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NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGH LEVEL DIAGNOSTIC TOOLS IN IRISH FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE IRISH MEDIUM SECTOR

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Education & Training

RESEARCH REPORT



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**Department of
Education**

**Needs
Assessment &
Feasibility Study
for the
Development of
High Level
Diagnostic Tools
in Irish for
Children with
Special
Educational
Needs in the
Irish Medium
Sector**

**Public Sector
Consulting**

**Report
FINAL**

April 2011



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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FGS McClure Watters was commissioned to undertake a Needs Assessment and Feasibility Study for the Development of High Level Diagnostic Tools¹ in Irish for Children with Special Educational Needs in the Irish Medium Sector on behalf of the Department of Education (DE).

1.1 Tender Requirements

This assignment is to complete a Needs Assessment & Feasibility Study for the Development of High Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish for Children with Special Educational Needs in the Irish Medium Sector, in order to address the following aims and objectives as set out in the Terms of Reference issued by DE as follows:

Aim

In order to make informed decisions on the way forward, the Department of Education (DE) requires comprehensive and specific research to:

- (i) identify and define the exact need for high level diagnostic tools in Irish; and*
- (ii) assess the technical, operational and economic feasibility of the development of such tools, through examination of existing models and research.*

¹Definition of High Level Diagnostic Tools

These types of tests, as used by Educational Psychologists, are usually restricted tests that require a higher qualification to use. Test publishers, in accordance with The British Psychological Society policy, restrict the purchase of tests to those professionals with appropriate training and experience. The most restricted tests such as “high level diagnostic tools”, as set out in the Psychological Corporation’s purchasing system (other publishers operate a variation of this methodology), require post graduate professional qualification and training in Educational or Clinical Psychology and are also available to certain Chartered Psychologists and those with certain PhD qualifications. The next lower level of tests can be purchased by those in the previous category and all other psychologists and speech and language and occupational therapists. The next lower level includes those above and SENCOs and the lowest level include qualified teachers.

The Principal Educational Psychologists consider that “high level diagnostic tools” would fall into the most restricted group and include the following

- Intelligence tests for young children, children and young people and adults, based on modern models of intelligence and having a robust statistical basis and providing a range of index scores covering, for example, memory, processing speed, perception and comprehension.
- Working memory tests for children and young people based on a modern model of memory and having a robust statistical basis.
- Tests of executive functioning.
- Pupil questionnaire based assessments of social functioning, personality, self esteem, anxiety, depression and other issues concerning pupil wellbeing.

This is not an exhaustive list but it provides exemplars.

Objectives

The objectives of this project are:

- *To describe current methods of high level diagnostic testing for children educated through the medium of Irish in the north of Ireland;*
- *To analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of current methods of high-level diagnostic testing for children educated through the medium of Irish and identify the difficulties experienced by educational psychologists and professionals in measuring children's progress and obtaining clearer information about their areas of difficulty due to the lack of available high-level diagnostic Irish tools;*
- *To identify and define the need for high level diagnostic tools in Irish;*
- *To analyse methods of high level diagnostic testing for children immersed in a minority language, which are employed in other regions / countries including Great Britain and the south of Ireland;*
- *To analyse relevant research in relation to the need for high level diagnostic tools and the development of such tools, including proposals for development of models in other areas facing similar issues;*
- *To examine any restricting factors and barriers to developing high level diagnostic tools for use in the north of Ireland; and*
- *To present options for the development of high-level diagnostic tools, and provide an analysis of the technical and operational feasibility of each of the options, defining the restricting factors and barriers and if/ how these could be overcome and the likely costs, taking into account value for money, and estimated timeframe for development and ongoing application.*

1.2 Methodology

The methodology for this needs assessment and feasibility study was agreed with the Project Steering Group and documented in the Project Initiation Document. It consisted of the following main steps:

- **Policy Context and Desk Research** including an extensive literature review and review of statistical data;
- **Consultation** with key stakeholders (including DE, ETI, ELB staff (including Educational Psychologists, Heads of SEN, SEN Advisors, IM CASS staff), representatives of the IM sector and those involved in teacher education);
- **Benchmarking** including Irish Medium Education in Ireland; Welsh Medium Education in Wales; Scottish Gaelic Medium Education in Scotland; and also consideration of other

tools recently developed including Bilingual Verbal Ability Tool and InCAS-Irish Medium Assessment.

- **Options Generation and Analysis.** Based on research, consultation and benchmarking, we identified and presented information on need for high level diagnostic tools to the Project Steering Group, along with a number of preliminary options to address this need. From this discussion, five options were identified – these have then been evaluated against criteria agreed with the Project Steering Group and a preferred option identified.

1.3 Summary of Need for High Level Diagnostic Tools

Research into bilingualism and SEN highlights that this is a complex area and also that there are some potential pitfalls to consider when using monolingual tests. These include the possibility of false diagnoses – either false positive diagnosing a learning difficulty that does not exist or a false negative when a learning difficulty is not correctly identified.

However statistics on the IM sector in Northern Ireland indicate that there are relatively small numbers in the sector and when we consider the numbers with SEN, these are smaller again, so care must be taken in interpreting these. The level of SEN overall in the IM sector is on a par with that in EM schools and although there is a gap in the proportion of children with statements (lower in IM sector), this gap has been closing. There is also evidence that the IM sector is accessing disproportionate levels of some SEN supports.

The review of research and statistics, coupled with consultation in the IM sector and with EPs highlights concerns both with the current process for assessing SEN, puts forward some alternatives (and also raises some issues with regard to these). It is clear from the review of research, statistics and consultation that there is merit in investigating alternatives to the status quo. Development of High-Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish is one potential option to be explored in more detail.

1.4 Assessment of Options and Preferred Option

Five options were identified – these include:

- Option 1: Status Quo;
- Option 2: Status Quo plus Additional Interventions
- Option 3: Develop Low Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish;
- Option 4: Develop High Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish;
- Option 5: Develop High Level Diagnostic Tools – Bilingual

These five options have been scored against seven criteria:

- Delivery of Education outcomes (addressing the needs of IM pupils with SEN);
- Reliability;
- Equality;
- Technical Feasibility;
- Operational feasibility;
- Funding; and
- Value for Money.

A total score was obtained for each option and these scores have been ranked. On this basis – Option 2 is the preferred option. Option 2 is based on the Status Quo with some enhancements – i.e.:

- It assumes the use of High Level Diagnostic Tools in English in the IM sector
- Some psychologists who administer the tests have Irish and use this to settle children
- Other psychologists who administer the tests are not Irish speakers

This option however, has interventions in place to address concerns / issues – including:

- Capacity building for IM teaching staff around identification of SEN
- Awareness raising for IM teaching staff around role of Psychologist and tools / techniques used
- Awareness raising amongst professionals (including Psychologists) around IM immersion education and bilingualism
- Guidance for Psychologists on approach to assessment in IM sector

(We understand that some of these are already being addressed through the work of the SEN ThinkTank currently underway e.g.: confidence building, awareness of Code of Practice, etc.).

Therefore the study shows that it is not feasible to develop 'high level diagnostic tests' based on the evidence of need and research considered.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Introduction

FGS McClure Watters was commissioned to undertake a Needs Assessment and Feasibility Study for the Development of High Level Diagnostic Tools² in Irish for Children with Special Educational Needs in the Irish Medium Sector on behalf of the Department of Education (DE).

2.2 Tender Requirements

This assignment is to complete a Needs Assessment & Feasibility Study for the Development of High Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish for Children with Special Educational Needs in the Irish Medium Sector, in order to address the following aims and objectives as set out in the Terms of Reference issued by DE as follows:

Aim

In order to make informed decisions on the way forward, the Department of Education (DE) requires comprehensive and specific research to:

- (iii) *identify and define the exact need for high level diagnostic tools in Irish; and*

²Definition of High Level Diagnostic Tools

These types of tests, as used by Educational Psychologists, are usually restricted tests that require a higher qualification to use. Test publishers, in accordance with The British Psychological Society policy, restrict the purchase of tests to those professionals with appropriate training and experience. The most restricted tests such as "high level diagnostic tools", as set out in the Psychological Corporation's purchasing system (other publishers operate a variation of this methodology), require post graduate professional qualification and training in Educational or Clinical Psychology and are also available to certain Chartered Psychologists and those with certain PhD qualifications. The next lower level of tests can be purchased by those in the previous category and all other psychologists and speech and language and occupational therapists. The next lower level includes those above and SENCOs and the lowest level include qualified teachers.

The Principal Educational Psychologists consider that "high level diagnostic tools" would fall into the most restricted group and include the following

- Intelligence tests for young children, children and young people and adults, based on modern models of intelligence and having a robust statistical basis and providing a range of index scores covering, for example, memory, processing speed, perception and comprehension.
- Working memory tests for children and young people based on a modern model of memory and having a robust statistical basis.
- Tests of executive functioning.
- Pupil questionnaire based assessments of social functioning, personality, self esteem, anxiety, depression and other issues concerning pupil wellbeing.

This is not an exhaustive list but it provides exemplars.

- (iv) *assess the technical, operational and economic feasibility of the development of such tools, through examination of existing models and research.*

Objectives

The objectives of this project are:

- *To describe current methods of high level diagnostic testing for children educated through the medium of Irish in the north of Ireland;*
- *To analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of current methods of high-level diagnostic testing for children educated through the medium of Irish and identify the difficulties experienced by educational psychologists and professionals in measuring children's progress and obtaining clearer information about their areas of difficulty due to the lack of available high-level diagnostic Irish tools;*
- *To identify and define the need for high level diagnostic tools in Irish;*
- *To analyse methods of high level diagnostic testing for children immersed in a minority language, which are employed in other regions / countries including Great Britain and the south of Ireland;*
- *To analyse relevant research in relation to the need for high level diagnostic tools and the development of such tools, including proposals for development of models in other areas facing similar issues;*
- *To examine any restricting factors and barriers to developing high level diagnostic tools for use in the north of Ireland; and*
- *To present options for the development of high-level diagnostic tools, and provide an analysis of the technical and operational feasibility of each of the options, defining the restricting factors and barriers and if/ how these could be overcome and the likely costs, taking into account value for money, and estimated timeframe for development and ongoing application.*

2.3 Methodology

The methodology for this needs assessment and feasibility study was agreed with the Project Steering Group and documented in the Project Initiation Document. It consisted of the following main steps:

- **Policy Context and Desk Research:** this included a review of:
 - Policy and strategy documents which provide the context for the assessment of Special Educational Needs and set out statutory requirements in this regard;

- Literature Review covering bilingualism and immersion education as well as issues around assessment of SEN;
- Statistics related to the size and scale of the Irish-Medium sector as well as prevalence of SEN in Irish-Medium and other schools (sourced from DE and Educational Psychologists).
- **Consultation** with key stakeholders (including DE, ETI, ELB staff (including Educational Psychologists, Heads of SEN, SEN Advisors, IM CASS staff), representatives of the IM sector and those involved in teacher education. This used a variety of approaches including focus groups, 1-to-1 interviews and telephone interviews. A list of consultees is included in Appendix I.
- **Benchmarking.** In order to address the requirement in the Terms of Reference: *“To analyse methods of high level diagnostic testing for children immersed in a minority language, which are employed in other regions / countries including Great Britain and the south of Ireland”*, we have consulted widely and present available information on:
 - Irish Medium Education in Ireland;
 - Welsh Medium Education in Wales;
 - Scottish Gaelic Medium Education in Scotland; and
 - Other tools recently developed including Bilingual Verbal Ability Tool and INCAS-Irish.
- **Options Generation and Analysis.** Based on research, consultation and benchmarking, we identified and presented information on need for high level diagnostic tools to the Project Steering Group, along with a number of preliminary options to address this need. From this discussion, options were developed and additional options identified – these have then been evaluated against criteria agreed with the Project Steering Group and a preferred option identified. We have also documented potential barriers to implementation and considered ways of overcoming these.
- **Analysis and Reporting.** This draft report present details of our analysis of information gathered against each element of the Terms of Reference and specifically summarises the need for high level diagnostic tools, options analysis and recommendations on a preferred option.

2.4 Format of the Report

The remainder of this draft report is set out as follows:

- Section 3 - Policy Context and Trends – IM and SEN
- Section 4 - Current Methods of High Level Diagnostic Testing – IM Sector

- Section 5 - The Need for High Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish
- Section 6 - Benchmarking – Lessons from Other Areas
- Section 7 - Options
- Section 8 - Assessment of Options, Preferred Option
- Appendix 1 - Consultees
- Appendix 2 - Literature Review
- Appendix 3 - Strategic Context
- Appendix 4 - Statistical Profile of Irish Medium Sector
- Appendix 5 - Educational Psychology – Statistics

2.5 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Project Steering Group members for being available for meetings and workshops and providing access to the information that we required for this evaluation.

In addition, we would like to express our gratitude to all those with whom we consulted including those involved in Irish-Medium education, education professionals supporting the sector (including Educational Psychologists, Heads of SEN and SEN Advisors, IM-CASS officers) and those from other jurisdictions for being readily available for consultation and providing access to information that was required.

3 POLICY CONTEXT AND TRENDS – IM AND SEN

3.1 Introduction

In order to develop the needs assessment, we first consider the context for, and trends in Irish Medium education as well as considering current practice with regard to the assessment of Special Educational Needs. In this section, we consider the following key areas:

- Legislative basis for Irish Language and Irish-Medium Education;
- Legislative basis for assessment of Special Educational Needs;
- Current process for assessment of Special Educational Needs;
- School Improvement Policy and Review of Special Educational Needs;
- Bilingualism and Immersion Education;
- Irish Medium Education and Special Educational Needs – Statistics and Trends.

3.2 Legislative Basis for Irish Language and Irish-Medium Education

The development of the IM sector in Northern Ireland and the protection of the Irish language, are recognised in legislation.

With regard to provision of IM education, the Education (Northern Ireland) Order (1998) placed an obligation on the Department of Education to ‘facilitate and encourage the development of Irish-medium education’.

With regard to the Irish language, the Good Friday Agreement endorsed the ‘importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of various ethnic communities’ The agreement also includes a general commitment in relation to the Irish Language to “take resolute action to promote the language (NIO, 1998:24). In its ratification instrument (2001) in respect of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML), the UK government recognised the Irish language both under the general protections of Part II of the Charter and under the more specific provisions of Part III. Part III covers measures to promote the use of Regional or Minority Languages in public life and includes pre-school, primary and post primary education in Irish.

