



# Exemption from the Study of Irish

## Questions and Answers for parents

The Irish language is an official language of Ireland and the European Union. The language is part of the unique cultural heritage of the Irish people and has social, historical and educational importance.

The Government aims to increase the use and knowledge of Irish as a community language by the various actions in the [20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030](#).

Both the Irish and English languages are included as core subjects in the national curricula and all students enrolled in recognised schools in Ireland are required to study Irish unless they have been granted an “Exemption from the study of Irish” and have a “Certificate of Exemption”.

An exemption from the study of Irish may be granted by school management in the exceptional circumstances outlined in circular 0054/2022 (Primary) and 0055/2022 (Post Primary). There are no other exceptional circumstances where an exemption from the study of Irish can be granted.

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## 1. What are the implications for a student of not studying Irish?

A certain standard of Irish is a requirement for entry to some third level courses and programmes of study. These rules are set by the third level institutions and may be subject to change. It is therefore important that students/parents are aware of such requirements. Information on third level entry requirements can be accessed on relevant college/university websites. Typically, at post-primary level, guidance teachers have access to this information.

CAO applicants are advised to check the CAO website for up to date information about language exemptions. See: [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie)

Portals such as Careersportal ([www.careersportal.ie](http://www.careersportal.ie)) provide information on Leaving Cert Subjects. . As all information is subject to change candidates are advised to check directly with any HEI, PLC or other training provider about the entry requirements of a course they wish to apply for.

All Primary teacher initial education programmes in state funded Higher Education Institutions have a requirement for a minimum standard of Irish, English and Mathematics. In addition Irish is a requirement for registration as a Primary teacher in Ireland. Further information is available at [www.teachingcouncil.ie](http://www.teachingcouncil.ie)

Official Languages (Amendment) Bill 2021 contains a requirement that 20% of new recruits to the public service be competent in the Irish language by 2030. This suggests that students who study Irish it may have greater employment options in the Public Service sector.

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## 2. How do I apply for an exemption from the study of Irish?

Parents and guardians of a student can make an application for an exemption from the study of Irish to the school on behalf of their child. An application can also be made by a student if they are 18 years of age or older.

If you are making an application you should send it to the student's current school using the form available on the website: <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/irish-exemption/>.

It is recommended that you discuss with the school whether the school believes that there is sufficient evidence to support an application for an exemption from the study of Irish. For applications based on a student's educational need the circular sets out what kind of evidence that the school must hold in your child's Student Support File.

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### 3. What are the exceptional circumstances in which a school may consider granting an exemption from the study of Irish?

The only exceptional circumstances in which a school may consider granting an exemption from the study of Irish are set out in Section 2.2 of [Circular 0054/2022](#) in the case of primary schools and in Section 2.2 of [Circular 0055/2022](#) for post-primary schools.

In certain circumstances that are outlined in the circular an exemption may be granted to:

- A student, aged at least 12, moving from abroad without previous experience of learning the Irish language or a student who have completed their primary education abroad.
- A student who experiences significant literacy difficulties which are an obstacle to their learning across the curriculum
- A student who experiences a high level of multiple and persistent needs that are a significant barrier to the student's participation and engagement in their learning and school life
- A student in a recognised special school or class or who was previously enrolled in a recognised special school or class or who has a recommendation and has been deemed eligible for a place in a recognised special school and/or in a special class in a mainstream school
- A student whose parent(s)/guardian(s) is a/are diplomatic or consular representative(s) of another country to Ireland irrespective of age or educational history

It is recommended that the parent(s)/guardian(s) discuss with the school whether the school believes that there is sufficient evidence to support an application for an exemption from the study of Irish.

It is the department's policy that all students (*including those granted an exemption*) are provided with opportunities to participate in Irish language and cultural activities at a level appropriate to their learning needs, to the greatest extent possible, and in a meaningful way.

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### 4. How do I know my child has been granted an Exemption from the study of Irish?

If your child is granted an exemption from Irish, the school principal will give you a 'Certificate of Exemption' that is signed and dated by them and has details of the reason the exemption was granted.

If you do not have a copy of the Certificate of Exemption then your child should be learning Irish.

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## 5. Can I tick more than one category option on the application form?

**No.** An application is considered on one criterion only. You should choose the option that best matches the circumstances of the student.

