

2. How do the specifications align with the rationale and aims of the updated specifications for Junior Cycle Irish (T1 and T2), and the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) more broadly?

The National Parents Council (NPC) has gathered and analysed feedback from parents and children regarding their opinions on the specifications for Junior Cycle Irish (T1 and T2).

The findings presented in this submission are based on a survey conducted by the NPC between the 16th and the 28th of April 2026. The survey was sent to parents of post-primary children on the NPC mailing list who had consented to receiving such invitations. During this time, a total of 254 responses were collected, including 194 parents and 60 students. We asked whether they were attending an Irish-medium (T1) or an English-medium (T2) school. Most of the respondents attend T2 schools but we did have responses from 6 parents and 1 student attending a T1 school. The opinions of the parents and students who participated in the survey will be shared in this submission.

In order to find out how they think the specifications align with the rationale and aims of the updated specifications for Junior Cycle Irish (T1 and T2), and the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) more broadly, we specifically asked about students' confidence, how much they enjoy Irish, and whether they think it is relevant to their lives. We examined the responses from the perspectives of the two different school settings, but this must be viewed within the context of the lower number of respondents from T1 schools.

In terms of confidence, 67% of parents in T2 schools said their children are either not very confident or not confident at all when speaking Irish. In T1 settings, 83% responded their children feel very confident or somewhat confident using Irish. The student in a T1 school also reported feeling somewhat confident, which

contrasts with the responses from students in T2 schools, where 66% reported feeling not very confident or not confident at all.

When it comes to relevance, in T2 schools, 69% of parents said that Irish is not very relevant or not relevant at all to their child's daily life. This is closely matched by students, with 68% saying that Irish is not relevant to their everyday lives. In T1 settings, 83% of parents think that Irish is very relevant or somewhat relevant to their child's daily life. The student in a T1 school also reported that Irish is relevant to their daily life.

There is also a difference in attitudes. In T2 schools, 69% of parents said their child's attitude towards Irish has either become more negative or has not changed since starting Junior Cycle. Student responses reflect this, with 66% saying they do not enjoy Irish classes very much or at all. In T1 settings, 83% of parents reported that their child's attitude has become more positive or slightly more positive. The student in a T1 school also reported that they enjoy Irish classes a lot.

Overall, the Junior Cycle Irish specifications aim to make learning active, enjoyable, and useful. However, this does not seem to be happening for all students, especially in English-medium schools. Many students do not feel confident, do not enjoy the subject, and do not see its value in their daily lives.

3. What are the strengths/ opportunities related to the provision and implementation of Junior Cycle Irish specifications (T1 and T2) (in the areas of teaching, learning, assessment and supports)?

Regarding the strengths related to the provision and implementation of Junior Cycle Irish specifications, parents and

students were given different options to express their opinions on what they think is working well in how Irish is currently taught.

Whilst they could choose more than one option it is clear there is strong support for speaking activities in Irish classes. In T2 schools, 48% of parents expressed that speaking activities are important and should continue to be included in the curriculum, while this figure rises to 80% in T1 schools. Additionally, 31% of parents in T2 schools and 40% in T1 schools believe that learning about Irish culture is valuable. They feel that this knowledge enhances students' understanding of the language and helps them connect with it more effectively.

A parent commented:

“More about Irish culture and the relevance of the Irish language may help increase interest”

In response to the question “*Which of these elements of assessment do you think are working well?*”, parents could choose more than one option but most frequently selected was Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) in both Irish-medium and English-medium settings. In T1 schools, 80% of parents indicated that CBAs were working well for oral assessment and 60% for written assessment. In T2 schools, 49% selected CBAs as working well for oral assessment and 42% for written assessment. Overall, parents view CBAs as more practical and less stressful for students than traditional written examinations and believe they provide a better reflection of students' abilities.

Students gave helpful insights into what they enjoy in Irish class. When they were asked to select from a list of activities they enjoy, 22% said they like games, 17% enjoyed group work, and 11%

preferred interactive activities, such as watching videos and using technology. Students said these approaches make classes more enjoyable and help them feel more comfortable using the language.

4. What are the obstacles related to the provision and implementation of Junior Cycle Irish specifications (T1 and T2) (in the areas of teaching, learning, assessment and supports)

Despite the positives, parents and students also identified several challenges. In the survey, respondents were given set options to choose from, but they were also given the opportunity to add further comments to explain their answers in more detail. These additional comments provide important context for understanding their experiences.