3.3 Special Education Legislation and Code of Practice

The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have statutory responsibility for identifying, assessing and meeting children's special educational needs (SEN). The SEN legislation is contained in the Education (NI) Order 1996, as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005, (SENDO), In dealing with children with SEN, ELBs must have regard to the guidance issued by the Department of Education in the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs 1998 (COP) and the Supplement to the Code of Practice (2005) which gives detailed, practical guidance to schools and ELBs on how to identify, assess and, where appropriate, make SEN provision for children.

The Code and the Supplement are issued by the Department of Education under Article 4 of the Education (NI) Order 1996. Schools and Boards, and others exercising relevant statutory functions (including the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal), will need to be able to demonstrate, in their arrangements for children with special educational needs, that they are fulfilling their statutory duty under Article 4(2) of that Order to have regard to the Code. In the case of schools, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) will consider, in the context of their inspections, the effectiveness of schools' policies and practices and the extent to which schools have had regard to the Code.

Special Education provision is matched to individual needs and may be made in special schools, special units attached to mainstream schools or in mainstream classes. The term "*special educational needs*" is defined in the legislation as "*a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made*". "*Learning difficulty*" means that the child has significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of his or her age, and/or has a disability which hinders his or her use of everyday educational facilities (or, where the child is below school age, would hinder such use if the child were of school age). "Special educational provision" means educational provision which is different from, or additional to, the provision made generally for children of comparable age.

SENDO strengthened the rights of children with SEN to a mainstream education and introduced into Northern Ireland, for the first time, disability discrimination laws for the whole education sector. The Department of Education issued a Supplement to the COP to support SENDO provisions. The Supplement aims to provide clear understanding and consistency of approach for schools, ELBs and others in relation to their statutory functions in taking forward the SEN aspects of SENDO.

3.3.1 Code of Practice – Five Stages

The Code of Practice sets out a five-stage SEN framework for ELBs and schools to follow. The five-stage approach covers the identification of children having learning difficulties, the assessment of their special educational needs and the making of whatever special educational provision is necessary to meet those needs. The first three stages are based in the school, calling at stage 3 as necessary on external specialists. At stage 4 the Board

considers the need for a statutory assessment and if appropriate at stage 5 considers the need for a statement of special education needs.

3.3.2 Consistent Approach to Assessment and Meeting SEN

In order to ensure that there is a consistent approach to assessment of SEN, the ELBs developed guidance documents. One such document (***Provisional Criteria for Initiating Statutory Assessments of SEN and for Making Statements of Special Educational Need***) describes in detail the criteria to be applied by ELBs when considering requests to make a Statutory Assessment for children with SEN. It sets out the criteria and processes required for making a Statutory Assessment for eight types of SEN (but also highlights that the complex nature of these needs may mean that children often present with more than one type of need). It also sets out guidance to follow on the decision making process for determining whether or not the pupil meets the criteria for making a Statutory Assessment.

Another guidance document is ***Good Practice Guidelines – for schools to meet the SEN of pupils at school-based stages of the Code of Practice***. This includes guidelines which are intended to support schools by providing details of the reasonable adjustments and relevant and purposeful measures that a Board would expect that a school may be able to provide for a pupil with SEN during the school-based stages of the Code of Practice, in particular, at Stage 3 prior to any consideration of a request for Statutory Assessment.

3.4 School Improvement Policy

3.4.1 School Improvement Policy

DE: Every School a Good School. A Policy for School Improvement (2009) provides the foundation for all aspects of school improvement. Its vision for the schools of NI is:

“Our vision is of schools as vibrant, self-improving, well governed and effectively led communities of good practice, focusing not on institutions but on meeting the needs and aspirations of all pupils through high quality learning, recognising the centrality of the teacher.”

The policy is based on the following key principles:

- the interests of pupils rather than institutions must be at the centre of efforts to improve educational achievement and tackle underachievement;
- equity of access and equity of provision as well as a continuum of provision for a diversity of need;
- an acceptance of the importance of effective leadership – having a clear vision and high expectations for pupils as well as the skills to translate that vision and those expectations into reality;

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- a recognition that improvement comes first and foremost through high quality teaching from committed and professional teachers whose skills and competence are recognised and respected and their professional development supported;
 - a recognition that every school is capable of improvement; that the school is best placed to identify particular areas for improvement; and that sustained improvement comes from within the school;
 - an acceptance that support from their governors and from the education support bodies is vital in ensuring that schools can deliver sustained improvement;
 - a recognition that there will, at times, be a need for an external view of progress as well as support and, possibly, more active interventions to ensure, in keeping with the pupil-centred focus of the policy, that poor quality educational experiences are not allowed to continue;
 - a corresponding need for the nature and purpose of any interventions to be clearly explained and fairly applied;
 - a recognition that, while the Department of Education and its support bodies are accountable for overall standards, it is the school and its Board of Governors that is accountable for the standards achieved by its pupils; and
 - recognition that the improvement process is a collaborative one, requiring communication and co-operation within the school and between the school and its parents and the wider community that it serves.

The school improvement policy is centred on six key policy areas, each with associated goals and actions; the policy areas are:

- Supporting effective leadership and an ethos of aspiration;
- High quality teaching and learning;
- Tackling the barriers to learning that many young people face;
- Embedding a culture of self-evaluation and self-assessment and of using performance and other information to effect improvement;
- Focusing clearly on support to help schools improve – with clarity too about the place of more formal interventions where there is a risk that the quality of education offered in a school is not as high as it should be;
- Increasing engagement between schools, parents and families, recognising the powerful influence they and local communities exercise on educational outcomes.

Barriers to learning (and the risk of underachievement) arise from various issues including special educational needs. In order to address these needs, it is important to have a robust assessment process for special educational needs of children in all schools (including those

in the Irish Medium sector). This has an important role to play in tackling barriers to learning – a key policy area for school improvement.

DE's goal in relation to tackling barriers to learning is:

“To make sure that our strategies, policies and programmes to support children and young people who have special needs or who face particular barriers to learning are developed in a way that maintains a clear focus on raising standards and on allowing every young person to reach his or her full potential”

DE made a commitment to bring forward a number of revised policies including one on special educational needs in pursuit of this goal.

3.4.2 Every School a Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion

In August 2009, following a review of SEN and inclusion policies, DE issued the consultation document *Every School a Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion*. This document set out a raft of high level policy proposals aimed at addressing concerns arising from the current policy framework. The policy proposals include the development of a robust and accountable inclusive framework, which identifies the needs of all children facing barriers to learning whenever they occur, supports these needs, and promotes a culture that welcomes diversity. Some of the key principles underpinning the proposals, as set out in the consultation document, are:

- the continued promotion of an inclusive ethos as detailed in the supplement to the existing Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN (and the supplement to it);
- quality intervention and provision tailored to the needs of individuals and groups of children and focused on improved outcomes for those facing barriers to learning;
- schools and other educational establishments providing appropriate and timely support for the vast majority of their children with additional needs;
- all professionals, including teachers, have the skills and knowledge to allow early identification and intervention to facilitate improved outcomes; and
- promotion of greater collaborative working and sharing of information among schools.

3.5 Bilingualism and Immersion Education

Appendix 2 contains a literature review which covers many key themes and theories relating to bilingualism and immersion education. (Note – most international research in this area focuses on minority language children immersed in a majority language rather than children from majority language backgrounds (i.e. English) who are immersed in a minority language

setting (Irish). Clearly whilst there are similarities in these two situations, they are not the same; however, they share some common features. Bearing this in mind, key findings discussed here have been carefully selected in the context of this study.)

Key definitions and issues related to assessment of SEN are set out below:

- **Bilingualism** is defined as people using two or more languages in everyday life (distinction between those who choose to, and those for whom it is a necessity)
 - **Elective bilinguals** – characteristically from a language majority group and seek an additional language. Usually add the second language at no apparent cost to the first – **additive bilingualism**. This generally applies to children whose first language is English and who are being educated in Irish-Medium schools.
 - **Circumstantial bilinguals** – acquire a second language out of necessity. As a result, their first language is in danger of being replaced by the dominant second language that surrounds them – **subtractive bilingualism**.
- Children who acquire both of their languages simultaneously whilst acquiring speech are referred to as **simultaneous bilinguals**;
- Children who acquire the language of home as their first languages and acquire an additional second language through informal or formal schooling are referred to as **sequential bilinguals**;
- Language and cognitive abilities of bilinguals – viewed by some as having the same language skills and abilities as 2 separate monolingual speakers contained within one person. A more holistic view perceives the bilingual as a unique linguistic entity with strengths and weaknesses across both languages.
- There are widely recognised cognitive benefits of immersion education and bilingualism.
- Common issues encountered in assessing SEN in immersion settings:
 - Over-representation of bilingual children in Special Education – a common issue due in part to lack of appropriate assessments
 - Assessments – can lead to false positive (SEN diagnosed but none exists) or false negative (SEN not correctly identified)
 - Use of monolingual tests – these doesn't recognise a bilingual child's true language abilities – assumes they are fluent in all domains (social / academic) of that language. In addition, these tests are normed on monolingual groups.
 - Direct translations of tests can alter comparability, and hence validity and fairness of a test.

-
- A variety of approaches to assessment are considered in the literature review including – ecological assessment, dynamic assessment, observation, dual language concept testing and criterion referenced assessment.
 - The literature indicates warranted concerns over the inappropriate assessment of bilingual children. Such inappropriate assessments can result in erroneous judgments being made and children being wrongfully placed in special education settings.
 - The literature advises against the use of monolingual tests on bilingual children. Monolingual testing used on bilingual children doesn't recognise a bilingual child's true language abilities and fails to recognise them as 'bilinguals' with abilities across two (or more) languages. The research warns against direct translations of English tests as this can alter the level of difficulty of the test. It advocates comparing bilingual children to other bilingual children and to avoid the use of tests normed on monolingual populations alone. Criterion referenced tests are advocated in an effort to avoid directly comparing bilinguals with monolinguals. The literature highlights early predictors of later literacy achievement that operate as predictors across languages. Dual language testing across both of the child's languages with conceptual scoring across both languages gives a more accurate portrayal of the child's abilities.
 - The research points to the need for further research in the development of appropriate assessment tools.

The POBAL report (2009) also included an extensive review of international literature (extracts in Appendix 3) – key findings include:

- supports for the need for appropriate, culture-fair assessment which takes into consideration a child's bilingualism or multilingualism in the assessment of SEN;
- the potential for mistaking possible language difficulties experienced during the acquisition of a second language with learning difficulties, and vice versa;
- the need for understanding amongst all professionals working with bilingual children of the concept of bilingualism; of the specific needs of bilinguals and their parents/guardians; the need for adequate and appropriate resources; and equal access to support services for bilingual children; and
- concern regarding accurate identification of SEN amongst bilingual children, both in an international and local context.
- In terms of providing support to bilinguals, it is important to take into account the varying degrees of bilingualism which exist within the various bilingual communities. Linguistic variations are prevalent in the IM sector - the vast majority of children come from an English-speaking home background and are being immersed in the Irish language at school. There is considerable variation in the linguistic proficiency of parents within the

IM sector (from little or no Irish to a high level competency in the language, with some children being raised through the medium of Irish in the home).

3.6 Irish-Medium and SEN – Statistics and Trends

3.6.1 *Current Models of Immersion in Irish Medium Education*

Irish-medium Education develops bilingual pupils, proficient in both Irish and English. Immersion is a form of education to develop bilingualism – this occurs when a child whose first language is English is taught through the medium of Irish. Children in the same classroom who have Irish as their first language will also experience a bilingual education, leading to proficiency in Irish and English, though this will not be an immersion experience for those children.

Characteristics of Immersion Education

‘Immersion education’ is widespread across the world (it has its roots in Canada in the 1960’s) and exists in several different varieties. The following characteristics are common to all types of immersion education:

- a) The ‘immersion’ language is not the students’ first language.
- b) The students not only learn the immersion language but also learn other important subject matter through the medium of the language.
- c) The teacher is a highly fluent speaker of the language, and very often a native speaker.
- d) The teacher provides the students with substantial exposure to the immersion language, through teaching and other interactions, giving a strong impetus to the development of students’ comprehension skills.
- e) The teacher does not force the students to speak the language, and initially allows them to speak in their first language if they so wish.
- f) Students’ initial expressions using the immersion language tend to be through songs, poems, games, and phrases. Gradually, of their own volition, they develop spontaneous expression through the immersion language.

Benefits of Immersion Education

The Review of Irish-Medium Education (2009) cites an ETI study which noted the cognitive benefits of bilingualism including:

- language acquisition;
- cognitive and academic development;
- the self-confidence and self-esteem of the children; and

- problem-solving abilities, with children who are less afraid to get things wrong.

The majority of research studied by the ETI highlighted that immersion education, dual language immersion, bilingual education (bilingualism) and content and language integrated learning (CLIL) are positive for the recipients/ learners in terms of both second language acquisition and overall cognitive development. The ETI research found that other beneficial spin-offs that can be developed include: positive attitudes to multiculturalism, inclusivity, openness, tolerance and acceptance of 'otherness'.

The Review highlights research demonstrating other benefits including:

- Research which found that bilingual people are better at multitasking;
- Research which found being bilingual exercises the brain and dramatically lessens age-related mental decline.
- Research which found that pre-school children who are bilingual are quicker to understand the symbolic function of letters and score twice as high as monolingual children in recognition tests of written characters. Bilingual children who have been exposed to literacy and stories in both languages are advantaged in learning to read.
- Research which shows that bilingual children perform better in school when the school teaches the mother tongue effectively and, where appropriate, develops literacy in that language. By contrast, when children are encouraged to reject their mother tongue and its development stagnates, their personal and conceptual foundation for learning is undermined.

Irish Medium Education – Characteristics

A range of approaches are currently employed to deliver Irish-medium Education in Northern Ireland. These include:

- i) **Free-standing Irish-medium schools, both primary and post-primary.** These aim to provide a total-immersion setting for the children for whom Irish is not their first language, as they are educated, grow and develop.
- ii) **Irish-medium Units at primary and post-primary schools.** These are attached to a host, English-medium, school, typically where there are insufficient pupils to establish a free-standing school. These also aim to provide an immersion experience for the children for whom Irish is not their first language, with all the teaching in the unit normally being conducted through the medium of Irish.
- iii). **Irish-medium Streams at English-medium post-primary schools.** In this arrangement a group of pupils learn some of their subjects through the medium of Irish, and others through the medium of English. This is a partial-immersion approach for children for whom Irish is not their first language who transfer from Irish-medium primary provision.

3.6.2 Size and Scale of IM Sector (see Appendix 4)

Schools, Units and Enrolments

In 2009/10, there were 58 IM schools and 11 IM units with 4,045 pupils enrolled across all of these (across voluntary and private pre-school centres, primary and post-primary schools). The majority of pupils (80%) are enrolled in schools rather than units and by school type, the majority (73%) are in primary schools.