When you submit an application a school official should contact you to discuss application and to confirm the criteria on which the application is based. If you choose more than one option the application is not considered valid and the school does not have to process the application.

If you previously had an application refused but consider that your child's circumstances meets another criterion outlined in the circular, you may apply for an exemption from the study of Irish again.

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## 6. Can I appeal the school principal's decision not to grant an exemption from the study of Irish?

**Yes.** If you are not satisfied with the decision made by the school to refuse your application, then it is open to you to make an appeal. You should complete the Irish Exemption Appeal Form on the [department's website](#) and return it to the Department of Education within 30 calendar days from the date you were notified of the decision of the school not to grant an exemption

There is no need to send in any other documentation as the department will be contacting the school to request the documentation that was used in the decision to refuse the exemption.

An Irish Exemption Appeal form can be submitted by e-mail to: [Irishexemptionappeal@education.gov.ie](mailto:Irishexemptionappeal@education.gov.ie) or by post to Schools Financial and Database Section, Department of Education, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, N37 X659.

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## 7. Can I re-apply for an exemption from the study Irish if I made an application and was refused previously?

**Yes,** if you consider that the student meets another criteria outlined in the circular, you may apply for an exemption from the study of Irish again.

In this case, it is recommended that you discuss with the school whether the school believes that it holds sufficient evidence to support a new application.

If you a new application under the same category as your application which was refused, the principal may again refuse the application if he/she believes that the school does not hold any new evidence to support the application.

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## 8. What do the phrases ‘enrolment’ and ‘re-enrolment’ mean in the circulars on Exemption from the Study of Irish?

‘*Enrolment*’ means that a student starts in a school in Ireland for the first time.

‘*Re-enrolment*’ means that a student was in a school in Ireland before but then moved to another state and has now returned to continue their education in a school in Ireland.

The date of enrolment/re-enrolment used in the circular is the date the student first (re)starts their education in Ireland after being in another state. If a student moves school, the original enrolment date still applies.

If a student starts school in Ireland in the last 2 months of a school year, the circular allows schools to use the child’s age on the first day of the new school year when considering an application for an exemption from the study of Irish.

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## 9. My child was 11 ½ when they enrolled in a school in Ireland for the first time. Can they be granted an exemption from the study of Irish?

Normally a student should have reached their 12<sup>th</sup> birthday before the date of their enrollment/re-enrollment in a school in Ireland. However if your child has **completed** his/her primary education outside the state and this primary education **did not include** the study of Irish, you can apply for an exemption under Section 2.2.1.b of the circular. Before the principal of your child’s school can grant an exemption he/she must be satisfied that he/she has documentary **evidence** to show that your child has completed the full course of Primary school abroad.

If you are a diplomatic or consular representative of another country to Ireland, your child may be exempt from the study of Irish at any age under section 2.2.5 of the circular.

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## 10. My child has no understanding of English or Irish. Can I apply for an exemption from the study of Irish?

**No**, not understanding English or Irish alone is not enough to be considered for an exemption from the study of Irish. All children educated in Ireland are expected to have the opportunity to study Irish to an appropriate standard, unless they meet the criteria for an exemption for the study of Irish. The school should support your child in learning English and Irish to allow them to participate in all parts of the curriculum.

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**11. My child did not learn much Irish while schooling from home when the school buildings were closed as a precaution against the spread of COVID-19; can she/he be granted an Exemption from the study of Irish?**

**No.** All children educated in Ireland are expected to have the opportunity to study Irish to an appropriate standard, unless they meet the criteria for an exemption from the study of Irish. The school should support your child in learning English and Irish to allow them to participate in all parts of the curriculum.

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**12. How long should my child be getting educational support before an exemption can be considered?**

When a child is getting support for their literacy, the amount of support and length of time the support is given will depend on the type of support. For some children improvement would be expected after a short intervention, for others it may take time to see an improvement. For applications under subsection 2.2.2 (significant and persistent literacy difficulties) the circular does not set down a specific amount of time that supports must be in place before a child can be considered for an exemption. Schools will assess each child's needs and how they are responding to supports over time.

For applications under subsection 2.2.3 (a high level of multiple and persistent needs) the circular specifies that the intervention should take place over a period of at least 2 years, and that in general an exemption would only be considered after the student has reached 5<sup>th</sup> class of primary school.

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### 13. What is meant by a “significant and persistent literacy difficulty”?

Your child may have literacy difficulties if they have a problem with reading, writing or spelling.

