive.

It took almost two decades of campaigning before the school was given its new site.

On a dark winter day in December 2015 pupils waved 'slán' to their old school and walked to their bright new spacious classrooms a mile or so away.

"They went into the new school with cheers and clapping ringing in their ears as parents and locals gathered to give them a 'Céad Míle Fáilte'," says Máire.

"And that was fitting as parents and the wider community have and will always play a key role in this school.

"And indeed in the development of IME in North Belfast."

It was those parents who made a brave decision in 1984 to send their children to Náiscoil Ard Eoin who started it all off.

"The growth since that first Náiscoil has been tremendous but it didn't happen accidentally.

It came from the hard work and energy and sheer willpower of parents and teachers and the wider community.

"Alongside the constant and crucial support of Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta. That energy is still needed, still there, and you can see its impact in the increasing numbers of parents in North Belfast who are choosing IME. Maith iad."

Máire herself watched the start of IME in North Belfast from the sidelines.

"I was at school at the time Náiscoil Ard Eoin was set up in 1984. Even then I knew I wanted to be a teacher.

"When I was at school I was very influenced by my Irish teachers, Brid Lynsey and Nuala McGrath. They really inspired my love for the language. So I had good role models."

As do the children of Bunscoil and Náiscoil Bheann Mhadagáin as they get excited not only about life at their school but the expectation that when it's time to go to secondary school they'll be going up the road rather than across town to Coláiste Feirste in West Belfast.

The first generation from North Belfast to ever do so. At nursery, primary, and secondary level, Irish Medium Education in North Belfast is now firmly set on a brighter and better future.

And it will take a lot more than the 'Beast from the East' to steer it off course!



## Maidin mhaith daoibh



Greeting children at the school gate is still a highlight of her day for Máire Ní Dhochartaigh, principal of Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh in Strabane.

Tapping into their energy, enthusiasm and positivity is always a real fillip.

She does though have a lot more of them to greet nowadays, with over 170 pupils in Gaelscoil and Naíscóil compared to just four when the school first opened in 1997!

While the intake of children has been increasing steadily year on year, the numbers are expected to surge even further when Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh moves to a new £3m brick-build seven-classroom school on a site on Strahan Road.

Plans for the development are in their final stages, with expectation that workers will get the go-ahead soon.

"The move has been delayed a few times but we're near to it now," says Máire. "We've had bigger waits for things in times past so we just keep focused on the here and now."

She will be sad to leave their neighbours in Ballycolman estate who, along with Cumann Mhic Shíogair, have been fantastic — but the links will always be there.

"The new school will certainly be more comfortable, more modern and spacious, and easier in many respects for the teachers and the pupils.

"It will also increase our profile more than ever before.

"But the standard of education in this school, whether in the new buildings or the old, was, is and will be excellent."

Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh opened in 1997 with four pupils and one teacher, building on the success of Naíscóil an tSraitha Báin which had opened in 1994 and had shown clearly the demand for IME in Strabane.

Having been teaching there since 1999, Máire has seen many highlights.

2010 was a seminal year for the school as for the first time the Naíscóil came in with the Gaelscoil.

In 2013 Minister for Education John O'Dowd visited and the Department confirmed that the school would be getting a new building and site.

2016 was another really special year for the school.

They celebrated their 20th anniversary.

And celebrated great results in GCSEs.

13 pupils sat the exams, scoring 6As and 7A\*s.

There are always things to celebrate at Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh!

"This is an Irish Medium school of course, but it's also a community school," says Máire.

"We are so lucky to have such a great PTA, so many parents and others from the wider community whose volunteer work has been crucial. So many people who have collected money, organised events, helped inform people about the school and Irish Medium Education.



"Everyone can play a role here in Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh."

A few years back the school performed 'An Béal Bocht', a stage version of the best-selling book by one of Strabane's most famous sons, Flann O'Brien, Brian O'Nolan, Myles na gCopaleen.

They paid tribute to another of Strabane's famous sons the year the Gaelscoil opened.

Gearalt Ó Dhochartaigh was a Conradh na Gaeilge stalwart who from the 1940s onwards cycled the towns of Tyrone teaching Irish and helping promote the GAA.