Overall the number of pupils in Irish Medium education (preschool, primary and post-primary) accounts for about 1.3% of all pupils.

The majority of pupils are enrolled in schools and units in 3 of the 5 ELBs - with almost half in the BELB (45.4%), and around one fifth in each of the SELB (21.3%) and the WELB (18.6%).

The POBAL report notes that most children in Irish medium schools come from English-speaking families with a small number coming from bilingual (Irish – English), and a few from Irish-speaking, families. While there are no exact statistics for the number of parents of children in the IM sector who speak Irish, it is estimated by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta that no more than 5% of parents within the sector are Irish speakers.

Teachers (FTE, Mean Age, Pupil: Teacher Ratio)

Primary Schools

- In 2009/10, there were 134.2 **full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers** employed in Irish medium primary³ schools, representing some 1.7% of FTE teachers in primary⁴ schools. This compares with 2004/05, when the number of FTE teachers in Irish medium primary³ schools was 105.1, some 1.3% of FTE equivalent teachers in all primary⁴ schools.
- The **mean age of teachers** in Irish-Medium³ primary schools was 33.5 in 2009/10, in comparison to the mean age (41) of teachers in primary⁴ schools excluding Irish-Medium³ primary schools.
- The **pupil: teacher ratio** for all Irish medium primary³ schools was 16.6 in 2009/10. This compared with a pupil: teacher ratio of 20.4 for primary⁵ schools not in the Irish medium sector. The pupil: teacher ratio for all grant-aided primary⁵ schools in 2009/10 was 20.4.

Post-Primary Schools

The following statistics have been produced for IM post-primary schools, however there is only one such school in the north of Ireland therefore, they must be interpreted with caution.

³ The figures are based on Irish Medium Schools only. IM Units are not included

⁴ Includes preparatory departments of grammar schools and teachers in nursery classes.

⁵ Includes preparatory departments of grammar schools and pupils and teachers in nursery classes.

- In 2009/10, the number of **FTE teachers** employed in the Irish medium post-primary school was 45.0. This is some 0.5% of FTE teachers in all post-primary schools and 0.8% of FTE teachers in non-grammar schools. In 2004/05, the number of FTE teachers in the Irish medium post-primary school was 32.9, some 0.3% of FTE teachers in all post-primary schools and 0.5% of FTE teachers in non-grammar schools.
- The **mean age of teachers** in the Irish-Medium post-primary school was 34.4 in 2009/10, in comparison to the mean age (40.6) of teachers in post-primary schools excluding Irish-Medium primary schools.
- The **pupil: teacher ratio** in the Irish medium post-primary school was 12.5. This compared to 14.3 for all non-grammar post-primary schools and 14.6 for all post-primary schools in 2009/10.

Summary

- The number of FTE teachers in the Irish Medium sector has increased in both primary and post-primary sectors between 2004/05 and 2009/10 (by just over a quarter and just over a third respectively).
- Teachers in the Irish-Medium sector are younger, on average than those elsewhere: 7.5 years younger on average in primary schools and 6.2 years younger on average in post-primary schools. The POBAL report notes that during data collection 55% of IM sector teachers had 5 or less years teaching experience.
- The pupil: teacher ratio is lower in Irish-Medium schools than in other schools – the difference is more pronounced in primary schools: 16.6 vs 20.4 in 2009/10 for primary schools; and 12.5 vs 14.6 in post-primary schools.

3.6.3 SEN – By Stage, ELB and Irish Medium/ English Medium

The table below compares the levels of SEN in the IME sector and the Non-IM sector by stage of SEN and type of school.

Given the relatively small numbers in the IME sector relative to the overall school population, comparisons must be treated with caution – and in particular for the post-primary schools (total of 706 pupils). However, if we consider pupils in IM Primary schools (2,934 in total), we see that:

- the proportions with no SEN are similar in both IM and Non-IM (approx 80%) i.e. approx 20% with SEN;
- the proportions at each stage of the SEN Code are similar in both IM and Non-IM (slightly higher proportion at Stage 1 in IM and slightly lower proportion at Stage 2 and Stage 5 in IM sector);

- the number of pupils at Stage 4 & 5 (combined) is 52 in the IM sector (5,294 in non-IM) i.e. IM is about 1% of all at Stage 4 & 5.

Primary	% at each SEN Stage						No. at 4&5
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
NonIM	79.6%	4.6%	8.4%	4.1%	0.5%	2.8%	5,294
IM	80.6%	6.0%	7.5%	4.1%	0.3%	1.5%	52
Total	79.6%	4.6%	8.4%	4.1%	0.5%	2.8%	5,346
Post-Primary	0	1	2	3	4	5	No. at 4&5
NonIM	84.2%	5.3%	4.8%	2.3%	0.1%	3.2%	4,958
IM	64.9%	4.0%	22.2%	7.2%	0.3%	1.4%	12
Total	84.1%	5.3%	4.9%	2.3%	0.1%	3.2%	4970

Note:
 1. Figures include pupils in Irish medium schools only. There are no Irish medium units in the preschool sector.
 2. Figures for primary include nursery, reception and year 1 - 7 classes.
 3. There is only one IM post-primary school therefore the figures must be interpreted with caution.
 * denotes fewer than 5 pupils
 # denotes figure >=5 suppressed due to potential identification of individual pupils
 Source: NI Schools Census 2009/10

Applying a similar analysis to that in Table 4-8 above for the 2 preceding years, a similar pattern emerges for IM primary school pupils:

- the proportions with no SEN are similar in both IM and Non-IM (approx 80%)
- the proportions with SEN are fairly similar i.e. approx 20% with SEN (Non-IM) in 2008/09 and 2007/08 and 18% with SEN (IM) in 2008/09 and 16% with SEN (IM) in 2007/08;
- the proportions at each stage of the SEN Code are similar in both IM and Non-IM (slightly higher proportion at Stage 1 in IM and slightly lower proportion at Stage 2 and Stage 5 in IM sector);
- the number of pupils at Stage 4 & 5 (combined) is 53 in the IM sector (5,261 in non-IM) in 2008/09 and 43 in the IM sector (5,283) in 2007/08.

Table 2
Pupils in Non-IM and IM Schools by SEN Stage (2008/09)

Primary	% at each SEN Stage						No. at 4&5
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
NonIM	80.4%	4.7%	8.0%	3.8%	0.5%	2.8%	5,261
IM	82.4%	5.2%	6.5%	4.1%	0.5%	1.3%	53
Total	80.4%	4.7%	7.9%	3.8%	0.5%	2.8%	5,314
Post-Primary	0	1	2	3	4	5	No. at 4&5
NonIM	85.2%	5.1%	4.5%	2.1%	0.1%	3.0%	4,652
IM	66.4%	2.8%	24.2%	5.4%	0.3%	0.9%	8
Total	85.1%	5.1%	4.6%	2.1%	0.1%	3.0%	4,660

Note:
 1. Figures include pupils in Irish medium schools only. There are no Irish medium units in the preschool sector. Figures for primary and post primary include Irish Medium schools and units.
 2. Figures for primary include nursery, reception and year 1 - 7 classes.
 3. There is only one IM post-primary school therefore the figures must be interpreted with caution.
 * denotes fewer than 5 pupils
 # denotes figure >=5 suppressed due to potential identification of individual pupils
 Source: NI Schools Census 2008/09

Table 3
Pupils in Non-IM and IM Schools by SEN Stage (2007/08)

Primary	% at each SEN Stage						No. at 4&5
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
NonIM	80.9%	4.7%	7.7%	3.4%	0.5%	2.8%	5,283
IM	84.1%	6.0%	5.1%	3.2%	0.6%	1.0%	43
Total	81.0%	4.7%	7.7%	3.4%	0.5%	2.7%	5,326
Post-Primary	0	1	2	3	4	5	No. at 4&5
NonIM	85.8%	5.0%	4.3%	2.0%	0.1%	2.8%	4,359
IM	82.0%	3.5%	9.3%	4.1%	0.3%	0.8%	7
Total	85.8%	5.0%	4.3%	2.0%	0.1%	2.8%	4,366

Note:
 1. Figures include pupils in Irish medium schools only. There are no Irish medium units in the preschool sector. Figures for primary and post primary include Irish Medium schools and units.
 2. Figures for primary include nursery, reception and year 1 - 7 classes.
 3. There is only one IM post-primary school therefore the figures must be interpreted with caution.
 * denotes fewer than 5 pupils
 # denotes figure >=5 suppressed due to potential identification of individual pupils
 Source: NI Schools Census 2007/08

The POBAL report (see Appendix 3) analyses data relating to pupils registered as SEN in the academic year 2006-07 and its findings are broadly consistent with those above:

- Around 17% of pupils in IM primary and post-primary settings are recorded as experiencing SEN;

- Around 5% of children in IM at the preschool phase are recorded as experiencing SEN; and
- Incidence of SEN in the IM primary and post-primary phases reflect the overall incidence from other sectors (17%). The data indicate an under-representation and under-reporting of pupils at pre-school and post-primary school levels (5% and 14%, respectively).
- As is the case in other sectors, there are about ten times as many pupils recorded on stages 1-3 of the Code of Practice as there are recorded on stages 4 and 5.

3.6.4 Statements – By Irish Medium/ English Medium

The POBAL report (see Appendix 3) analyses data relating to pupils registered as SEN in the academic year 2006-07. It showed that: overall, just less than 1% of pupils in the IM sector have a statement of SEN which is around a quarter of the overall percentage of pupils with a statement of SEN in other sectors. The report concludes that “*The data, therefore, raise questions regarding identification and referral of pupils in the IM sector who experience needs requiring more specific, long-term support, and therefore, a statement of SEN.*”

Considering more recent data (for 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10) in Table 4, to compare the level of statements in the IM sector and that in others (English-Medium), it is evident that the gap between the proportion of children with statements in these sectors is closing. In the primary phase, in which the majority of children in the IM sector are enrolled (and also in which the majority of referrals are initiated and actioned), the gap has narrowed from 1.0% (IM sector) vs 2.8% (others) to 1.5% v 2.8%. The gap has also narrowed for the post-primary phase, although data for IM post-primary is based on 1 school and should therefore be treated with caution.

Table 4			
Pupils in Non-IM and IM Schools by year (SEN Stage 5)			
	% at SEN Stage 5 (statement)		
Primary	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
NonIM	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%
IM	1.0%	1.3%	1.5%
Total	2.7%	2.8%	2.8%
Post-Primary	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
NonIM	2.8%	3.0%	3.2%
IM	0.8%	0.9%	1.4%
Total	2.8%	3.0%	3.2%

Note:

1. Figures include pupils in Irish medium schools only. There are no Irish medium units in the preschool sector.
2. Figures for primary include nursery, reception and year 1 - 7 classes.
3. There is only one IM post-primary school therefore the figures must be interpreted with caution.

* denotes fewer than 5 pupils
denotes figure >=5 suppressed due to potential identification of individual pupils

Source: NI Schools Census 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10

Whilst the gap in the level of statements has been closing, the level remains lower in the IM sector than in other schools. The assessment process itself is considered by the IM sector to account for this gap. However, other factors should not be overlooked as possible contributors to the gap – for example the reluctance of some parents in the IM sector to have their children “labeled”.

3.6.5 SEN – By SEN type and Irish Medium/ English Medium

Table 4-11 in Appendix 4 compares the levels of SEN in the IME sector and the Non-IM sector by type of SEN and type of school in 2009/10. This highlights that there are a number of key categories of SEN which are prevalent in IM and Non-IM as well as across school types (although the incidence varies – however due to small numbers in the IM sector, when we disaggregate SEN, any interpretation must be treated with caution). The most common are:

- Pre-School:
 - Speech and Language Difficulties (51.44% of all those on the Code of Practice in non IM, 36.67% IM);
- Primary School:
 - Mild Learning Difficulties (27.74% non IM, 21.48% IM);
 - Cognitive and Learning (19.97% non IM, 27.11% IM);
 - Speech and Language Difficulties (10.01% non IM, 11.44% IM);
 - Moderate Learning Difficulties (8.19% non IM, 4.05% IM);
 - SEBD (6.24% non IM, 5.63% IM)
 - Dyslexia_spld (6.95% non IM, 4.05% IM)
- Post-Primary:
 - Cognitive and Learning (11.72% non IM, 43.15% IM)
 - Dyslexia_spld (14.52% non IM, 0.00%IM)
 - Mild Learning Difficulties (19.14% non IM, 14.52% IM)
 - Moderate Learning Difficulties (11.90% non IM, 15.32% IM)
 - SEBD (7.84% non IM, 5.65% IM).

The POBAL report (see Appendix 3) analyses data relating to pupils registered as SEN in the academic year 2006-07:

- Just over half of IM sector pupils on the SEN register present with moderate or mild learning difficulties with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) being the other significant category of SEN recorded. The most frequently reported categories of SEN in the IM primary and post-primary phases are moderate and mild learning difficulties (3% and 19%, respectively) and SEBD (15%). In the IM pre-school phase the most frequently reported category of SEN is speech and language difficulties (59%). Compared with 2006/07, the types of SEN diagnosed for children on the SEN register are somewhat different in 2009/10. Due to the relatively small numbers in the IM-sector, this data should be treated with care.
- Cognitive and Learning is the largest SEN area reported in IM primary settings which resonates strongly with the picture for primary settings for all sectors. Areas of SEN not recorded in the post-primary IM sector are Communication and Interaction, Medical Conditions/Syndromes and Physical.
- ASD represents the most frequently cited category of need among those with statements. ASD represents 39% of the statements of SEN in the IM sector.
- There is a greater diversity of needs in the IM primary phase than the post-primary phase, which is expected due to the small numbers in post-primary.
- The profile of SEN types recorded on the SEN register in IM primary and all schools are broadly similar. There are some differences evident in the profile of SEN types in IM post primary settings and all schools – but given the low numbers of pupils in IM post-primary settings, this is not unexpected. The following table shows the key findings.