“Significant” means that when the school assesses your child's literacy in a standardised test (a test that compares your child's skills against his/her peers) the test scores indicate that their literacy difficulties are greater than those of most other children who are the same age.

“Persistent” means that even though the school has been helping your child with in class or out of class special teaching they are still experiencing the literacy difficulty. A child's needs cannot be identified as being “persistent” after a single test or report, but only through the monitoring of their progress over time.

To grant an exemption from the study of Irish, the school must have evidence that the student is experiencing significant and persistent literacy difficulties with their learning in all subjects.

Schools follow the guidance of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). Information for parents on the services of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is available here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/5ef45c-neps/>

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### 14. What does “differentiation” mean?

**Differentiation** is a way of teaching in which teachers proactively modify curriculum, teaching methods, resources, learning activities, and student products in line with the identified needs of an individual and/or small groups of learners to maximize the learning opportunity for each learner in the classroom.

All children should be encouraged to study Irish and achieve a level of personal proficiency that is appropriate to their needs and ability.

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### 15. Do I need to get a psychological report or a report from a specialist recommending an exemption from the study of Irish?

**No.** You do not need to have a psychological or other specialist's report to be granted an exemption from the study of Irish.

It is up to the school to have the evidence as set out in the circular, when considering the exceptional circumstances in which an exemption should be granted.

For students with significant literacy needs, such as those where there are concerns that literacy attainments remain, despite intervention, at/below the 10th percentile, the school will most likely be providing support through the Special Education Teacher. Over time these teachers undertake assessment and identification of need as part of their problem solving approach and development of Student Support Plans. The granting of an Irish exemption emerges from this process. Therefore the school will have evidence on an individual's Student Support file to support the application.

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### 16. I have a psychological report or a report from a specialist recommending an exemption from the study of Irish. Is this enough to apply for an exemption from the study of Irish?

**No,** a psychological or medical professional's report is not sufficient evidence that a child requires an exemption from the study of Irish. While an external report might recommend an exemption, it is up to the school to have the evidence as set out in the circular, when considering the exceptional circumstances in which an exemption should be granted.

However, if you have an external report (e.g. from a psychologist, speech and language therapist (SLT), Psychiatrist, GP or other practitioner), you should give a copy to the school as these reports are useful to help inform the school about your child's needs and to help identify appropriate interventions. Sometimes a decision to grant an exemption from the study of Irish will come from the needs identified in the report after you're the school has tried to help your child over time.

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## 17. My child has scored at or below the 10th percentile in a literacy test, can I apply for an exemption?

**No.** One score at/below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile in a discrete test of either Word Reading or Reading Comprehension or Spelling is not enough for a school to grant an exemption.

As well as a test score at or below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile in a discrete test at the time of application, the child must also be in **2<sup>nd</sup> class or above** and present with significant and **persistent** literacy difficulties despite having had access to a **differentiated approach** to language and literacy learning over time. The circular sets out what evidence is needed by the school.

**See also:**

Question 11 [What is meant by a “significant and persistent literacy difficulty”?](#)

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## 18. Do schools need to do their own testing or can this be done externally to the school?

The school must do their own testing and consider the results of these tests and your child’s performance in school over time.

While the school may have an external report with test results, it is up to the school to decide if it has the evidence of ongoing support, response to intervention and current level of need as identified in school testing when considering the exceptional circumstances in which an exemption may be granted.

A student’s needs cannot be identified as being “significant and persistent literacy difficulties” on the basis of a single test or report, but only through monitoring of their progress over time.

**See also:**

Question 21. [Can my child's school use the information from his/her Student Support File from their time in a previous school?](#)

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## 19. Can my child's school use the information from his/her Student Support File from their time in a previous school?

**Yes.** You can request your child's previous school to send a copy of their child's Student Support File to their new school. Their Student Support File will have details of the level of support he/she required while in that school. This should include his/her student support plans, details of in-school testing, interventions and reviews over time.

This information will help the new school identify his/her current needs and the level of support they need and should be considered, along with the school's own documentation when considering an application for an exemption from the study of Irish. In the case of an application made under subsection 2.2.3 (multiple and persistent needs), the evidence documented over the two year period of review required by the Circular can include the evidence recorded in a previous school.