When Strabane got its Gaelscoil in 1997 it was fittingly named in his honour.

And undoubtedly he and Flann O'Brien are both looking down with pride on Strabane today, marvelling at how their home town is now a hub not just for Irish Medium Education but for the Irish language.

Leading the way!

# Carryduff - Ready for Irish Medium Education...



That's been the opinion of Stephanie Haughey since she was a young girl growing up there, frustrated that she couldn't go to a Naíscóil or Gaelscoil locally.

So she determined to make sure that her own child and others should have the choice of IME in Carryduff in the future.

And as Chairperson of the committee to set up an IME school in Carryduff, Gaelscoil Aodha Dhuibh, Stephanie and fellow committee members and supporters have been very busy for the last year.

They have been organising fundraising events, inviting among others Linda Ervine to come and talk about 'Hidden History, Protestants and the Irish Language.'

They have been canvassing locally to try and gauge demand for an IME school in Carryduff.

And encouraged by a great response to that canvass they have been searching for a suitable location for a new school.

May 2018 brought not only an early summer but an early Christmas for the committee when they secured a suitable location.

This autumn an Grúpa Súgartha, an IME Parents and Toddlers Group, will open in McKibben House on the East Bank Road.

And in September next year Naíscóil Aodha Dhuibh, the first IME nursery school in Carryduff, will open its doors.

"It's tremendous news," says Stephanie. "And to top it all we got confirmation from Iontaobhas, the IME funding body, that they will be funding the refurbishment of the unit for the Grúpa Súgartha so that it can be open this September."

The name of the Committee, Gaelscoil Aodha Dhuibh, confirms that their ultimate aim is to set up a Gaelscoil, an IME primary school, in Carryduff. And based on good practice in other areas which have successful IME schools, they'll do it in stages.

"To be able to start the Grúpa Súgartha this year, just a year since the committee came together, is a great boost," says Stephanie.

"There are great schools in Carryduff and in the future we want Gaelscoil Aodha Dhuibh to be one of them. So we will start with the Grúpa Súgartha in the autumn, the Naíscóil next year and we'll take the next step from there. But we have a very capable and dynamic committee, a really good response from the public and the backing of Iontaobhas and Comhairle na

Gaelscolaíochta. We have also been in contact with Bunscoil an Droichead, who have pioneered IME in South Belfast, and they are delighted to see Carryduff make our first move towards providing IME."

And of course Gaelscoil Aodha Dhuibh have also the example of more than 80 schools in the North who have already successfully travelled the path they are setting out on.

There is no one template for a successful Irish Medium school.

Some are bigger, some are smaller, some take a long time to cross the line, some a short time.

But there is one element common to every school that succeeds.

A dynamic committee made up of caring and committed parents and supporters.

And Gaelscoil Aodha Dhuibh has that in spades.

For more information about Gaelscoil Aodha Dhuibh go to their Facebook page.

## One round or two?

If only Niall Loughran could make toast he'd be the perfect teacher! Or that's what some of his pupils think.

Newry man Niall, Principal of Gaelscoil na mBeann in Kilkeel Co. Down, greets the children each morning at the Club Bricfeasta, the Breakfast Club.

But can he make toast right?

Dá bhfeicfeá é!

Even so Niall and the other teachers at Gaelscoil and Naíscoil na mBeann must be doing something right.

For the school is doing great!

Since the Naíscoil was set up in 2007 and the Bunscoil in 2010 they have steadily enhanced their reputation and the number of pupils.

Having started with four children, there are now more than 80 pupils between Gaelscoil and Naíscoil, and the numbers are growing each year.

In 2013 Minister John O'Dowd opened new accommodation for Gaelscoil and Naíscoil na mBeann on a site in town, beside the local High School.

It's an ideal site for a school which draws about 40% of pupils from Kilkeel and about 60% from the surrounding areas.

And alongside the steady progress at nursery and primary level, second-level education in Irish is also on offer at St Malachy's High School in nearby Castlewellan.

Gaelscoil na mBeann are in a good place both metaphorically and physically.