Table 5
Breakdown of SEN in primary and post primary schools (IM and all sectors) 2006-07

SEN area		IM	All Sectors
Primary	Cognitive and Learning	60%	62%
	Social, Emotional, and Behavioural	17%	12%
	Communication and Interaction	12%	15%
	Physical	3%	2%
	Medical Conditions/Syndromes	2%	5%
	Sensory	1%	2%
	Other	5%	2%
	Total	100%	100%
Post Primary	Cognitive and Learning	72%	57%
	Social, Emotional and Behavioural	26%	19%
	Sensory	2%	2%
	Medical Conditions/Syndromes	0%	10%
	Communication and Interaction	0%	6%
	Sensory	0%	2%
	Physical	0%	2%
	Other	1%	4%
Total	100%	100%	

Source: DE & POBAL: The special educational needs of bilingual (Irish-English) children (2009)

3.6.6 Referrals to Educational Psychologists & Use of Other Education Professionals (see Appendix 5)

Referrals to EP Service and Outcomes

The ELBs have provided statistics on referrals to the Education Psychology Service and outcomes of this referral process for the IM sector (split by whether the EP is fluent in Irish or not) and for English-Medium schools. This data is presented in Appendix 5 for NEELB, SELB and WELB.

We are cautious about drawing robust conclusions from this data given:

- the very small numbers in NEELB (10 referred in IM sector)
- the partial data from SELB (i.e. not all EPs included but all those attached to IM schools are included (so potentially the figures are biased towards IM)).

There is a more complete picture for WELB; this shows:

- a fairly similar pattern between those in the IM sector where the EP is fluent and where the EP is not fluent in Irish;

- comparing the IM sector overall with the others (English-Medium):
 - in the IM sector, there are fewer consultations with EPs (pre-referral) than expected compared to the others i.e. approx 1.5 of these for every 1 referral to EPs in the IM sector, but about 5.5 of these for every 1 referral to EPs in the others;
 - however, once the IM schools are in contact with the EPs, there appears to be a greater use made of ELB services
 - for the IM sector, 25% of all cases result in access to another Board service; the corresponding figure for the others is 14%;
 - for the IM sector, 48% of all cases result in advice being provided; the corresponding figure for the others is 15%; and
 - with regards to outcomes, for the IM sector, 1% of all cases result in a statement; the corresponding figure for the others is 4%.

Table 6								
WELB – Referrals to Education Psychology Service and Outcomes – IM Sector vs Others – 2009/10								
	IM Sector – EP fluent in Irish		IM Sector – EP not fluent in Irish		IM Sector - Total		Others (English Medium)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No of cases in which educational psychologists are consulted (pre-referral)	29	64%	26	59%	55	62%	6,533	85%
No. of referrals to educational psychologists	16	36%	18	41%	34	38%	1,198	15%
No of cases: sum of consulted + referral	45	100%	44	100%	89	100%	7731	100%
Outcome of consultation / referral – access another Board service	8	18%	14	32%	22	25%	1,045	14%
Outcome of consultation / referral – advice provided	25	56%	18	41%	43	48%	1,189	15%
Outcome of consultation / referral – no of children statemented	*	*	0	0%	*	1%	286	4%
Notes: In addition to statistics above: 1 P. 7 Transfer review of a child with a Statement took place in the IM sector 3 Stage 3 referrals to the EPS in the IM sector progressed to Stage 4 but the Statement was not completed within the 09/10 timescale * Denotes fewer than 5 pupils Source: WELB								

Irish-Medium Sector - Access to Support for SEN

Although the WELB data suggest that the IM sector does not consult with EPs to the same extent as other schools (English Medium), data from BELB and WELB indicate that in general the IM sector accesses ELB supports at disproportionately higher levels than others: e.g.:

- In BELB IM primary pupils account for 4.35% of the total; however pupils from IM primary schools accounted for 8.2% of referrals for additional support from the specialist service for children with Specific Learning Difficulties / Dyslexia (reasons for this “over-representation” are discussed in Section 4.3.2 - related to the later introduction of the teaching of English in the IM sector and therefore the not unexpected need for greater support);
- WELB: IM equates to 1.18% of the school age population but considering referrals to the EPS, the IM sector accounts for 2.75% of all referrals (from both IM and other schools).
- WELB: 25% of all IM cases (where an EP is consulted or a referral made) result in access to another Board service; the corresponding figure for other schools is 14%;
- WELB: 48% of all IM cases (where an EP is consulted or a referral made) result in advice being provided; the corresponding figure for other schools is 14%;

Summary

A higher proportion of children in IM schools in BELB, SELB and WELB access some sort of additional provision compared to EM referrals. This evidence suggests that needs are being identified in the IM sector and that these are being addressed when referrals are made.

4 CURRENT METHODS OF HIGH LEVEL DIAGNOSTIC TESTING – IM SECTOR

4.1 Introduction

This section presents information on current methods of high level diagnostic testing including commentary on effectiveness and difficulties. It addresses the following aspects of the Terms of Reference:

- *To describe current methods of high level diagnostic testing for children educated through the medium of Irish in the north of Ireland;*
- *To analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of current methods of high-level diagnostic testing for children educated through the medium of Irish and identify the difficulties experienced by educational psychologists and professionals in measuring children's progress and obtaining clearer information about their areas of difficulty due to the lack of available high-level diagnostic Irish tools.*

Note this section draws on a range of sources including consultation with stakeholders as well as research such as the POBAL report.

4.2 Current methods of high level diagnostic testing for children in IM Sector

4.2.1 Approach

A child can be brought to a Board's attention as possibly requiring a statutory assessment by referral from a mainstream school, another agency or by formal request for an assessment from the parent (that may ultimately lead to a child being statemented) – this is the same in the Irish-medium and English-medium sectors.

Testing using high level diagnostic tools in IM sector reflects the approach used in English medium schools : there are no specific high level diagnostic tools in Irish – all are in English although the teaching of formal English is delayed to Year 3 or 4 in IM schools. A wide range of diagnostic tools (each with a specific purpose) is employed in the IM sector as in all other schools.

There is some variation in approaches across ELBs in terms of how EPs are allocated to schools in the IM sector – in general there is no structured approach to assigning EPs with Irish to IM schools; allocation is more likely to be done on a geographic basis across all EPs. This means that:

- Some psychologists who administer the tests in IM schools have Irish and use this to settle children;
- Other psychologists who administer the tests in IM schools are not Irish speakers.

The POBAL report noted that educational psychologists working with IM pupils carry out their work in the vast majority of cases (81%) using English only, none of them use Irish only, while around one fifth (19%) use a combination of Irish and English.

EPs generally feel that they have a good relationship with the IM schools in which they work although there is some variation. They also recognise that it is necessary to allow time to build trust and relationships. From the IM sector, some concerns were expressed in terms of changes in EP personnel and a lack of continuity can damage relationships and understanding that has developed between schools and Psychology Service.

The IM sector also felt that there were some differences in approach across the ELBs. In some cases, the IM sector felt that there was a delay between identifying SEN and support being provided citing waiting lists for Classroom Assistants as evidence for this. [Note: this is the perception of consultees from the IM sector; whereas in fact if a Classroom Assistant is to be provided via a statement then there should not be a waiting list at all, whether in EM or IM sectors and the ELBs should provide it as soon as a statement is finalised).

It is important to note that the using a high level diagnostic tool will form one part of an overall assessment. EPs will also use teacher observation, parental observation, their own observations of children in class and out of classroom context (e.g. playground, etc.) to inform their overall assessment. This means that the outcome of an assessment will not depend solely on the score from one high level diagnostic test.

EPs employ compensatory procedures to ensure that IM educated children have at least equal equality of opportunity. For example they may place greater emphasis on the implications of non-verbal parts of IQ tests, or use entirely non-verbal IQ tests.

4.2.2 High Level Diagnostic Tools Currently Used

Table 7 presents information on a range of high level diagnostic tools which are currently used by EPs in NEELB; these are classified according to the area in which they are focused (e.g. cognition, social development, etc.) and the type of tool (e.g. comprehensive or specialist).

All the tests listed as Cognition Area/Core Comprehensive Assessment Tests (WPPSI 111, WISC IV etc): WIAT II Language Skills: Reynell Language Scale: PLS – 3: CELF are regarded as “high level” according to the definition used in this study. Other high level tools which are used by ELBs include Bayley Scales - used in BELB for preschool assessments

The tests most commonly used by EPs are cognition (i.e. IQ) tests – and usually in conjunction with attainment testing i.e. literacy and numeracy tests.

Table 7
NEELB Educational Psychology Service
Comprehensive Assessment - Audit of Tests and Assessments used by Educational Psychologists, February 2008 (based on n=17 EPs)

Area	Core Comprehensive Assessment Tests	Additional Specialist Tests			
		ASD	Language	Specialist SEED	Other Specialist Tests
Early Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Schedule of Growing Skills 9 ▪ PEP – R 0 ▪ Vineland II 13 ▪ PIP Developmental Charts 9 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ GADS 10 ▪ GARS 13 ▪ ASDS 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Symbolic Play Test 4 ▪ Test of Pretend Play 1 ▪ BPVS 8 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Devereux Scale of Mental Disorders 5 ▪ Devereux Behaviour Rating Scale 8 ▪ Beck Youth Inventories 6 ▪ Early Years Behaviour Checklist 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Movement ABC 11
Cognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ WPPSI – III 16 ▪ WISC – IV 17 ▪ NV WISC 10 ▪ WAIS III 7 ▪ BAS II 8 ▪ WASI 7 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CARS 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ WIAT II Language Skills 8 ▪ Reynell Language Scale 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resiliency Scales 4 ▪ CFSEI 2 4 ▪ ASEBA Child Behaviour Check List 0 	
Core Academic Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ WIAT II 16 ▪ BAS II Word Reading 7 ▪ BAS II Spelling 6 ▪ BAS II Number 6 ▪ Gillham Early Literacy Test 2 ▪ PhAB 4 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PLS-3 9 ▪ BAS Sub – Scales 2 ▪ CELF 1 ▪ PAT 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Brown ADD Scales 2 ▪ Conner's Rating Scales 15 ▪ Boxall Profile 6 ▪ Pupil Behaviour Assessment System 3 	
Social Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vineland II 14 ▪ ABAS II 13 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teach Talking 1 ▪ Renfrew Language Scales 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ B/G Steem 7 ▪ Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire 3 	
Emotional and Behavioural Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vineland II 14 ▪ Interview 12 ▪ Observation 5 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Porteous Adolescent Coping Scale 3 ▪ Mooney Problem Checklist 2 	

Source: NEELB

Notes:

In BELB, the most commonly used high level diagnostic tools are: WISC IV, WPPSI III, BAS 11, NV WISC, PLS III.

In WELB the BAS11 is not used and the WASI is used infrequently but all other (high level) tests mentioned are used regularly.

4.3 Effectiveness of Current Methods and Difficulties Due to Lack of Available High-Level Diagnostic Tools

4.3.1 Effectiveness of Current Methods

The perception (amongst EPs) is that children in IME are not disadvantaged in the assessment (for SEN) process given that:

- the majority have English as their first language [The POBAL report cites Kennedy (2007) who examined the effect of IM education on children's English academic competence. The research, carried out on children aged 8-9 and 11-12 in an IM and EM school, concludes that IM education does not impede the children's English academic progress and that, despite lesser exposure to English education, the children in IM schools showed equal academic proficiency to the children educated through the medium of English].
- there is scope to use non verbal tests e.g. Wechsler 'Non-Verbal';
- the outcome of an assessment does not depend solely on the result of a high level diagnostic test – other information is also taken into account e.g.: also consider teacher observation, parental observation, psychologist observing child in class, out of classroom context (e.g. playground, etc).

Feedback from educational psychologists (in the POBAL report) supports these views; this indicates:

- that EPs believe that standardised assessment materials in English provide an accurate profile of pupils' ability for pupils whose first language is English;
- most of the EPs interviewed believe that the assessment of cognitive ability and numeracy skills through the medium of English provides an accurate profile of pupils in the IM sector whose first language is English. (However, they are aware that care must be taken when assessing bilingual children using assessment tools designed for monolingual English-speaking pupils).

4.3.2 Difficulties due to lack of high level diagnostic tools in Irish

The majority of consultees (including EPs and IM sector) noted that in IM schools, it can be difficult to identify whether a child who is underperforming has difficulty owing to a delay in language development or if there is an underlying cognitive issue. Under the current regime, pupils' bilingualism is not taken into account – this runs the risk of failing to profile pupils' strengths as well as areas of weakness.

Deryn Hall (2001) highlights a dilemma facing professionals when assessing bilingual pupils with suspected learning difficulties - it is very easy to make two errors which have wide-ranging implications for a child's progress. These are:

- A **false positive** occurs when a learning difficulty is diagnosed when in fact none is present. The child is incorrectly labelled and may fail to achieve their potential because expectations have been lowered and inappropriate support may be provided.
- A **false negative** occurs when a learning difficulty is not correctly identified. In this case the child's difficulties are incorrectly attributed to lack of proficiency in English and appropriate help and support is not provided. Lack of early intervention can have serious and long reaching consequences for the child.

Whilst recognising the possibility of these two "false" outcomes in addition to a "true" outcome, the likelihood of each of these outcomes is unknown.

According to PEPs, the risk of not arranging SEN provision when it ought to be made (i.e. false negative) is greatest in the case of Dyslexic children where the access criteria are largely based on measures of the difference between the child's IQ and the child's RQ (Reading Quotient, RQ or Reading "Standardised Score"). Often possibly dyslexic children are assessed by psychologists in ability to read in English in Year 3 or Year 4 when IM educated children have had relatively little exposure to reading in English (typically IM schools do not start teaching English reading until the last term of Year 3). IM Educated children are therefore more likely to demonstrate a difference between IQ and reading attainment and are more likely to appear to meet the criteria for additional support from specialist services (and this is evident in statistics from BELB – see Section 3.6.6).

As the timing of the introduction of the teaching of English in IM primary schools (i.e. introduced in P4 and therefore later than in English Medium) is delayed, then compared to "norms", children in the IM sector are more likely to appear to be below the "norm" as they have not been taught English for the same length of time as counterparts in other schools. This delay in the introduction of English leads to the following:

- EPs noted that as a result of such an assessment, additional support would be provided. This refers to the teaching and acquisition of reading/literacy in English as well as English language development; and
- In the POBAL report, EPs indicated that having to wait until an IM pupil commenced English literacy study formally at year 3 or 4 can lead to a delay in accessing additional support.

Feedback from EPs is also included in the POBAL report which highlights the following difficulties arising from the lack of tools in Irish:

- EPs are unable to assess pupils' Irish literacy which may therefore, cause a delay in accessing appropriate support;
- The assessment of children whose first language is Irish is less straightforward (where available tools are in English). EPs are aware that care must be taken when assessing

bilingual children using assessment tools designed for monolingual English-speaking pupils and report that the absence of standardised tests in Irish is a challenge for them.