Information on a child's needs and progress should be included in the child's 'Education Passport' which their primary school sends to their post-primary school once they enroll. Information for Parents/guardians about the Education Passport is available here: <https://ncca.ie/en/primary/reporting-and-transfer/education-passport/>

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## 20. What does "a high level of multiple and persistent needs" mean?

Section 2.2.3 of the Circular allows an exemption to be granted to a child who experiences "a high level of multiple and persistent needs" that are an obstacle to their participation and engagement in their learning and school life. These children have needs that lead to a major disruption to their learning and participation in school on a day to day basis, and these may cause of significant distress to the student in the school environment. The school will be trying to help the child with an intensive and evidence-based programme of support designed with the child's specific needs in mind. This plan will be implemented and reviewed by the school, in collaboration with the student, parents and other relevant agencies.

To be considered as "multiple needs" the child will experience a number of different kinds of difficulties. These difficulties are outside of, or in addition to, those related to literacy that impact on their learning and participation at school.

"Persistent needs" means that these needs that are continuing to causing difficulty over time after the school has been trying to help the student address them using interventions recorded in the child's student support plan.

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## 21. My child is currently unable to attend school regularly due to a serious illness. Can I get an exemption for them?

**No.** Schools can only consider applications from students currently enrolled in their school. If the student is still enrolled in the school and the school has the evidence outlined in the circular, an exemption may be granted by the school.

Schools can only consider applications on behalf of students currently enrolled in their school.

When a student is absent for a prolonged period of time they will experience difficulties reengaging in their learning across all subjects and schools should take steps to assist the student after they return to school.

Absence from school alone is not grounds for granting an exemption. The student's circumstances must also meet those as set out in the circular for granting an exemption and the school must have the appropriate documentation to support the decision in the student's Student Support File.

All children educated in Ireland, including those who are home-schooled or in receipt of Home tuition are expected to have had the opportunity to study Irish to an appropriate standard.

Children who are unable to attend school for reasons such as chronic illness may be able to receive support from the Home Tuition Scheme. Further information is available on the government website: <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/d15f58-home-tuition/>

Information for parents/guardians on the choice of Home-Schooling is outlined here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/37fdef-home-schooling-or-attendance-at-non-recognised-schools/>

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## 22. What does it mean when the circular says a child has a "recommendation and has been deemed eligible for place in a recognised special school and/or special class"?

"Recommendation" means that an appropriate professional believes that the child should be educated in a special school or class rather than in a mainstream school.

"Deemed eligible" means that if a suitable place was available to the child, they could enroll in a special class or special school. A representative of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), the local Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), or the management of a special school or mainstream school with a special class can deem a child as eligible for a place.

In general this option is for children who are unable to take up an appropriate special class place and are being educated in a mainstream class.

If this is the case for your child you should provide sufficient documentary evidence to your child's current school to allow them process your application for an exemption from the study of Irish.

A special school/class is one that is one that is sanctioned and resourced by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). See <https://ncse.ie/> for a list of such schools/classes.

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## 23. If my child moves from a special school or class into a mainstream school/class, do I need to apply for a 'Certificate of exemption' from the study of Irish?

**No.** Students in special schools and special classes have an exemption from the study of Irish without needing to apply and will not have a 'Certificate of Exemption'. If your child moves from the special school/class to a mainstream school/class, the Principal of special school/class should issue you with a 'Certificate of Exemption' which you can show to your child's new school. You should keep the Certificate but the new school needs to have a copy.

Once your child holds a Certificate of Exemption, it can be used until the end of their post-primary education.

Irish is an important part of our culture and all children should have the opportunity to take part in Irish language and cultural activities in a meaningful way at a level appropriate to their learning needs.

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## 24. Can my child continue to study Irish after they have been granted an exemption from the study of Irish?

**Yes.** The granting of an exemption from the study of Irish should not be an obstacle to a student building on their language skills.

All children educated in Ireland, including those who hold an exemption from the study of Irish, are encouraged to engage with the language and to participate in activities that help them to achieve a level of personal proficiency that is appropriate to their needs and ability.

For any number of reasons a Student may be advised to or otherwise decide to continue to study Irish at an appropriate level even if they hold an exemption. This is what is meant by the option "not to exercise" an exemption referred to in the Circulars. A student holding an exemption from the study of Irish may withdraw from the formal study of Irish at any time as long as the school has a copy of their Certificate of Exemption on file.

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## 25. My child has an exemption from the study of Irish. Can they stay in the Irish class?

