



AN ROINN DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS EDUCATION

TO BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT AND PRINCIPALS OF NATIONAL SCHOOLS

REVISION OF CIRCULAR 18/79 ON EXEMPTION FROM THE STUDY OF IRISH

1. It is a fundamental principle of the primary school curriculum that due allowance should be made for individual pupil differences in ability, interests and circumstances. In accordance with this principle, the primary school programme in Irish is designed to meet the learning needs of a wide variety of pupils. It is taught in a stimulating and activity-centred fashion and the main emphasis is on oral learning and interaction. The question of the need to grant exemption from the learning of Irish should arise only in rare and exceptional circumstances.

The Minister for Education has reviewed the circumstances in which exemption from the study of Irish may be granted to pupils in national schools and has revised Circular 18/79 to read as follows:

Pupils in the following circumstances may be allowed exemption from the study of Irish in national schools :-

- (a) Pupils whose primary education up to 11 years of age was received in Northern Ireland or outside Ireland, provided that the parent or guardian who had custody of the pupil was permanently resident in Northern Ireland or outside Ireland during the pupil's period of education up to that age;
- (b) Pupils who were previously enrolled as recognised pupils in national schools who are being re-enrolled after a period spent abroad, provided that at least three years have elapsed since the previous enrolment in the State and the pupil is at least 11 years of age on re-enrolment;

(c) Pupils

- (i) who function intellectually at average or above average level but have a Specific Learning Disability of such a degree of severity that they fail to achieve expected levels of attainment in basic language skills in the mother tongue, or
- (ii) who have been assessed as having a general learning disability due to serious intellectual impairment [i.e. mental handicap] and are also failing to attain adequate levels in basic language skills in the mother tongue, or
- (iii) who have been assessed as having a general learning disability due to serious sensory impairment, and are also failing to attain adequate levels in basic language skills in the mother tongue.

The evidence of such a disability must be furnished by a qualified psychologist, supported in the case of (iii) by a report from an appropriate medical specialist. In addition, a full report on the pupil must be furnished by the school.

- (d) Pupils from abroad, who have no understanding of English when enrolled, would be required to study one language only, Irish or English;
- (e) Children of foreigners who are diplomatic or consular representatives in Ireland;
- (f) Children from other countries in whose case the Minister is satisfied that they are resident in this country as political refugees.

Pupils from the above categories may be allowed to remain in the class during the Irish lesson so that they may have an opportunity to gain a knowledge of spoken Irish and to participate in the learning activities. Alternatively, other suitable arrangements may be made such as allocating school work on other subject areas.

2. This revision will apply with effect from the beginning of the school year 1996/97. It will apply to students currently enrolled in national schools as well as to students who will enrol in national schools in the future. An exemption granted to a student will be operative throughout his/her stay at national school.

Exemption may continue to be granted under the terms of Circular Letter M10/94 for second level schools.

3. The term Specific Learning Disability does not include disabilities due to poor general intellectual functioning. Account must be taken of the following criteria in determining whether a Specific Learning Disability exists:

- assessed intellectual functioning at average level or above;
- marked failure to achieve expected levels of attainment in basic skills such as reading and writing;
- a history of such failure not related directly to factors such as poor attendance, poor motivation or problems in social interaction which may affect attainment.

4. School managements will be required to observe the following prescribed procedures:

- A written application for exemption will be made by a parent or guardian to the principal of the school. This application will specify the grounds on which the exemption is sought. It will be accompanied by documentary evidence of age and previous schooling as appropriate to the grounds cited.
- The school authorities will satisfy themselves as to the documentary evidence submitted.
- The school authorities will prepare a full report on the student in consultation with relevant teachers.
- Where exemption is being sought under sub-paragraph 1(c) above, the parent or guardian will be required to furnish reports from a qualified psychologist and appropriate medical specialist as appropriate.
- A decision to grant exemption will be conveyed to the parent or guardian by way of a written certificate, signed by the school principal, that the exemption has been given in accordance with this Circular. The certificate will also cite the name, address and type of school, the student's name and date of birth, the sub-paragraph under which the exemption is being granted and the specific grounds for exemption. Where the exemption is being granted under sub-paragraph 1(c), the name and address of the qualified psychologist and the date of the psychologist's report and the name of the medical specialist and date of report, if applicable, will be included.
- The application, school report, psychologist's report, report of medical specialist, copy of certificate of exemption and other relevant documents will be retained by the school and will be made available for inspection by authorised officers of the Department.
- A copy of the exemption certificate will be sent to the **Department of Education Primary Administration Section 1, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath** within one week of the granting of the exemption.
- A copy of the exemption certification should be sent to the relevant second level school when the pupil in question has completed her/his primary education.

5. The psychologist's report should be of a full psychological assessment carried out by a qualified psychologist not more than two years prior to the application for exemption.

The Department has prepared guidelines on the preparation of these reports which are available to psychologists.

6. The school report should include information on assessments carried out in the school **by remedial teachers or other teachers**. It should include, as well, the results of tests, reports from relevant teachers, information on the pupil's attendance, application to study and any remedial or other special help given. Samples of the pupil's unaided written expression should also be attached to the report.

7. The operation of the revised circular will be monitored regularly by the Department. The delegated authority to grant exemption may be rescinded in the case of individual schools where circumstances so warrant. The operation of the Circular will be formally reviewed at the end of the school year 1996/97.
8. An exemption certificate form is attached.
9. Further enquiries in relation to this Circular Letter should be addressed to Primary Administration Section 1, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, telephone (01) 8734700, or (0902) 74621 extensions 5159 or 5153.

John Dennehy
Assistant Secretary

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