Within the IM sector, there are a number of concerns linked to the lack of high level diagnostic tools in Irish as follows:

- A widely held view in the IM sector is that children are disadvantaged in the assessment (for SEN) process where for example, they may know a word in Irish but not the English equivalent. One respondent described this as follows: *“A monoglot assessor cannot appropriately assess a child when Irish is offered in response”*
- Standardised scores refer to children who have been educated in the medium of English. Key issues arise from:
 - a) the timing of the introduction of the teaching of English in IM primary schools (i.e. formally introduced in Year 4⁶ and therefore later than in English Medium); and
 - b) the fact that in Irish Medium schools, children typically have a number of periods of English per week (the exact number of periods of English will vary; 3 to 4 is the norm but in some cases it may be up to 7) compared with other schools in which all classes are taught in English:

This means that:

- children who are monolingual in Irish might not be assessed at as early as stage as their counterparts in English Medium schools. However children who have English may be assessed using English Medium tests (although the perception amongst the IM sector is that as these children’s English may not be as well developed, they may be at a disadvantage) – as noted in Section 3.6.2, the POBAL report indicated that most children in IM schools come from English-speaking family backgrounds with no more than 5% of parents Irish speakers;
- some cases of SEN may not be diagnosed until later than would be the case in other schools;
- compared to “norms”, children in the IM sector are more likely to appear to be below the “norm” as they have not been taught English nor through the medium of English for the same length of time as counterparts in other schools. As a result of such an assessment, additional support will be provided.
- The validity of “norms” is questioned as external assessors/observers have used school-based results and analysis of children’s English in Year 4 to value judge both pupils and schools; this is compared with standardised scores that refer to

⁶ The formal introduction of English is not required until Yr. 4 and it is important to note that some amount of introductory work in the latter part of Yr. 3 should not be interpreted as a year of English language study.

children who have been educated in the medium of English. This is considered to be unreasonable.

- There are concerns that the outcome of assessments may be “false positives” i.e. identifying a SEN which does not exist – but that in fact the result of the assessment may be due to the child’s lack of knowledge of English;
- Some of those consulted in the IM sector report that when feeding back results of an assessment, psychologists are adding a caveat to these because the assessments are in English. The view in the IM sector is that the assessments are not robust / valid and that there is a lack of confidence in the assessments (from teachers and parents). The argument around lack of robustness is based on the fact that the lack of assessment materials in Irish means that pupils from the IM sector are, for the most part, assessed through the medium of English using assessment materials which have been designed for monolingual English-speaking children.
- Some of those consulted in the IM sector feel that it is more difficult to get a statement for a child in the IM sector (linked to the lack of high level diagnostic tools in Irish).
- The concerns / issues raised by the IM sector apply across all types of SEN not just literacy and numeracy, also ASD, behaviour, etc.

There are also issues regarding knowledge, awareness and understanding of the roles within the IM sector and the EPs as follows – these compound the difficulties already described:

- IM sector understanding of the assessment process / role of EPs
 - EPs feel that not all IM schools are as aware of / familiar with the Code of Practice as they should be;
 - EPs feel that there may be a reluctance in some IM schools to place children on the SEN register (perception of stigma). [The POBAL report provided a counter-argument – concerns among teaching practitioners and educational psychologists that the lack of assessment materials in Irish hinders teachers in providing statistical data on pupils’ attainment to enable them to monitor progress and to make accurate, evidence-based referrals to the educational psychology service. IM teachers felt uneasy sometimes about making judgments about pupils using professional judgment only and not authenticated by standardised tests in Irish.]
 - Some of the teachers in the IM sector felt they had a lack of detailed knowledge / awareness of the processes / tools used by Educational Psychologists; this was perceived as a lack of transparency on the part of IM teachers.
- EPs understanding of the IM sector / immersion education

- Consultees in the IM sector and including EPs note that there is no specific training in immersion pedagogy for Educational Psychologists (degree-level and CPD)
- EPs would welcome guidance / training on bilingualism and immersion education
- EPs would welcome guidance / protocol on approach to assessment in IM schools

An illustration of the impact of these difficulties is evident in feedback from the IM sector and from EPs regarding outcomes of assessments:

- Within the IM sector, there are concerns that in some cases recommendations have been made to remove children from IM sector as a result of assessments carried out by Educational Psychologists.
- The POBAL Research Report (The Special Educational Needs of bilingual (Irish-English) children (2009) cited a study which “*reported that some pupils in Irish medium (IM) schools have left IM education to be educated in an English medium (EM) mainstream or special education settings, as a result of SEN issues (Mhic Aoidh, 2004 and Nic Annaidh, 2005)*”;
- The POBAL Research Report also noted that “parents whose children have transferred from the IM sector reported feelings of frustration that they were being dissuaded by health and education professionals from pursuing IM education for their child, as a result of the child’s additional needs”.

The EPs, however, indicated that whilst the outcome of an assessment may be a recommendation to focus on one code rather than two (i.e. English or Irish) until progress is made, they would not make a recommendation that a child is removed from an IM school.

4.4 Summary

4.4.1 Current Methods

Educational Psychologists adopt the same approach to assessment of SEN using high-level diagnostic tools in the Irish Medium sector as in other schools. The only slight difference may arise if the EP is fluent in Irish and uses this to settle children before undertaking the assessment.

4.4.2 Effectiveness of Current Methods

The current approach is felt to be effective as:

- the majority of pupils in the IM sector have English as their first language;
- there is scope to use non verbal tests e.g. Wechsler ‘Non-Verbal’;

- the outcome of an assessment does not depend solely on the result of a high level diagnostic test – other information is also taken into account e.g.: also consider teacher observation, parental observation, psychologist observing child in class, out of classroom context (e.g. playground, etc).

4.4.3 Difficulties owing to lack of high level diagnostic tools in Irish

However, there are also some concerns / difficulties associated with the current approach:

- Difficult to identify if an issue is due to delay in language development (since children in IM sector not commencing formal English education until later than in other schools) or if there is an underlying SEN issue (cognitive);
- Risk that underlying SEN is not diagnosed – false negative; however another possibility may be that SEN is diagnosed (due to child' lack of knowledge of English) where it does not exist – false positive - and additional support put in place); [Note: there is no evidence to suggest which of the likelihood of false positives or negatives is greater or lesser];
- Children are not being assessed early enough – this may mean that problems are not identified until post primary in some cases;
- Owing to later introduction of English in IM schools:
 - children are more likely to be below the “norm” – may lead to additional support;
 - there may be a delay in accessing additional support for a small number of children who are monolingual in Irish and who might not be assessed at as early a stage as their counterparts in English-Medium schools (since English Medium tests could not be administered to them until they develop English);
- Lack of robustness / validity of score due to test being in English
 - Does not take into account bilingualism
 - Tools are designed for monolingual English-speaking pupils and standardised on that population
- Perception (amongst some) that it is more difficult to get a child statemented in IM sector
- Concern that in some cases recommendations are made to remove children from IM sector

There are also issues regarding knowledge, awareness and understanding of the roles within the IM sector and the EPs as follows – these compound the difficulties already described. This includes both IM sector understanding of the assessment process / role of EPs and EPs understanding of the IM sector / immersion education.

5 THE NEED FOR HIGH LEVEL DIAGNOSTIC TOOLS IN IRISH

5.1 Introduction

In this section, we present a summary of evidence of need from research, statistics and consultation to address the following aspects of the Terms of Reference:

- *To identify and define the need for high level diagnostic tools in Irish*

5.2 Evidence of Need: Research and Statistics

Research

Recommendations from two recent reports put forward the case for examining the need for and indeed developing high level diagnostic tools in Irish for children in the IM sector:

- **DE: Review of Irish Medium Education (2009) - Recommendation 17: Support for SEN**

(iv) High-level diagnostic tools for the Irish Medium Sector should be developed, drawing on all-Ireland and east-west opportunities

- **DE & POBAL: The special educational needs of bilingual (Irish-English) children (2009) - Recommendation 13: Providing Irish Language Assessment Tools**

DE should encourage resource providers to gather, assess and disseminate assessment materials currently in use in IM schools and should commission research into: producing standardised Irish language literacy assessment and diagnostic tools, perhaps on an all island basis, to meet pupils' needs.

c. literacy and numeracy tools for the assessment of language and literacy

These recommendations are supported by research and theory about bilingualism and immersion education which highlight common issues encountered in assessing SEN in immersion settings:

- Over-representation of bilingual children in Special Education - common issue due in part to lack of appropriate assessments
- Assessments – can lead to false positive (SEN diagnosed but none exists) or false negative (SEN not correctly identified)
- Use of monolingual tests – does not recognise a bilingual child's true language abilities – assumes they are fluent in all domains (social / academic) of that language and does not recognise a bilingual child's true language abilities and runs the risk of failing to profile

pupils' strengths as well as areas of weakness. In addition, these tests are normed on monolingual groups.

- Direct translations of tests can alter comparability, and hence validity and fairness of a test

Other potential pitfalls in using monolingual tests include:

- difficulty in identifying whether a child who is underperforming has difficulty owing to a delay in language development or if there is an underlying cognitive issue.
- the potential for mistaking possible language difficulties experienced during the acquisition of a second language with learning difficulties, and vice versa.
- the potential for:
 - A **false positive** - occurs when a learning difficulty is diagnosed when in fact none is present. The child is incorrectly labelled and may fail to achieve their potential because expectations have been lowered and inappropriate support may be provided.
 - A **false negative** - occurs when a learning difficulty is not correctly identified. In this case the child's difficulties are incorrectly attributed to lack of proficiency in English and appropriate help and support is not provided. Lack of early intervention can have serious and long reaching consequences for the child

Statistics

Available statistics presented in Section 3.6.3 demonstrate that we are dealing with small numbers particularly in the IM sector and this can be inconclusive – particularly for the post-primary sector. However, for the primary sector, the proportions by stage of Code of Practice are broadly similar in both IM and Non-IM sectors.

Data in Section 3.6.4 also demonstrates that the gap between the proportion of pupils with statements in the IM and Non-IM sectors is closing amongst primary pupils. The gap has also narrowed for the post-primary phase, although data for IM post-primary is based on 1 school and should therefore be treated with caution. Whilst the gap in the level of statements has been closing, the level remains lower in the IM sector than in other schools.

There is also evidence (in Section 3.6.6) that pupils from the IM sector are accessing disproportionate levels of some SEN supports (and therefore are not being disadvantaged)

5.3 Evidence of Need: Feedback from Consultation

The first priority for a psychologist during assessment is to minimise obstacles that may prevent the child from demonstrating his/her true levels of ability. Given this priority,

educational psychologists take the view that the use of a high level diagnostic tool in Irish in the IM sector may not be appropriate / valid as:

- children in the IM sector are unlikely to be fully bilingual (there are different stages of development of bilingualism – semi lingual, bilingual, elite bilingual and the latter may take up to 7 years to develop;
- English is the first language / normal day today home language and local community language of the vast majority of children with learning difficulties educated in IM schools. (As reported in Section 3.6.2, the POBAL report notes that most children in Irish medium schools come from English-speaking families with a small number coming from bilingual (Irish – English), and a few from Irish-speaking, families. While there are no exact statistics for the number of parents of children in the IM sector who speak Irish, it is estimated by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta that no more than 5% of parents within the sector are Irish speakers.). For all children who are failing to thrive in the context of the school it is important to evaluate their intellectual abilities in the wider context of the home and the community. Some children demonstrate greater intellectual ability in the home and community context than they do in the context of school. It would often, therefore, be unfair to the IM educated child to attempt to communicate through Irish during an assessment.
- Whilst it remains the case that English is the first language, it is likely that if these children have learning difficulties, psychologists must exercise caution about conducting assessments in Irish if they are to promote equality of opportunity. Psychologists employ compensatory strategies when conducting assessments in English with children educated in IM schools to ensure that they have at least equal access to specialist services such as the service for children with Specific Learning Difficulties/Dyslexia. The level of access to this service in BELB demonstrates that IM educated children currently have at least equal access;
- Availability / use of Non-Verbal Tests;
- Diagnosis / assessment is not based on the outcome of one test but also takes into account e.g.: psychologist observation (in and out of classroom context), parental input and teacher input, etc.

However, there is a strong view (within the IM sector) that there should be a duality of provision i.e. all of the tools and support that is available in the medium of English should also be appropriate/available in Irish (designed for IM and fit for purpose) – for example, there are IM CASS officers with a sector-wide remit, but no dedicated IM Psychologists who could also deliver capacity-building regarding immersion education. This argument is about a demonstration of commitment to bilingual education, a consistent approach and parity with English Medium education.

A high level diagnostic tool alone would be insufficient; should a tool be developed. There are other associated factors which would also need to be taken into account in order to implement the tool – this includes the need for:

- A sufficiently large population to standardise the test – to produce acceptable norms for the results to be statistically valid;
- Appropriately qualified personnel to use the tools i.e. Educational Psychologist with:
 - an understanding of Irish Medium Education, benefits of bilingualism and immersion education. It was noted that professional training at degree and CPD level does not include knowledge an understanding of immersion language issues – for psychologists and other educational and health professionals - i.e. speech therapists;
 - appropriate fluency in Irish to administer the test; and
 - tasked with responsibility for delivery of awareness training and capacity building to other professionals (this was favoured by the IM sector);
 - other resources / support in the medium of Irish;
 - protocol / guidance on the procedure for assessing in IM sector (this would be welcomed by the Educational Psychologists regardless of whether a tool is developed or not).

It was felt to be important that the development of any high level diagnostic tool(s) in Irish is guided by a panel of experts including IM practitioners and Educational Psychologists.

It was also highlighted by the IM sector in particular that that development of suitable low level diagnostic tools is also critical – given the current range of commonly used tools in Irish – for example:

- AML
- NFER – Irish Language version
- InCAS – available in Irish Medium

There are also commonly used English Medium tools such as Progress in English and Progress in Maths but no corresponding tools in Irish. Some in the IM sector felt that the range of tools was limited and that some of these lower level tools could be improved / updated.

Some possible solutions proposed by the IM sector include:

- an “all-island” solution i.e. develop tool(s) to be used across the island of Ireland:

- Would bring economies of scale and access to larger population to provide standardised scores
 - Precedent in that IM InCAS – tested in Republic of Ireland
 - May not be possible due to regional differences in language. Although a counter-argument has been put forward that regional differences in language has not been a problem due to the availability of other resources in Irish including standard Irish-text books, examinations and other assessments including InCAS. In addition, it is suggested that it would be possible to avoid most examples of regional differences in language or to provide appropriate versions or list alternatives within.
- bilingual assessment i.e. using both English and Irish.