**Yes.** A student who is exempt from the study of Irish has the option *not to exercise the exemption* granted and to participate in Irish classes and/or examinations, without any loss of the right to exercise the exemption at a future time.

In line with the department's policy of inclusion, schools are expected and encouraged to provide all students to the greatest extent possible and in a meaningful way, with opportunities to participate in Irish language and cultural activities at a level appropriate to their learning needs.

A student who holds an exemption and who is not studying Irish may be in a classroom with other students who are learning Irish. These students should be following a plan to use their time for their learning (prepared by themselves, their parents and/or teachers as appropriate). The student should not disrupt the learning of other students and should follow the school's rules and the instructions of the staff at all times.

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## 26. Is a student with an exemption from the study of Irish, also exempt from studying foreign languages?

**No.** Circulars 0054/2022 and 0055/2022 are for exemption from the study of Irish only. Where an exemption from the study of Irish is granted, it should not be interpreted as an exemption from the study other languages.

In accordance with the [Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools](#) and the [Framework for Junior Cycle](#), the study of foreign languages is optional. Any decision not to study a modern foreign language should be made carefully and following discussion between the student's parent(s)/guardian(s), Guidance Counselor, SET teachers and other school representatives as relevant.

A student may commence the study of a language (including the study of Irish) at an appropriate level after the granting of an exemption from the study of Irish. The reasons for this will vary from student to student.

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## 27. I have an exemption from the study of Irish, am I also exempt from the language requirements for 3rd level entry?

**No.** Third level institutions may set their own rules for the entry requirements for the courses they offer, therefore a language exemption at third level is a matter for the individual University.

A student will need to apply to the institution for an exemption from their requirement for Irish and/or a foreign language where these are in place. The school's guidance teacher can advise on applying for this kind of exemption and on different pathways to third level based on an individual students' needs and interests.

## 28. I have a language exemption granted by a third level institution does that I don't have to study Irish.

**No.** Only exemptions granted under the Department of Education Circulars can be used to exempt a student from the requirement to study Irish.

Rule 21 of the [Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools](#) outlines that the approved course for recognised students at Junior and Senior Cycle must include Irish. This applies to all students except for those holding an exemption from the study of Irish granted under the terms of a circular issued by the Department of Education.

A language exemption granted by at third level is a matter for the individual University and only apply to the entry requirements and/or course requirements which are set by the individual institutions.

A student with an exemption from the entry requirements and/or course requirements of a third level institution but who does not hold an exemption from the study of Irish granted under the Department of Education Circulars is required to study Irish while enrolled in a recognised school.

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## 29. My child is in an Irish-medium school, Can I apply for an exemption?

**No.** The Circulars apply to students who are being educated through the English language only. Students who are studying some or all of their subjects through the medium of Irish cannot apply for or use an exemption from the study of Irish.

Where a school that is participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme, only those students who are studying all subjects through English may apply for or use an exemption from the study of Irish.

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## 30. My child is home-schooled. Can he/she be granted an exemption from the study of Irish?

**My child is in a private school which is not a recognised primary or post-primary school be granted an exemption from the study of Irish?**

**No.** The Circulars for exemption from the study of Irish are for implementation in the case of students who are enrolled in recognised primary and post-primary schools only. A student who is home-schooled or enrolled in a school which is not recognised cannot therefore be granted an exemption from the study of Irish under the terms of the Department of Education circulars.

All children educated in Ireland, including those who are home-schooled, are expected to have had the opportunity to study Irish to an appropriate standard. The department has provided guidance on this matter in the document: '*Guidelines on the assessment of education in places other than recognised schools*' available on the department's website; <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/5a819e-guidelines-on-the-assessment-of-education-in-places-other-than-recog/>

Recognised schools are listed on the Department of Education website: <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/find-a-school/>

If a student enrolls in a recognised school having previously been educated in Ireland at home or in a school which is not recognised, they cannot be considered under subsection 2.2.1 of the circulars but can be considered for an exemption from the study of Irish on a case by case basis according to the other sub criteria of the circular.

Any arrangement made not to study Irish while being home-schooled or while enrolled in a school which is not recognised, is not considered an exemption from the study of Irish.

- Information for parents/guardians on education their children at home or in other places of education is outlined here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/37fdef-home-schooling-or-attendance-at-non-recognised-schools/>

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