It's quite a turnaround from a few years back when accommodation was inadequate, Department recognition was still a way off and the school was situated on a mountainside, quite a bit out of town.

'Get off the mountain' was a good bit of advice.

Another was 'phone a friend', or in this case two friends.

Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

The two organisations which from 2001 have been working to promote and support Irish Medium schools.

With their help the school was able to progress further, quicker, better.

"It was hard at the start particularly," says Niall.

"Parents would send their children to the Naíscoil but some might have baulked a little at sending them on to the Gaelscoil.

"They waited to see how things went.

'But when they got good reports back about the Gaelscoil they made up their minds and came on board.

"Word of mouth was a crucial factor."

And he continues: "Your child's education is one of the most important decisions you will make in your life so I understand parents think really hard before choosing a school.

"And that's why we are elated that so many are choosing Gaelscoil and Naíscoil na mBeann.'

But it isn't only about numbers, says Niall. It's about the quality of education and the benefits of IME.

"Having two languages at an early age; the small class sizes, the relationships built through having pupils call teachers by their first name, a child becoming comfortable with diversity from an early age.

"All these and many other benefits of IME are well documented and I think that they speak to parents who want an option

which includes both bilingualism and an excellent quality of education."

Conradh na Gaeilge in the Mourne area has been central to the success of Gaelscoil na mBeann, as also has been the Gaelscoil's links to other IME schools in the wider area.

"Newry has its Bunscoil and Naíscoil as well as Gaeláras Mhic Ardghail, the Irish language cultural centre," says Niall.

"In Castlewellan you have Bunscoil and Naíscoil Bheanna Boirce. You also have Glór Uachtar Tíre and a whole range of Irish language social activities. In Annalong you have Páirc na Mara.

"So Kilkeel isn't out on the edge, it's bang centre in the middle of all this activity."

Living in the shadows of the Mourne, the Gaels of Boirche Íochtar are used to scaling heights.

But Gaelscoil na mBeann has still a ridge to go before they get to the summit.

Says Niall: "We are on a great site at present and in the short term it's all good. But we haven't had certainty yet about the long-term future of the site and we'd love to get that cleared up soon.

"We'll be talking to the Department in the coming months and we're confident it'll work out.

"We've had a lot of challenges in this school over the years. And we've overcome them all."

Well, almost all.

If only he could learn how to make toast!

# Don't say it, do it!

*Ná habair é  
Déan é!*

You need to be patient if you want to talk to Maighréad Ní Chongaile, Principal of Gaelscoil Éanna.

Situated in Glengormley on the northern approaches of Belfast, Gaelscoil Éanna is one of the fastest growing schools in the North.

You want to talk to Maighréad about the past 10 years, about the fact that Gaelscoil Éanna has gone from a Portakabin with 12 children and a single teacher to a well-respected school in four modern modular classrooms accommodating over 185 pupils.

Oops, that's 211 pupils if you include the náiscoil, which now has statutory status and is fully subscribed for the next year.

Maighréad insists she will talk about the past 10 years in a while but for now her mind is focused on the next 10 years.

Planning for the new seven-classroom school with all mod cons which is on its way. She wants to talk too about the new community hall being built by the GAA club which has been so integral to the success of Gaelscoil Éanna, that is St Enda's GAA.

She is enthused about the role the school community can play in the new hall with plans to expand the already very extensive Irish cultural activities of Croí Éanna – music, dance, language, sport, history.

Oh, and did she mention the new Wrap-Around Service, with supervised activities for the pupils from 8am until 6pm?

You try to ask her about her own contribution to the success story which is Gaelscoil Éanna.

She tells you instead about Donna Ní Mhealláin who was the first teacher at the school and is now in charge of the náiscoil.

She wants to talk about the governors, some of whom have been there from the very start 10 years ago, and yet today are working away with the same energy and vision they had back then. The parents, the volunteers.

The way they help raise the extra money needed to supplement the school budget.

And she mentions again the unstinting help from St Enda's GAA.

She points out for you, just in case you're a bit slow, the difference local people have made.

Tells you about the nights in mid-winter rapping thousands of doors telling people about IME, about the 'fáilte mhór' they got on the doorstep and about the increasing number of parents who opt for Gaelscoil Éanna.