Alternatives to the development of high level diagnostic tests in Irish proposed by some psychologists included:

- Tests of reading in Irish which may provide valid measures for IM educated children in all parts of Ireland have been published recently and psychologists in Belfast will be checking the feasibility of using these tests in collaboration with IM schools
- Creation of a specialist EP post for the IM sector (linked to CASS) – could develop guidance for EPs working in the IM sector

It was noted that using a translator (with the Psychologist) would be too stressful for the child being assessed and that translating existing tools would not be appropriate for example it would not be appropriate for an Irish speaking psychologist to simply translate questions in the Verbal parts of the IQ test into Irish because this compromises the validity of the test.

5.4 Summary of Need for High Level Diagnostic Tools

Research into bilingualism and SEN highlights that this is a complex area and also that there are some potential pitfalls to consider when using monolingual tests. These include the possibility of false diagnoses – either false positive diagnosing a learning difficulty that does not exist or a false negative when a learning difficulty is not correctly identified.

However statistics on the IM sector in Northern Ireland indicate that there are relatively small numbers in the sector and when we consider the numbers with SEN, these are smaller again, so care must be taken in interpreting these. The level of SEN overall in the IM sector is on a par with that in EM schools and although there is a gap in the proportion of children with statements (lower in IM sector), this gap has been closing. There is also evidence that the IM sector is accessing disproportionate levels of some SEN supports.

The review of research and statistics, coupled with consultation in the IM sector and with EPs highlights concerns both with the current process for assessing SEN, puts forward some

alternatives (and also raises some issues with regard to these). It is clear from the review of research, statistics and consultation that there is merit in investigating alternatives to the status quo. Development of High-Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish is one potential option to be explored in more detail.

6 BENCHMARKING – LESSONS FROM OTHER AREAS

6.1 Introduction

In this section, we present information on our review of experience in other regions / countries with immersion education sectors in order to address the following aspects of the Terms of Reference:

- *To analyse methods of high level diagnostic testing for children immersed in a minority language, which are employed in other regions / countries including Great Britain and the south of Ireland*
- *To analyse relevant research in relation to the need for high level diagnostic tools and the development of such tools, including proposals for development of models in other areas facing similar issues*

This section explores methods of high level diagnostic testing for children immersed in a minority language, which are employed in other regions / countries including Great Britain and the south of Ireland including:

- Irish Medium Education in Ireland;
- Welsh Medium Education in Wales; and
- Scottish Gaelic Education in Scotland.

We also present information on two assessment tools which have been developed – as these provide potential benchmarks regarding cost and timescales to develop and implement new tools. These are:

- Bilingual Verbal Ability Test
- INCAS – Irish

6.2 Irish Medium Education in Ireland

6.2.1 History / Development

Immersion education first began in Canada in the 1960s (Manharyam, 2002). Since then immersion programmes have spread to other parts of the globe. In Ireland there has been considerable growth in Gaelscoileanna, with Irish medium education being one of the fastest growing fields of education in Ireland over the past thirty years.

6.2.2 Forms of Irish-Medium Education

Within the Irish context children who acquire the additional language of Irish usually acquire this through contact with the school system. In the Irish republic the language is compulsory in the curriculum but children will experience it differently across settings.

The degree of second language use in an English medium setting would entail Irish being taught for one lesson a day. In contrast, in an immersion setting language acquisition occurs whereby the second language (Irish) is the medium of instruction for 50% to 100% of the school day. The function of the language differs within a Gaelscoil as children must use the Irish language to communicate with school personnel and to access a broad range of subjects across the curriculum. It is not confined to 'Irish' class but it is considered to be "the working language of the school" (Gaelscoileanna, 2010).

In Ireland there has been considerable growth in Gaelscoileanna, with Irish medium education being one of the fastest growing fields of education in Ireland over the past thirty years. Outside of the Gaeltacht there are approximately 40,000 children attending Gaelscoileanna around the country (Gaelscoileanna, 2010). Immersion in the Irish language can take the form of early total immersion, whereby all subjects are taught through Irish and English is not introduced until senior infants and in some instances total immersion can be practised until second class (Ní Bhaoill and Ó Duibhir, 2004).

6.2.3 Size of Sector

In the Republic of Ireland, Irish is a mandatory subject in primary and secondary education. Between 700,000-800,000 students are taught Irish on a daily basis within the education system; this is similar to the situation of the Welsh language in Wales.

In 2009/10, there were over 36,000 pupils⁷ receiving education through the Irish-Medium education outside the Gaeltacht⁸:

- **Primary: 28,581 pupils studied in 138 primary schools** with 1,490 full-time teachers and 105 part-time. This represents 5.6% of total pupils in RoI and 4.2% of primary schools; and
- **Secondary: 7,468 pupils studied in 36 secondary schools** with 639 full-time teachers and 102 part-time. This represents 2.1% of total pupils in RoI and 4.9% of secondary schools.

In addition, there were **101 schools in the Gaeltacht in which classes are taught through Irish only, with 7,022 pupils.**

⁷ Source: Gaelscoileanna – Statistics 2009/10. Excludes pupils receiving education through the medium of Irish in Northern Ireland.

⁸ Gaeltacht refers to the districts where the government recognises that the Irish language is the predominant language, that is, the vernacular spoken at home.

6.2.4 High Level Diagnostic Tools / Assessment of SEN

The NCCA (2007) comment on the lack of appropriate standardised assessment tools for Irish and for Maths through Irish and emphasise the importance of providing psychological services and assessment through Irish.

In their policy on the use of psychometric tests in Ireland, the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) (2006) provides guidance on good practice, which includes issues of fairness in testing in relation to individuals from different groups. This policy also gives attention to testing in more than one language and directs that test developers be sensitive to issues of content, culture and language; that test administrators can communicate clearly in the language in which the test is administered; that the appropriate language version of the test is administered or bilingual assessment is conducted.

However, in a submission to the advisory group on reasonable accommodations at the certificate examinations (RACE), educational psychologists in Ireland expressed concern that “no appropriate tests are available in the Irish language” (NEPS, 2007, p. 13).

With regard to Gaeltacht students, NEPS claim that data scores from available standardised tests in English are of doubtful validity and reliability (see Appendix 2 - Literature Review). This concern was also expressed in an international review of the procedures used to diagnose a disability and to assess special educational needs (Desforges and Lindsay, 2010) which was recently commissioned by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). While the authors of the report recommend a broad range of assessment approaches, they consider that standardised testing has an important role to play in Ireland.

Few tests used in Ireland have been developed for an Irish population and as such there is a need to investigate the norming of some assessment tools using an Irish standardisation sample. Recent developments by the Educational Research Centre in Drumcondra have begun to address this issue. A test of Irish, *Triail Ghaeilge Dhroim Conrach do Bhunscoileanna Gaeltachta agus Lan-Ghaeilge (TGD-G)* (2010), based on the Primary School Curriculum, has been developed. The test, which aims at Infants to 6th class, has been normed on pupils in Gaeltacht schools and Gaelscoileanna.

Note: The test of Irish can be administered by teachers (the lowest level according to the definition being used in this study) and is not restricted to psychologists but has been developed to the very highest standards of test construction with a sound statistical basis. This test for Irish-medium schools was standardised in May and September 2009 in Senior Infants, First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth classes in Gaeltacht schools and scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge. The May standardisation involved approximately 2000 pupils at each class level across a sample of 80 schools. Norms are based on the combined performance of pupils in the two school types. These may be found in the relevant test manuals. Smaller samples (800 pupils at each class level across 30 schools) were tested in September to facilitate the development of Autumn norms. Figures on uptake are not available.

6.3 Welsh Medium Education in Wales

6.3.1 History / Development

Education in Wales is organised differently than in other parts of the UK because of the compulsory teaching of the Welsh language.

The Education Act 1944 allowed local education authorities to open Welsh-medium schools. The first such state primary opened in Llanelli in 1947. Initially, these schools catered for children for whom Welsh was a first language. But by the 1960s increasing numbers of pupils came from non-Welsh speaking homes.

The Welsh language became a compulsory subject for all pupils in Wales at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 (up to age 14) in 1990, and in 1999, it became a compulsory subject for Key Stage 4 pupils (GCSE (ages 15 and 16)), and therefore all pupils in mainstream schools in Wales now study Welsh (either as a first or a second language) for 12 years, from the ages of 5 to 16.

6.3.2 Forms of Welsh Medium Education

Primary provision may vary in different parts of Wales. Welsh-medium primary education can be provided by traditional Welsh-medium schools, designated Welsh-medium school or two stream primaries, where children are either taught through the medium of English or Welsh. In Welsh-medium or stream school, pupils are taught solely in Welsh at Key Stage 1. At Key Stage 2, Welsh continues to be the main teaching medium, but English is taught as a subject.

Most children who were taught in Welsh in primary school continue being taught in this way at secondary school. There are different types of Welsh-medium and bilingual secondaries. In predominantly Welsh-speaking areas there are traditional Welsh-medium secondary schools where pupils can choose to be taught either in Welsh or English. In other areas there are designated Welsh-medium secondary schools where the majority of subjects are taught in Welsh to GCSE, AS and A-level, or there may be a choice of language in mathematics and science.

6.3.3 Size of Sector

Schools and pupils

In January 2010 there were 25 nursery, 1,462 primary, 223 secondary schools and 43 special schools. Of these, 473 primary (32% of total) and 58 secondary (26% of total) schools were classified as Welsh medium. There were 64 independent schools. Overall, there were 20 fewer Local Authority (LA) maintained schools and 4 more independent schools than at January 2009.

The total number of pupils (headcount) in LA maintained nursery (1,672), primary (257,445), secondary (203,907) and special schools (4,117) was 467,141 (2,500 fewer pupils than in

2009). There were 59,880 pupils in Welsh-Medium primary schools (23% of the total) and 43,432 pupils in Welsh-Medium secondary schools (21% of the total).

Teachers and support staff

There were 25,287 full-time equivalent (FTE) qualified teachers in LA maintained schools, a fall of 275 (1 per cent) over the year. The pupil teacher ratio for all LA maintained schools was 18.0 compared to 17.9 in 2009. There were 20,410 support staff (FTE) in LA maintained schools.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

In January 2010, 14,128 pupils in schools in Wales had statements of SEN, 293 fewer pupils than in January 2009.

In LA maintained sectors:

- Primary schools: 1.7 per cent of pupils had statements of SEN and a further 19.6 per cent of pupils had special educational needs but no statement.
- Secondary schools: 2.7 per cent of pupils had statements of SEN and a further 16.9 per cent of pupils had special educational needs but no statement
- Special schools: 96 per cent of pupils had statements of SEN and 4 per cent of pupils had special educational needs but no statement.

In the Independent sector 4.1 per cent of pupils had statements of SEN and a further 10.5 per cent of pupils had special needs but no statement.

6.3.4 High Level Diagnostic Tools / Assessment of SEN

The first ever language test to be developed to measure the language abilities of bilingual children was launched in June 2008. It is the first specifically designed test for bilingual children. Up until the introduction of the Prawf Geirfa, educators, speech therapists, and researchers have had to rely on measures standardised/ designed for English or on cumbersome and inappropriate translations of such measures. There has been a need for assessment tools that they can use reliably in the conduct of their work with Welsh-speaking children.

Prawf Geirfa Cymraeg: Fersiwn 7-11, (Vocabulary Test 7-11) has been developed by Professor Virginia Gathercole and Dr. Enlli Thomas at Bangor University, with support from the Welsh Assembly Government, and others. The Prawf Geirfa Cymraeg is the first receptive vocabulary test designed specifically for Welsh-speaking bilingual children. This version of the test, for 7- to 11-year-olds, is based on a sample of 611 children throughout Wales, and is the first in a series of tests that are being developed for children from 3 to 15 years of age.

The test benefits from several innovative features:

- It is the first receptive vocabulary test in the world designed specifically for bilingual children coming from distinct home language backgrounds. Professionals and researchers have long established that it is inappropriate to assess bilingual children using measures that have been based on monolingual populations. This test and the manner in which it addresses the long-recognized issues for assessment of bilingual children's language is already being praised as a model that can be used to design similar measures for bilingual children speaking other languages throughout the world.
- Another key innovative aspect of this measure is the formats available. There is a standard "book" format, for use one-on-one with an individual child. The test is also provided in a computerised format. This format can be installed on a computer, and the child can work through the test on his /her own at the computer with headphones. The computerised format calculates the child's scores automatically and provides this at the end of the testing.
- Finally, there is a classroom version of the test, which can be used with a whole class or group of children at the same time. The test is administered via a PowerPoint presentation at the front of the classroom, and children are provided with booklets in which they circle their choice of picture that represents the word they hear.

Standardisation

The current, published version is based on 700 or so children between the ages of 7 and 11. When we divide those children into age bands (7, 8, 9, 10, 11) and home language experience (Welsh speaking home, mixed Welsh and English speaking home, English speaking home) these numbers diminish somewhat. However, a statistician has been involved in the standardization phase from the beginning, and was happy with the numbers.

Use of the test

It is anticipated that this test would be used by Speech and Language Therapists, Educational Psychologists, teachers, and researchers. As a diagnostic tool, it would have to be used alongside other measures, but if used in part to inform a diagnosis, then it should only be used by individuals who are able to interpret the scores appropriately. If used as a general measure of language ability for, say, the purpose of selecting similar children for research, then it needs no specific training as such.

The test is used by some specialist SLTs and EPs. The current version is expensive to purchase. Subsequent versions for other ages and subsequent tests measuring other aspects of language knowledge will be made available via other means, possibly via the purchase of a license to view and use the materials online, etc.

Cost and Timescales

The development of this test has been in the making for over 8 years, the test owes its existence to the efforts of many, many individuals and institutions, including grant support

from the Welsh Assembly Government. The work has been conducted in conjunction with the University's ESRC Centre for Research on Bilingualism.

The total cost to develop the test is difficult to estimate since the work was unfunded for many years (8 or so); funding has only been received for the last 3 years. The research team have recently been able to renew that funding for another 3 years to develop other tests. The initial WAG funding was for £90,000, to cover research assistant costs for 3 years (with a similar level for the current funding). However, a lot of the work had already begun, funded via the university's own overheads, and via a 1 year assistant position funded by the School of Psychology.

Professor Gathercole and Dr Thomas are the key researchers, who have overall responsibility for the work. They have requested the assistance of a statistician, a technician (for developing the computerised version of the task and to develop a webpage), and there is a full time research assistant working on the WAG grant funding (and 1 research assistant working under the funding provided by the school at some point).