The biggest issue for T2 parents is that students lack confidence in speaking Irish, with 66% identifying this as a concern. Over half of parents (54%) said their children have difficulty understanding the language when it is spoken, which makes it harder for them to take part in class. A further 44% of parents reported a general lack of interest in Irish among students.

A parent summed up this concern clearly:

“It is taught as an academic language with learning by rote. It doesn't seem to be taught/viewed as a living language.”

The main issue for T1 parents is also that students lack confidence in speaking Irish, with 67% identifying this as a concern. A further 33% of parents said their children find writing in Irish difficult, while 33% also reported limited support at home as a challenge.

Students provided further details on what they find challenging. In T2 schools, 22% of students said that grammar and spelling are

major difficulties. A further 18% reported problems with remembering vocabulary, while 18% said they struggle to understand spoken Irish. The student in T1 schools also identified grammar and spelling as the most challenging aspect of learning Irish.

Students told us these difficulties cause them to feel frustrated and less motivated.

“Actually being able to talk in Irish during class (I would be scared of being judged for example), more casual conversational activities, being taught proper pronunciation -- so overall more focus on spoken language”

Overall, these challenges suggest that Irish is often taught in a way that feels difficult and disconnected from real life. Parents believe this makes it harder for students to build confidence and enjoy learning the language.

5. Would you like to make any recommendations regarding the provision and implementation of Junior Cycle Irish specifications (T1 and T2) (in the areas of teaching, learning, assessment and supports)?

At the end of the survey, parents and students were given the opportunity to tell us more about their views on Junior Cycle Irish.

Based on the feedback from parents and students, a key recommendation is that Irish should be treated more as a living language, not just an academic subject. Many parents and students feel that after many years of studying Irish, students still cannot

speaking it confidently or use it in real-life situations. Irish is often seen as being taught through memorisation, grammar rules, poetry, and written answers, rather than through real communication.

One of the strongest messages from the feedback is the need for much more spoken Irish in classrooms. Parents and students want more opportunities for conversation, listening, pronunciation, and everyday language use. Many believe that students can succeed in exams but still cannot say basic phrases naturally. In contrast, students often perform better in other modern languages such as French or Spanish, where speaking is prioritised.

Assessment is also a major concern. Many parents believe that written exams and CBAs place too much pressure on students and do not support real language learning. There is strong support for increasing the importance of oral assessment and reducing the focus on written work.

The transition from primary to post-primary school is another challenge. Students arrive in first year with very different levels of Irish. Some find the work too easy, while others feel completely lost from the start. Many parents believe the system assumes a level of spoken Irish that many students simply do not have, which can quickly damage confidence.

Students with additional learning needs are particularly affected. Parents of children with dyslexia, ADHD, and other needs report that the heavy focus on written grammar creates serious barriers. Some students who are strong speakers of Irish do poorly in written exams and begin to lose confidence. Parents strongly feel that oral ability should carry more weight in assessment, especially for these learners.

There are also mixed views on whether Irish should remain compulsory. Some parents feel that making Irish an exam subject for all students can lead to frustration and disengagement. Others suggest that Irish culture and spoken Irish could remain compulsory in a more relaxed and enjoyable way, while the exam subject could be optional. However, many also believe Irish should stay compulsory if better teaching and support systems are introduced.

Teaching methods are widely described as outdated. Parents and students want more modern, interactive approaches such as videos, audio, digital tools, games, group work, music, film, and real-life communication. Many suggest that Irish should be used more naturally around the school and not just inside the classroom.

Students' own voices strongly support these changes. Many say they are afraid to speak Irish in class because they worry about making mistakes. They dislike memorising long answers and poems and want lessons that are more active, relaxed, and enjoyable. Some even say they would prefer Irish to be optional.

A student captured this clearly:

“I think it needs to be taught completely differently, more like a language like Spanish with less of a focus on literature. We should actually be taught how to speak the language, how to read it, how to understand it, I feel like I never was taught that properly.”

In summary, parents and students alike believe that there is too much focus on writing, exams, and memorisation, and not enough focus on communication and real-life use. Parents and students are calling for more speaking, fairer and more balanced assessments, modern teaching methods, and a system that supports all learners.