You give it a last try — get her to follow your script!

Why is IME doing so well in this area?

The same reason the Irish language is doing so well in Belfast she says.

Ná habair é, déan é — don't say it, do it.

It's an attitude which was exemplified by those who set up Pobal Bhóthar Seoighe and the first Bunscoil.

And it's an attitude adopted by many Irish speakers in North Belfast, she says.

That default position of being upbeat and getting on with doing rather than just talking.

Speaking of which, she has to help organise the event in Belfast Castle to celebrate 10 years of Gaelscoil Éanna.

So, rather than just talking about it...

Off she goes.

*Ná habair é, déan é!*



## A growing voice



Like many good things it started with a childish voice.

Twelve of them actually.

Answering the roll call.

In Irish and in English.

Finding their voice in two languages rather than just one.

The start of a great adventure!

In September 2004 those 12 pupils of Bunscoil an Traonaigh in Lisnaskea chalked up a first for Fermanagh.

They were the first pupils in the first class in the first Bunscoil ever in Fermanagh.

Nowdays 16 childish voices answer the roll call in Rang 1.

But they are no longer a solitary class.

From Rang 1 to Rang 7 a full chorus of almost 70 voices answer the roll call each morning.

A sign of the times.

Of the popularity of the Bunscoil and of the continuing growth of IME, Irish Medium Education.

At a time when many schools are suffering a drop in numbers, Bunscoil an Traonaigh is kicking the trend.

Their numbers, like those in most IME schools, continue to increase.

Which brings its own challenges.

One being pressure on space.

As they wait for the green light to move from their present site at Drumbrughas North to their new site in the grounds of the old Lisnaskea High School, a move which will give them a lot more space, lontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta is providing an extra double-modular classroom.

And the lontaobhas will continue to support the school until relocation.

For Principal at Bunscoil an Traonaigh, Sorcha Ní Mhurchú, the emphasis is very firmly on the present.

"We keep focused on the children, on our normal daily school activities," says Sorcha. "Moving to a new site will be a great tonic when it happens but wherever we are sited we have wonderful children and teachers, fantastic support from the wider community, and a great school spirit.

"The present is great and yes the future will be even better."

Their Facebook page tells the story of Bunscoil an Traonaigh.

Smiling children and lots of activities.

Pupils being interviewed at the Balmoral Show by TG4.

Hushed children listening to a talk on townland names.

A visit to a local supermarket to understand how Fair Trade works.

Dressing up as characters from literature for International Book Day.

On a treasure hunt.

Taking part in the St Patrick's Day parade.

Out on a nature walk

And running in Rith 2018, an all-Ireland running event for IME schools.

When Rith 2018 came to Fermanagh it was the children of Bunscoil an Traonaigh who got to carry the race baton when it came to Lisnaskea.

Inside the baton a message from the President, an tUachtarán Michael D Higgins, saluting Irish speakers for the great strides they have made in promoting the language.

It could well have been a personal message to the kids of Bunscoil an Traonaigh who have been carrying the baton for Irish Medium Education in Fermanagh with confidence for more than 10 years now. And aren't about to slow their pace anytime soon!





As parents ourselves, and with many of our team involved in the education sector outside of work, we have a passion for education and lifelong learning. The numerous education contracts we have completed since our formation over 40 years ago are testament to this. By working collaboratively with education specialists as well as teachers, students and the wider community, we provide facilities that give young people the best opportunities to learn, develop and enjoy themselves, in addition to schools that actively encourage community use and participation.

This is demonstrated by the Coláiste Feirste project which won the Considerate Constructions Gold National Site Award 2018. This site has demonstrated an outstanding commitment to improving the image of construction, achieving exemplary standards in all areas of the Code of Considerate Practice. The project was highly commended at the GO Awards 2018 which recognised the commitment to providing employment, education and apprentice opportunities in the local community. The Ionad Spóirt /Sports Building at Coláiste Feirste won two design awards:- a RIBA Award (A Royal Institute of British Architects) and a RSUA Award (The Royal Society of Ulster Architects).

### Coláiste Feirste, Falls Road, Belfast



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