6.4 Scottish Gaelic Medium Education in Scotland

6.4.1 History / Development

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 specifies that "school education" includes "the teaching of Gaelic in Gaelic-speaking areas", and that local authorities should have regard to the principle that "pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents"

Specific Grants Regulations established a grants scheme in 1986 to assist with the teaching of the Gaelic language or the teaching in that language of other subjects. Government provides 75% grant funding and local education authorities are expected to top-up the grant with 25% of their Grant-Aided Expenditure. The Scheme of Specific Grants for Gaelic has been critical to the expansion and development of GME and Gaelic Learner Education (GLE) over the last twenty years and it has also facilitated the production of appropriate curriculum resources through Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig, the National Gaelic Resource Centre.

The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 states that there is a duty on all education authorities in Scotland to publish an annual statement of improvement objectives which must include an account of the ways in which they will provide GME or the circumstances in which it will be supported. Gaelic is also listed as a national priority in the Education (National Priorities) (Scotland) Order 2000.

The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 enables Bòrd na Gàidhlig to offer advice or to issue guidance in relation to Gaelic education; the Bòrd has set out a National Gaelic Education Strategy within its National Plan for Gaelic; and the Bòrd is able to request the development of Gaelic language plans by individual public authorities, including education authorities.

Stòrlann produces Gaelic books and other learning and teaching materials for pre-school, primary and secondary education. Bòrd na Gàidhlig provides additional financial resources to Stòrlann to expand the range and quality of resources available to Gaelic schools.

Three local authorities have developed statutory five-year Gaelic Language Plans which set out how those local authorities will support the development of Gaelic education. The Highland Council has given a commitment to establish two new dedicated Gaelic schools during the lifetime of its plan. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles) has indicated its intention to introduce a policy of Gaelic Medium Education, in line with the National Gaelic Education Strategy, as mainstream primary provision. It has also undertaken to plan for the expansion of GME as a significant part of secondary provision.

Six further bodies are in the process of developing Gaelic Language Plans. Five of these bodies are key education bodies.

6.4.2 Forms of Gaelic Education

There are three forms of Gaelic education in the secondary schools: subjects which are taught through the medium of Gaelic; Gaelic as a subject for fluent speakers; and Gaelic as a subject for learners. Gaelic as a subject (for fluent speakers and learners), culminating in a final exam, is available at Standard Grade, Access, Intermediate 1 and 2, Higher and Advanced Higher. There are a number of other subjects taught through the medium of Gaelic in secondary schools up to Standard Grade level, and it is expected that this will expand in the future. Pupils at present may (when requested) sit a Standard Grade exam in Geography, History, Maths and Modern Studies.

6.4.3 Size of Sector

According to Bòrd na Gàidhlig⁹, there are **58 nursery units** (pre-school groups for children aged three and older) in the different local authority areas which contain a total of **856 children (2009/10)**.

Gaelic Medium Education at primary school level has grown substantially since it began in the 1980s and there are **2,256 pupils in primary schools at present (2009/10)**. There are **60 Gaelic units and schools** in Scotland and there are over 300 pupils (the largest Gaelic school roll in Scotland) in Glasgow's Gaelic Primary School alone. With regard to the number of pupils in each year, the larger numbers are between primary one and four according to the latest figures. Most of the units and schools are in the local authority areas of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council, but there are others in the large cities in the east and south of Scotland.

⁹ Bòrd na Gàidhlig is a statutory Non-departmental Public Body directly funded by the Scottish Ministers and is accountable to them. It works closely with the Scottish Government, public authorities and key partners, including the Gaelic organisations and community groups, to promote and develop the use and understanding of Gaelic and to ensure that public funds are wisely and effectively spent.

As the number of pupils in the primary schools grows the demand for Gaelic Medium Education in secondary schools is rising. There are **390 pupils being educated in Gaelic in Scottish secondary schools** according to the latest figures (school year 2009-2010) and there are 1,028 fluent speakers and 2,824 learners taking Gaelic as a subject (2009-2010).

Key statistics for 2008¹⁰ are as follows:

- 718 children registered for Gaelic pre-school education.
- 2,164 pupils currently accessing GM primary education.
- 968 pupils studying Gàidhlig (fluent speakers) in secondary schools.
- 322 pupils studying other subjects through the medium of Gaelic in secondary.
- 2,733 pupils studying Gaelic learners' courses in secondary schools.
- Approximately 6,000 beginners being taught Gaelic Language in the Primary School.

6.4.4 High Level Diagnostic Tools / Assessment of SEN

At present assessment is carried out using tools in the medium of English; the sector faces many similar issues to the IM sector.

However, recently as part of her PhD, Fiona Lyons has been exploring the following research questions – although the focus of these is on lower level tools:

- How might Early Intervention screening help to provide effective literacy support in the early stages of Gaelic-medium education?
- Is it possible to measure a pupil's phonological awareness using Gaelic?
- What are the difficulties that arise in creating a phonological awareness assessment tool in Gaelic?

She developed a screening tool following an investigation of Scottish Gaelic phonology and an audit of 22 English screening tools. This was trailed in 48 of the 60 Gaelic-medium schools in 11 local authorities and involved 60% of the pupil population. 368 pupils participated and teachers gave their comments via questionnaires and interviews. Results enabled her to create tables of norms in six month age bands for teachers to use. Along with her external examiner, Prof. Colin Baker, Fiona is looking into publishing the tests. She hopes to follow this study with further diagnostic tests in reading and spelling.

¹⁰ The Scottish Government website – Arts, Culture & Sport – Gaelic Medium Education.

6.5 Bilingual Verbal Ability Test

The Bilingual Verbal Ability Tests-Normative Update (BVAT-NU) measure bilingual verbal ability, or the unique combination of cognitive/academic language abilities possessed by bilingual individuals in English and another language. The need for this test is based in the reality that bilingual persons know some things in one language, some things in the other language, and some things in both languages. Traditional procedures only allow the person's ability to be measured in one language, usually the one considered to be dominant — examiners intuitively know that many individuals know “more” than they can show on these monolingual approaches.

The BVAT-NU is derived from the Woodcock-Johnston III Tests of Cognitive Ability; it gives a general intellectual ability-bilingual score.

The BVAT-NU provide a technically sound procedure for combining a person's knowledge in English and their native language, thus yielding a better estimate of his/her verbal ability. It may be administered either by one examiner who is fluent in the individual's two languages, or, alternatively, by a primary and ancillary examiner team when a bilingual examiner is not available (procedure is detailed in the manual).

The BVAT-NU can be used for a variety of purposes in bilingual education and clinical assessment: for entry and exit criteria in bilingual programs, to assess the academic potential of bilingual students through a comparison of his/her current level of English language proficiency to his/her bilingual verbal ability.

The BVAT-NU consist of 3 subtests from the WJ-R Tests of Cognitive Ability: Picture Vocabulary, Oral Vocabulary, and Verbal Analogies that have been translated into 18 languages: Arabic, Chinese (2 forms), French, German, Haitian-Creole, Hindi, Hmong, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Navajo, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, Vietnamese.

The examiner administers the three subtests in English first. Any item that was missed is then administered in the native language. If the person gets that item correct in the native language, it is added to the score for that subtest. The end result is a raw score that reflects the individual's knowledge in both languages. That raw score is then converted to derived, normative scores. Each test record is designed for easy administration and scoring. English is included in each test record with blanks for the second language administration. Any item that could not be translated from English is blocked out for the second language administration. This design facilitates administration of items missed in English as well as combining results from both languages.

The BVAT-NU provide an overall score (BVA) which can be used to determine an individual's overall level of verbal ability. For comparative purposes, the BVAT-NU also provide a measure of English language proficiency. The BVAT-NU yield an aptitude measure that can be used in conjunction with the WJ-III Tests of Achievement. A Scoring and Reporting Program is included with each test kit. This automates all scoring procedures and provides a

narrative report of the individual's bilingual verbal ability, English language proficiency, and language use and exposure. When used with the WJ-III Tests of Achievement, the achievement test results are scored and aptitude/achievement discrepancies are calculated and interpreted. The program determines and explains whether any identified discrepancy is related to limitations of English language proficiency.

6.6 InCAS Computer-based Assessments – Irish

InCAS has been developed by the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring at Durham University and is an adaptive computer-based assessment. This ensures that the assessment(s) focus on the pupil as an individual, by selecting the initial questions based on the pupil's age and then presenting further questions in response to the pupil's answers. The difficulty of subsequent items is dependent upon their responses. In this way, pupils answer questions that are tailored to their ability.

The phased introduction of the InCAS computer-based assessments began with Year 5 in September 2007. The principal focus in 2007 was to deploy the InCAS assessment tool and train teachers in its use. The implementation was supported by a programme of face-to-face training delivered by CCEA as well as a broad range of support and guidance materials available for teachers (and parents) including a website, online materials, hardcopy guidance and interactive tutorials.

By the end of the autumn term 2008, all English Medium Primary Schools in Northern Ireland were required to administer two statutory assessments - Reading and General Maths to Year 5 and 6 pupils to produce age equivalent scores, and report these scores to parents before the end of the autumn term.

For 2008/09, within the Irish Medium sector, the requirements of reporting InCAS results to parents were slightly different. Whilst schools were required to report the age equivalent scores from the General Maths assessment to parents they did not have to report the age equivalent scores of the Reading assessment. It was the first year of this assessment and transitional arrangements were in place.

In order to develop the **InCAS Irish Medium assessment**, CCEA worked with a Working Group which included external psychologist support, software developers and others to develop an Irish literacy assessment tool to complement English-Medium assessment tools in the INCAS system.

Key issues in developing InCAS Irish Medium assessment:

- Involvement of Working Group including IM schools, St Mary's, QUB, St Patrick's College Drumcondra, ELB Officers, CnaG, IM principals and translators. The remit of this group was to "advise, guide and quality assure the development of an Irish literacy assessment tool suitable for use in schools". In practice, its role included acting as a "sounding board", agreeing and Quality Assurance of the full bank of

questions; reviewing all questions several times. It was felt to be critical that practitioners were involved in the development of tools.

- There is a need to ensure relevant skills are in place with appropriate expertise to develop the tool – this included the involvement of County Dublin VEC Psychological Support Services. They were involved primarily because they had experience developing assessments;
- In the process of developing this tool, it was acknowledged that it was difficult at times to get agreement on “standard” Irish;
- Testing / QA for questions; also the need to test software. This included hard-copy testing of the questions with pupils to get approximate difficulty levels. This was then tested again within the software to get a proper standardisation of the assessments.
- The need to develop instructions in Irish as well as the test itself.

Testing / Piloting and Standardisation

- The first stage of testing was done using hard copy tests;
- The developers provided instructions to schools;
- The developers tried to get all schools involved in IM sector; (Note there are approximately 370 pupils per year group in the IM sector);
- Although using schools in the Republic would have increased the population, a decision was taken not to use these as they work on the basis of a different curriculum. It was also important to standardise the tool on the population that it would be used by;
- Once questions were agreed, the next stage was to move to software development.
- Proper standardisation commenced once the electronic version of the test was rolled out.

Project Costs

The total cost of developing the **InCAS Irish Medium assessment** was £337k – the largest elements of cost within this were – software development (approximately £162k), literacy question bank development (approximately £128k) and teacher training and evaluation (approximately £20k).

Timescales

Development of the INCAS-Irish tool was approved in December 2007 and was live in schools the following October 2008. The first year was viewed as a full scale trialling with additional adjustments made based on feedback from pupils and teachers. Similar projects should allow for adjustments after full scale trial and evaluation.

7 OPTIONS

7.1 Introduction

In this section, we present options to address the need identified and include a discussion of restricting factors and barriers – addressing the following aspects of the Terms of Reference:

- *To examine any restricting factors and barriers to developing high level diagnostic tools for use in the north of Ireland*
- *To present options for the development of high-level diagnostic tools, and provide an analysis of the technical and operational feasibility of each of the options, defining the restricting factors and barriers and if/ how these could be overcome and the likely costs, taking into account value for money, and estimated timeframe for development and ongoing application.*

7.2 Option 1: Status Quo

Table 8 Option 1 – Status Quo	
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This option involves the using the High Level Diagnostic Tools which are in English or are Non-Verbal, in the IM sector • Some psychologists who administer the tests have Irish and use this to settle children • Other psychologists who administer the tests are not Irish speakers and there are mixed views as to how important this might be regarding getting a correct result.
Technical Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As established / developed diagnostic tools are used it is clear that this option is technically feasible
Operational Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similarly as the diagnostic tools are administered in the IM sector in the same way as in the EM sector, then this option is already operationally feasible.
Economic Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no additional cost involved in this option.

EPs consider that the existing option allows IM pupils the opportunity to be tested using internationally recognised tests and there is concern that an Irish test or tests could not be developed to the same level of reliability and validity, given the small population involved. The range of tests available in English allows the EP to select the most appropriate test for each specific child. For example children in the IM sector do not start to be taught English until year 3 and if a child has difficulty with the language the EP would select a non verbal test for use with the child. As children in the IM sector tend to speak English at home, this is generally not an issue for most students and in this case the EP will select a test in English.

EPs use non verbal tests currently, when they are working with children with low language skills; they are also used with children who have no English and where the EP is not fluent in the language of the child they are testing – they can be used for any language. EPs do not

need to be fluent in Irish, or any other language, to administer non-verbal tests. The range of non-verbal tests is recognised as a valid and reliable way to test children for SEN. All EPs within the 5 ELBs have as an option the ability to use the non-verbal items within most IQ tests when testing any child. The Wechsler Non-Verbal IQ test is used by many EPs when testing ‘newcomer’ pupils and they do not need to be fluent in the language of the child they are testing. Such assessment techniques could also if necessary, be used with children from Irish Medium Schools.

EPs would work with children and teachers to choose the best approach for each individual child, and in some cases for those children with strong English skills this may be using the existing standard English-Medium tests.

EPs have concerns that using an Irish test on children where Irish is not their strongest language could generate a false positive (i.e. indicating a SEN, where none actually exists).

Consultation with representatives from the IM sector highlighted their concerns regarding the Status Quo option – there was a desire to see duality of provision so that all tools that are available in English should also be available in Irish. There were also concerns expressed that it is unsettling for children to spend their school day immersed in the Irish language, only to be assessed in English. Representatives of the IM sector also feel that not only should the assessment tools be in Irish but so should all the associated materials / supports. Such are their concerns that the perception of some in the IM sector is that the existing tests are not providing an accurate picture of children’s SEN in the IM sector.

7.3 Option 2: Status Quo plus Additional Interventions

Table 9	
Option 2 – Status Quo + Additional Interventions	
Description	As for Option 1 i.e.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It assumes the use of High Level Diagnostic Tools in English in the IM sector • Some psychologists who administer the tests have Irish and use this to settle children • Other psychologists who administer the tests are not Irish speakers This option however, has interventions in place to address concerns / issues – including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building for IM teaching staff around identification of SEN • Awareness raising for IM teaching staff around role of Psychologist and tools / techniques used • Awareness raising amongst professionals (including Psychologists) around IM immersion education and bilingualism • Guidance for Psychologists on approach to assessment in IM sector (We understand that some of these are already being addressed through the work of the SEN ThinkTank currently underway e.g.: confidence building, awareness of Code of Practice, etc.)
Technical Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This option uses the same established / developed diagnostic tools as in Option 1
Operational Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic tools are administered in the IM sector in the same way as in the EM sector
Economic Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no additional cost for developing high level tools • There are some additional costs involved re: awareness raising / capacity building / development of guidance for EPs

Option 2 seeks to address a number of the concerns under Option 1, namely that the children being tested are supported by Educational Psychologists who would have greater awareness of the issues for children in IM and likewise the teachers would be made more aware of how to identify SEN. This option recognises that there could be some issues for children around the English language being used to explain the tests, when they are taught in Irish, but it still focuses on the children being tested in English (where language is used in the test).

Whilst this Option does not involve the development of a new test, it seeks to build capacity amongst teacher staff – as the POBAL report notes teachers use their professional judgement to decide if pupils should be on the register of the Code of Practice or not. Therefore it is not only when children are referred to EPs that problems may occur; correct identification and the need for tests that schools can use at an earlier stage are also important.

Since Option 2 (as with Option 1) requires no test development the costs involved are minimal.

7.4 Option 3: Develop Low Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish

Table 10 Option 3 – Develop Low Level Diagnostic Tool(s) in Irish for the Irish Medium Sector	
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This option involves the development of Low Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish for the IM sector. These tests would be administered by teachers in schools to assist with referrals to Educational Psychologists / other education professionals
Technical Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarity of purpose for tool or tool(s) Availability of population of sufficient size (approx 1000+ per strata) to standardise test (s) – one solution would be to develop on all-island basis and/or link with Scotland? However, there are mixed views on the feasibility of developing tools on an all-island basis owing to regional variations, also different curriculum and different schools (both models in Rol - Irish Medium school (immersion education) and Irish language school (i.e. Gaeltacht where home and community language is Irish). Each specific tool will cater for a specific condition and the number with that condition may be relatively low in the IM sector (which itself is relatively small at present) (hence difficult to standardise) Precedent for development of low level tests e.g. InCAs in Irish (Northern Ireland Curriculum, 2008b), AML (<i>Áis Mheasúnaíthe sa Luathlitearthacht</i> (Clay and Nig Uidhir, 2007)), Drumcondra Reading Test¹¹
Operational Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requirement for guidance on using tool(s) to be developed as well as development of the tool(s) themselves Precedent for development of low level tests – as noted above
Economic Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of developing tool Cost of standardising tool VFM – cost per head of population that will use the tool

¹¹ Within the last year the Centre for Educational Research attached to Drumcondra, Dublin, have published tests of reading in Irish which have been standardised on children in IM schools across the 26 counties. The publishers claim that these tests can provide valid measures of reading ability for children who are from both Irish speaking areas and also non Irish speaking areas. The BELB Educational Psychology Service has recently obtained these tests - it aims to check the feasibility of using these in collaboration with IM schools.

Option 3 assumes that a test or tests can be developed in Irish that can be used by teachers in school to assist with the identification of SEN – and hence validate or otherwise the need to make a referral to Educational Psychologists. It offsets the concerns of using a tool in English with children being taught in Irish, and as it would be administered by Irish teachers then there would be no potential for children to be confused by the use of English in the administration.

The key difficulty with this option would be the development of a test which would be reliable and valid. There may also be some concerns from EPs that some children in the IM sector will have stronger English than Irish and that this approach could have a negative impact on them. Technically this option is feasible as other specific tests have been developed previously. However, once the low level tests are completed, and children identified with SEN and referred to EPs, then the next level tests used by psychologists would be in English.

Note the numbers of children identified as having SEN (Stage 1-3 i.e. stages at which low level testing would be appropriate) in the IM sector in 2009/10 were approx 750 (primary and post-primary). Assuming the level of cost is comparable to the InCAS-Irish Medium assessment (without the software development costs i.e. approximately £175k), then this would equate to £233 per pupil. This needs to be set in the context that in some cases, children in the IM sector already avail of support disproportionately (e.g.: BELB IM accounts for 4.35% but >8% referred to peripatetic support from IM; WELB: IM accounts for 1.18% of the school age population but IM referrals to the EPS = 2.75% of all referrals).

7.5 Option 4: Develop High Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish

Table 11	
Option 4 – Develop High Level Diagnostic Tool(s) in Irish for the Irish Medium Sector	
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This option assumes the development of High Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish for the IM sector These would need to be administered by psychologists who are fluent in Irish
Technical Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for clarity of purpose for tool or tool(s) Availability of population of sufficient size (approx 1000+ per strata) to standardise test (s) – one solution would be to develop on all-island basis and/or link with Scotland? However, there are mixed views on the feasibility of developing tools on an all-island basis owing to regional variations, also different curriculum and different schools (both models in RoI - Irish Medium school (immersion education) and Irish language school (i.e. Gaeltacht where home and community language is Irish). Each specific tool will cater for a specific condition and the number with that condition may be relatively low in the IM sector (which itself is relatively small at present) (hence difficult to standardise) Availability of personnel to administer the test to standardise i.e. field force of psychologists with an appropriate level of fluency in Irish Only truly appropriate for those children who are “balanced bilingual” – very few would be at this stage
Operational Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requirement for guidance / instructions on using tool(s) as well as information on interpreting the scores to be developed in Irish as well as development of the tool(s) Requirement of educational psychologists administering the test to be <u>thoroughly</u> competent in both speaking and comprehending Irish Resource implications – to administer the test (if developed) i.e. requirement for psychologists with appropriate level of fluency in Irish How the tool “fits” within spectrum of interventions that are all in English
Economic Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of developing tool Cost of standardising tool VFM – cost per head of population that will use the tool

Option 4 would meet the concerns of those in the IM sector, however as mentioned above a number of consultees felt that some children in the IM sector will be stronger in English rather than Irish, and they could be negatively impacted by the blanket use of this test.

Note the numbers of children identified as having SEN (Stage 4 & 5 i.e. stages at which EPs would be involved for high level diagnostic testing) in the IM sector in 2009/10 were approx 65 (primary and post-primary). The cost of this option is expected to be at least as much as the InCAS Irish Medium assessment (excluding software development approximately £175k), the cost per pupil is relatively high (almost £2,700). There would also be concerns about the practicality of actually developing these tests given both the low numbers of pupils in the sector and further, the low numbers with each specific SEN, relative to the numbers needed to develop and validate a new tool.

7.6 Option 5: Develop High Level Diagnostic Tools – Bilingual

Table 12 Option 5 – Develop High Level Diagnostic Tool(s) – Bilingual - for the Irish Medium Sector	
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This option assumes the development of High Level Diagnostic Tools – Bilingual (English-Irish) - for the IM sector These would be administered by psychologists who are fluent in Irish
Technical Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarity of purpose for tool or tool(s) Availability of population of sufficient size (approx 1000+ per strata) to standardise test (s) – one solution would be to develop on all-island basis and/or link with Scotland? However, there are mixed views on the feasibility of developing tools on an all-island basis owing to regional variations, also different curriculum and different schools (both models in Rol - Irish Medium school (immersion education) and Irish language school (i.e. Gaeltacht where home and community language is Irish). Each specific tool will cater for a specific condition and the number with that condition may be relatively low in the IM sector (which itself is relatively small at present) (hence difficult to standardise) Availability of personnel to administer the test to standardise i.e. field force of psychologists with an appropriate level of fluency in Irish Precedent: Bilingual Verbal Ability Tests - (based on Woodcock Johnston Revised Cognitive Battery) – measures bilingual verbal ability, or the unique combination of cognitive/academic language abilities possessed by bilingual individuals in English and another language. The need for this test is based in the reality that bilingual persons know some things in one language, some things in the other language, and some things in both languages. Translated into 18 languages.
Operational Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requirement for bilingual guidance / instructions on using tool(s) as well as information on interpreting the scores to be developed as well as development of the tool(s) Resource implications – to administer the test (if developed) i.e. requirement for psychologists with appropriate level of fluency in Irish
Economic Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of developing tool Cost of standardising tool VFM – cost per head of population that will use the tool

Option 5 assumes that a bilingual tool can be developed. This would resolve the concerns about testing a child in one language, when his/ her abilities were stronger in another language. However, the concerns with this option are with regard to the costs involved in developing such a tool and the population sizes needed to ensure that the test developed is reliable and valid.

7.7 Summary

In consultation with the Steering Group we agreed the five options to be tested. In the next section we score the options against these criteria and develop a preferred option.

8 ASSESSMENT OF OPTIONS, PREFERRED OPTION

8.1 Introduction

In this section, we present criteria for assessing the five options proposed to address the need identified; the criteria were also agreed at the outset as technical feasibility, operational feasibility and economic feasibility. To these we have added several criteria – informed by issues raised during consultation – and of importance to those involved in the process. We then examine how each option fares in this assessment and then conclude on a preferred option.

The overarching aim is that tests employed should be fit for purpose and selected by the test administrator on the basis that they will help address the referral question.

8.2 Criteria for Assessing Options

Table 13	
Criteria for Assessing Options	
Criterion	Description
Delivery of Education outcomes (addressing the needs of IM pupils with SEN)	Provides an effective means of assessing a pupils' SEN (if any) in a way that is consistent with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Improvement policy - meeting the needs and aspirations of all pupils through high quality learning; a focus on putting interests of pupils first DE's goal in relation to tackling barriers to learning which is about allowing every young person to reach his or her full potential"
Reliability	Produces a robust, consistent score – which is standardised on an appropriate / equivalent population
Equality	Ensure access to appropriate support for children with SEN in the Irish Medium sector to ensure parity of treatment in both Irish Medium and English Medium sectors
Technical Feasibility	Available knowledge, skills, experience to develop / implement the option
Operational feasibility	Practicality of developing / implementing the option
Funding	Level of funding required to develop / implement
Value for Money	Cost of development / implementation relative to benefits (numbers benefiting)

8.3 Assessment of Options

For each Option, we have scored each criterion (out of 5) – the higher the score, the better the Option meets the criterion. In this section, we present the rationale for each score.

8.3.1 Delivery of Education outcomes (addressing the needs of IM pupils with SEN)

Currently all of the options address the needs of IM pupils with SEN and hence contribute to the delivery of education outcomes. Option 2: Status Quo plus Additional Interventions scores 5 as it provides an enhancement to Option 1: Status Quo which receives a score of 4 and therefore will better address the needs of IM pupils with SEN.

The remaining options - Option 3: Develop Low Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish; Option 4: Develop High Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish and Option 5: Develop High Level Diagnostic Tools – Bilingual – all receive the same score as the Status Quo as they would all be designed to be fit for purpose i.e. to meet the needs of IM pupils with SEN in assessing and diagnosing their situation.

8.3.2 Reliability

All five options receive an equal score of 4 for this criterion as all are based on the use of standardised tests which have been appropriately developed, piloted and quality assured. The tests will produce robust and consistent scores for pupils. The use of English, Irish or non-verbal tests does not have a bearing on the reliability of the test.

8.3.3 Equality

All five options receive an equal score of 4 for this criterion as all are deemed to satisfy requirements with regard to equality – ensuring parity of treatment in both Irish Medium and English Medium sectors.

8.3.4 Technical Feasibility

Option 1: Status Quo, Option 2: Status Quo plus Additional Interventions and Option 3: Develop Low Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish all receive scores of 5 for this criteria. Options 1 and 2 already exist and are therefore technically feasible. Option 3 is also technically feasible as some low level diagnostic tools in Irish have already been developed.

Option 4: Develop High Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish and Option 5: Develop High Level Diagnostic Tools – Bilingual receive scores of 2. A key issue in the development of such tools is the availability of a population of sufficient size to develop norms for standardised tests.

8.3.5 Operational feasibility

Option 1: Status Quo, Option 2: Status Quo plus Additional Interventions and Option 3: Develop Low Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish all receive scores of 5 for this criteria. Options 1 and 2 already exist and are therefore operationally feasible. Option 3 is also operationally feasible as some low level diagnostic tools in Irish already exist and are in use.

Option 4: Develop High Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish and Option 5: Develop High Level Diagnostic Tools – Bilingual receive scores of 2. Key issues which account for the lower score in implementation of such tools are the need for resources to administer the tests (EPs fluent in Irish) and the need for suitable guidance and information on using and interpreting the tools.

8.3.6 Funding

Option 1: Status Quo receives a score of 5 – there are no additional costs associated with this option. Option 2: Status Quo plus Additional Interventions also receives a score of 5 – there are some additional costs associated with this option but these are not significant.

Option 3: Develop Low Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish – receives a score of 3 – there are additional costs associated with this option in order to develop a low level diagnostic tool.

Option 4: Develop High Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish and Option 5: Develop High Level Diagnostic Tools – Bilingual both receive lower scores – 2 and 1 respectively. This accounts for the additional costs anticipated in developing and standardising more complex tools. These costs are expected to be higher for the bilingual tool (involving 2 languages) and hence it receives the lowest score.

8.3.7 Value for Money

Option 1: Status Quo and Option 2: Status Quo plus Additional Interventions both receive a score of 5 – there are some additional costs associated with Option 2 but these are not significant.

Option 3: Develop Low Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish – receives a score of 3 – there are additional costs associated with this option in order to develop a low level diagnostic tool and these would reduce the VfM of this Option.

Given the relatively high development and operational costs associated with Option 4: Develop High Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish and Option 5: Develop High Level Diagnostic Tools – Bilingual both receive lower scores of 1.

8.4 Summary / Preferred Option

The table below includes the individual scores per option for each of the criteria. At the bottom of the table, we have totalled the scores and then ranked the total scores for each Option. On this basis – Option 2 is the preferred option.

Table 14					
Assessment of Options					
Criterion	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
	Status Quo	Status Quo Plus Additional Interventions	Develop Low Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish	Develop High Level Diagnostic Tools in Irish	Develop High Level Diagnostic Tools - Bilingual
Delivery of Education outcomes (addressing the needs of IM pupils with SEN)	4	5	4	4	4
Reliability	4	4	4	4	4
Equality	4	4	4	4	4
Technical Feasibility	5	5	5	2	2
Operational feasibility	5	5	5	2	2
Funding	5	5	3	2	1
Value for Money	5	5	3	1	1
Total Score	32	33	28	19	18
Rank	2	1	3	4	5

Therefore the study shows that it is not feasible to develop high-level diagnostic tests based on the evidence of need and research considered.



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Any views expressed in the Research Report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of Education.

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